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Zambia's private sector boosted by newly revitalized national trade association

BACKGROUND: Private sector domestic wholesalers, manufacturers and retailers are critical actors in the supply of lifesaving maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) commodities. However, these commercial entities operate in challenging contexts, facing barriers that limit their ability to provide affordable, quality health commodities. These constraints include inaccessible financing, lack of data on demand for commodities, and challenges with ensuring product quality throughout the supply chain. In many countries, commercial pharmaceutical associations exist to address those challenges and partner with governments to operate as proactive, solution-oriented, standard-setting organizations. One such organization is the **Zambian Pharmaceutical Business Forum (ZPBF)**, a national non-profit association of pharmaceutical suppliers that aims to help members as they execute their important role in the provision of essential health commodities. In fiscal year 2022, the **USAID Global Health Supply Chain Program-Procurement and Supply Management (GHSC-PSM)** project partnered with the foundation arm of the **International Federation of Pharmaceutical Wholesalers, Inc. (IFPW)** to build ZPBF's organizational capacity, enhance leadership skills and provide planning tools, helping to strengthen the association and further their goal of improving commodity availability.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND LEADERSHIP CAPACITY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

To start the program, IFPW conducted in-depth interviews with ZPBF members to understand priority areas and examine challenges. IFPW used information from the interviews to tailor a series of technical sessions that would provide ZPBF with relevant tools and facilitate discussion and planning among members. In 2021, ZPBF was undergoing significant leadership change and required assistance to revitalize the association. The sessions are described below in Figure 1.

TOPICS	KEY QUESTIONS EXAMINED
IDENTITY	What is the mission of ZPBF? Who does it represent and who can be a member?
OBJECTIVE	What are the existing, additional and priority shared objectives? How can progress on the objectives be measured, monitored, and reported?
FINANCIAL RESOURCING	What are the financial requirements to effectively run ZPBF and how can ZPBF meet those needs?
HUMAN CAPITAL RESOURCING	What combination of leaders, staff and volunteers are needed to ensure ZPBF is successful?
GOVERNANCE	Why is good governance critical and how can ZPBF construct a transparent and equitable approach in governing documents and activities?
COMMUNICATIONS	What are the critical components of the ZPBF communication plan including content, modes and audiences?

Figure 1. IFPW and ZPBF technical sessions

Following the technical sessions, IFPW collaborated with ZPBF to develop short- and long-term workplans with measurable goals and timelines. ZPBF prioritized:

- Re-committing to ensuring equitable and transparent governance approaches through updating of the ZPBF constitution and bylaws.
- Increasing membership and ensuring inclusivity of a range of pharmaceutical suppliers for fair representation.
- Developing a communication plan to share accomplishments and increase industry engagement and membership.



ZPBF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since inception, ZPBF has been involved in formulation of statutes, regulations, guidelines, strategic documents, and policies affecting pharmaceutical business in Zambia including but not limited to:

- Lobbying with the Ministry of Finance for exemption of duty on products used in pandemics and critical noncommunicable diseases (NCDs)
- Working with the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry (MCTI) in developing a 5-year strategic plan for local pharmaceutical manufacturing

- Engaging with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Zambia Public Procurement Authority (ZPPA) on an open tender procurement process to enhance transparency and implementation of e-procurement as an environmentally sustainable and more transparent mode of procurement
- Providing input to the Zambia Medicines Regulatory Authority (ZAMRA) on various guidelines (e.g., Guideline for Grant of Marketing Authorization for In-Vitro Diagnostic Devices, Guideline for Recall of Medicines and Allied Substances, Dangerous Drugs Act, and the Statutory Instrument for Pharmaceutical Licensing)

Strengthened ZPBF's capacity to be a leader in the pharmaceutical industry and to contribute to public health goals

The technical assistance from IPFW allowed ZPBF to build on these successes and resulted in the accomplishments on the left.

In 2021, ZPBF was undergoing significant leadership change. Broadly, they sought to increase membership and improve representation of suppliers within the association. The sessions led by IPFW facilitated conversations and provided tools to establish a shared vision for the future and revitalize ZPBF. The sessions helped the ZPBF board of

directors address important organizational development issues and develop an action plan for completing identified tasks.

ZPBF prioritized review and updating of the existing constitution and bylaws to ensure equitable representation among members. Wholesalers, manufacturers and retailers of all sizes are members of ZPBF, making it important to develop an inclusive environment that gives a voice to all members. This allowed members to set aside competitive inclinations and established trust within ZPBF.

Improved collaboration with national systems and entities to ensure product quality and enable a supportive environment for commercial pharmaceutical entities

As noted earlier, ZPBF has long worked with ZAMRA to establish regulations, strategic documents, and policies affecting pharmaceutical businesses in Zambia and works in a similar capacity with ZPPA, the independent agency responsible for public procurement. Commercial entities have found it useful to partner through ZPBF when collaborating with government agencies like ZAMRA and ZPPA, among other entities, as it allows them to present a united voice with a shared goal of improving market conditions for its members. Together through ZPBF, pharmaceutical businesses can also provide information to the government on new trends, technologies and innovations in the

pharmaceutical industry. ZPBF is also beneficial to the government as it promotes compliance with laws and regulations governing the pharmaceutical industry to its members with the ultimate goal of improving the safety of medicines for patients.

During the technical sessions with IPFW, ZPBF worked to improve their focus on collaboration, teamwork, and a unified approach for further success with ZAMRA, the MoH and other entities. ZPBF committed to improving its communication about proposed legislative and regulatory changes to its members, soliciting input from the industry, and identifying ways to consistently and effectively meet with government counterparts and improve collaboration.

CHALLENGES

Establishing a detailed, organized workplan with measurable goals and reasonable timelines is helpful for maintaining the momentum of a growing association. One challenge ZPBF faced as it developed its action plan was to set manageable tasks that could be divided equitably among

members to execute. ZPBF was also challenged by the fact that it's run by volunteers who are business professionals with competing priorities. These individuals from private sector domestic wholesalers, manufacturers and retailers volunteer their time which complicates the assigning of tasks and impacts ZPBF's ability effectively run the association and work towards the agreed upon goals.



OPPORTUNITIES

The health sector continues to grow in Zambia. Notably, in February 2022, the MoH announced it would soon deploy 11,200 health workers to roles throughout the health system. As a marker of this growth, ZPBF members will support three large government procurement tenders that are scheduled for this year: essential medicines, oncology pharmaceuticals, and anti-malarial products. After increasing capacity and demonstrating leadership in the space, ZPBF was invited by MCTI to join a workshop on improving local pharmaceutical manufacturing and was asked to consult on the Named Patient Program, providing patients and physicians access to internationally sourced, commercially approved medicines that are not available to them domestically.



Patients wait at an under-five health clinic at Nalube Health Post in Choma, Zambia.

Pharmaceutical trade associations like ZPBF can provide significant value to the pharmaceutical industry and national health systems to improve medicine affordability, quality and availability. Associations have the ability to bring an industry voice to health authorities for the development of policy and regulation that serves both pharmaceutical suppliers and the national health system. However, in many countries with limited resources these associations are nascent and require support to successfully operate. Further opportunities exist to strengthen existing associations and establish new associations. GHSC-PSM and partners encourage continued sharing of lessons learned in Zambia to the global community, informing the work of other countries to strengthen the private sector pharmaceutical industry landscape.