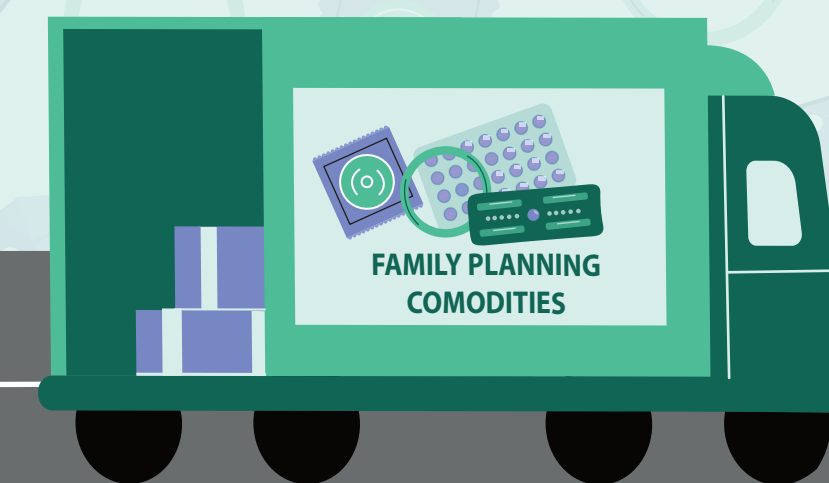


2



Engaging India Post

Innovative Transport Alternatives to Strengthen Family Planning Supply Chains





Challenge: Broken Transport Systems

PATH's assessment of the family planning supply chain in eight states (Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal) showed recurring stock outs of family planning products at downstream facilities.

Broken transportation mechanisms, resulting in longer lead times in transporting family planning commodities from the state to the district warehouses, as well as down to facility levels, were a key contributor to out of stock instances. Breaks in the supply chain and stockouts were introduced due to:



Limited fleets of vehicles



No back-ups in case of breakdowns



Vehicles of inadequate size and with inadequate storage facilities



No dedicated vehicles for transporting family planning commodities

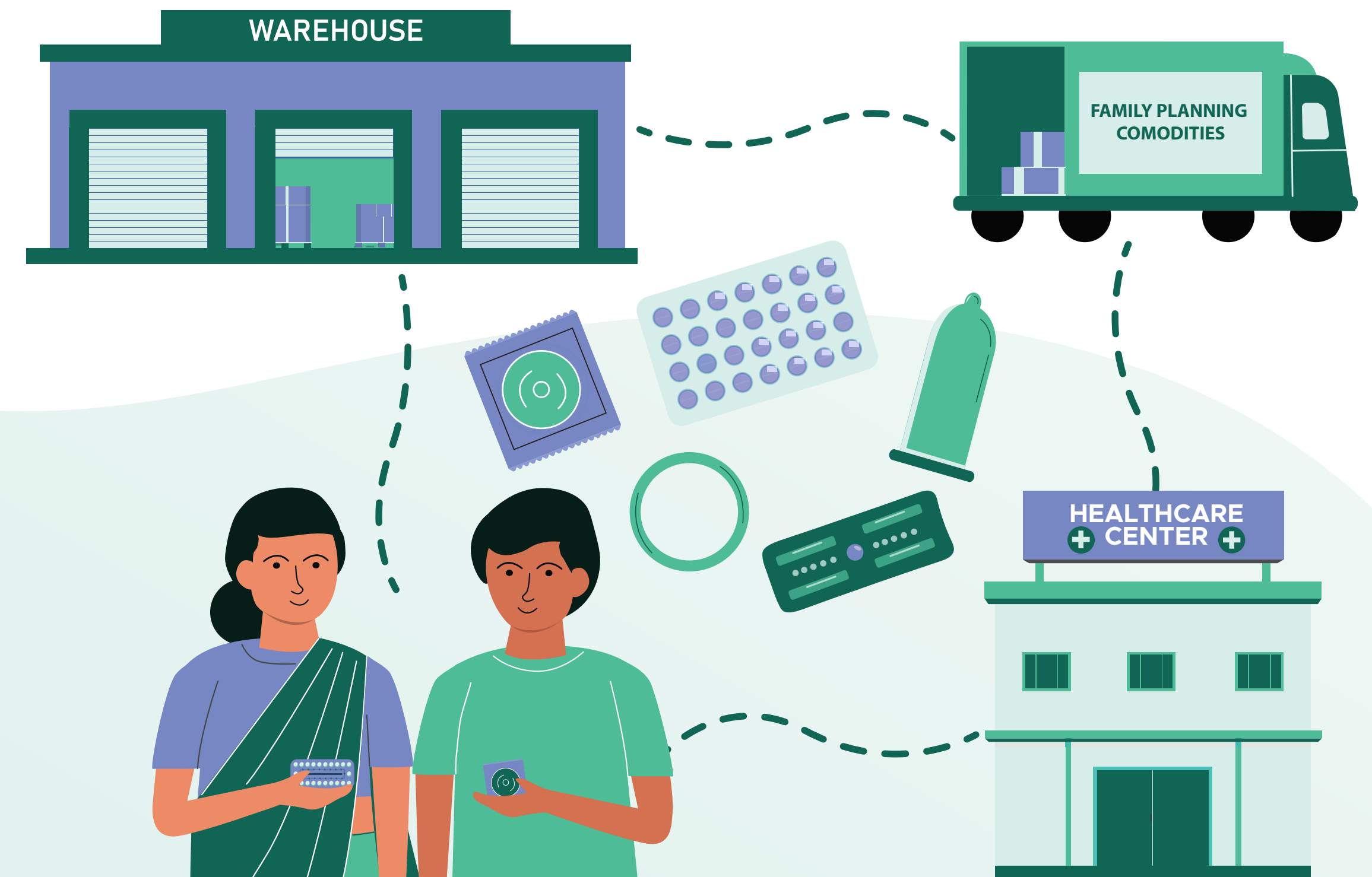




Context

Continuous availability of a wide range of contraceptive methods is a key factor in people's ability to plan families. A reliable stock of contraceptives supports voluntary choice, contributes to user satisfaction, and promotes method continuation (Dehlendorf, et al, 2014)¹. Effective family planning (FP) supply chains, by ensuring a range of commodities reach the last mile, contribute to supporting women's choice of modern contraception, and ensure previously unavailable methods reach beneficiaries (WHO/RHR, 2017)².

Breaks in transport mechanisms, fragments an already burdened supply chain even further, leading to delays in acquiring stock, and reduced access for end users. To address identified challenges and promote agency and access in family planning and reproductive health solutions, PATH identified several interventions, to address gaps in specific points of the supply chain.





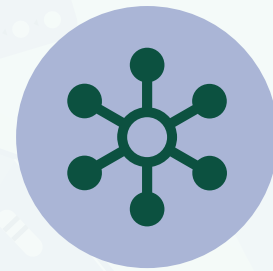
Our Intervention



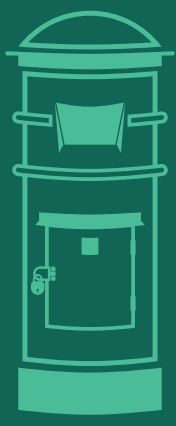
We explored alternatives to bridge transport gaps and ensure uninterrupted availability of contraceptives at district warehouses, which in turn supply FP products to primary healthcare facilities.



India Post, with over 150 years of experience and capability in delivering packages to urban, rural, remote, and hard to reach corners of the country, presented a viable and reliable alternate transport option.



To strengthen the distribution system for FP products, PATH implemented the use of postal services to deliver FP commodities in all 30 districts in the state of Odisha.



Using India Post

In Odisha, the state's health system relied on the services of a state-owned vehicle with a government driver to transport family planning commodities to district warehouses.



It took around three months to deliver shipments to all the districts in the state.

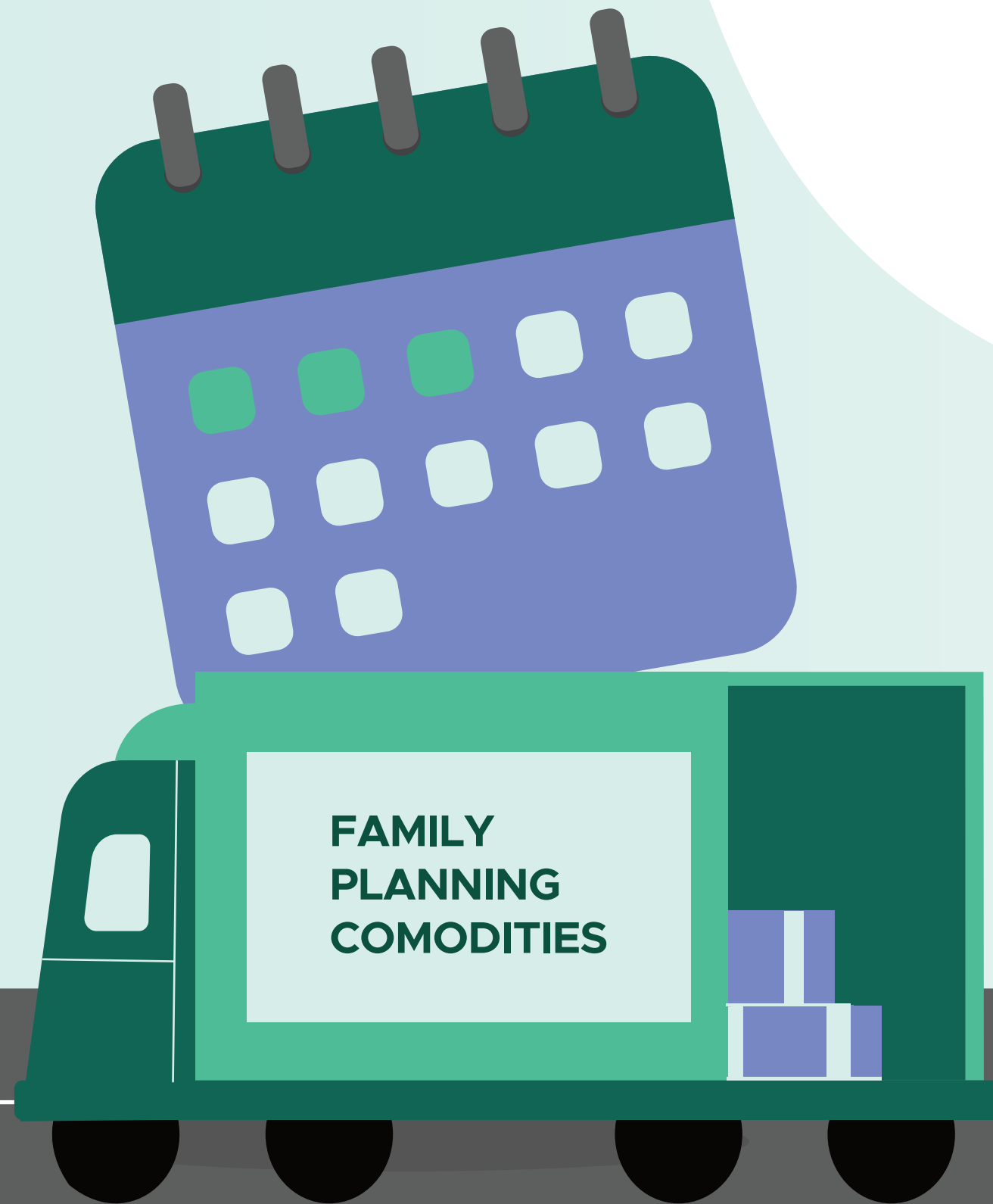


When a district ran out of supplies, there was little chance for replenishment until the next quarter.



Vehicle breakdowns also affected delivery schedules.

The state warehouse had to wait till an entire truck's worth products were available for distribution, delaying smaller indents, leading to low and delayed product availability.

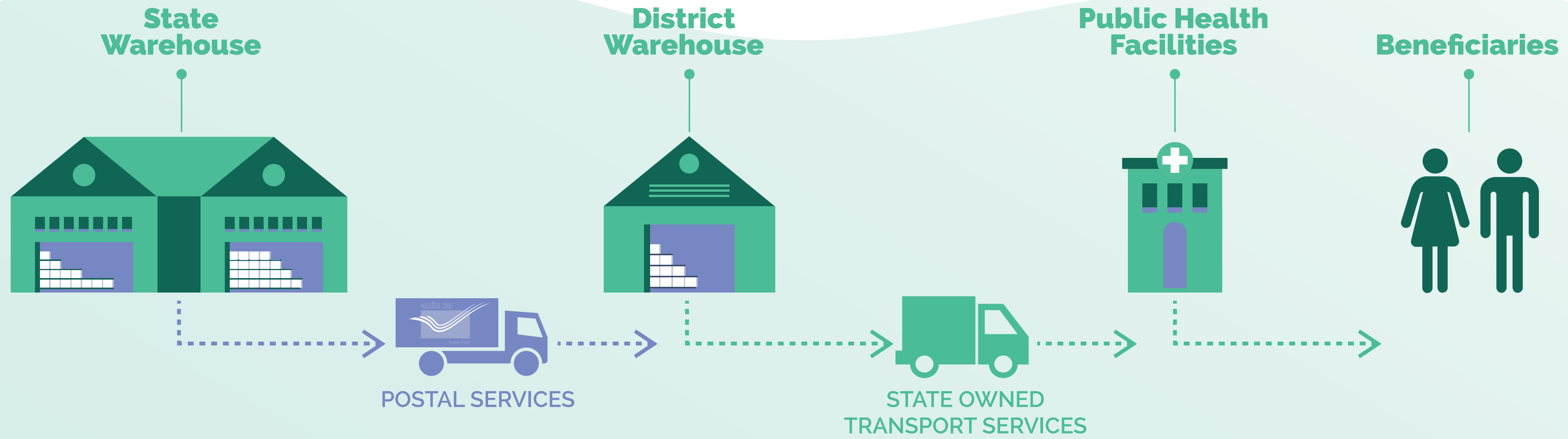




Intervention in Odisha

India Post was leveraged in Odisha, at different points of the supply chain, to address transport gaps, and ensure reliable supply of family planning commodities

INTERVENTION LEVERAGING POSTAL SERVICES FOR DISTRIBUTION OF FP COMMODITIES





Process



First, PATH advocated with the Department of Posts, Ministry of Communications, Government of India and the state governments of Odisha to use postal services for distributing family planning commodities.



India Post in Bhubaneswar was engaged for supplying FP commodities from the state warehouse to the district warehouse.



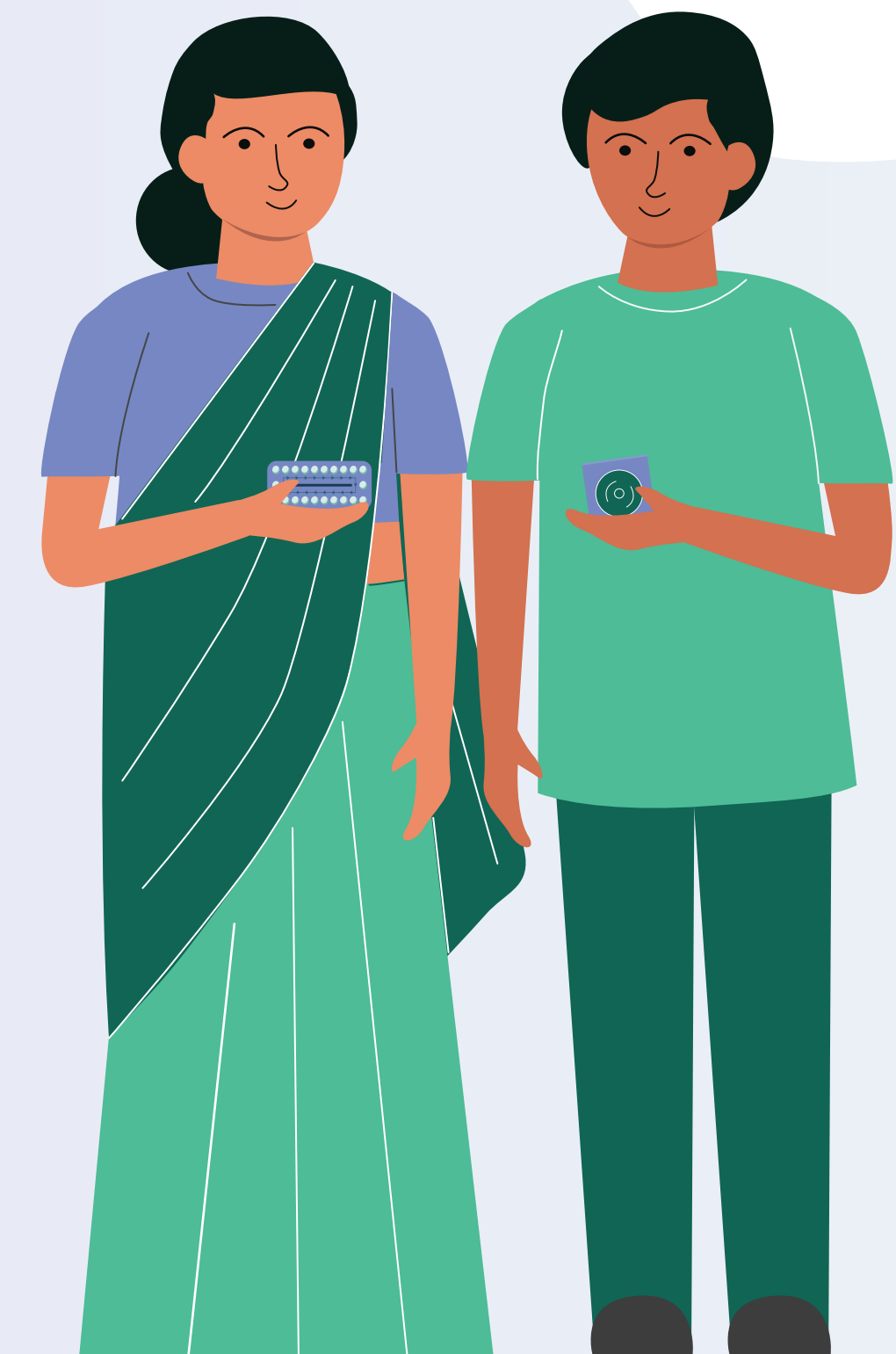
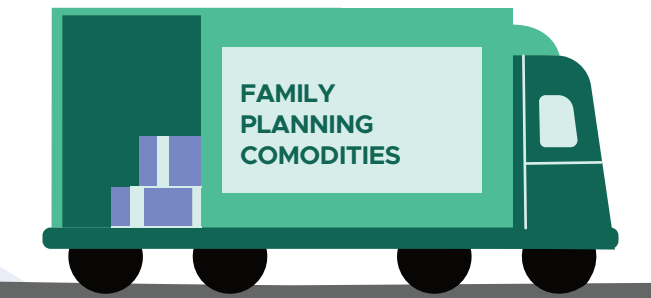
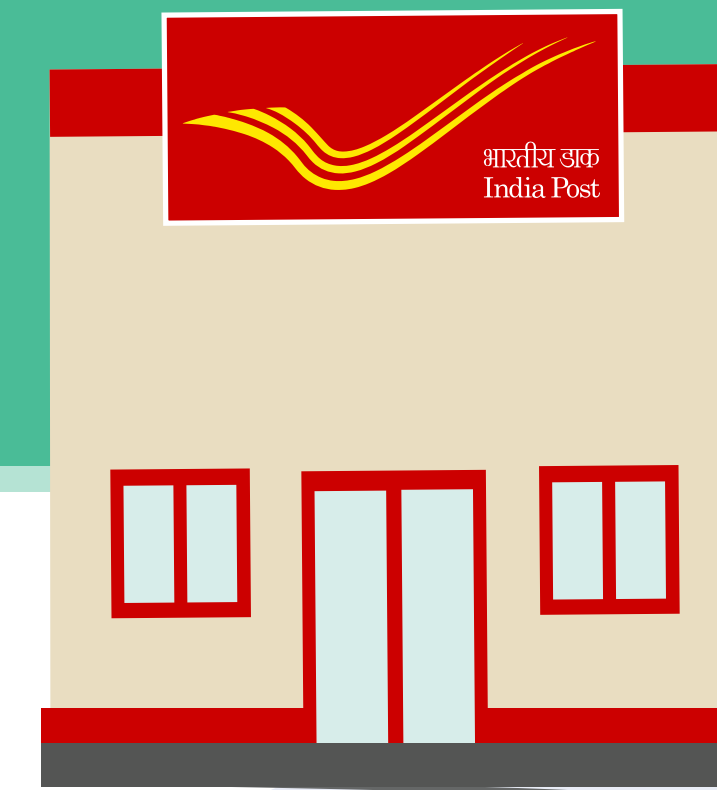
Based on the indents raised by the districts, the state warehouse raised request to transport commodities to specific districts.



India Post picked up and delivered the commodities to the destination district warehouse.



The district warehouse pharmacist received and acknowledged the stock in the FP-Logistics Management Information System (FP-LMIS).





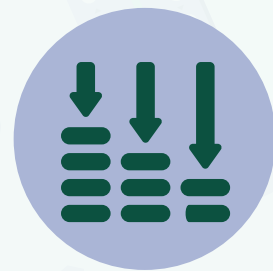
Impact



In January 2020, the state of Odisha used India Post to ship its first-ever consignment of family planning supplies from state warehouse in Odisha to five districts.



The government of Odisha now uses India Post's express parcel services to transport smaller consignments of family planning commodities like Condoms, OC Pills, Pregnancy Kits, IUDs, injectable contraceptives, and tubal rings in all 30 districts. A wider range of contraceptives are available earlier and more regularly, improving access overall.



Overall costs have been reported to be lower, delivery times are faster, and there are no restrictions on the quantities that can be transported.





Impact

PERFORMANCE WITH INDIA POST IN ODISHA BETWEEN MARCH AND AUGUST 2020

Until the COVID-19 outbreak in India, the government of Odisha used both its own vehicle and India Post to supply contraceptives to the districts. But the nationwide lockdown closed borders and restricted the movement of vehicles, and districts were running out of contraceptive stocks.

Classified as essential, postal services remained functional throughout the lockdown.

This enabled the state and district health officials in Odisha to transport contraceptives across closed district borders and containment zones using India Post, ensuring adequate stock of contraceptives in the district warehouses and primary health facilities.



332+ consignments
of family planning
commodities dispatched



3,780 kgs
of contraceptives
transported to various
districts



95% on - time
arrival on destination
achieved



3.4 days
average delivery time
achieved

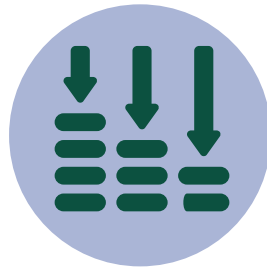


ZERO stock loss
due to damage or
pilferage during
transportation



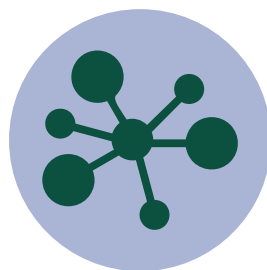
Observations

India Post, being a 150-year-old government institution, offered several strategic advantages over private logistic service providers.



LOWER COSTS

The cost of their services is lower, especially for services to government departments. Contracting is easier as the agreement is between two government departments.



GREATER RESOURCE AND NETWORK DEPTH

A much wider and deeper network of services and significant resources at their disposal.



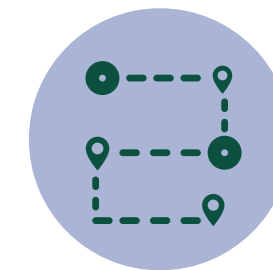
FASTER DELIVERY OF LARGER QUANTITIES

Delivery times are faster, there are no restrictions on the quantities that could be transported.



GREATER GEOGRAPHICAL REACH

Indian postal system has the capability to reach doorsteps, in both urban as well as rural areas. This introduces the scope to deliver contraceptives from health facilities all the way to end users.



PROVISION OF TRACKING MECHANISMS

The India Post Parcel Services also provides the users with tracking facility for the consignments.



Considerations for Way Forward

However, certain key considerations need to be taken to fully leverage the potential of India Post.



ANONYMITY

There is a need to ensure anonymity of the beneficiaries to enhance continuity of contraceptive use.



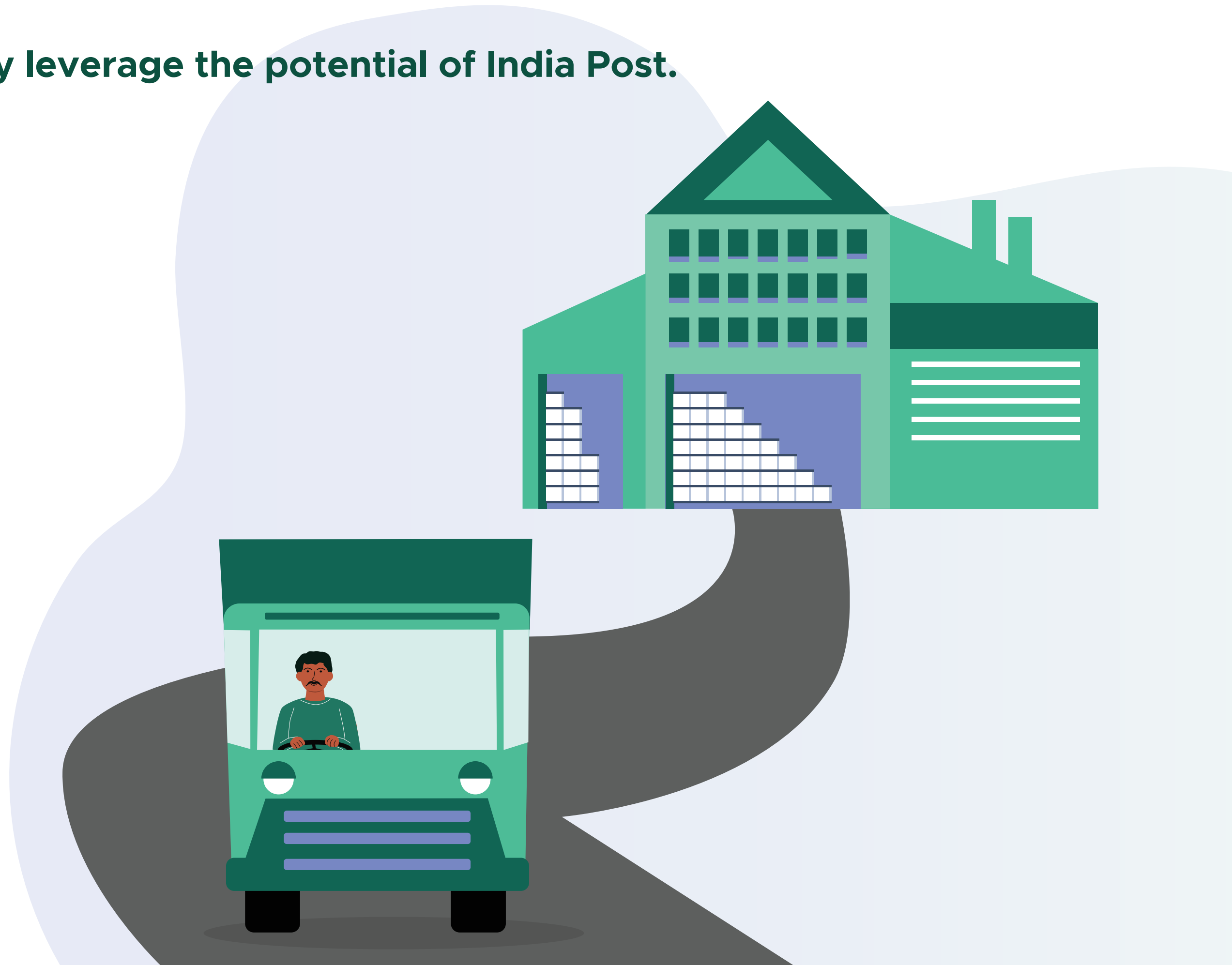
PANDEMIC AND DISASTER READINESS

Postal service, being an essential service, can be a reliable logistic enabler for health commodities during pandemics and other extraordinary circumstances.



SPECIAL TRANSPORT REQUIREMENTS

There is a need to explore the feasibility of postal services to deliver essential drugs and other health commodities due to special requirements of various drugs and consumables, which need to be transported under unique conditions.





Considerations for Way Forward



CONSIDERATIONS FOR LAST MILE DELIVERY

Though India post has been used to transport commodities from state to district warehouses, there is still scope of assessing the usage of postal services to deliver them up to the last mile, that is, to subcenters, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), Auxiliary Nurses & Midwives (ANMs) or directly to the intended beneficiary.



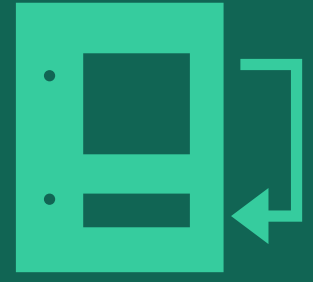
RURAL ACCESS

Compared to private logistics, which are complex and expensive, postal services are a viable alternative for delivering FP & other public health commodities to rural areas.



SCALING POTENTIAL

Using postal services to deliver FP commodities has shown great potential in the state of Odisha, and can be scaled up to other states of the country and for other commodities.



Endnotes

- 1 2014. Christine Dehlendorf, Colleen Krajewski, and Sonya Borrero. “*Contraceptive Counseling: Best Practices to Ensure Quality Communication and Enable Effective Contraceptive Use*” in *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology*: December 2014 - Volume 57 - Issue 4 - p 659-673.
- 2 2017. Evidence Brief: Ensuring contraceptive security through effective supply chains. WHO/RHR/17.09. July, 2017.