The Need for a Caribbean Pharmaceutical Policy

Access to essential medicines is a prerequisite for realizing the right to health. Access to medicines is guaranteed through the development and implementation of pharmaceutical policies, integrated with health policies, addressing primary determinants in product selection, pricing and financing, as well as regulation, organization of the provision system and rational use. In order to be beneficial, medicines need to be safe, effective and of quality - otherwise funds can be wasted, the populations’ health can be put at risk and confidence in the health system can be jeopardized. National medicines expenditures currently ranges from 7% to 66% of total health expenditure worldwide.

EU Support for Technical co-operation for development and implementation of Caribbean Pharmaceutical policies

2004-2010: Since 2004, the European Union (EU) has supported through Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) the strengthening of technical cooperation in the Caribbean in the area of medicines via the EU/ACP (Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific) / World Health Organization (WHO) Partnership on Pharmaceutical Policies, covering CARICOM members and the Dominican Republic. This partnership operated from March 2004 to September 2010 and was designed to enhance accessibility, quality, and use of essential medicines and other key pharmaceuticals in African, Caribbean and Pacific Island countries. The objectives were:

1. Develop, implement and monitor National Medicines Policies;
2. Increase equitable access to essential medicines, particularly for priority health problems;
3. Ensure the quality, safety and efficacy of medicines through effective drug regulation; and
4. Improve rational use of medicines by health professionals and consumers.

More than US$ 1.2 million dollars was provided by the EU to support technical cooperation activities during the period, complemented by significant additional resources from PAHO.

Main Achievements 2004 - 2010

Pharmaceutical Policies: Increased capacity of ACP countries to develop, implement and monitor the impact of National Medicines Policies with an emphasis on equitable access to essential medicines.

• Caribbean Pharmaceutical Policy developed based on evidence and approved by the CARICOM 21st Council of Human and Social Development in April 2011.
• Support for strengthening National Pharmaceutical Policies, eg. Dominican Republic, Barbados, Surname, Belize.
• Pharmaceutical Situation in the Caribbean Countries. Available at: http://new.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2035&Itemid=1177
• Training and WHO Assessment of the Pharmaceutical Situation completed in: Barbados, Jamaica, Suriname and St. Lucia and pilot of the reviewed WHO Country Pharmaceutical Profile completed in Suriname.
• Strengthening of Pharmaceutical Education with the establishment of the Caribbean Network on Pharmacy Education.

Access and International Trade Agreements: Countries take advantage of the flexibilities and safeguards in the TRIPS Agreement.

• Technical Support to the Regional Assessment on Patent and Related Issues and Access to Medicines in CARICOM Member States and the Dominican Republic, commissioned by CARICOM and conducted by HERA, 2009.
• Capacity building and active participation of Caribbean countries in the WHO Inter-Governmental Working Group on Public Health and Intellectual Property Rights (IGWG) of WHO;
• Support to the Technical Advisory Group on Intellectual Property/CARICOM, in the development and submission for approval of the Caribbean Pharmaceutical Policy.

Affordability and Financing: Improved affordability and financing of essential medicines in both the public and private sectors through active use of price information, generic competition, differential pricing, reduced tariffs and taxes, benchmarks for public financing and expanded use of new medicines financing strategies.

• Training provided and Medicines Prices and Availability Surveys completed in Dominican Republic and Bahamas.
• Strategies for strengthening medicines supply and cost-containment developed in Dominican Republic.
Medicines Supply Management: More reliable and efficient medicines supply management systems in both the public and private sectors in countries including, where appropriate, regional pooled procurement and sustainable local production.

- Trainings organized with establishment of the Network of National Authorities for Medicines Procurement (CARIPROSUM) with the development of performance indicators
- Strengthening of the Pharmaceutical Procurement Service/Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (PPS/OECS)
- Assessment and strengthening of Medicines Supply Systems in Guyana, Belize, Bahamas and Trinidad and Tobago.

Norms and Standards: Strengthened norms, standards and guidelines for the quality, safety and efficacy of key medicines, including new pharmaceutical tests and coordinated regional and international harmonization of norms.

- Strengthening of the Caribbean Regional Drug Test Laboratory and National Laboratories for Medicines Quality Control.
- Support for the participation of Caribbean countries in the activities of the Pan American Network on Drug Regulatory Harmonization (PANDRH)

Effective Drug Regulation: Increased capacity in ACP countries for effective drug regulation and quality assurance systems, with improved inspection practices, combating substandard and counterfeit drugs, reliable information management systems.

- Strengthening of National Regulatory Authorities, with self-assessment and support for capacity building.
- Technical support for the Regional Assessment of Drug Registration and Regulatory Systems of CARICOM Member States and the Dominican Republic commissioned by CARICOM and conducted by HERA, 2009.
- Trainings conducted and pharmacovigilance implemented in Suriname, Barbados, Jamaica and OECS/PPS. A Caribbean Network for Pharmacovigilance (VIGICARIB) established and operational.
- Strengthening medicines regulation with the establishment of the Caribbean Network on Medicines Regulation.

Rational Use of Medicines: More rational prescribing and dispensing of medicines by health professionals and containment of antimicrobial resistance in ACP countries through training and regional workshops.

- Trainings conducted and countries supported to develop/update Essential Medicine Lists, eg: Barbados, Dominican Republic, Guyana, St Vincent and Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago and OECS/PPS;
- Experts consultation and development of the Essential Medicines for Disasters and Emergencies;

2011 and beyond: Future Challenges

Despite enormous progress and the approval of the Caribbean Pharmaceutical Policy, significant challenges remain. In particular promoting access to medicines based on the principles of equity, safety, quality and rational use, with health systems and services that provide people-centered care. The main strategies proposed to face future challenges include:

- To implement a Workplan for the Caribbean Pharmaceutical Policy that will support and improve access, quality and rational use of medicines in Caribbean countries, with special emphasis on strengthening regulatory capacity for medicines;
- To continue strengthening regional networks/collaborative forums in pharmaceutical policy issues, availing of the established networks and collaboration that has been achieved through the EU/PAHO/WHO project 2004–2010.
- To continue providing sub-regional and country support in strategic areas of medicines and health systems.
- To strengthen the inter-programmatic and inter-sectoral work program including with CARPHA.

PAHO/WHO is committed to building on the successes of the EU/WHO ACP Partnership on Pharmaceutical Policies 2004–2010 and is looking forward to continue its collaboration with the EU within the framework of the “Renewed Partnership on Pharmaceutical Policies” and establishing other partnerships. Within this framework PAHO will be mobilizing additional resources to consolidate the results achieved to date, complete the unfinished agenda and address future challenges that have been identified by Caribbean countries.

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