

African Strategies for Health (ASH): Monthly Progress Report: January 2012

This report was made possible through support provided by the US Agency for International Development. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the US Agency for International Development.

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1. Activities and Achievements

a. Retreat Preparation

During the month of January, all of the ASH team members were involved in planning for the retreat with USAID which was held at the end of the month. In preparation for the retreat ASH technical staff worked closely with their USAID counterparts to understand the needs of African Bureau and to determine the role ASH can play in assisting the Africa Bureau accomplish its objectives. As a result of these discussions, ASH staff produced twenty-eight Technical Concept Notes (TCNs) based on the results of their mapping work during the previous three months. The TCNs provided a brief summary of potential activities ASH could begin to undertake in year one of the project. The ideas in the TCNs were generated based on discussions with the relevant Strategic Team, discussions with leading experts in the technical field, review of documents, meetings with other USAID projects and donors, as well as analysis of recommendations made by Africa 2010. It should be noted however that given the travel schedules of USAID staff, in some cases it was not possible to have lengthy discussions with all of the pertinent Strategic Teams. As a result some of the TCNs were broader in their scope while others were much further developed.

In preparing for the retreat, USAID and ASH agreed that the retreat should cover both a discussion of priority areas for the first two years of the project, as well as a discussion of how the project can work most effectively and efficiently. To this end there were two objectives for the retreat: i) to articulate and solidify how ASH and USAID work together and with African institutions to achieve results; and ii) to agree upon priority activities for years one and two. Over the course of the two day retreat the sessions were organized around these two objectives. Furthermore, the discussion of the TCNs was organized around the relevant WHO health systems building blocks: service delivery; health workforce; information; financing; and leadership/governance.

During the retreat USAID provided feedback on the TCN ideas proposed by ASH. Once the group discussed all of the TCNs and proposed new ideas, for which there were no TCNs, the proposed activities were categorized into three groups: i) approved (green lighted); ii) waitlisted (yellow); and iii) not approved (red lighted). There were thirteen ideas which were green lighted.

2. Project Management and Administration

a. Dr. Thetard Visa

The paper work for the L-1B visa petition for Rudi Thetard, the Infectious Diseases Specialist was approved by the US Immigration during second week of January, 2012 and he relocated to the US on January 28, 2012.

b. Gwen Morgan

Gwen Morgan, the Communication Advisor for ASH, seconded from APHRC relocated to the US on January 6, 2012.

c. Budget

In view of earlier discussions with USAID CORs and senior management team of ASH, MSH received a request from USAID Contracting Officer on January 17, 2012 for submission of a revised budget with reduced funding for year one based on obligation from USAID and readjustment of the total budget so that the ceiling of the contract remain unchanged. The request also directed MSH to make some changes to the staffing structure of the ASH Project and informed MSH that the ASH contract will be changed from hybrid type to a cost-reimbursement type contract so that it can be managed more easily. Accordingly, ASH team held several meetings with the senior management of MSH to come up with a plan to cover staff time that cannot be covered with ASH funds due to funding constraints in year one. A revised budget and budget notes were submitted accordingly to USAID on 2/10/11.

3. Challenges

Budget constraints for year one continue to impact ASH's capacity to engage and work in close collaboration with African institutions since ASH will not be able to interact with them face-to-face. In view of the budget constraints ASH is exploring innovative ways of collaborating with these institutions such as leveraging trips by ASH staff funded by other MSH activities.

4. Key Activities planned for February, 2012

- ASH Retreat Report Submission
- Development of scopes of work and COR letters based on retreat outcomes
- Continual networking and mapping
- Submission of ASH Project budget revision and modification request to USAID