

Increasing Access to Family Planning Commodities through Accredited Drug Shops in Liberia, Tanzania, and Uganda

In many low-income countries, women often turn to drug shops to access medicines and family planning methods, particularly in rural areas where access to registered pharmacies and health centers may be limited. Assessments, however, have shown that drug shops are often poorly regulated and have unqualified and untrained staff. To improve access to affordable, quality medicines and pharmaceutical services in drug shops, Management Sciences for Health has collaborated with local authorities to launch accredited drug seller initiatives (ADSI) in Tanzania, Uganda, and Liberia with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The ADSI program takes a holistic approach that combines dispensing and business training, government accreditation, business incentives, and regulatory enforcement with efforts to increase consumer demand for quality health products and services. The more than 9,900 accredited drug shops established through the ADSI program in the three countries, serve as essential platforms for integrated care in their surrounding communities.



Family planning has become a central component of ADSI and drug sellers are increasingly promoting access to family planning information and commodities. The ADSI drug seller training in all three countries includes family planning, and accredited drug shops are allowed to dispense family planning methods such as combined oral contraceptives (COCs) and condoms.

Accredited Drug Shops in Uganda offer robust family planning services, including client education on condom or pills initiation, counseling, and referrals for other methods, thereby increasing access to family planning in underserved communities.

In Uganda, to broaden family planning services in Accredited Drug Shops (ADS), the ADSI program strengthened the family planning content in the drug seller curriculum and trained 479 drug sellers to counsel women on family planning options, initiate COCs or condoms, and refer women to health facilities for other methods. The program also built sellers' management skills through supportive supervision and training on the use of patient registers.

As a result, from July 2012 to May 2013, ADS expanded access to family planning services in four districts serving 12,084 family planning clients, dispensing 7,191 cycles of oral contraceptives, and referring 1,151 clients to public health facilities where long-acting and permanent methods are available. Furthermore, a recent evaluation of the program in Uganda revealed that ADS likely

contributed to improved availability of COCs. While a baseline evaluation found that only 70% of ADS carried COCs, after the focused family planning intervention 93% of surveyed ADS carried COCs. This 33% increase was statistically significantly greater than the change found in the evaluation's control district.

The potential for drug shops to improve access to family planning methods and information has been recognized by U.S. Agency for International Development as a Promising High Impact Practice¹. Acknowledging ADSI's ability to improve access to quality family planning services and other community health commodities and information, Tanzania has completed a country-wide roll-out of its Accredited Drug Dispensing Outlet program and Uganda and Liberia are currently exploring scale-up strategies for their initiatives.

¹ High-Impact Practices in Family Planning (HIP). Drug Shops and Pharmacies: Sources for family planning commodities and information. Washington, DC: USAID; 2013 Jun. Available from <http://www.fphighimpactpractices.org/resources/drug-shops-and-pharmacies-sources-family-planning-commodities-and-information>