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Abt Associates: Scaling Indoor Residual Spraying for Malaria Prevention in Africa

In the summer of 2011 Abt Associates was awarded a contract to implement indoor residual spraying (IRS) in up to 17 countries in sub-Saharan Africa based on successes the company had with its IRS program in Uganda. The company had come a long way since it took over the Uganda project in 2009 from the previous contractor. When it tried to replicate existing processes and procedures for the first spray round, the results were less than satisfactory. Spraying was expensive, took too long, and had low coverage rates. Abt Associates also experienced a number of operational problems—poor inventory tracking, low levels of accountability among staff, as well as a lack of transparency with respect to the handling of funds, equipment, and insecticide. Public opinion of the spraying program was low, as questions were raised about the effectiveness of the insecticide as well as its health and environmental impacts. While the Uganda project no longer used the controversial insecticide dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) in its spray operations, the community and its political leadership were skeptical as to the ability of IRS to address the country's immense malaria burden.

Abt Associates implemented a number of changes in supply chain management after the first spray round of the Uganda project, including getting community buy-in and involvement, as well as tracking of equipment and supplies—all with excellent results. Clearly, the current award to roll out the program in the majority of sub-Saharan African countries was a strong vote of confidence from United States Agency for International Development (USAID)—the United States federal government agency primarily responsible for administering civilian foreign aid. Susan Scribner, a portfolio manager at Abt Associates, was elated. However, the challenges facing Scribner and her team—Division Vice President for International Private Sector Health Systems David McGuire, Deputy Chief of Party Operations and Communications Allan Were, Deputy Chief of Party of Finance and Administration David Rothschild, Chief of Party of the Uganda office J. B. Rwakimari, and Senior IRS Advisor and Entomologist Ranjith De Alwis—now were to determine if the Uganda model that was developed on a small scale over a long period could be replicated, and if lessons learned in supply chain management would prove equally effective in countries with different cultures and health care infrastructures. The procurement process for the new sub-Saharan project had come to a close, and Abt Associates had to present a work plan to the client in just four weeks. Scribner decided to visit with Rwakimari in Kampala to examine how to best apply these lessons from the Uganda project on a larger scale.



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This case was developed under the supervision of Professor Ravi Anupindi of the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business by graduate student Colm Fayⁱ as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate the effective or ineffective handling of a situation.

ⁱ Colm Fay is now an Associate in the International Health Division at Abt Associates.