



Building Resilience in the Health Supply Chain to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic

Project Location:	Zambia
Project Start Date:	September 2020
Project Duration:	Six months

Introduction:

Zambia recorded its first confirmed case of Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) case on the 16th March 2020. Five days earlier the WHO had announced that the outbreak could be characterised as a global pandemic.

Governments across Southern Africa responded by introducing measures aimed at curbing the spread of the virus, including the closure of land borders to the majority of cross-border traffic and cargo. As a result, landlocked countries such as Zambia were left particularly vulnerable to health commodity shortages and stockouts, potentially increasing pressure on its already fragile health system and its ability to maintain the distribution of vital supplies of medicines across the country whilst in parallel mounting a coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At a time when demand for emergency orders was increasing, protecting essential workers from exposure to the virus was more important than ever, and the essential role of health supply chain workers, including professional drivers during these challenging times had never been more visible.

It was therefore essential to improve the level of awareness and preparedness in the sector and to ensure that up-to-date information was made accessible and delivered in a context appropriate way to the health supply chain workforce. For delivery of this initiative, Transaid collaborated with its long-term partner and one of Zambia's principal providers of training to the logistics and transport sector, the Industrial Training Centre (ITC).

This joint initiative aimed to increase resilience in the health supply chain workforce with an emphasis on COVID-19 prevention and responded to:

- Increased risk of exposure to the COVID-19 virus and a stated lack of information and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the health supply chain workforce;
- Deteriorating working conditions (mental and health risks to professional drivers);
- No current guidelines targeting professional drivers specifically;
- No standard application of measures associated with COVID-19.

Transaid and ITC collaborated with local transporter groups and the Ministry of Health (MoH) to deliver the following objectives:

- Develop and distribute COVID-19 factsheets specific to professional drivers;
- Develop and deliver a COVID-19 training module;
- Distribute packages of basic PPE;

- Integrate the above-mentioned training module in ITC's existing trainings.

To achieve these objectives, the project team developed and distributed COVID-19 sensitisation, including packages of basic PPE, and key road safety messaging via printed factsheets and classroom trainings to professionals employed at medical stores across Zambia, while long-term sustainability and increased preparedness in the sector against future shocks was addressed by training learners enrolled in ITC's transport and logistics courses, and then the integration of the training module into ITC's existing trainings.

This project is a recipient of People that Deliver's Grand Challenge for Last Mile Health Supply Chain COVID-19 Support, and follows a donation from the FIA Foundation to support projects in sub-Saharan Africa that seek solutions to critical health commodity transportation and logistics challenges brought on by COVID-19.

Methodology:

Transaid's presence in Zambia for over a decade working to deliver improved road safety and access to health initiatives has been advantageous in terms of understanding the daily challenges experienced by the supply chain workforce in the COVID-19 context.

Notably, at the beginning of the project, the role of a 'key worker' in Zambia was largely defined as someone working in a hospital or health clinic based in an urban centre. As a result, it was thought that due to the mobile working nature of their jobs, many health supply chain professionals were being missed by the current government-led sensitisation efforts, therefore limiting the uptake and adherence to national guidelines, including the use of PPE.

Working with ITC and in collaboration with the MoH, an information factsheet featuring driver-specific COVID-19 sensitisation and key road safety messaging was developed, which included a cleaning guide detailing the steps needed to sanitise commonly touched points inside and outside of vehicles. Printed colour versions of the factsheet were distributed to drivers via their employers, while at the same time, digital copies were distributed by the Truckers Association of Zambia (TAZ) to its nationwide membership via WhatsApp.

With the support of Transaid's UK corporate members, a COVID-19 sensitisation training module was developed. The aim of the training module focused on increasing awareness and preparedness in the health supply chain sector by explaining the current risks while reinforcing preventative strategies, including the correct and appropriate use of PPE in the workplace. To ensure accuracy, the module incorporated Zambia's current national guidelines and received approval from the MoH before being implemented.

Transaid then conducted Training of Trainers (ToT) to equip ITC trainers with the skills required to deliver the COVID-19 module to professional drivers. The training, which was highly participatory in approach, was carefully designed to ensure that COVID-19 protocols

were observed at all times to minimise the risk to both trainers and trainees.

In a targeted effort to prioritise professionals working to maintain essential health supplies, including those working on the frontline of the pandemic's response, the project team partnered with Medical Stores Limited (MSL), an autonomous government agency responsible for ensuring the continuous distribution of pharmaceutical products throughout Zambia. ITC's training team then conducted trainings at MSL's headquarters in Lusaka, as well as at several satellite distribution hubs across the country. The training was also offered to students enrolled in ITC's transport and logistics training programmes.

All trainees received a package of basic PPE, which included a washable and reusable facemask, a tablet of bar soap and a personal bottle of hand sanitiser. A second factsheet was also developed and included in the package.

Outcomes:

A total 2,158 printed factsheets were distributed during the lifetime of the project to professional drivers engaged in a number of sectors, including mining, fuel and agriculture. A total 1,382 of those drivers were based at transporters in the Lusaka area, and 700 in Ndola, in the Copperbelt region. A further 76 factsheets were distributed to drivers and vehicle operators who attended the COVID-19 sensitisation training.

In addition, it is estimated that up to 4,500 professional drivers based in Zambia received a digital copy of the factsheet via TAZ's 106 road transporter members in the WhatsApp messaging platform.

Ten trainers at ITC received ToT training to deliver the COVID-19 sensitisation training before training a total 101 health supply chain colleagues, including 74 professionals directly engaged in the handling and distribution of Zambia's health commodity cargo.

Following the integration of the training into ITC's existing driver training courses, 27 learners enrolled in ITC transport and logistics courses also received the training. A total 120 packages of basic PPE, including a second laminated colour factsheet, were also distributed.

An analysis of pre- and post-training assessments demonstrated a marked increase in COVID-19 awareness following the training, including the number of known symptoms, possible routes of transmission and preventive measures to mitigate risk.

Conclusion:

This project aimed to increase the awareness and preparedness of health supply chain workers in Zambia through the distribution of driver-specific factsheets and the training of colleagues engaged in the handling and distribution of health commodity cargo.

The project team were able to deliver these activities by working with known and trusted partners in Zambia to disseminate information and learning at a time when COVID-19 scepticism and disinformation was thought to be reducing the uptake and adherence to preventative measures. The project team also utilised the use of mobile messaging to rapidly disseminate messaging via WhatsApp, thereby negating the need for mobile workers to return to base to receive up to date sensitisation.

The increased pressure on the sector during a live pandemic reduced the availability of some colleagues for training. The project team responded by decentralising the training; traveling to key locations and offering training to smaller cohorts of trainees.

The enduring nature of the pandemic has also highlighted the need to increase capacity in Zambia's future health supply chain workforce by way of integrating a communicable diseases training into existing standardised training courses, and the long term need to support local training institutions to periodically revise and update its trainings to address and respond to emerging risks and potential future outbreaks.

Tools Utilised:

- [Trainer's manual for delivering communicable disease awareness and preparedness training with a focus on COVID-19 for increasing resilience in Zambia's health supply chains;](#)
- [Staying Safe in the Workplace – COVID-19 Information for the Health Supply Chain Workforce factsheet;](#)
- [Protect Yourself Against COVID-19 – Information for Professional Drivers Working in Zambia factsheet.](#)

Partners: Industrial Training Centre (ITC), Medical Stores Limited (MSL), People that Deliver, FIA Foundation, Truckers Association of Zambia (TAZ), Zambia Ministry of Health (MoH).

The project is backed by Transaid member companies from the UK Transport and Logistics industry, including DHL & the British Industrial Truck Association (BITA).

About Transaid:

Transaid is an international UK development charity that aims to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods across Africa and the developing world through creating better transport. Transaid was founded by Save the Children and the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. Our Patron is HRH The Princess Royal. Transaid specializes in the following:

- Building the capacity of public health authorities to provide effective, safe and cost efficient transport management systems to promote equitable access to primary health care services.
- Developing and improving logistics and supply chain systems to enhance the delivery of medicines, equipment and relief services to vulnerable communities.
- Promoting effective partnerships to support and enhance community participation in developing sustainable transport solutions in rural areas.
- Developing and delivering transport and logistics training and qualifications for public and private sector operators.

Transaid has the capacity and reach to lead projects throughout the developing world, but is equally capable of providing niche technical assistance to large scale health systems strengthening projects. Transaid maintains strong relationships with a number of leading international organizations including donor agencies such as DfID, DANIDA and USAID, and implementing organizations such as Health Partners International, Options Consulting, John Snow Inc. and Management Sciences for Health.

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