

Commodity security at Options

Options is a global health consultancy with over 30 years' experience in tackling some of the world's most pressing health challenges. We work with leaders and change-makers at global, national, sub-national and community levels to bring health strategies to life. We provide ideas, advice, insight, and technical expertise that enable our partners to build a path to lasting change. We have long-standing, deep-rooted, connections to the places we work. Options has provided health systems strengthening support in over 60 countries globally.

What we do in commodity security

Options works with government, private sector and civil society organisations to create an enabling environment for improved commodity security. Taking a health systems approach, we work with partners to:

- ➔ Strengthen **government stewardship and coordination** of health commodity markets, ensuring a conducive policy and regulatory environment.
- ➔ Ensure **funding for commodities** is prioritised in national and sub-national budgets and strategic purchasing arrangements.
- ➔ Strengthen **accountability** to ensure governments deliver on their commitments relating to contraceptive security.
- ➔ Strengthen **supply chain management** through training and mentoring at national and sub-national levels.
- ➔ Strengthen **monitoring, evaluation, research and learning** to ensure that insight and data is used to inform supply chain decisions.

What we've achieved

Strengthening the policy and regulatory environment

Since 2019, Options has strengthened the enabling environment for commodity security across six countries through the development of 17 policies, strategies or plans. This ranges from the development of costed implementation plans in Kenya, Nigeria, Madagascar and Uganda, to the Multisectoral Strategic Plan for Family Planning (FP) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Options contributions to the policy landscape for commodity security is particularly noteworthy in Kenya, where we supported 6 policy documents, including the [Total Market Approach \(TMA\) Strategy for FP](#) (see box below).

Expanding access to contraceptives through policy reform: Successes from the development and implementation of the TMA Strategy in Kenya

Options worked with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to set out a path for achieving its vision that “Kenya’s market for FP is sustainable, efficient, equitable and less distorted for its people” through the Total Market Approach (TMA) for FP Strategy (2020-2025). By strengthening the capacity of MoH to regularly convene the whole market (private, social marketing and public) to solve challenges, the TMA strategy is delivering results. For example, DMPA-SC has been introduced and scaled up across private pharmacies and a PPP has been initiated with Coca Cola to strengthen the interoperability between the LMIS and DHIS2.



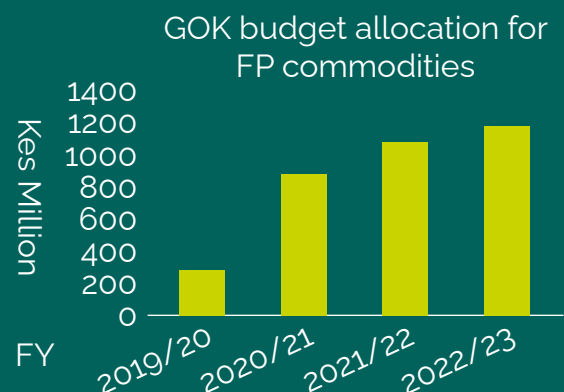
In Madagascar, strategic advocacy led to the removal of import taxes for FP commodities. This was enacted into law by the National Assembly in 2020. Prior to this, the Ministry of Health was paying \$94,000 per year in taxes on donated commodities. These funds have now been freed up for family planning access.

When speaking about this achievement as part of the International Budget Partnership (IBP) [implementation story series](#), Dr Onisoa Rindra Ralidera, Options Country Lead Madagascar, noted that a key to the success was “before you do anything, you have to first master what you want to talk about... you must really master the programme, master the data, master the information that you want to share with decision-makers. That’s a big one. You also must know the political process and how to identify the key decision-maker. And you must find the right messenger - someone who is convinced of the programme.”

Increasing public investment in reproductive health (RH) commodities

Options’ approaches to increase public investment in FP has led to an increased budget allocation of \$15 million for FP across 7 countries since 2019. We estimate that this will avert 809,000 unintended pregnancies and 2,500 maternal deaths by 2030.

Through engagement with the National Commodity Security Technical Working Group (TWG) in Kenya, Options worked alongside external partners to agree a [matched funding arrangement](#) for FP commodities whereby Government of Kenya (GOK) funding would shift progressively from 44% to 80% over five years. As a result of this, GOK allocation increased from Kes 245 million in FY2019/20 to Kes 863 million in FY 2020/21, increasing the domestic investment by more than 350%. It has continued on an upward trajectory in subsequent years, showing continued commitment by GOK ownership of FP commodity financing.



A combination of strategic advocacy and ongoing technical assistance has seen Options work with governments of Madagascar and [Jigawa State in Nigeria](#) to formally include FP as part of health insurance benefit packages. In Madagascar, the inclusion of FP in private insurance packages means that 123,985 vulnerable families can now access FP.

Holding decision-makers accountable

Options works collaboratively with FP and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) stakeholders to identify bottlenecks, package evidence and propose solutions to address the identified challenges. For example:

In **Malawi and Zambia**, Options conducted a [bottleneck analysis](#) to understand the root causes of FP commodity security challenges and engaged with key decision-makers to develop targeted advocacy strategies and messages. In **Malawi**, this led to:

- ✓ An increase in FP commodity budget by 137% from MK200 million in FY2021/22 to MK475 million in FY2022/23.
- ✓ A decision to procure FP commodities through the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to avail of cost saving on commodity procurement.
- ✓ A commitment to reduce the procurement review processes from 3 to 1 week, reducing delay in FP commodity procurement process considerably
- ✓ An MOH procurement and payment process checklist, including last mile assurance, making tracking of procurement process easy and transparent.

In **Zambia**, this resulted in:

- ✓ An increase in FP commodity budget execution from 40% (2019) to 70% (2020).
- ✓ Procurement of four vehicles to distribute FP commodities by MOH
- ✓ UNFPA providing direct support to FP commodity distribution in 1 province and committing to further support across 9 provinces.

In **Nigeria**, Options supported Lagos State Accountability Mechanism to shine a light on the consequences of pervasive stockouts of life-saving commodities such as misoprostol, oxytocin, magnesium sulphate and ORS/Zinc. Subsequent remedial actions meant there were zero stockouts in 2020 and 2021 across the state.

In **Kenya**, Options worked with the civil society organisation (CSO) Coalition in Bungoma County to advocate for reforms in the county procurement procedures which had been characterised by lack of procurement plans, unclear roles and responsibilities between national and county governments and inadequate supply chain management skills. As a result:

- ✓ An act was passed allowing facilities to procure RH commodities
- ✓ Guidelines on facility procurement planning, budgeting and approval were issued
- ✓ A memorandum of understanding was signed with the Kenya Medical Supply Agency, allowing facilities to receive commodity supplies directly

In **Ghana**, Options worked with the Mental Health Authority to investigate the root causes of the erratic supply and widespread shortages of psychotropic medicines in Ghana and solutions to overcome them. Findings were used to address systemic challenges, including:

- ✓ A defined medicine list for regular procurement of psychotropic medicines was developed
- ✓ Bulk procurement of medicines with two-year shelf life to avail of economies of scale was initiated
- ✓ Procurement contracts extended from one to two years to minimise administrative burden
- ✓ Psychotropic medicines were included in the medicine forecasting tool

Supply chain management

Options has enhanced government monitoring and oversight of commodity supply by strengthening the effectiveness of the RH Commodity Security Technical Working Group (TWG) and the FP Logistics TWG in Kenya and the FP Commodity Task Force in Malawi.

In Kenya, we have strengthened public sector commodity management for FP through enhanced national and county level capacity for FP commodity quantification, forecasting, supply planning and pipeline monitoring. This includes 120 county-level staff trained on how to prepare evidence informed forecasting and quantification plans and 41 county-level staff trained on commodity management.

Using insights and data to inform decisions

Bringing together our research capabilities with our understanding of local contexts, Options is well positioned to investigate some of the challenges and opportunities in relation to commodity security. For example:

- ✓ In 2021, Options carried out a study to assess the factors affecting access to maternal, neonatal and child health (MNCH) products and commodities in low-resource settings, including an evidence review in Kenya, Nigeria and Pakistan. The data is being used by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to identify scalable solutions that can be prioritised for investment, based on value for money and potential impact.
- ✓ In 2022, Options carried out a comprehensive literature review on existing evidence-based guidance on MNCH commodity transition and integration of new commodities into national supply systems. Feedback on this from the client was that "it is an excellent and comprehensive literature review... I may use this same format for future literature reviews! Truly incredible amount of information presented and organised". Mrs Siobhan Perkins, Maternal and Child Health Deputy Director.