

CGD PROJECT ON UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON ESSENTIAL MEDICINES SUPPLY CHAINS

Brief Report

INTRODUCTION

TalaConsult was contracted by the Centre for Global Development (CGD) to obtain and analyse a dataset from a select number of medical stores in Africa. The scope of work included:

- a) To review, amend and finalise the wholesaler questionnaire for the central medical stores survey;
- b) To contact the final list of seven selected Central Medical Stores, administer the survey and conduct follow-up interviews and
- c) To provide inputs into the analysis of the survey results.

IMPLEMENTATION

The questionnaire developed for the wholesaler survey was reviewed and amended to capture Central Medical Stores' unique position and challenges as public health institutions operating under various governance models. The amended questionnaire and letter of introduction were shared with CGD for inputs and finalised, and further translated into French for the francophone medical stores.

TalaConsult utilized its own network to get contact details and also received a number of contact details from CGD. For the survey, the following institutions were contacted:

1. Tanzania- Medical Stores Department (MSD) – CEO L. Bwanakunu
2. Kenya – Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (KEMSA) – Commercial Director E. Muriithi & Operational Director E. Njoroge
3. Ethiopia – Ethiopian Pharmaceutical Supply Agency (EPSA) – Former Director General L. Abraham
4. Senegal – Pharmacie National D'Approvisionnement (PNA) – Director A. Seck
5. Gambia – National Pharmaceutical Services (NPS) – Director B. Sabally
6. Zambia - Medical Stores Ltd (Medstore) – Managing Director -C. Mbewe
7. Zimbabwe – National Pharmaceutical Company (NatPharm) – Managing Director FN Sifeku

INITIAL RESPONSES:

- Senegal and Gambia - acknowledged receipt and confirmed that the questionnaire would be duly filled and submitted.

- Tanzania and Zimbabwe – emails were returned with the messages that CEO Bwanakunu of Tanzania and MD Sifeku of Zimbabwe were no longer on the mailing lists of MSD and NatPharm respectively.
 - Tanzania- further investigations revealed that the MSD CEO has been jailed, and is currently going through a trial on economic sabotage charges. A Brigadier General Dr. Mhidize was appointed to replace him as the new Director General of MSD as of May 2020.¹
 - Zimbabwe – It was also found that NatPharm MD and other senior managers are going to court on financial fraud and procurement irregularities since June 2020. Four Board members were also arrested in July 2020. It is unclear who is currently in charge.
- Zambia – received a response from the MD of Medstore that the Ministry of Health is responsible for the procurement of essential medicines, and not the medical stores. After follow-ups, the contact details of the Permanent Secretary were provided.
- Kenya – during follow-ups received the news that KEMSA CEO, Commercial Director and Procurement Director are suspended facing charges of Covid-19 procurement irregularities and alleged misuse of funds.

Additional contact details were sought and communications despatched accordingly to the below contacts:

1. Ethiopia – S. Isa, Tender Management Director, EPSA
2. Zambia – K. Malama, Permanent Secretary, MOH

New countries were accordingly identified and communication sent:

1. Ghana – B. Asamany, Ghana Health Services
2. Malawi – J. Khalani, Central Medical Stores Trust (CMST)
3. Uganda – M. Kamabare, Director General, National Medical Stores (NMS)
4. Sierra Leone – SJ Smith, Programme Manager, Central Medical Stores
5. Niger – Director General, Medical Stores

FINAL RESPONSES

Initially, only two responded and submitted filled-in questionnaires and participated in follow-up interviews to further clarify their answers and/or provide additional information. Considering that the survey questions were quite straight forward, it was decided to follow up with questions that would provide additional context to the situation. Both filled-in questionnaires and interview responses were duly submitted.

Following a lack of responses from other countries, the deadline to submit the questionnaire was extended, which enabled additional follow-ups and new contacts to be reached, namely:

1. Malawi – CEO, Feston Kaupa, CMST contacted

¹ Reference: <https://dailynews.co.tz/news/2020-05-035eaf00d89c281>

2. Ethiopia – follow-up email and calls made to S. Isa, Tender Management Director, EPSA
3. Nigeria – Pharmacist Mashood Lawal, Director Food and Drugs Services , Federal Ministry of Health, Abuja contacted
4. Kenya – follow-up message to E. Njoroge, Acting CEO KEMSA
5. Sierra Leone – Director, Jack Lansana, Directorate of Drugs and Medical Supplies contacted
6. Nigeria – CEO, Ramatu AbdulKadir, Kaduna Medical Supply Management Agency contacted

CONCLUSIONS

A total of five responses were received. In addition to Gambia and Senegal, Malawi and Nigeria (Abuja and Kaduna) responded to the questionnaire. A follow-up interview was conducted with Malawi.

For Abuja as a Federal CMS, the questionnaire was filled, but with the message that Essential Medicines are not centrally procured, with the various states and Tertiary / Specialists hospitals carrying out direct procurement. Thus the data was scanty as only narcotic drugs were relevant to their context. Whilst the Director of the Federal CMS was very responsive, he also indicated that the questions would be more applicable to hospitals. Follow-up information on the overall stock situation was requested and received from Abuja.

For Kaduna, the questionnaire was filled and duly submitted.

Despite numerous follow-ups through e-mails and phone calls:

- Ghana, Niger, Uganda and Nigeria (Kaduna) did not respond to the messages
- Ethiopia and Sierra Leone acknowledged receipt but did not respond to the questionnaire. Ethiopia, subsequently sent a note of apology for not responding to the questionnaire .

Three medical stores (Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe) were removed from the list as potential responders as they are all currently going through major upheavals with senior management changes and/or dismissals, court cases on procurement & financial irregularities charges and public and political scrutiny during the covid-19 pandemic.

In spite of the challenges, at least 4 countries representing 5 facilities did respond positively to the request. Based on my experience with central medical stores, most of the senior management at medical stores are under a huge amount of pressure especially in the last two months in which covid-19 infections and deaths have been rapidly increasing in many African countries. This has created many challenges including but not limited to: reduced number of human resources (for example in The Gambia, many health care workers and even staff at the Central Medical Stores have been infected with covid-19; the Director of Pharmaceutical was self-isolating for 2 weeks; the Director of the FCMS, Abuja has been home sick all during our communication); redirection of priorities and available resources to activities directly dealing with covid-19 and related emergencies. The short timeframe for filling the questionnaires might also be a limiting factor, as the deadline was extended twice.

The implication therefore is that most are reluctant to engage on surveys and interviews as they may not see the questionnaire as a priority or a mandatory requirement from e.g. donors and other funding

agencies and/or they do not have the necessary resources, time and motivation to be engaged especially as the situation is worsening on the continent.