

From the Interagency Supply Chain Group: Visibility for Health Systems: Adoption of Global Data Standards (GS1)

About the ISG

The broad purpose of the Interagency Supply Chain Group (ISG) is to share information and seek greater alignment across supply-chain investments to bring more impact to individual agency supply chain strategies. The group promotes coordination both globally across programs, and locally through national leadership with the overall aim of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of in-country supply chains. The ISG is an informal partnership of 15 major actors involved in providing supply chain support to countries: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, DFID, Global Affairs Canada, the Global Drug Facility, KfW, the Global Fund, Gavi, NORAD, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, USAID, World Bank, WFP and WHO.



Boxes of medical supplies are sorted before being distributed among the mobile health brigades at the Chicualacuala District hospital in Mapai, Mozambique, in July 2016. ©UNICEF/Rich.

Background

Medicines supply chain execution and responsiveness require synchronization of supply and demand, as well as the orchestration of three flows of commerce, that are the movement of goods, information and funds, across an increasing number of logistics and trading partners, spanning a wide (if not global geographic) region. Whilst the implementation of traceability systems has been identified by National Regulatory Authorities as a useful and efficient tool to combat falsification and illicit distribution of medical products, only some countries have issued progressive traceability regulation. Many have not, and are still assessing various implementation mechanisms, alter

natives or otherwise have not approached this topic at all¹. The international community has recognized the need to support countries in determining what these best approaches are. Since 2014, the international development community has promoted the use of global data standards (GS1) to provide a wider and harmonized framework for supply chain visibility, strengthening anti-counterfeiting measures and sharing of data between parties. The Interagency Supply Chain Group recognizes the value for advocating for both effective and sustainable solutions to enable traceability and safe passage of medicines through national supply chains and have committed to strengthening this response accordingly.

Current activities of the ISG

- Strengthen global and country advocacy for the adoption of GS1 standards and traceability systems with countries, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders.
- Accelerate the understanding and adoption of an open and global supply chain standard, globally, through technical support, education, and collaboration with manufacturers.
- Collaborate to improve donor procurement guidelines, including the requirement for the use of GS1 standards for identification and barcoding on the different packaging levels, and coordinate with manufacturers on an implementation timeline.
- Develop a roadmap & timeline for the adoption of GS1 standards in labeling all health commodities and products.
- Provide technical assistance to several countries in defining parameters necessary to implement National Traceability Systems. These include development and finance implementation plans for barcoding of health commodities for member states. e.g. support to the Government of Ethiopia to implement a nation-wide adoption of barcoding technology.

¹ Fourth meeting of the member state mechanism on substandard/spurious/falsely-labelled A/MSM/4/3 falsified/counterfeit medical products, 13 November 2015, provisional agenda item 4C. Existing technologies and 'track and trace' models in use and to be developed by member states. Draft document submitted by Argentina.

Benefits of adopting GS1 standards:

Adopting data standards for product identification and data capture in medicines supply chains will improve traceability and the quality and usability of data from medicines supply chains. These global standards for product identification and for the capture and exchange of supply chain data are key enablers of the global and in-country visibility and analytics networks (VANS)².

The benefits of global standards transcend all points of the health care system³:

- Safe, effective patient care that is accessible when and where it is needed to achieve quality of life, health and wellness. Patients are informed of products and can report adverse events.
- Tracking across the continuum of care and identification of root cause or adverse events, product recalls.
- Track product outcomes, mitigate shortages and ensure access to safest and best available products. Enables post market product safety surveillance to ensure that only the safest, high performing products are used.
- Inventory savings and accurate data to support planning and procurement.
- Visibility to address product performance. While promising practices have emerged from individual projects, most are fragmented and too small to impact persistent data quality problems, resulting in poor visibility and shortages.



A nurse takes a prescription from a woman, in the dispensary at the health centre in Cacuo, Angola, in June 2007. ©UNICEF/Nesbitt

The ISG has committed to the process of transitioning to include established, global data standards as part of their procurement requirements and support country uptake of these standards.

Countries where GS1 standards implementation is receiving support from ISG partners:

Ethiopia: Support to National Drug Regulatory Authority for the development of policy and regulation for GS1 standards adoption, designing and implementing a national level track and trace system.

Pakistan: Support to Drug Regulatory Authority for the development of policy and regulation for GS1 standards adoption.

Myanmar, Haiti, Tanzania, Zambia: GS1 standards education and awareness building.

Lesotho, Uganda: GS1 standards required for WMSERP.

South Africa: Implementation of GS1 standards.

The ISG partners are committed to working with all stakeholders to support these recommendations:

1. Work with countries in creating policy frameworks to support GS1 standards adoption.
2. Align national supply chain policies regarding standards harmonization.
3. Support & encourage investment in digital infrastructure in countries to implement national product traceability systems.

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² FP2020 Summit, Summary of commitments, July 11, 2017.

³ Visibility, the new value proposition for health systems, World Health Innovation Network, October 3, 2016.