

KEYNOTE ADDRESS AND OFFICIAL OPENING OF WORKSHOP



Prof. Chairman, representatives of NGOs and CSOs, providers of pharmaceuticals, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen, all protocol observed. It is indeed my pleasure and privilege to be asked by the organizers of this civil society organisations capacity building workshop on access to essential medicines to give this keynote address. I am delighted to see here an assembly of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) interested in access to medicines, governance, transparency and accountability processes in Ghana.

Mrs Irina Ofei

Director of Health Services-Asuagyaman District

Prof. Chairman, medicines are essential health commodities such as drugs, vaccines, contraceptives, diagnostics and laboratory supplies. One third of the world's population lack access to essential medicines as indicated in WHO medicines strategy 2004-07. Pharmaceuticals are the largest health sector expenditure after personnel costs in most low income countries and can constitute 50-90 per cent of out of pocket spending on health for poor households. Improving the availability and affordability of quality essential medicine is therefore the key to increasing access to healthcare. However the opaque nature of medicines sales and distribution contributes to high levels of inefficiency and fraud. Issues include bribery, theft and diversion, the supply of counterfeit and substandard medicines and rent seeking behavior - such as the addition of unnecessarily high mark-ups at different points along the supply chain. This increases the cost of quality medicines and reduces their availability undermining health services and outcomes. It also harms those that supply medicines and other health-related goods and services – increasing their operational costs, reducing their competitiveness and damaging their reputation. Increased transparency and consumer participation in procurement can help cut corruption, improve efficiency and increase value-for-money.

Prof. Chairman, this workshop is part of civil society capacity strengthening as part of the work of the international Medicines Transparency Alliance (MeTA). MeTA has been launched as a global alliance with pilots in seven countries that recognise that increased transparency in medicines sales and distribution would help them to challenge corruption, inappropriate mark-ups and prevalence of counterfeit and other substandard medicines. A first step would be a commitment at a high political level to prioritise the issue. Global and national activities facilitated by MeTA could include:

- Support countries to undertake full medicine pricing and availability surveys.
- Encourage the use of follow-up survey methodologies for regular monitoring of medicine prices and availability.
- Publicising widely this and other data on prices paid at various points along the supply chain, including those agreed at public tender. Scrutinising this alongside all data on stock volumes and the availability of medicines to the consumer.
- Facilitating agreement by pharmaceutical companies (global and domestic) to publicise their supply prices. Triangulating those with tender data.
- Produce a MeTA report which would further analyse and contextualise issues relating to price, availability and quality.

- Disseminate the MeTA report and other sources through the media and public interest groups to enable scrutiny and the appropriate challenge of medicine pricing and availability along the supply chain.
- Making available financial, technical and political assistance including to build capacity in procurement and supply chain management systems.
- Developing and building awareness of guidelines and case studies on good practices as appropriate.
- Supporting developing country governments to formulate and implement policies and appropriate regulatory frameworks to address medicine affordability, availability and quality using the above evidence.

MeTA aims to use multi-stakeholder approach towards increasing transparency around the regulation, procurement, sale, distribution and use of medicines in developing countries thereby strengthening governance, encouraging responsible business practices and ultimately improving access to medicines especially for the poor.

The meaningful participation of civil society in these multi-stakeholder activities in Ghana, in which the MeTA process has been launched, is critical to the success of the process. This five-day workshop with a particular emphasis on strengthening those with the least power to engage with the process will help participants:

- Feel more prepared and comfortable to engage with national policy processes including the multi-stakeholder working groups envisaged by MeTA.
- Acquire specific knowledge on issues related to access to medicines, in particular transparency, accountability and efficiency issues.
- Acquire skills to promote greater transparency and accountability at national, district and community levels.
- Strengthen networking and establish linkages among CSOs working on essential medicines issues.
- Develop ideas on campaigns and advocacy on medicines issues in Ghana.

Prof. Chairman, I think this is a great opportunity for our participants to share their knowledge, skills and experiences. It is my hope that the participants of this workshop as well as other leaders of other relevant bodies will accept the challenge that they have a major role to play in working with the MeTA initiative and do their best to support this initiative to ensure the success of it and also to form a strong network to address issues on access to essential medicines in Ghana.

At this point I want to declare this workshop fully opened. Thank you very much and may the Almighty Lord bless all of us.