



Developing a Chemical Sellers' Franchise in Ghana

A. Banful

GSMF International, Ghana

In Ghana, the health care system is characterized by comparatively high prices, inadequate availability of quality essential drugs, and poor quality of service.

Public sector organizations have been in the lead in delivering public health services in Ghana, but provider potential in the private sector has not been exploited fully in improving access for the poor. The questions are: Can a private sector organization deliver for the benefit of public health more generally? What form of controls can be put in place? What will be the key motivation to serve the poor?

In order to move from anecdotal scenarios to reality and to confirm their conviction that the private provider can fulfill this role, GSMF International (the leading social marketing, nonprofit organization in Ghana) and MSH have embarked on a program establishing an essential drugs franchise with chemical sellers.

Chemical sellers are licensed by the Pharmacy Council—the statutory body—to sell over-the-counter (OTC) medicines to the public. Recent surveys indicate that chemical sellers provide the “first line” of treatment for more than 66 percent of people in rural areas seeking access to medicines. Because of the low technical requirement for the acquisition of a license, however, irrational and inappropriate drug dispensing is prevalent. Also, the low quality of the services provided raises doubts about the safety and effectiveness of the chemical sellers' operations.

To enhance access to essential drugs, GSMF Enterprises Limited (GSMFEL), a subsidiary of GSMF International, has initiated a conversion franchise network with privately owned chemical sellers located in rural and periurban districts. Within this network of essential drug franchisees, the chemical sellers will have to operate under a single brand—CAREshop—to produce a uniform operating mode. CAREshop staff members are required to undergo intensive training and will be supervised and monitored on an ongoing basis. The aim is to achieve a reliable, high quality of products and services. The CAREshop franchise will also exploit economies of scale for procurement to provide lower prices on products to their rural and periurban clients

The impact of the franchise on essential drug availability and affordability will be assessed over a period of time. This method of providing service is projected to be completely financially sustainable.