



Modified transport options and warehousing solutions

inSupply Health and Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition (RHSC) have released a report in 2023 examining strategic supply chain adaptations that were undertaken by stakeholders in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in response to the severe supply chain disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The report, *Adaptations used to ensure contraceptive access during the COVID-19 pandemic*, was issued through RHSC's Compass initiative, which supports greater resilience in supply chains and marketplaces following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2023 report documents adaptation strategies that were planned and/or applied in six categories: policy and advocacy, financing, supply sources, digital interventions, adjusted inventory management policies and procedures, and modified transport options and warehousing solutions. The insights from this report are intended to be used to increase the resilience of supply chains now and in preparation for future crises. This brief documents the findings for one of the six adaptation categories presented in the report.

"...Previously we used a combination of ships and air but now everything needed to be airlifted..."

- RH Global Manufacturer

The shifting of priorities by national governments toward pandemic response exacerbated existing supply chain constraints, as already congested ports prioritized pandemic-related shipments, and this led to further delays in delivery of RH products. In some cases, efforts to ease the impact of supply constraints created new issues, such as a need for increased storage and warehousing capacity. RH supply chain actors responded with adaptations within the category of modified transport options and warehousing solutions—changing the physical movement or storage of commodities to ensure continued access to services and products.

Adaptation: Expand warehousing and increase storage space

SMOs, such as DKT and Population Services (PS) in Kenya, increased their RH product inventory levels to hedge against volatile supply lines. In some cases, this meant that existing warehouse space became insufficient to store goods. SMOs and other RH suppliers implemented two adaptations to address this storage capacity constraint. Firstly, some suppliers

secured additional warehouse space to accommodate temporary increases in stock levels. And secondly, other suppliers relocated their existing warehouses to larger spaces. These adaptations allowed suppliers more flexibility to accommodate supply surges, more efficient use of space, and, in some cases, resulted in cost savings.

Adaptation: Use alternative shipping routes and modes of transport

Congestion at major ports contributed to longer supply lead times and potential stockouts. To alleviate or circumvent these delays, suppliers explored alternate routes and modes of transport. RH supplies, such as intrauterine devices and implants, were moved in some cases from sea shipments to air by manufacturers, and SMOs, such as PS Kenya, explored alternate shipping routes. Some organizations adjusted the size of shipments to align with available cargo capacity and to facilitate moving goods. For each option, trade-offs, such as cost and speed, needed to be assessed by supply chain actors, such as global RH manufacturers in India and Indonesia.

Adaptation: Utilize new distribution and service delivery channels for accessing RH products and services

Restricted movement made it difficult for clients to access RH products from health facilities and for healthcare workers to consistently staff the facilities. RH product and service providers repurposed existing modes of local transport to get products to people, including motorbikes and rideshare apps as demonstrated in Uganda. E-commerce platforms with delivery services also facilitated access to RH products. Furthermore, some governments, such as in Senegal, modified existing service delivery channels, such as outreach teams, to adopt high-impact practices or partner with small private sector healthcare providers to increase product access points for clients.



Key Takeaways

Actors throughout the supply chain were able to take practical decisions about moving and storing inventory and shipments to ensure supply and reach clients. Many adaptation examples were temporary and sometimes costly solutions that were not sustainable in the long term, but they offered short-term solutions to address urgent needs; these serve as examples that can be employed in critical situations. Provision of quality RH services and supplies through community-based distribution and mobile outreach programs, including when integrated with other healthcare services (e.g., postpartum care, malaria, and nutrition), can be a cost-effective strategy in emergency situations.

