Increasing Access to Quality Pharmaceuticals and Other Commodities for the Treatment, Care, and Support of HIV/AIDS Patients: A Case for Regional Collaboration for Procurement

Introduction
South Africa faces challenges in increasing access to high-quality, affordable pharmaceuticals for treating people living with HIV/AIDS. Even when antiretroviral therapy is available, its effectiveness is undermined by lack of access to a consistent and uninterrupted supply of antiretrovirals (ARVs). Groups of countries in various parts of the developing world have had success in pooling their resources to more efficiently procure essential medicines and supplies. Regional collaboration for the procurement of HIV/AIDS-related pharmaceuticals and commodities would provide a mechanism to increase access to these products in the 14 countries belonging to the Commonwealth Regional Health Community (CRHC) of Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa.

Assessment Methods
The Regional Pharmaceutical Management (RPM) Plus Program of Management Sciences for Health administered a questionnaire to assess the structure of public sector pharmaceutical management to support pooled procurement in 11 CRHC member countries—Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Prior to this study, no standardized approach had been used to guide groups of countries in selecting the best model for collaboration. Our methodology identified three conditions that a point in a group toward a particular model, based on the group’s characteristics. Steps of the assessment, which was conducted between June and October 2002, included:

Collaborative development of a questionnaire by RPM Plus and the Center for Pharmaceutical Management’s Rockefeller Foundation-funded project to assess the feasibility of using regional blocs for pooled procurement of HIV/AIDS drugs and commodities
Identification of favorable conditions for each model, which were linked to questions in the survey instrument
Intensive follow-up to the initial questionnaire, including document reviews and interviews with key personnel.

Analysis of data from 28 questions determined whether favorable conditions exist for countries to embark upon any of four models of procurement collaboration.
Computation of the proportion of favorable conditions to determine a country’s readiness to participate in a particular model. We set a cutoff point of 70 percent as representing the proportion of favorable factors required for successful participation in any model of collaboration.

What Is Regional Collaboration for Procurement?
The concept of collaborative procurement covers a range of options from simple information sharing to pooling of resources confirmed, with joint contracting and purchasing carried out by an agency using in-house or outside of a group of countries, health systems, and suppliers.

Regional models of collaboration identified in the assessment are informed buying, coordinated purchasing, group contracting, and central contracting.

Select Assessment Results
Legal or Policy Mechanisms for Participation in Multicountry Information Sharing
Countries were asked as to whether they had legal or policy mechanisms that would permit or restrict participation in multicountry information sharing. Six countries—Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, the Seychelles, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe—reported having no restrictions to participating in pooled procurement. These countries—Swaziland, Uganda, and Zambia—reported having restrictions.

For more information please contact—
Website: www.msh.org/rpmplus
Email: zmplucho@rmp.org

Next Steps
RPM Plus is collaborating with the CRHC Secretariat to initiate a coordinated informed buying (CIB) model in the region; however, most countries will have to reform their policies and administrative procedures before CIB can be fully implemented. Enacting these reforms will require considerable human and financial resources, time, and most of all, political will.

As a first step, RPM Plus help established and support a regional body that serves as a mechanism for addressing issues identified in this research—the Regional Pharmaceutical Forum. Additional steps necessary for establishing a CIB model include—

Soliciting and securing funding
Developing information dissemination tools
Conducting a training workshop in the use of CIB tools
Identifying personnel in each member state to be trained in market research techniques
Providing office space and recruiting CIB staff
Procuring and installing hardware, software, and office equipment and supplies
Subscribing to relevant journals and purchasing relevant publications and documents
Conducting monitoring/evaluation and support visits to member states

The use of CIB is expected to enable member states to make more rational and informed buying decisions, leading to potential cost savings, better service from manufacturers, and an improved and more efficient supply chain from manufacturers to pharmacists. Once the CIB model is established, it could possibly evolve into a regional pooled procurement model that could be conducted in the health sector.

For more information please contact—
Website: www.msh.org/rpmplus
Email: zmplucho@rmp.org

www.msh.org/rpmplus
Email: zmplucho@rmp.org

Commonwealth Regional Health Community of East, Central, and Southern Africa
The Rockefeller Foundation