



MeTA: Contributing to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The goal of the Medicines Transparency Alliance (MeTA) is to contribute to increased access to affordable essential medicines in developing countries, in cooperation with pharmaceutical companies. This is in line with Millennium Development Goal 8, Target 17 which states

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential medicines in developing countries

MeTA is starting work in 7 countries – Ghana, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Peru, The Philippines, Uganda and Zambia.

What's the current situation in each of these countries in relation to meeting this goal and its associated target? Finding reliable information on progress is not always easy. Partnerships for development come in various shapes and sizes. Access to essential medicines is not a simple measurement: it needs to look at the price, the availability (in stock, nearby), and the appropriateness of the product (the right medicine, right quantity, good quality). The table on the next page gives an initial snapshot of where things stand in mid-2008, and draws from a number of different information sources.

One of MeTA's major challenges is to support countries to improve the quality of the information they have available to be able to respond to issues around access to medicines, particularly for the poor, in an efficient manner.

Recent efforts in two MeTA countries – Jordan and The Philippines (see boxes below) – show what can be done when there is a clear political commitment from governments to:

- increase access to essential medicines for all citizens
- improve transparency of information
- promote better governance and encourage accountability
- improve the functioning of the health system and the pharmaceutical market
- promote more appropriate resource allocation by public medicine purchasers
- work with and involve all sectors of society in a multi-stakeholder approach .

Over the next few years, concerted effort in these areas, and the sharing of the lessons learned, will help to develop approaches that can help these countries and many others to increase access to medicines for poor and vulnerable people.

Status of progress towards MDG 8, Target 17

Country	Progress towards Goal (according to the UNDP MDG monitor) ¹	Progress towards Target
Ghana	MDG goal possible to achieve by 2015	Availability for 27 out of 39 essential drugs in 2004 was less than 50% in the public sector. ²
Jordan	Jordan is facing the challenges of Goal 8 by working both on external relations and on internal policies. ... more efforts have to be made in order to achieve more effective roles and functions of all the stakeholders within the development process. (The box on the next page illustrates how this might happen.)	Of the lowest price essential drugs surveyed in 2004, less than 30% were available in public health facilities. <i>'The very low availability of medicines in public health facilities plus some unaffordable prices in private retail pharmacies are major barriers to accessing essential treatments for the poorest and uninsured segments of society'</i> ³
Kyrgyzstan	Insufficient information to make an assessment; next report due in 2008	A 2005 study found that there is less than 60% availability for some essential medicines in the private sector ⁴
Peru	Insufficient information to make an assessment	A 2006 Amnesty International study say that according to estimates by Peru's Ministry of Health, 25 per cent of the population – some 6.5million people, have no access to primary health care. ⁵ A key component of primary health care is access to essential medicines.
Philippines	Although the Philippines is generally on target to meet the MDGs, there is insufficient information to make an assessment on Goal 8; however, this has been highlighted as a major priority for future efforts (see box)	This is one of only 8 MDG indicators not available (WHO has estimates for 1995 and 1997) ⁶ . A 2005 survey found low availability of essential medicines in the public sector and high prices for medicines in both public and private facilities. ⁷
Uganda	With continued good policies, Uganda appears likely to achieve targets for Goals 1, 3, 6, 7 and 8.	A 2004 survey showed that among 28 medicines included in the country's national essential medicines list only 55% could be found in health facilities where treatment is offered for free. ⁸
Zambia	Insufficient information to make an assessment	'Access to essential medicines is still a challenge in Zambia', said Zambian President L.P. Mwanawasa in June 2007. ⁹

¹ http://www.undp.org/mdg/tracking_countryreports2.shtml For additional detailed information, see also: <http://www.undp.org.ph/target15.php>; http://www.undp.org.ph/?link=news&news_id=118&fa=1

² http://www.hiafrica.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=169&Itemid=130

³ <http://www.haiweb.org/medicineprices/surveys/200405JO/sdocs/summary-report.pdf>

⁴ www.haiweb.org/medicineprices/surveys/200502KG/sdocs/survey_report.pdf

⁵ <http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR460042006?open&of=ENG-PER>

⁶ <http://www.nscb.gov.ph/stats/mdg/assessment.asp>

⁷ <http://www.haiweb.org/medicineprices/surveys/200502PH/sdocs/PhilippinesSummaryReportFINAL.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs325/en/>

⁹ http://www.statehouse.gov.zm/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=290&Itemid=45

Working together to improve access to medicines in Jordan

An end to taxes on essential medicines seems likely following a workshop in December 2007 hosted by the Jordanian Food and Drug Administration (JFDA) and Health Action International (HAI) to discuss ways to make medicines more available and affordable in Jordan.

The workshop brought together some 90 participants from the Ministry of Health, other government agencies, pharmacist and physician associations, civil society, academia, the pharmaceutical industry, WHO, the World Bank and donors (including DFID's MeTA team). It provided an opportunity to disseminate and discuss the findings and recommendations of a WHO/HAI medicines price survey in Jordan and to establish a multi-stakeholder task force to take forward efforts to strengthen policies and programmes to improve the availability and affordability of medicines in the country.

One of the key recommendations of the workshop was to remove customs duty (up to 5% on most imported medicines) and sales tax (4% on all medicines). On 3 January 2008, the JFDA Director General, Dr Mohamed Rawashdeh, announced in a major Jordanian daily newspaper that exempting customs and sales taxes on medicines will not affect the Jordanian economy but will help improve the affordability of treatments. Subsequently, the Pharmaceutical Association and Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association supported the JFDA's call for taxes to be removed on medicines. The President of the Parliament's Health and Environmental Committee, Mr. Khalil Al Ruqad, responded positively, saying the Committee will meet to discuss abolishing these taxes in order to lower medicine prices and improve affordability.

The Medicines Transparency Alliance (MeTA) will encourage these stakeholders to develop further approaches that will increase access to medicines and improve people's health in Jordan.

Making a difference in the Philippines

The Philippines has highlighted work on Goal 8 as two of its 11 major priorities in its 2007 mid-term review of progress on the Millennium Development Goals.

It hopes to achieve this by:

Ensuring transparency and accountability in government transactions

Graft and corruption must be addressed and accountability and transparency in every branch of government from national down to the local levels especially in activities that involve huge amounts of financial and human resources has to be guaranteed to ensure more efficient use of funds for MDGs that will minimize leakages and wasteful use of public funds.

Need for public-private partnership

Civil society has shown that it can effectively monitor government institutions and performance of officials. It is also a powerful advocate for the MDGs. Meanwhile, the private sector is the main provider of jobs and livelihood and has also proven to be a strong partner in social development and the protection of the environment.

The work of the Medicines Transparency Alliance (MeTA) will support both of these priorities in the Philippines.