The importance of data visibility

In the face of shrinking development resources, reaching 120 million new contraceptive users by 2020 will require more effective and efficient family planning (FP) supply chains. Getting there hinges on strengthening supply chain visibility.

Insufficient or incorrect data sends wrong messages through the supply chain, which results in stockouts, overstocks, expiration, wastage, and ultimately, empty hands.

Transcending the silos

Since 2004, the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition has fostered the development of many tools and mechanisms to enhance supply chain visibility. The Coordinated Supply Planning (CSP) and the Coordinated Assistance for RH Supplies (CARhs) teams are perhaps the best known of these. But their effectiveness is increasingly being hindered by cumbersome manual processes for reconciling data from multiple systems. In an ideal world, both these groups and the tools they use would form integral parts of a virtual, collaborative platform where community members can access the same data to collectively make supply chain decisions. This is the vision that is driving the establishment of a Global Family Planning Visibility and Analytics Network, or Global FP VAN.
Global FP VAN—a new vision for collaborative supply chain management

The Global FP VAN will bring together people, processes, policy and technology to transform the way our community makes supply chain decisions. From the people side, it will link procurers, manufacturers, shippers and countries in an active network focused on product flow into countries. In terms of technology, the platform will capture data from many sources, facilitate data harmonization and consolidate tools for network members to use. New processes will transform how these members interact, analyze data, and make decisions. There will be harmonized policies that govern data-sharing and use. The Global FP VAN will offer a platform to collectively estimate and prioritize supply needs, take action when supply imbalances loom, and advocate for funding when necessary. Eventually, a well-functioning Global FP 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 Way Forward

The Global FP VAN is being field-tested in Malawi and Nigeria, with four manufacturers (Bayer AG, Merck Sharp & Dohme Corp, Mylan Laboratories Ltd., and Shanghai Dahua Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd) and two product families—implants and oral contraceptives. Within the next six months, the Global FP VAN initiative will have the pilot supply chain players using and exchanging data on the live platform, will have collected data on initial key performance indicator data, and will have finalized a business case that measures the value of the Global FP VAN to-date versus expectations. For more information on Global FP VAN, please contact Julia White at jwhite@rhsupplies.org.