

Abstract

Author: Sviatlana Kavaliova, MEd, MBA

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Title: Identification of important factors for development of procurement and supply management plans for health projects financed by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and managed by the United Nations Development Programme

Key Words: Procurement and supply management (PSM) plans, systems thinking, factors, Global Fund health programmes.

Institution: Charité-Universitätsmedizin, Berlin, Germany

Supervisor: Peter J. Campbell, MBBS, MSc. Lecturer on TropEd short courses at Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, and Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, Institut für Public Health

Problem Statement/Objectives:

Globalization is changing the national and international health landscapes. The health initiatives emerged in the last decades brought to light pressing challenges connected with health systems strengthening that require a new modus operandi to optimize investments into global health. There is an increasing understanding that complex health systems that consist of many sub-systems including procurement and supply management (PSM) systems and PSM planning will benefit from systems thinking approaches. The aim of this exploratory and retrospective study was to explore factors important for development of PSM plans for the Global Fund health programmes managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the context of complex health systems and to discuss whether the theoretical rationales of systems thinking can explain the study findings as determinants for successful development of PSM plans that are essential for timely start and implementation of GF health programmes.

Methods: The study has employed qualitative data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and participatory observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 procurement and programme professionals from UNDP involved in developing of PSM plans. The participatory observation component of the study was represented by the author's years of experience in PSM planning for the GF grants in different countries and served as a supportive instrument both for anticipating important general themes and for making personal assessments of the findings.

Findings: Synthesis and analysis of theoretical and practical literature, coupled with analysis of the interviews, revealed an impressive collection of common themes that are considered essential for PSM planning: multi-dimensional engagement of stakeholders (partnerships, cooperation, collaboration, communication, joint planning and budgeting, etc.), professional and committed human resources, data and information, technical assistance, management support, time and others.

Discussion: The identified factors correspond with determinants of successful planning as mentioned in theoretical sources on systems thinking as well as in health systems and PSM planning practice publications. The study findings are relevant in the context of aids effectiveness and within the health systems strengthening context.

Conclusions: The findings suggest that the study has contributed to the research of unexplored field of PSM planning for Global Fund health programmes by identifying the complex of elements or causes instrumental to achieving the results: development of quality PSM plans that can get approval within the shortest time period. Based on the findings some ways for strengthening of existing practices in PSM plan development are suggested. The research results open encouraging perspectives for future research that - in the light of systems thinking perspectives - could look into the ranking of factors important for PSM plans development and explore the factors important for PSM plans development by the GF Principal Recipients other than UNDP. Such future research could support creation of a framework for PSM plans development practice with detailed specified steps and processes that could benefit various Global Fund Principal Recipients.