



Leveling the playing field: 23 June 2009, London

Over 30 pharmaceutical representatives attended a one day consultative meeting on 23 June 2009, to find out more about MeTA and to share their own perspectives. MeTA organised the meeting to provide the private sector with an opportunity to hear about MeTA's efforts so far, and to identify – from the perspective of private sector enterprises – the major challenges facing pharmaceutical companies working in emerging markets. It also provided an opportunity to help shape efforts to find a sustainable and lasting solution to the problem of access to medicines in developing countries.

Representatives were from all sections of the industry – international and local, research-based and generics. Chaired by Andrew Jack of the Financial Times, the meeting provoked engaging discussion about the interests of pharmaceutical companies in emerging markets, and the barriers that exist for poor people to access the medicines they need including poverty, infrastructure, governance, and inefficient systems.

Callum Miller, of the Growth and Investment Group at the UK Department for International Development (DFID) said he was heartened by the presence of so many pharmaceutical company representatives. He noted that the history of non-cooperation between partners – the government, private sector and civil society - and that now through MeTA they are working towards a common goal and to the benefit of citizens in the seven pilot countries participating in MeTA.

Brian Elliott, Executive Director of MeTA said at the start of the day, “We would like the pharmaceutical industry to express support for the MeTA principles. We would like to engage with you in a public manner.” He went on to explain what is meant by a level playing field.

What do we mean by a level playing field?

- Poor patients can afford essential medicines
- Fake and sub-standard drugs are eliminated
- Stockouts and theft in the public sector and leakages from the public to the private sector controlled
- High government taxation reduced or eliminated
- Importers, distributors, wholesaler and retailer margins curtailed
- Registration and regulatory procedures streamlined
- Medicines rationally prescribed
- Ethical codes and promotion standards observed
- Intellectual Property rights protected as described under TRIPS – country's legitimate need for processes to obtain fair access to essential medicines recognised.

At the international level MeTA asks the pharmaceutical industry to support the MeTA principles of transparency and multi-stakeholder dialogue. At pilot country level it asks the industry to engage with MeTA by beginning the process of progressive disclosure of data and information concerning price, quality, availability and promotion. It also asks industry to engage with the other stakeholders through the MeTA Councils in the discussions and debates arising from these disclosures aimed at eliminating barriers to access to medicines.

Private sector representatives from four of the MeTA countries – Ghana, Jordan, Uganda and the Philippines – presented information about access to medicines in their respective countries. They shared the problems they faced in the medicine supply chain and the areas they will focus on. Reiner Gloor Executive Director of PhAC in the Philippines and MeTA Philippines Council member said, “We want to develop a strong culture of ethical marketing in both the private and the public sector.” Paul Lartey, Representative of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association of Ghana (PMAG) and MeTA Ghana Council member noted the problems that Ghana has with fake and sub-standard medicines and how they would like to improve the quality of medicines.

Nazeem Mohammed, Representative of Uganda Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association and MeTA Uganda Council member noted that a big issue in Uganda is the lack of data on medicines and suggested ideas on how MeTA and the private sector can best work together. Hanan Sboul from the Jordan Pharmaceutical Manufacturer’s Association and MeTA Jordan Council member said of MeTA Jordan, “As the private sector we saw there is a need to have a private sector playing an effective and active role.” They are aiming to be active in the transparency process, not just to be represented. The challenge is to build the capacity and willingness of the private sector to share information relating to pricing, availability, quality and promotion of medicines.

Small group discussion further explored the key issues relating to the private sector and MeTA including price, quality, availability of medicines and ethical practices. Key points to emerge from these groups were:

Price:

- More information and mapping of the supply chain is needed and there should be incentives for disclosure.
- MeTA can add value by acting as a facilitator.
- Which aspects of medicine pricing is the private sector expected to disclose and how will this information be used?

Quality:

- There should not be different quality standards, need to link more with WHO to ensure quality. But WHO prequalification may be unsuitable in current form. Should it be regional?
- Regulatory bodies are vital and should be supported. Assistance should be given to regional Drug Regulatory Authorities.
- Clarity is needed around definitions on counterfeit and sub-standard medicines.

Availability:

- The biggest barrier to availability is the lack of infrastructure, but other barriers are the lack of purchasing power at individual level and lack of availability in rural areas.
- Incentives are important: what are some ways to creatively de-incentivise certain systems and incentivise better systems?
- Supporting local manufacturers is vital and we need to address registration issues.

Ethical practices:

- It is the responsibility of the industry to propose a code of ethical practice. There is a lack of sanctions and rewards relating to practice.
- We could agree on a definition of ethical practice.
- What really matters is the relationship between the private sector and government officials.

Transparency, data and information

MeTA's goal is to generate good quality and robust information about the medicines sector. Disclosure of data is essential to the process. Peter Stephens from Intercontinental Marketing Services raised some important issues around disclosure and use of information. He pointed out that it is very difficult to get people to disclose information. There are ways of treating information or aggregating sensitive information that recognise the complexities of the market and respect competitive advantages.

MeTA Core Principles

Andrew Chetley, Director of Communication and Capacity Strengthening, presented the Core Principles of MeTA.

The following core principles underpin MeTA's approach. MeTA is asking all stakeholder, including the private sector, to subscribe to these core principles.

- Governments are responsible for providing access to health care, including access to essential medicines.
- Stronger and more transparent systems and improved supply chain management will increase access.
- Increasing equitable access to medicines improves health and enables other human development objectives to be achieved.
- Improved information about medicines can inform public debate, and provide a basis for better policy.
- A multi-stakeholder approach that involves all sectors – private, public and civil society - will lead to greater accountability.

Dilip Shah of the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance made a presentation about the generics industry and the important role it can play in MeTA. He said, "I believe MeTA could be a catalyst for change."

The final session of the day was a panel discussion. The panel, chaired by Andrew Jack, was Sophia Tickell, Director of SustainAbility and chair of the MeTA International Advisory Group; Dilip Shah of the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance; Chris Mockler of the American Pharmaceutical Group Workstream; and Rory O'Riordan of the European Generics Medicines Association.

Some key issues discussed included:

- Incentives to get involved in disclosing data as part of the MeTA process.
- The sensitivities around disclosing data that if handled incorrectly might lead ultimately to less transparency and more protection of information.
- The need to increase capacity of countries to make more medicines themselves.
- A need for one common regulatory body at regional level to reduce the amount of time it takes for medicines to be approved.
- MeTA is an opportunity to understand more about what is happening in emerging markets and this can help private companies and governments make more informed choices.
- There are different spheres of information. The way that information is disclosed, treated, and aggregated can recognise the complexities of the market and respect competitive advantages.
- A pro-competitive policy is important and we need to create an environment where the industry is willing to share information.
- Most poor people pay 'out of pocket' – so how does affordability play out in emerging markets in this scenario?
- What about intermediaries like the Gates Foundation or the Global Fund? What is their role and how is MeTA partnering with them?

Brian Elliott closed the event by saying that MeTA is about process and it is about structure and it is about the efforts of people at country level. Stakeholders are not involved with MeTA because of financial gain as funding is small. He said, "There is great good will and great belief and this is what we are trying to harness." The private sector, at national and international levels, can be a part of the process through participation and dialogue to make change happen and increase access to medicines for poor people.

He asked the private sector to consider and support the Core Principles and participate fully in MeTA at country level.