

Assessments: The First Step in Engaging the Private Health Sector

One of the greatest challenges to engaging the private health sector is getting a clear picture of the actors involved and their capabilities. This sector is often misunderstood—but can be a critical partner in meeting public health goals. An assessment can help government, development partners, and other key stakeholders understand the role the private health sector plays with an eye toward identifying areas where the private sector can contribute.

The Approach

A private health sector assessment describes private sector activity at one moment in time. An assessment provides accurate data on the scope, size, and activities of the private sector throughout the entire health system. This strategic assessment analyzes secondary data sources—ministry of health policies and plans as well as service statistics, demographic health analyses, national health accounts, and donor-funded research. Primary data collection, including stakeholder interviews, fills gaps in current knowledge. The assessment may take a broad approach and examine the health sector as a whole or it may focus on specific health areas such as family planning or HIV and AIDS.

Each private health sector assessment includes recommendations to harness private sector capacity. The assessment helps foster dialogue on how to maximize the role of the private sector. Often, the dissemination of the assessment’s findings and recommendations bring together for the first time public and private stakeholders to discuss the private sector’s contribution and ways to leverage its role. Stakeholder engagement throughout the assessment process helps ensure that the recommendations are endorsed by all interested parties and are likely to lead to change.

Web-based Assessment Tool

In response to the growing demand for private health sector assessments, the SHOPS project developed a web-based tool called Assessment to Action. The tool provides a step-by-step guide for those conducting a private health sector assessment in addition to resources to draw from. The tool builds on private health sector assessments conducted by Abt Associates and its partners over the past decade in 25 countries.

Visit assessment-action.net.



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Stakeholder meetings are part of the assessment process. They validate the findings and serve as a way to prioritize next steps. Pictured here, a meeting in Malawi in 2011.

Elements of an Assessment



Public-Private Dialogue: Key to Harnessing the Private Sector

Public-private dialogue is a process that enables government and private sector stakeholders to exchange views and exchange their respective perspectives on health sector issues. This process provides the private sector with a seat at the table in policymaking while encouraging the public sector to regard the private sector as a partner. Shared leadership, balanced representation, and joint decision-making are crucial features of a successful public-private dialogue process. In combination, these elements foster genuine engagement across stakeholders that helps create a common vision on the private sector role, defines ways to leverage the private sector and identifies needed reforms so that the private sector can realize its potential.

From Assessment to Action in Tanzania

The SHOPS project, in collaboration with the IFC Health in Africa Initiative, conducted the assessment in 2012. The assessment team met with 170 stakeholders to better understand the role of the private sector and identify opportunities for an expanded private sector role in addressing national health needs. The Tanzania Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in collaboration with USAID and the IFC Health in Africa Initiative, convened 45 public and private stakeholders to validate the assessment's findings, discuss recommendations, and identify next steps.

The private sector assessment report has since helped the ministry prioritize activities and shape discussions with donor agencies about further donor support for public-private partnerships in health. The Tanzanians have established a public-private dialogue mechanism, PPP Health in Tanzania, incorporating newly formed private sector associations. The ministry has formalized contracting arrangements with private sector organizations to expand delivery of key health services into underserved areas. Collaboration on a directory of laboratories, the scale-up of PMTCT B+ through PRINMAT (the private association of nurses and midwives), and work on voluntary male medical circumcision with the Association of Private Hospitals stemmed from the assessment.

Tanzania is an example of the strides that can be made based on an assessment and driven by a motivated PPP unit and technical working group in the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.

Recent Assessments



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For more information about the SHOPS project, visit: www.shopsproject.org



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