

The Medicines Transparency Alliance (MeTA) is designed as a global alliance where country members can participate to support their own objectives in relation to healthcare system reform. A key role of MeTA is to enable the multiple stakeholders involved in the complex systems of selection, regulation, procurement, supply, promotion and prescription of medicines to engage and cooperate in improving accessibility and pricing of medicines. Actors in this process include the Public sector, Private sector, and the Civil Society sector.

Public sector

Government procurement systems have an essential role in enhancing access and reasonable costing of essential medicines. Government also has a key function in registration and regulation of health commodities available nationally. Public institutions are likely to have a key direct role in monitoring drug quality.

Government health facilities are generally a major health provider, and so are highly influential in terms of procurement and supply. The constitution and structure of the public health system e.g. large centralised hospitals, regional clinics and rural health posts will significantly influence both the supply and demand sides of medicine provision. Public health facilities may result in parallel systems with reduced efficiency e.g. where ministries and large public institutions deliver separate facilities for employees and dependents. Public health service managers play a key role in developing transparency and accountability, and in ensuring better health outcomes.

The public sector has a central responsibility in setting national policies in regard to health delivery, and therefore in monitoring quality and health outcomes. MeTA aims to enhance public policy setting and decision-making through correlating data on quality and outcomes. MeTA works to prevent the obscuring of inefficient or inappropriate practices by promoting transparency of information relating to medicine quality, availability and pricing.

MeTA countries commit to disclosing data in the core areas of: drug quality and registration status; availability of medicines; pricing data; and policies on ethical promotion of medicines. By simultaneously building accountability and strengthening governance, MeTA promotes improvements in health commodity accessibility and affordability.

Private sector

Countries vary considerably in the size and influence of the private pharmaceutical sector, and in the engagement with government ministries and public health institutions. Nevertheless, private players are likely to be essential in both the supply side and demand side of the national pharmaceutical market, and can influence all aspects that decide cost and availability of basic health commodities for end users.

International and domestic manufacturers and drug importers are likely to have an influential role in the private sector. Other major actors in the pharmaceutical sector include private pharmacies and other retail outlets; wholesalers of health commodities; and private physicians,

other medical practitioners and clinics. Supply chain operators and distributors play significant roles in the safe storage, quality assurance and timely delivery of health commodities.

Professional associations e.g. of private pharmacists or General Practitioners also have a role to play in ensuring access and identifying failures in the market place – as well as in implementing reforms.

The private market for medicines is characterised by informational imbalances that tend to favour suppliers over consumers – and so there is not a perfectly competitive market. In addition, patents and other limits to competition act to concentrate market power for suppliers.

MeTA seeks, in cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, to encourage the disclosure of information on quality, availability and pricing, and use of essential medicines on the open market. Monitoring market imperfections is essential to increase market efficiency, and MeTA aims to engage the private sector in improving market efficiency to improve health outcomes. Shifting some decision-making to consumers and putting greater competitive pressure on suppliers is an aim of MeTA in order to enhance market effectiveness.

Civil Society sector

The Civil Society sector is a very broad and diverse sector; including representatives of communities, patients and consumers. Different civil society players may be acting to encourage good governance, or to enhance transparency and accountability. Media, faith-based groups and many other parts of civil society may be relevant actors, acting through both global and national organisations. NGOs may also directly provide health facilities and treatment; or provide significant health funding. Civil society organisations have roles in monitoring health outcomes; Consequently, civil society (broadly defined) has a significant and important function in reinforcing and sustaining reform in the health sector. MeTA countries commit to working with civil society in promoting medicine access and affordability.

Public understanding of information on medicines quality, availability and pricing can help inform public debate, which in turn can drive improvements in accessibility and affordability. Civil society has a critical role in disseminating information and encouraging community engagement on health outcomes through the broadest means - from national media to community meetings and workshops. Civil society has a particular role within MeTA in representing the needs of the poor and socially excluded and in promoting social justice.

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