

USAID MEDICINES, TECHNOLOGIES, AND PHARMACEUTICAL SERVICES (MTAPS)

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LTAPS advocacy and engagement meeting with Central Visayas CHD and Consolacion LGU. Photo credit: Janille Cassiana Balani/MTaPS.

Understanding the Enabling Factors and Generating Models for Effective Implementation of Institutional Capacity Development Through a Local Technical Assistance Providers (LTAPs) Scheme

Technical Highlight | December 2023 | PHILIPPINES

Background

The Philippines Republic Act No. 11223, also known as the Universal Health Care (UHC) Act, and its implementing rules and regulations devolved the country's national health system and placed more responsibility in terms of financial accountability and supply chain authority on hundreds of individual Local Government Units (LGUs) that have varying degrees of maturity. The maturity of LGUs is determined by administrative order (AO) 2020-0037, which sets standards for LGUs in terms of guidelines on determining local health systems maturity levels, including the supply chain.

Problem statement

In February 2021, MTaPS facilitated a consultative and gap analysis workshop with representatives from the Department of Health (DOH), LGUs, USAID Philippines Office of Health, and USAID implementing partners to identify the systems and capacity gaps affecting the achievement of the desired Procurement and Supply Chain Management (PSCM) performance level and to recommend interventions and models for addressing these gaps. First-hand information was collected from 147 (92 female, 50 male, 5 unknown) participants from DOH central, 3 centers for health developments (CHDs), and 33 LGUs. During the workshop, participants agreed that there were PSCM

system and capacity gaps which should be addressed to implement the UHC Act. The following specific gaps were identified for interventions at a local level:

- 1 Governance—inadequate local oversight for PSCM functions, and an absence of local PSCM policies.
- 2 Human resources—a lack of adequately trained personnel capable of performing PSCM functions, and the absence of readily accessible PSCM training courses.
- 3 Information systems—fragmented information systems, lack of IT equipment and dedicated staff to perform electronic Logistics Management Information System (eLMIS) work, weak/fluctuating internet connectivity.
- 4 Financing and resources—heavy dependency on the DOH's central office for the supply of health commodities since a special health fund had not yet been established.
- 5 Service delivery—inadequate knowledge of various supply chain components/functions and the need to strengthen and link with each component, absence of a procurement unit at LGU health offices, delayed deliveries by engaged third-party logistics providers.

In addition, it was reported that LGUs needed technical assistance, guidance, and training from the DOH and development partners in setting up a well-functioning PSCM system in compliance with the UHC Act and its implementing rules and regulations. Having a pool of local technical assistance providers (LTAPs) who possess the required knowledge, skills, and attitude—and can be engaged by the LGU and/or DOH—was recommended.

Technical approach

Following the systems and capacity gap analysis workshop and guided by the USAID Philippines Office of Health, MTaPS developed the concept of a local technical assistance providers (LTAPs) scheme with the overarching goal of creating local capabilities to support PSCM system strengthening and the implementation of the UHC Act in the Philippines.

To achieve this goal, the following five key interventions were designed:

- 1 Introduce the concept of LTAPs scheme and advocate for engagement with the government, non-government organizations, and potential private-sector providers.
- 2 Develop PSCM technical and leadership toolkits to build capacity among potential local providers.
- 3 Develop standard specifications or terms of reference (TOR) for contracting local organizations to provide PSCM technical assistance.
- 4 Certify the agreed LTAPs curriculum locally, including utilizing a local institution for ongoing training of LTAPs.
- 5 Select, train, and certify institutions and individuals to be LTAPs in supporting public health supply chain development and direct PSCM service delivery.

MTaPS developed the LTAPs concept and associated key interventions in such a way that, at the initial stage, advocacy work will be enhanced so that potential LTAPs are engaged and are aware of the scheme. The concept was also designed to accommodate toolkits considering DOH PSCM standards and initiatives with the aim of filling the gaps identified during the initial gap analysis workshop held in 2021. The toolkits comprise learning modules which are expected to be completed by potential LTAPs. These include an overview of the public health PSCM, quantification, inventory management, eLMIS, warehouse operations of health commodities, and leadership and change management.

In addition, selection criteria for LTAPs candidates were drafted, including geographical presence, technical capabilities, previous experience in capacity development, and support and commitment for engagement. The engagement of LTAPs within government institutions is envisioned to be through the public procurement law. Non-government organizations and other stakeholders could engage LTAPs through their own service procurement mechanisms. Sample technical specifications or TOR will be shared with agencies expressing an intention to seek technical assistance from LTAPs.

Interventions

ADVOCACY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

MTaPS engaged with stakeholders from the private and public sectors, including CHDs, private companies, academia, training institutions, professional organizations, social enterprise organizations, and individuals, in a series of meetings and information exchange sessions (Table 1). These sessions were held both in person and virtually, hosted by MTAps. In total, 19 individuals from 11 institutions took part in one or more of the sessions.

Table 1: Summary of advocacy and engagement meetings

Engagement period	Objective of engagement	Participants	Outcome of the meeting
May 2023	LTAPS information sharing session	12 participants from 7 organizations	MTaPS gained an understanding of the level of interest among industry stakeholders
June 2023	Orientation of eLMIS LTAPS	11 participants from 6 organizations	Better description of the eLMIS as a system for potential LTAPS
	LTAPS information sharing session with academia	7 participants from 4 organizations	MTaPS gained an understanding of the level of interest among partners in academia

In-person engagement activity was also held to foster public-private collaboration in improving the public health supply chain system through the LTAPS scheme. Private sector representatives were invited to this event to better understand their motivation and capabilities in moving forward and securing their participation in the LTAPS scheme. They expressed interest in the scheme, which provides more opportunities to leverage their expertise to benefit the LGUs, CHDs, and other stakeholders that need support.

The different tracks identified tap into the respective expertise of different domains of the private sector. Academic and training institutions, and professional organizations, can develop curricula and instructional designs to deliver training on PSCM and warehouse operations management, while private companies (i.e., third-party logistics providers, IT companies) are strong in terms of operational excellence.

The MTAps team, representatives of the CHD's Health Systems Development Section and faculty of Cebu Normal University (CNU) attended a joint discussion about the LTAPS scheme and the existing capacity-building initiatives for LGUs. The LTAPS concept had already been introduced during a previous visit by the MTAps team. The CHD partnered with CNU to build capacity within LGUs through its Municipal Leadership and Governance Program (MLGP), which is a systems governance-focused course. MTAps explored the possibility of including the LTAPS technical courses in the MLGP. However, CNU said it would not be possible to integrate the PSCM courses with the MLGP lectures, although they might possibly be included in the practical element of the program, with PSCM becoming one of the expected improvements achieved by the LGUs. Funding for the MLGP training comes from the CHD, earmarked in their annual general appropriations. Central Visayas CHD expressed its interest in providing funding for the LTAPS scheme, from fiscal year 2025, provided that further discussions on the implementation and operationalization of the LTAPS scheme will be undertaken.

DEVELOPING TOOLKITS

The LTAPS scheme is a strategic program aimed at not only building capacity in LGUs but also fostering sustainable knowledge transfer through engagement of the private sector in supporting the strengthening of public health supply chain systems at different levels.

MTaPS developed technical toolkits comprising various supply chain functional areas that aim to instill the core competencies in managing health commodities at different levels of the system. The conceptualized three tracks—A, B, and C—comprise technical areas in supply chain management (SCM), grouped according to their relationship to actual job functions and responsibilities.

- 1 Track A—Support adherence to quantification, warehouse operations, and inventory management standards.
- 2 Track B—Support eLMIS implementation (deployment and operationalization).

- 3 Track C—Provide training on SCM-related topics, focused on the public health supply chain.

Alongside MTaPS' implementation of the different program activities, knowledge products, such as manuals, e-learning courses, and PowerPoint presentations, are being developed. MTaPS and the DOH co-developed various e-learning modules on PSCM (track C), covering the general principles and concepts of public health SCM, which are accessible through the DOH's Academy. The Warehouse Operations Manual is another learning product (track A) with in-depth standard guidance to warehouse staff on performing their tasks more efficiently. Content on eLMIS (track B) was also developed, which tackles both introductory and system implementation. Other SCM-related topics are being developed to augment existing toolkits.

DEVELOPING TERMS OF REFERENCE

The development of terms of references (TORs) or technical specifications for service providers, a prerequisite in the procurement process, is part of the overall LTAPs scheme to support government or non-government organizations that express a need for SCM capacity building. TOR forms a structured document that specifies the scope of work, qualifications, and schedule of deliverables to guide interested LTAPs in developing their service provisions. It allows organizations to thoroughly screen and select qualified providers to deliver SCM training. It also serves both LTAPs and engaging organizations as a common agreement on providing services and delivering results.

MTaPS drafted the TORs for tracks A and B based on data gathered from the series of engagements and consultations with the public and private sectors. These TORs are designed to reflect neutrality in writing the general minimum requirements and are intended to be shared with public organizations for them to build upon. These receiving organizations are expected to revise the TOR template according to their respective needs, determined by performing a needs assessment or gap analysis of supply chain operations in their LGUs.

Lessons learned

Expand evidence-based advocacy. Introducing the LTAPs scheme and demonstrating its potential positive impact to the DOH, CHDs, LGUs, and other non-government stakeholders can facilitate government ownership, which will, in turn, facilitate development and issuance of policy provisions, guidelines, and generate demand for SCM technical assistance. For example, the successful engagement of a local IT service provider by the Global Fund principal recipient, Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), to support eLMIS implementation demonstrates evidence of the importance of the LTAPs scheme in supporting government initiatives. A commonly expressed concern is how private sector stakeholders will benefit from participating in the LTAPs scheme without having a budget commitment for providing the services. Since they will need to invest in personnel and resources to participate, their gains in any form (monetary return, recognition, extended reach) should be taken into consideration in the design of a public-private partnership initiative.

Adapting training toolkits and TOR. The existing training resources provided through MTaPS' implementation and their accessibility facilitated the development of technical toolkits and TOR. It allowed interested trainers to review the materials and provide suggestions to improve the contents. Early engagement has helped potential LTAPs become familiar with the scheme. The LTAPs track B, eLMIS deployment and operationalization, ensured the availability of training materials enabling the team to conduct an orientation for interested LTAPs. This allowed potential LTAPs to seek clarification from the MTaPS team, providing feedback on some important factors that had been missed out. In addition, having generic TOR describing general minimum requirements facilitates an immediate review and inclusion of technical requirements for end-users through either government or non-government procurement mechanisms. For example, PBSP quickly adapted the eLMIS TOR into the technical requirement for the engagement of eLMIS level 2 (L2) services.

Certification. There are multiple options for the certification and accreditation of the LTAPs scheme. Exploring these options and partnering with different

agencies takes time and financial resources and may have various prerequisites for engagement. The policy and legal aspects of certifying and accrediting LTAPs and facilitating their engagement vis-à-vis non-certified similar organizations that could provide similar services need to be clarified. During this phase, it could be beneficial to leverage existing certification pathways that align with the goal of the program. If the goal is to professionalize LTAPs, the Professional Regulatory Commission's track may be explored. If it is to be institutionalized within the LGU, the DOH Academy may be considered. Through the DOH Academy, a proponent DOH office is required to evaluate the toolkits and provide a certificate of completion (not accreditation). Then, during the engagement process, the completion of training toolkits on DOH standards could be included as a technical requirement in evaluating and selecting service providers.

Way forward

Government ownership and resource allocation. The LTAPs scheme is a complex undertaking by the MTaPS program and is in the early stages of development. Deliberate evidence-based advocacy activities with DOH and LGUs must be strengthened to ensure ownership of the scheme, development of policies, and resource allocation for the initiative. A proponent bureau at the DOH should be identified and engaged to take ownership. This will also facilitate the development of operational policy and guidelines for the engagement, implementation, and monitoring of the effectiveness of the LTAPs scheme at different levels.

Capacity development. Training on the technical toolkits to more potential LTAPs through different tracks should be conducted to increase the list of LTAPs available to provide services.

Stakeholders' involvement. Advocacy and collaboration with non-government stakeholders, such as the Philippine Pharmacists Association (PPHA), Asian Development Bank, and the Global Fund, should be increased to catalyze the engagement of more LTAPs. This approach will facilitate testing of the model and leverage resources to expand the implementation of different LTAPs tracks in different geographical areas.

In general, it will be reasonable to pilot the LTAPs scheme in a region where there is an enabling environment. Considering the demand for supply chain services, the capacity gaps identified, and the local capabilities available, the LTAPs scheme could be an effective model for strengthening PSCM capacity at different levels of the supply chain system in general and at the LGU level in particular.

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About USAID MTaPS:

The USAID Medicines, Technologies, and Pharmaceutical Services (MTaPS) Program (2018–2024) enables low- and middle-income countries to strengthen their pharmaceutical systems, which is pivotal to better health outcomes and higher-performing health systems. The program is implemented by a consortium of global and local partners, led by Management Sciences for Health (MSH), a global health nonprofit.



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