

Enhancing accountability in the medicines market: The Medicines Transparency Alliance

by TIM REED and RENÉE VASBINDER



Roberto Pagdanganan, MeTA Philippines Chair, Renee Vasbinder, HAI, Cecile Sison, MeTA Philippines Country Coordinator, Tim Reed, HAI, and Deirdre Dimancesco, WHO, at the 2014 MeTA Philippines Forum. (Photo courtesy of MeTA Philippines.)

At least a third of the world's population—over 2 billion men, women and children—still have no regular access to affordable essential medicines. In many countries, this abominable problem primarily stems from a scarcity of, or contradicting, information about the price, availability, affordability, quality and promotion of medicines. Unfortunately, the absence of this vital information has far-reaching, negative consequences; it begets a lack of accountability within the medicines market.

To address these ongoing problems of transparency and accountability, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) introduced a new program—essentially, a new approach—called the [Medicines Transparency Alliance](#) (MeTA) in 2008. Years later, and now in its second phase, the project, co-managed by Health Action International (HAI) and the World Health Organization (WHO), has seven participating countries. Each country—Ghana, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Peru, the Philippines, Uganda and Zambia—has formed a multi-stakeholder group of representatives from the public sector, private sector and, very importantly, civil society to drive transparency and policy reform within their countries. These collaborative groups identify country health policy priorities, and collect, share and analyse data on the selection, procurement, quality, availability, pricing, promotion and use of medicines. They then use this information to inform medicines policy so that more of their citizens can access quality-assured essential medicines through a truly country-driven programme of transparency and reform.

Since forming, MeTA multi-stakeholder groups have made great strides towards improving

medicines access. In Jordan, for example, the prices of more than 700 medicines were recently reduced, making them more affordable for Jordanian citizens. MeTA Jordan, particularly the Jordanian Civil Society Organizations Health Alliance (JCSOHA), has been instrumental in driving this positive result. Meanwhile, this week, HAI was pleased to join MeTA Philippines for its annual forum, which focused on the dreadful medicines promotion situation that is plaguing the rational use of medicines in that country. HAI gave a presentation about the role of drug promotion (using the HAI/WHO manual, [Understanding and Responding to Pharmaceutical Promotion: A Practical Guide](#)) and participated in a panel discussion regarding regulatory mechanisms to curtail the excesses of the pharmaceutical industry.

No doubt, MeTA milestones and events, like these, are important steps towards improving the health of citizens. They also offer hope that the MeTA model could, one day, be extended to other countries so even more people could reap the benefits of having reliable access to affordable essential medicines.