

VAN CASE STUDY



POLICY QUADRANT

Sharing Data Across a Community

Operationalizing a Collective Legal Framework for the VAN

2016-2021

**You cannot
manage what
you cannot
see**



Contents

A new vision for collaborative supply chain management | 2

Establishing a collective legal framework: Context | 3

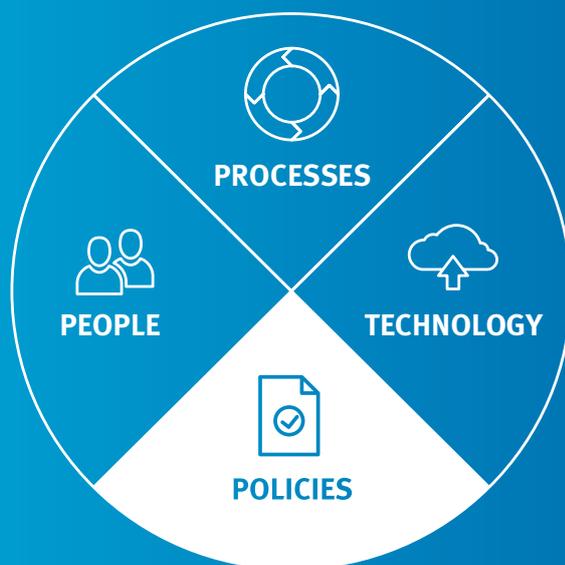
How was it done? | 6

Key learnings | 13

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A new vision for collaborative supply chain management

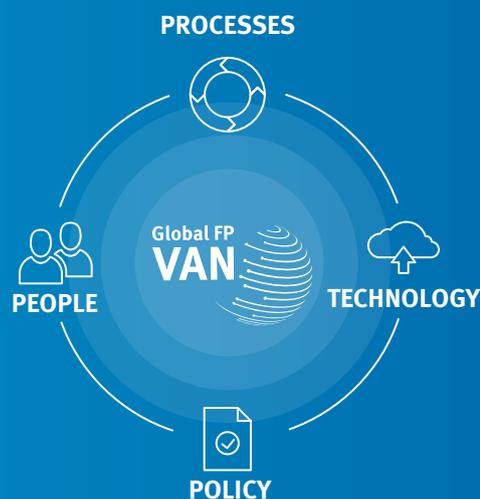
The reproductive health (RH) community has long known that limited access to a choice of high-quality, affordable contraceptives severely undermines efforts to increase contraceptive prevalence¹. Furthermore, supply chain data visibility is a prerequisite to increased access. Simply put, you cannot manage what you cannot see. Governments, global procurers, and other actors need timely access to supply chain data for effective decision-making to expand access to contraceptives, including for estimating supply needs, accessing planned orders, tracking shipment status from manufacturers to countries, acting when products arrive, and advocating if funding falls short.

In 2016, the RH community called on the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition (RHSC, or the Coalition) to take the lead in defining and operationalizing a more coherent and efficient way to gather and use data for family planning (FP) supply chain decisions to enhance access to contraceptives. The following year, the RHSC embarked on a short-term proof-of-concept initiative to establish a Global Family Planning Visibility and Analytics Network (VAN) that brings together people, processes, policy, and technology to transform the way the community makes supply chain decisions to expand access.

On the people side, the VAN links procurers, manufacturers, shippers, and country governments in an active network focused on product flow into countries. In terms of technology, the platform captures data from many sources, facilitates data harmonization, and consolidates tools for network members to use. New processes transform how these members interact, analyze data, and make decisions to expand access. Lastly, harmonized policies govern data sharing and use.

By offering the community a collaborative platform to assess supply needs, prioritize them, and act when supply imbalances loom, the VAN will ultimately lead to more timely and cost-effective delivery of commodities, a higher number of women reached with the right product at the right time, and a better allocation of limited health resources in the future.

The present case study focuses on the Policy quadrant of the VAN framework. It describes the steps the RHSC followed to create and operationalize a first-of-its-kind multilateral data sharing policy for the VAN that enables the diverse network of members to securely share data via one central platform. It is part of a series of case studies documenting the learnings from the VAN proof-of-concept phase. This case study will be useful for partners interested in the RHSC's pioneering approach to development and implementation of the VAN multilateral data sharing policy—reflected in the Terms of Use (TOU), including the Data Use Rights Table and the Data Definitions Table—as well as those desiring to learn more about crafting and operationalizing a multilateral data sharing legal framework².



1. Sedgh G, Ashford L, Hussain R. *Unmet Need for Contraception in Developing Countries: examining women's reasons for not using a method*. New York: Guttmacher Institute; 2016. <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/unmet-need-for-contraception-in-developing-countries>.

2. The VAN legal framework covers use of the platform, data sharing, and data use. While the VAN Terms of Use comprehensively addresses each of these elements, in this document we will refer to the legal framework broadly as a “data sharing” policy, allowing for a simpler expression of the range of content addressed in the policy.

Establishing a collective legal framework: Context

In January 2019, alongside the formal launch of the platform, the RHSC released the multilateral data sharing policy that governs how members use the VAN, including how they share, access, and use data within the VAN. Prior to the existence of the VAN, select FP supply chain data were accessible and shared among partners through multiple vertically managed tools and programs, as well as informal individual networks (Figure 1). This segmented and siloed data sharing ecosystem often resulted in inefficiencies, redundancies, and unnecessary expenses concerning data analysis and decision-making. Furthermore, supply chain actors³ faced a great deal of confusion around what data could be shared, with whom, and under what circumstances, complicating supply planning and response. More specifically, organizations shared data under a variety of terms, including informal “handshake” agreements or formal bilateral and nondisclosure agreements, providing inconsistency in usage rights.

In order to fully understand a particular country’s or product’s supply ecosystem, data analysts and country and donor decision-makers had to extract and collate data from multiple resources, requiring significant effort and time and often resulting in decision-making based on incomplete data. While these resources helped supply partners understand the environment, they did not provide a comprehensive view for their users.

- ▶ The Reproductive Health Interchange (RHI) included procurer order and shipment data.
- ▶ The Procurement Planning and Monitoring Report (PPMR) provided data on country stock levels.
- ▶ The Coordinated Assistance for Reproductive Health Supplies (CARhs) and Coordinated Supply Planning (CSP) groups⁴ utilized data from a range of sources, including bilateral agreements.

Furthermore, having multiple bilateral data sharing agreements in place before the VAN made it cumbersome and challenging to share the data among those who needed it. Due to uncertainties and discomfort about sharing data outside of the bilateral partnership, they unintentionally restricted use of those data for other collaborative processes, “overprotecting” the data and limiting the potential for positive impact.

While there was a strong desire among supply chain actors for better visibility into order, shipment, and inventory data, no one resource could provide this level of information, securely.

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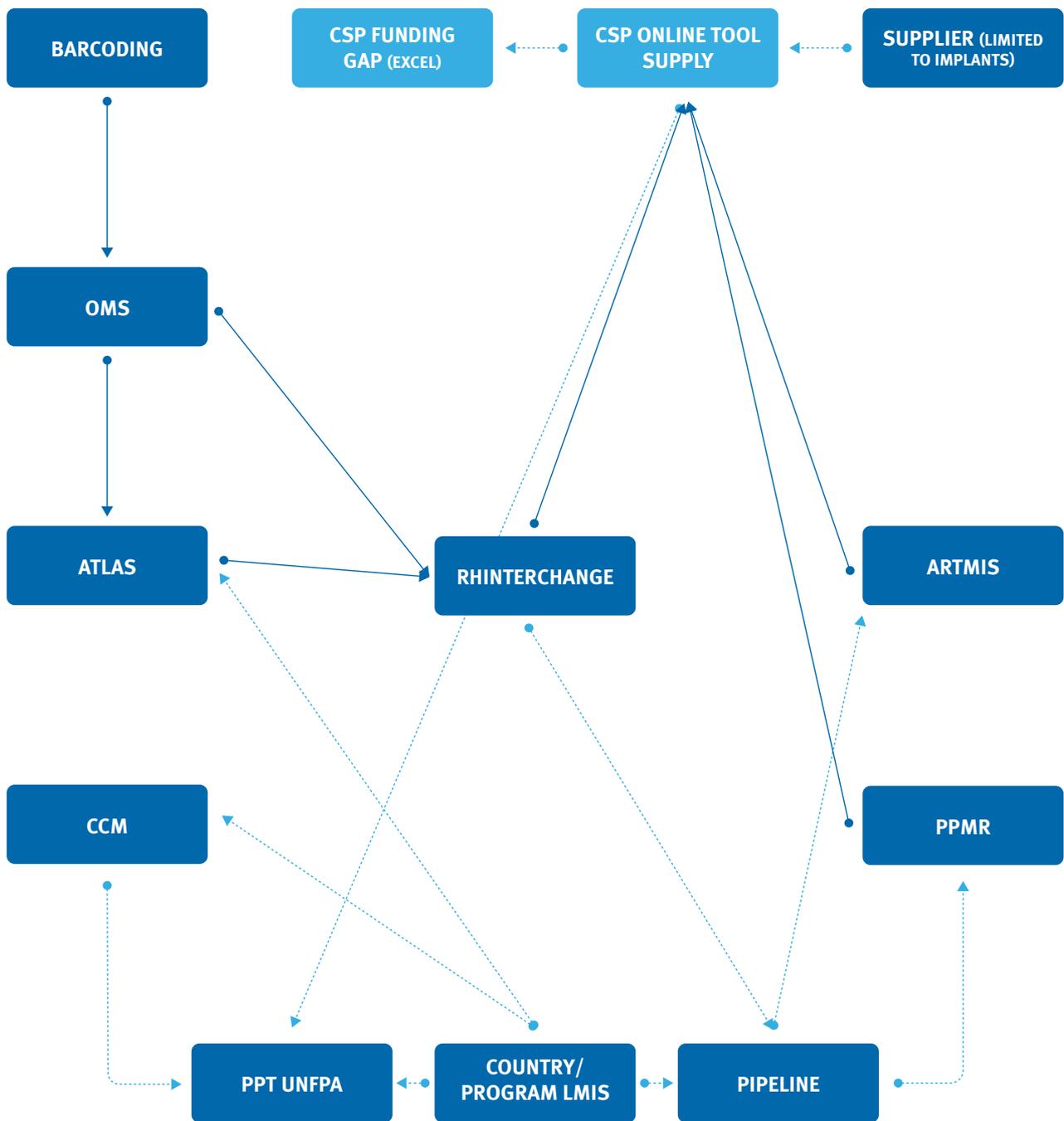
“...there was a need to have...access to this information and these bilateral arrangements were not necessarily aligned, so you had different rights and obligations associated with those separate bilateral arrangements that...precluded more robust discussion amongst the stakeholders.”

—Sabrina Powers, PATH

3. Supply chain actors are the variety of institutions and enterprises that make up the RH supply community of trading partners and include country governments, procurers, donors, manufacturers, social marketing organizations, and technical assistance partners.

4. These two groups were the precursors to the modern VAN Consensus Planning Group (VAN CPG).

Figure 1: Past landscape of automated and manual data



●--> Primary Automated data flow ●-> Primary Manual data flow

Abbreviations: ARTMIS, Automated Requisition Tracking Management Information System; CCM, Country Commodity Manager; CSP, Coordinated Supply Planning; LMIS, Logistics Management Information Systems; OMS, Order Management System; PPMR, Procurement Planning and Monitoring Report; PPT, Procurement Planning Tool; RH, Reproductive Health; UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund.

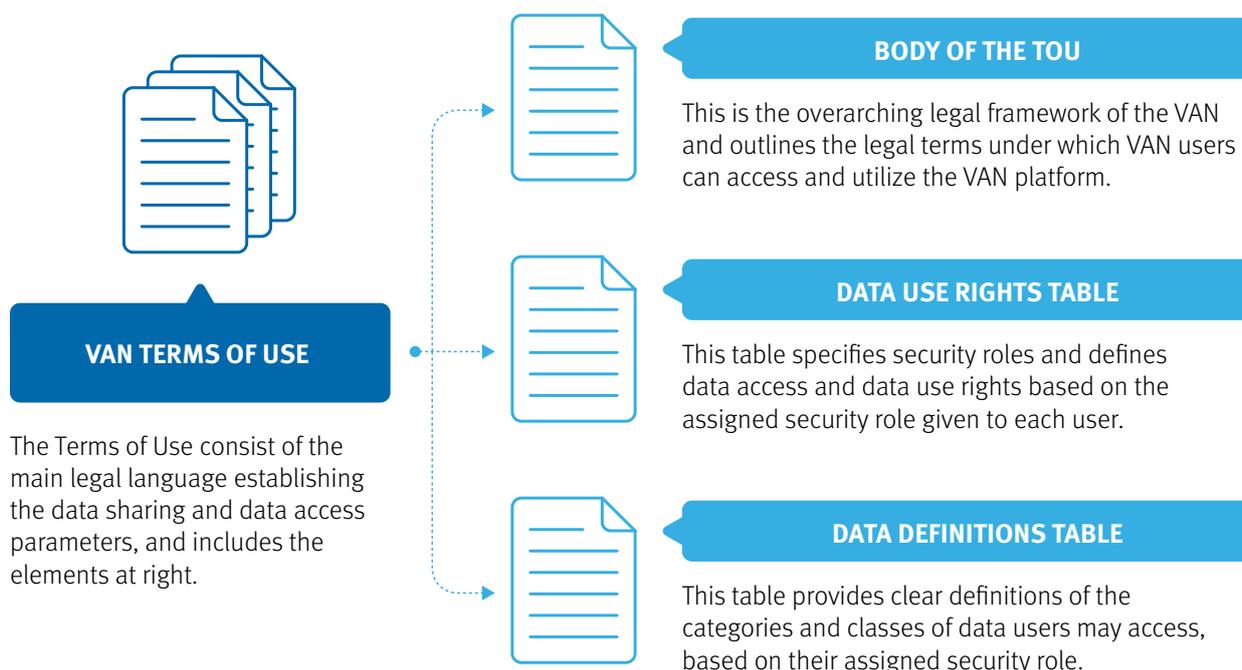
These challenges were part of the reasoning behind the community’s desire to create a VAN that would serve as a joint data sharing and networking hub, providing greater visibility along the FP supply chain, from manufacturers to country medical stores. Creating a legal framework that would simultaneously streamline data visibility for informed decision-making to expand supply and alleviate the data security concerns of the wide range of actors within the FP supplies community were among the highest priorities in bringing the concept of the VAN to life. This was an unprecedented undertaking, requiring shifts in mindset and practice among all prospective VAN members. The VAN’s legal foundation, the TOU—consisting of the main body of the legal document, the Data Use Rights Table, and the Data Definitions Table⁵—broke new ground in multilateral data sharing and continues to pioneer best practices in data visibility and data security within the global development sector.

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“We needed one terms of use that everyone would sign. We were not used to that, but this was really fundamental and needed change in our way of thinking.”

— Ramy Guirguis, USAID

Figure 2: The VAN Terms of Use



5. A publicly accessible version of the Terms of Use, including the main body of the document and both tables, is available on the VAN website under Policy Resources: <https://www.rhsupplies.org/gfpvan/about.html>.

How was it done?

In response to the community’s call, the Coalition forged ahead to build the VAN and establish a comprehensive, yet mutually agreeable, data sharing policy that reflected the legal and data sharing security requirements and norms already in place among key VAN partners—including FP supply chain actors, donors, and the VAN technology solutions vendor⁶—as well as within the larger global development community. The process of building community consensus, developing the data sharing policy documents, and releasing the policy in tandem with the VAN platform launch was a complex undertaking.

This section highlights the key tactical steps taken to define a joint vision for the data sharing policy and operationalize the VAN multilateral legal framework.

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“...the most interesting part was trying to do something new and that there wasn’t an example that you could just adapt and learn from—it is challenging to strike new ground when you don’t have examples. That was incredibly unique.”

— Shannon Mills, VAN Management Unit

6. For more information on identification of the VAN technology solutions vendor, please see [Forging a “Collective Ask” of the Global FP VAN Technology Vendor](#), a case study on the process to select the VAN software as a service provider.

KEY DATES

AUGUST 2017

⌚ VAN proof-of-concept phase launches with seed funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development, as well as in-kind support from UNFPA and USAID.

⌚ RHSC establishes the Data Sharing Task Force.

OCTOBER 2018

⌚ Consensus is reached on the VAN definition of confidentiality and the Data Definitions Table is drafted.

NOVEMBER 2018

⌚ The VAN Terms of Use are finalized, including the Data Use Rights Table.

JANUARY 2019

⌚ The VAN platform goes live, including the finalized Terms of Use.

JANUARY 2020

⌚ Version 2.0 of the Terms of Use is released.

⌚ The VAN platform and the Terms of Use are translated to French.

AUGUST 2020

⌚ The public version of the Terms of Use is made available on the VAN website, facilitating global learning.

JANUARY 2021

⌚ Version 3.0 of the Terms of Use is released.

JULY 2021

⌚ Version 4.0 of the Terms of Use is released.

Establishing trust

The first step in instituting the legal framework was ensuring the RH community was comfortable standing behind the effort and would support the outcome. Part of the reason the community called on the Coalition to undertake the VAN proof-of-concept was its neutrality—it offers a “safe space” where experts can leave their institutional hats at the door, while remaining focused on what they share in common, in order to achieve results no partner could accomplish on its own. The long-standing neutral convening power of the Coalition helped establish the VAN as a neutral entity and fostered trust among members of the community—essential factors in enabling the VAN to create a neutral legal framework that would appeal to a multilateral audience.

Similarly, the resources and tools that existed prior to the VAN established norms for data sharing and data use within the FP supply chain community, building a sense of communal trust among the users of those platforms. The CARHs, CSP, PPMR, and RHI established a precedent for the community’s positive intentions around supply chain data sharing and use, providing a strong foundation for the VAN to build on when establishing the legal framework.



“I think having the Coalition as a neutral host of the VAN has been so incredibly important to the multilateralism that is so essential to the VAN.”

— Alan Bornbusch, USAID

Defining a neutral facilitator

A critical factor in creating the VAN’s multilateral legal framework was establishing a neutral facilitator that would represent the interests of the community of VAN users as a whole, meaning the facilitator would oversee the VAN platform and associated legal framework on behalf of the RH community and for the benefit of the RH community. Given its established neutrality, it stands that the Coalition would facilitate the VAN. The Coalition’s Secretariat, including the VAN, is hosted by PATH, a global health nongovernmental organization. The Coalition worked through PATH to broker a legal connection between VAN users and the technology solutions vendor,⁷ E2open, using the VAN TOU as the vehicle for this connection.

Furthermore, for use of the VAN platform, E2open provides it under the terms of a master services agreement with PATH in order to protect the platform technology. VAN users access the platform and interact with data and each other according to the language of the TOU and their assigned business “role”⁸ in the platform. Under the VAN legal framework, each entity has their own obligations and risk, with no one entity bearing it all. This complex interplay of institutional structures is further described below and is what allows the VAN to remain neutral, and therefore accessible and acceptable to members of the platform.



“We can’t have a VAN without an external, neutral party that listens equally to the needs of all partners. If the VAN would have been maintained by one of the [supply chain actor] partners as the custodian of the VAN, that partner or custodian would obviously have more to say. It’s inevitable. Since this is a multilateral agreement, we need an entity in the middle that gathers inputs from all community partners fairly and further acts on their behalf.”

—Mina Asghari, UNFPA

7. For more information on identification of the VAN technology solutions vendor, please see [Forging a “Collective Ask” of the Global FP VAN Technology Vendor](#), a case study on the process to select the VAN software as a service provider.

8. The term “role” refers to the security role assigned to each individual user of the VAN based on their stated business need, as defined when their organization submits an Access Request Form. For further information, please refer to the [Establishing a roles-based security structure](#) section.

Involving the community

As a community-focused initiative, the VAN team incorporated prospective member desires and legal requirements into the “design and build” phase for actual data sharing policy development. Partner expertise and collaboration was essential to moving forward with development of the data sharing policy, with many checkpoints along the way to ensure the new data sharing policy was legally sound and would be acceptable to future VAN members. This collective approach put VAN users at the center and utilized the VAN’s governance structure⁹ to ensure integration of diverse perspectives as the data sharing policy language came together.



“The idea of inclusion and trying to bring everyone along, while still achieving objectives and addressing concerns, is key to staying in motion.”

— Stew Stremel, VAN Management Unit

The VAN Steering Committee¹⁰ helped set the course for the data sharing policy development process and endorsed the vision of a multilateral, roles-based data sharing policy framework. The VAN Management Unit integrated the policy framework process into routine meetings of the Steering Committee, allowing for regular touchpoints with VAN leadership on progress, critical questions, and decisions on the way forward. Steering Committee members not only provided input on the strategy and contents of the policy framework, they also championed the validity and acceptability of the multilateral approach and final policy materials within their institutions, smoothing the path toward agreement by those organizations.

The Data Sharing Task Force (DSTF) helped draft the data sharing policy and build broad community support for the multilateral framework. This community of doers was central to the development and operationalization of the VAN data sharing policy. Established early in the proof-of-concept

phase, the DSTF brought together representatives¹¹ who had experience in establishing formal and informal agreements with various supply chain actors, including individuals from CSP, CARhs, donor procurers, other organizations who contracted directly with manufacturers, and partners with nondisclosure or other agreements with other supply chain actors. This range of experience helped the VAN Management Unit understand what worked and what needed to be done differently in terms of the multilateral data sharing policy. Over the course of the initial proof-of-concept, the DSTF was key to vetting the contents of the policy and helped ensure the final product would be acceptable to VAN membership. This latter point became an essential role of the DSTF over time, as the group’s members served as VAN experts within their home organizations, helping to secure business-side support.

Convening this diverse and informed group enabled the VAN Management Unit to efficiently understand the existing landscape around data sharing agreements and identify opportunities for change. The DSTF was the first point of consensus for drafting the TOU, providing critical reviews and inputs as the legal documents were developed, and they continue to serve this role as the TOU is updated.



“...we used the DSTF as a way to vet ideas and drafts, and move towards agreement. This allowed us to foster champions within many of the key original organizations who were then able to support official acceptance of the Terms when the time came.”

— Julia White, VAN Director

9. For more information on the history of VAN governance, please see the companion case study, [Building a Collective Mindset: Operationalizing a Governance Structure for the Global FP VAN](#).

10. Steering Committee members include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, FCDO, RHSC, UNFPA, USAID, and user representatives from the Global Health Supply Chain Program (Procurement and Supply Management and Technical Assistance) and JSI.

11. Members of the Data Sharing Task Force include representatives from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CHAI, the Global Health Supply Chain-Procurement and Supply Management, JSI, RHSC, UNFPA, and USAID.

Engaging legal expertise

The VAN Management Unit recognized that legal expertise would be needed from the beginning to design, draft, and revise the data sharing policy, thinking through how to make it understandable and acceptable to legal representatives of prospective VAN member organizations. The Management Unit enlisted support from the PATH legal team, recognizing that PATH had the role of enabling appropriate data accessibility within the platform and use of the platform in compliance with the technology vendor’s requirements, the data sharing policy, and relevant applicable laws, including competition laws. This consultative process helped ensure that the legal implications and risks associated with the VAN had been considered from many different angles, including potential VAN members, the technology vendor, and PATH as the facilitator on behalf of the Coalition, and that the framework would reflect agreeable terms for the broadest range of prospective members.

To ensure the multilateral policy could serve an incredibly diverse membership while also addressing the highly specific needs and legal requirements of individual members, the VAN Management Unit facilitated conversations with legal representatives from a range of prospective member institutions, meeting frequently from the beginning to solicit input and discuss language and terms. This included consultations with the legal teams from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, CHAI, FCDO, JSI, UNFPA, USAID, and contraceptive manufacturers. An essential aspect of these discussions was ensuring legal representatives from these organizations understood the concept of the VAN by working with their technical colleagues to fully brief them on the purpose of the VAN and what the data sharing policy framework would entail. The Management Unit quickly learned this onboarding process was a key element of securing legal support, and overall buy-in, from prospective member organizations. Building a legal framework that would work for the full diversity of prospective VAN members was a challenge, and it was a hugely successful milestone when essential members of the platform, like UNFPA and USAID, officially agreed to the multilateral data sharing policy. Attaining legal consensus was a key turning point in successfully launching the policy and remains an ongoing focus of the Management Unit as it embodies best practices in data security and member responsiveness.

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“When you have data sharing amongst potential competitors or members of a supply chain, either vertical or horizontal, you have to consider the implications or consequences of that data sharing as it relates to competition.”

— Sabrina Powers, PATH

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“It paid off very well in the end, but it was not easy to agree, getting comments from each separate organization, from lawyers, and trying to accommodate this feedback in one acceptable Terms of Use. It would have been much easier to have multiple of this agreement based on each agency’s legal comments, but in the future, it would be much more complicated to maintain and much more difficult to manage. So, it was very hard to develop, but it really paid off.”

— Ramy Guirguis, USAID

Defining confidentiality

Constructing a core definition of what data would be considered confidential, and how that would inform access to and use of data within the platform, was an essential step forward in building out the multilateral data sharing policy. Prior to the VAN, shared data were available either at an aggregate level in resources or protected by bilateral nondisclosure agreements that defined confidentiality. Often, the nondisclosure agreements defined all the data from a certain sector as confidential, such as manufacturer shipment data, even when the received data included both nonconfidential elements and confidential elements. This worked well for the purposes of those agreements, which focused on aggregating data up to an anonymous level, but not for the VAN, which required a finer distinction and disaggregation among those able to view information. Furthermore, such definitions fostered a culture of overprotecting data and limiting data sharing, as noted earlier. Therefore, [defining confidentiality](#) became critical to establishment of the VAN’s data sharing policy framework. Specifically, it was essential to specify what data is truly confidential versus what is considered sensitive, as the two are not the same. To meet the requirements of prospective members, the VAN policy framework needed a highly specific description of the levels of data, what data could be accessed more publicly within the platform, and who could access the data, by level. The VAN Management Unit developed a [Data Definitions Table](#) based on the GS1 data hierarchy to break down all data into disaggregated labels. These disaggregated labels could then be compartmentalized into “confidentiality groupings,” which helped in determining how to assign data access rights while maintaining necessary confidentiality.

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“The VAN could not exist without the assurance that it continuously upholds the highest possible standards as it relates to confidentiality and data protection.”

— Marie Chantale Lepine, CHAI

Establishing a roles-based security structure

The VAN team determined who could access the different groups of confidential data available within the VAN, as denoted by the Data Definitions Table. The VAN Management Unit developed a [roles-based Data Use Rights Table](#), which clearly outlines the specific level(s) and categories of data each type of user can view when using the platform, and how they can use those data. A roles-based security structure means that each individual user of the VAN is assigned a security role based on their stated business need, as defined when their organization submits an Access Request Form for the platform. Each prospective member organization submits an Access Request Form. Those users are then assigned an individualized security role based on the business they will conduct within the VAN, allowing them to share and use select data as per the Data Use Rights Table and Data Definitions Table. This structure and assignment process safeguards confidentiality and security of VAN member data, while also facilitating multilateral use of the platform by making it easier to share and use data for collaboration and decision-making to expand supply.

Prior to the VAN, data sharing agreements—where they existed—were organization-based bilateral agreements, as mentioned previously. Organizations themselves would then determine who had access to the data internally, and for what purpose. This limited both internal access to data as well as cross-organizational collaboration (due to data security concerns), hampering efficient and effective data analysis and decision-making to assure access to contraceptives. Security roles within the VAN Data Use Rights Table are standardized, thus enabling users with similar security roles across organizations to share and use the same type(s) of data, without raising data security concerns. A first for the entities involved in standing up the VAN, establishing this type of roles-based multilateral policy enabled VAN users to access only the data necessary to fulfill their job responsibilities, while fostering cross-organizational collaboration and limiting risk for all members.

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“...being clear on how the data could be seen and how it could be used was really important.”

— Alexis Heaton, JSI

Operationalizing the legal framework

It took significant effort to operationalize the data sharing policy once there was consensus on the language and roles-based security approach. Given that access to the VAN was at an individual user level, versus an organizational level, a primary question that had to be addressed was how VAN users would ultimately agree to the legal framework. The historic bilateral agreements were often physically signed on paper, after much back and forth between institutions. This was time consuming, limited the discourse and process only to those individuals with the resources to manage the process (e.g., ability to sign off on documents for the institution or with access to senior decision-makers who could approve, etc.), and ultimately resulted in one-off agreements that were not harmonized across partners. The VAN Management Unit recognized the need to do away with such a cumbersome approach, and to modernize and democratize the process so it would be easily accessible and standardized for all.

The VAN Management Unit advocated for a “click and go” approach that would overcome these challenges, requiring users of the VAN, on behalf of their organizations, to accept the data sharing policy upon accessing the platform. This was, in effect, equalizing the multilateral legal framework by allowing all the opportunity to agree to the same policy in the same way. Importantly, the “click and go” approach also replicated similar digital user agreements VAN audiences would be familiar with (e.g., other software user agreements), and established a more structured and simplistic approach to agreement to future updates to the TOU. Through the DSTF, this approach was debated and refined, and task force members vetted the concept within their organizations. Any hesitancy on the part of institutions to allow users to agree to the policy on behalf of the institution was mitigated through the Access Request Form, which organizations are required to fill out prior to users being granted a login for the VAN. This ensured organizations self-identified the organizational approver for VAN activity, as well as individual users, and, in doing so, authorized them to agree to the TOU and do business within the VAN on behalf of the organization.

The VAN Management Unit worked very closely with E2open to ensure the policy was properly loaded into the platform, an agreement window would pop up the first time a user logged into the platform and anytime the TOU was updated, and users could not further access the platform without accepting the TOU. This approach has worked well for the VAN since it was initially implemented, simplifying the agreement process and making it more transparent and sustainable to manage over time.

Expanding accessibility through translation

The VAN platform and its legal framework were initially established and operationalized in English, though there was awareness from the beginning that a French version would be a huge asset to prospective members. To expand inclusivity, activities to translate the platform were undertaken in 2019 and the French version went live in January 2020. This included translating the data sharing policy documents from English to French. Given the legal language and implications, the Management Unit pursued a very detailed and thorough approach to developing a French translation of the data sharing policy, including validation through reverse and certified translation. The resulting French version of the data sharing policy is provided as a courtesy to Francophone users of the VAN; and the English version remains the legally binding policy document, and the reference for any questions.

Maintaining responsive policy

The VAN data sharing policy framework was purposefully built to allow for evolution. Great effort went into developing the first version and its included components, but from the beginning the VAN team recognized there would be an ongoing need to right-size the framework as membership grew and the platform technology and capabilities evolved.

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“...the flexibility to not have to get it right the first time is critical.”

— Stew Stremel, VAN Management Unit

This growth mindset fostered institution of a routine update process, administered by the VAN Management Unit and involving multiple layers of VAN governance.

Through regular touchpoints with the DSTF, the Steering Committee, and other VAN governance entities, as well as internal consultations and direct conversations with the VAN technology vendor, the VAN Management Unit monitors the need for updating the data sharing policy framework to align with:

- ▶ Norms and legal advances in data security and data sharing.
- ▶ Advancements in the capabilities of the VAN technology platform.
- ▶ Requested expansions to the VAN service offerings.
- ▶ Refined data security needs and data access rights.
- ▶ Institutional requirements of current and prospective members.

Further embodying the Coalition’s commitment to community-driven resource development, the VAN maintains a built-in group of technical experts who track and monitor the need for updates to the platform, including the data sharing policy framework. This Endorsers Group collects input on desired updates from VAN users; aligns those with the VAN “wish list” of features, service offerings, and platform capabilities; and collaborates with E2open and the VAN Steering Committee to prioritize and operationalize new releases of the platform software. While most releases do not require updates to the VAN data sharing policy,

it is occasionally necessary to update the framework so it remains aligned with the features of the VAN platform, ensuring transparency and sustained emphasis on the security of member data.

Any potential updates to the framework are reviewed with the lens that it should be a positive change for members. Should an update be needed, the VAN Management Unit develops draft language in consultation with PATH’s legal team; the DSTF provides initial input and thorough reviews; the Steering Committee is notified of key changes; and the draft revisions are shared with all VAN member organizations and their users for consideration. Members of the VAN are given the opportunity to view proposed changes to the policy framework, including changes to the Data Use Rights Table, before they take effect. This allows for institutional discussions and time for members to flag any concerns to the Management Unit. This process also serves to reinforce the transparency of VAN data sharing policy and to remind members of the policy terms, and it is another instance in which the neutrality of the Coalition facilitates trust within the community.

When a new version of the policy framework is finalized and uploaded to the platform, users are prompted to agree to the new version upon logging into the platform. This is yet another reminder to review the data use and data access policies, and that changes have been put in place. The consistent revisiting of the legal framework and its components ensures it remains relevant and applicable to all members as the user base grows and global data security norms evolve.

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“Transparency is always the best policy and best framework to be responsive to all the needs of the VAN members, transparency and communication.”

— Kara Hobbs, consultant to VAN Management Unit

Key learnings

As with the overall effort to establish the VAN, building the data sharing policy framework that serves as the backbone for the overall endeavor was complex, time intensive, transparent, and community focused. It required leadership, critical thinking, a willingness to experiment and be flexible, and ongoing focus on the details. Below are the key learnings regarding the establishment of a multilateral policy framework during the proof-of-concept phase.



Crafting a policy foundation is fundamental and must be prioritized at the earliest stages of development and throughout the proof-of-concept and beyond.

The importance of building the VAN's policy framework cannot be understated. Breaking new ground in multilateral, digital policy setting is a detailed, time-intensive endeavor that requires significant leadership from the implementing partner. Establishing the policy framework required considerable effort from the VAN Management Unit, governance entities, operational partners, and external collaborators. The time and budget for this exercise must be integrated into the proposal and proof-of-concept work plan, with all parties acknowledging the resources required to establish new policy. Policy establishment is part of systems change and must be integrated from the beginning as a central element of comprehensive systems change and process improvement.



Process management by a community-focused neutral implementer can bring the right partners to the table, facilitate decision-making, and safeguard inclusivity and transparency.

The VAN is an initiative undertaken on behalf of, and in service to, the RH community, and builds off the Coalition's long-established expertise and recognition as a neutral convener. This unique history and role within the community enabled the VAN Management Unit to bring disparate partners together for difficult, complex discussions, and oversee policy resolutions that were satisfactory to move forward with an agreeable data sharing legal framework. The Coalition then worked through PATH to broker a legal connection between VAN users, the technology solutions vendor, and the broader RH community.



Allowing space for adaptation, flexibility, and learning is key.

While developing the initial legal terms that shored up the VAN was complex and time consuming, the resulting TOU version 1.0 was never expected to be in place forever. The VAN Management Unit had sufficient foresight to recognize and implement processes and feedback loops for updating the data sharing policy as the platform evolved, membership grew, and lessons were learned. This included acknowledging the rapidly evolving data sharing environment (e.g., the General Data Protection Regulation in the European Union) and how the VAN's legal framework would need to grow and adapt. This adaptive management approach models a successful policy cycle (i.e., development, implementation, monitoring, revision) and helped ensure the initial and subsequent versions of the TOU were responsive, oriented around best practices and global norms, and reflected the learnings of the broader proof-of-concept phase.



Legal support should be enlisted early and often.

Drafting a legally binding data sharing policy framework requires significant input from legal professionals, and their collaboration should be integrated into the work planning process and project budget. Because there was significant landscaping prior to launch of the proof-of-concept, the VAN team recognized the need for legal expertise, and adequately budgeted for it, as well as time for high-quality, certified translations. This support helped provide a legally sound VAN data sharing policy framework that protects the VAN members, PATH as the facilitator of the VAN on behalf of the Coalition, the platform service provider and accommodates the legal requirements of prospective members.



Transparency is critical.

As noted throughout the case study, the transparency of the data sharing policy development process was an elemental driver of success for VAN policy building. Clear and frank discussions about data security requirements and data sharing practicalities enabled construction of a policy framework that is responsive to member needs. The VAN established a standard process for updating the policy, providing entry points for users to review changes and share feedback. These opportunities to provide feedback fostered inclusion and ownership among the VAN community.

The VAN proof-of-concept resulted in groundbreaking developments in multilateral data policy. In creating a legal framework that covered platform use, data sharing, and data use, the VAN established a model of multilateral policymaking that is truly innovative, yet replicable. A history of data sharing sensitized the reproductive health community to the practice, laying the groundwork for a multilateral approach. The neutrality of the VAN and the Coalition helped to secure the community’s trust and enabled operationalization, with the VAN pursuing a highly informed tactical strategy that addressed a host of complexities. Through extensive collaboration, transparency, and dedication to modernization, the VAN Management Unit and its partners created a multilateral legal framework that established a policy precedent and replicable example for the global development sector.

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“The VAN policy framework provides a solid example to follow for other health areas beyond family planning. It is a common problem. The VAN Terms of Use is by far the best existing model to the level of detail and is a good example that can be followed by other commodities, like HIV and malaria.”

— Ramy Guirguis, USAID

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“The legal framework and online policy resources developed by the VAN have been invaluable to the Verification and Traceability Data Sharing Task Team as we work to develop framework policies, processes, and agreements. With these, along with insights and direct advice from the VAN team, we have managed to massively accelerate progress, learning from the hard-won VAN experiences. The Data Use Rights Table formed the core of our Data Sharing Protocol. The VAN team has certainly succeeded in developing a global good to assist other multi-stakeholder consortiums, such as ours, which are striving to improve efficiency, visibility, and equity in supply chain and traceability systems.”

— Pierre Dane, Vital Wave: Verification and Traceability Initiative, Project Management Unit



THE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SUPPLIES COALITION & THE VAN

In 2016, members of the RH community asked the RHSC to take the lead in defining and operationalizing a more coherent and efficient way to gather and use data for upstream supply chain decision-making. The vision was to act on that request and put in place a Global Family Planning Visibility and Analytics Network (VAN). The VAN is meant to bring together people, processes, policy and technology to transform the way our community makes supply chain decisions. It offers a platform to collectively estimate and prioritize supply needs, people and processes to act when supply imbalances loom, and policy to govern data sharing and use. Eventually, a well-functioning VAN will lead to more timely and cost-effective delivery of commodities; more women reached with the right product at the right time; and a better allocation of limited health resources.

The present case study focuses on the policy quadrant of the VAN framework. It is part of a series of case studies documenting the key learnings from the VAN proof-of-concept phase.



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