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Exploring social franchising in Burundi

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY PERCENT LEVERAGE

It is not every day that funding is leveraged in development work as dramatically as it has been by this project in Burundi, supported by the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition's Innovation Fund. Upon its completion, this work by PSI Burundi proceeded to attract donor support for a second phase to the tune of US\$6M --150 times the original Innovation Fund grant of US\$40,000.

In 2010, the Burundi Ministry of Public Health published its National Health Plan for the period 2011-2015. In the plan, the government emphasized the critical importance of increased collaboration with the private sector, while at the same time acknowledging openly the many obstacles standing in its way: the pervasive disconnect between the private sector and national regulatory systems; wariness by the private sector of government intrusion; and lastly, a generally weak understanding by the public sector of market dynamics.

The Innovation Fund helped PSI Burundi¹ act upon the government's call. It did so by enabling them to carry out an evidenced-based strategy for leveraging the assets of the private sector – an approach known as social franchising – coupled with the prospects of future donor funding to take the strategy to scale.

TESTING VIABILITY

Social franchising is not a new concept. Indeed, few agencies have more global experience with it than PSI. But it is not a magic bullet – nor is its success necessarily guaranteed. To assess the appropriateness of this model for Burundi, and then encourage the broader donor community to support it, PSI turned to the Innovation Fund. Their approach was simple: assess the potential utility of social franchising for Burundi through an exhaustive situation analysis. And then, depending on a positive outcome of that assessment, design the future franchising programme, including both a logical framework and implementation plan.

In the words of its director, Beth Brogaard, the Innovation Fund grant allowed them to be responsive to government goals while at the same time, do their homework before approaching the wider donor community for large-scale support. “Donors will gladly fund success, but rarely do they have the appetite for the critical fact-checking needed to ensure that success.” For small, indigenous NGOs, that dilemma is especially problematic, because “rarely do such organizations have the resources to self-finance such endeavors – especially ones with any risk involved”.

POSITIVE PROJECT FINDINGS & THE NEXT PHASE

PSI Burundi has received EUR 4.5 million from the Government of the Netherlands for a three-year project which will kick-start social franchising in Burundi. The project will reach out to the existing private sector to improve the quality of services and accessibility of contraceptives within the private health sector. This will be accomplished through the training of providers, commodity procurement, and quality assurance visits. The project will also work to create demand for contraceptives and RH services by using communications agents, a live radio show hosted by PSI, a radio serial drama and mobile video unit campaigns.

The knowledge generated under the Innovation Fund grant enabled PSI Burundi to make the case for social franchising to the Government of the Netherlands. It also, once the new project got underway, made it possible to start at the implementation stage rather than analysis – accelerating the start-up process without sacrificing the quality situation analysis that is a crucial initial step for any project.

PSI Burundi's ultimate aim is to make a permanent and significant dent in the country's unmet demand for family planning products and services, and to improve the accessibility and quality of services to Burundi women. PSI Burundi's Innovation Fund project has proved worthy of flagship status, providing a compelling model for development work.

1. PSI Burundi is a small non-governmental organization affiliated with Population Services International – one of the largest family planning providers in the world. PSI Burundi opened its doors in 1990 – and kept them open until 1996 when political instability and civil war forced the evacuation of its staff. Its local affiliate, Population, Santé et Information, remained open, continuing to raise awareness and encourage prevention of HIV/AIDS awareness, and socially market condoms. PSI Burundi reopened in 2002 and has, ever since, played a key role in delivering quality family products and services.

Award

Recipient: PSI Burundi

Amount: US\$39,999

Date: November 2011 – April 2013

What is the Innovation Fund?

The Innovation Fund was established in 2008, through a generous grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Managed by the Coalition Secretariat, the Innovation Fund has to date made available more than US\$2.2M in small grants (maximum US\$200,000 per grant) to Coalition partners. The grants – more than 20 altogether – have yielded new tools, supported advocacy and research, leveraged millions of dollars in subsequent program funding, and launched a host of new initiatives across the Global South.

Traditionally, the Coalition has defined the concept of “innovation” broadly to include any promising new idea with the potential to bring about positive change. Innovation needn't mean a radical departure from previous practice. It could also include new approaches to existing processes or the implementation of an existing strategy in a new context, especially if this adaptation leads to replication or scaling-up at country level.

The Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition

Rue Marie-Thérèse 21, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 210 0222 / Fax: +32 2 219 3363 / secretariat@rhsupplies.org