

Sustainable access to family planning in Vietnam

Creating a total market plan for contraceptives

Family planning in Vietnam

Vietnam has made important progress in family planning in the past few decades. The contraceptive prevalence rate was 77.8 percent in 2011, with almost 60 percent of married women using a modern method. This reflects one of the highest contraceptive prevalence rates in the world. However, Vietnam's social and economic development has led many donors and development partners to scale back their assistance, particularly those who enabled free distribution to all consumers by providing family planning funding and products.

With more women of reproductive age, increasing demand for contraceptives, and the decrease in family planning support from external groups, the government of Vietnam is focused on how to ensure that all women, regardless of their location and ability to pay, have access to family planning methods. Since 2009, PATH has been working with Vietnam's General Office of Population and Family Planning (GOPFP) to develop a government-led plan for accessing family planning methods, including those provided by the public and private sectors—a total market plan.

When we began the collaboration, GOPFP was developing its contributions to the National Reproductive Health and Population Strategy for 2011-2020. This presented a key opportunity to situate total market planning within the larger context of government strategic planning, and ultimately, to link with the budgeting process. The National Strategy included a key commitment to:

“Prioritize free or subsidized supplies of contraceptives for poor, socially and economically disadvantaged and especially disadvantaged areas and, at the same time, enhance social marketing and sales of contraceptives in the free market.”

Developing a total market plan

A total market brings together the public sector and private sector (social marketing groups, nongovernmental organizations, and commercial for-profit providers) in a coordinated, government-led effort to provide services to the various population groups that they are best suited to serve. Project steps included engaging stakeholders, assembling evidence, and building the total market plan.



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PATH conducted a network analysis and stakeholder perceptions survey to involve key stakeholders in the planning process, address their interests, and document relevant opportunities and obstacles. The analysis discovered strong support for public leadership of a public-private collaboration. The interviews also revealed evidence that stakeholders needed in order to make informed decisions about a total market plan, such as consumers' ability and willingness to pay, products and prices in the commercial sector, and costs of providing services in the public sector. The project conducted several research and analysis activities to gather this information.

PATH presented the evidence from these activities to key stakeholders at the end of 2010, and GOPFP then convened a small working group to provide detailed input on the content of the total market plan. In June 2011, the Ministry of Health officially approved GOPFP's Operational Plan for the Contraceptive Total Market, which identifies specific roles for the public and private sectors in meeting the family planning needs of the Vietnamese population.

Additional project outcomes

In addition to the successful development and approval of a total market plan for contraceptives, the project achieved several other outcomes that are important for ensuring sustainable and equitable access to family planning in Vietnam.

One additional outcome is GOPFP's clear and public commitment to engage the private-sector in family planning policy and programming, and corresponding expressions of interest by private-sector stakeholders.

By conducting one-on-one meetings, PATH was gradually able to involve commercial groups and engage them in larger group planning meetings.

Outreach to commercial groups focused on incentivizing their active participation in project activities—for example, talking points cited the government's key commitment to private-sector engagement in the national strategy, availability of new research results on ability to pay and commercial contraceptive markets, and the chance to share opinions about opportunities and obstacles in family planning. All commercial manufacturers who participated reported that the process was a useful opportunity to engage with government stakeholders, and expressed interest in attending future coordination meetings.

Vietnam's Operational Plan for the Contraceptive Total Market

Objective: Promote equitable access to free, social marketing, and commercial market contraceptives concordant with the desire, ability to pay, and status of each client group so as to meet their increasing needs in quantity, diversity, and high quality of FP methods.

The plan's 2015 targets include:

- Increase the market share of social marketing and commercial condoms to 87 percent.
- Decrease the market share of free oral contraceptives to 31 percent and increase the market share of social marketing and commercial oral contraceptives to 69 percent.
- Decrease the market share of free injectables to 76 percent and increase the market share of social marketing and commercial injectables to 24 percent.
- Decrease the market share of free implants to 45 percent and increase the market share of social marketing and commercial implants to 55 percent.
- Decrease the market share of free IUDs to 70 percent and increase the market share of social marketing and commercial IUDs to 30 percent.

GOPFP is conducting a pilot study to assess mechanisms where poor women have free access to services and other women are subsidized at different levels, depending on their ability to pay. The design of this pilot draws on a study tour PATH organized in which GOPFP staff traveled to the US to learn more about family planning financing and how it is channeled to specific population groups.

Vietnam's own health-targeting program, the Health Care Fund for the Poor, serves as a model for how a targeting program can be applied to family planning.

Looking ahead: ensuring sustainable access

Along with successes, the project identified several challenges and areas for further support. Although young and unmarried women are important segments of the population, the solutions or activities to address these groups' needs are not clearly covered in the plan. In addition, improving service quality in both the public and private sectors is a widely held priority that has not yet been comprehensively addressed.



PATH has supported pharmacy staff to increase their knowledge about oral contraceptives, and be able to provide more accurate information to their clients. PATH/Matthew Dakin.

Sustaining the engagement and collaboration of various stakeholders in family planning from the public and private sectors is another key challenge going forward. It will be important for the government to convene a forum for stakeholders to continue to address issues and adjustments as the total market plan is implemented.

The Vietnamese Government has taken great steps toward ensuring equitable and sustainable access to family planning for their population. Although challenges remain, the government's commitment to developing and implementing the Operational Plan provides encouragement for the future of family planning in Vietnam.