

# The Innovation Fund

Translating promising ideas into action



Reproductive Health  
**SUPPLIES COALITION**

EXPLORING SOCIAL FRANCHISING  
IN BURUNDI



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## Exploring social franchising in Burundi

### THE POWER OF LEVERAGE

In 2012, PSI Burundi successfully turned a relatively small grant from the Coalition's Innovation Fund into a powerful lever for change. It allowed PSI to systematically assess and document the benefits of greater government engagement with the private sector, and, in so doing, to strengthen the prospects for additional donor support down the line. But perhaps most important of all, it is ensuring government stewardship of a growing movement to maximize the total market – public, commercial, and non-profit – for family planning products and services.

PSI Burundi is a small non-governmental organization, affiliated with Population Services International – one of the largest family planning providers in the world. PSI Burundi opened its doors in 1990 – and kept them open until 1996 when political instability and civil war forced the evacuation of its staff. Its local affiliate, Population, Santé et Information, remained open, continuing to raise awareness and encourage prevention of HIV/AIDS awareness, and socially market condoms. PSI Burundi reopened in 2002 and has, ever since, played a key role in delivering quality family products and services.

In 2010, the Burundi Ministry of Public Health published its National Health Plan for the period 2011-2015. In it, the government emphasized the critical importance of increased collaboration with the private sector, while at the same time acknowledging openly the many obstacles standing in its way: the pervasive disconnect between the

private sector and national regulatory systems; wariness by the private sector of government intrusion; and lastly, a generally weak understanding by the public sector of market dynamics.

The Innovation Fund enabled PSI Burundi to act upon the government's call. It did so by enabling them to propose an evidenced-based strategy for leveraging the assets of the private sector – an approach known as social franchising<sup>1</sup> – coupled with the prospects of future donor funding to take the strategy to scale.

### TESTING VIABILITY

Social franchising is not a new concept. Indeed, few agencies have more global experience with it than PSI. But it is not a magic bullet – nor is its success necessarily guaranteed. To assess the appropriateness of this model for Burundi, and then entice the broader donor community to support it, PSI turned to the Innovation Fund. Their approach was simple: assess the potential utility of social franchising for Burundi through an exhaustive situation analysis. And then, depending on a positive outcome of that assessment, design the future franchising programme, including both a logical framework and implementation plan.

Though still underway, PSI Burundi's grant from the Innovation Fund is filling a critical gap. In the words of its Director, Beth Brogaard, the grant is allowing them to be responsive to government goals while at the same time,

do their homework before approaching the wider donor community for large-scale support. “Donors will gladly fund success, but rarely do they have the appetite for the critical fact-checking needed to ensure that success.” For small, indigenous NGOs, that dilemma is especially problematic, because “rarely do such organizations have the resources to self-finance such endeavors – especially ones with any risk involved”.

## WIN-WIN

From an Innovation Fund perspective, whichever conclusion the Burundi analysis reaches – to recommend embarking on social franchising or otherwise – significant gains will have been made. On the one hand lies the potential for both more money, but also “better money” – in other words, money spent more wisely. The knowledge generated under this grant will serve as an empirical basis for developing new programmes, identifying priorities, and for lending credibility to future funding proposals. It presents the prospect for being a true catalyst of innovation.

But even if the situation should downplay the potential of a social franchising model for Burundi, the country would still benefit. The risks of an expensive and potentially unsuccessful experiment will have been reduced and the lessons learned will still inform future strategies for private sector engagement.

Perhaps most important of all, however, this grant will have reinforced the government’s stewardship role by enabling agencies such as PSI Burundi to respond to their calls for greater private sector engagement and, in so doing, sustain their interest in the years to come.

1. Social franchising incorporates community-based health workers, pharmacists and clinicians into a franchise network that helps them improve quality and productivity less expensively and more sustainably than each could achieve on their own.

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## Award

**Recipient: PSI Burundi**

**Amount: US\$39,999**

**Date: November 2011 – April 2013**

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### What is the Innovation Fund?

The Innovation Fund was established in 2008, through a generous grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Managed by the Coalition Secretariat, the Innovation Fund has to date made available more than US\$2.2M in small grants (maximum US\$200,000 per grant) to Coalition partners. The grants – more than 20 altogether – have yielded new tools, supported advocacy and research, leveraged millions of dollars in subsequent program funding, and launched a host of new initiatives across the Global South.

Traditionally, the Coalition has defined the concept of “innovation” broadly to include any promising new idea with the potential to bring about positive change. Innovation needn’t mean a radical departure from previous practice. It could also include new approaches to existing processes or the implementation of an existing strategy in a new context, especially if this adaptation leads to replication or scaling-up at country level.

### The Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition

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