



CDC's Country Management and Support Initiative

Report Summary for January 2012 Country Management and Support Visit to Thailand

Background

As the U.S. science-based public health and disease prevention agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) plays an important role in implementing the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) under the direction of the Department of State Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator. CDC uses its technical expertise in public health science and long-standing relationships with Ministries of Health across the globe to work side-by-side with countries to build strong national programs and sustainable public health systems that can respond effectively to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic. All CDC global HIV/AIDS PEPFAR-related activities are implemented by the Division of Global HIV/AIDS (DGHA) in CDC's Center for Global Health.

CDC's Commitment to Accountability

CDC/DGHA launched the Country Management and Support (CMS) initiative in 2011 to identify any challenges resulting from the rapid scale-up of complex PEPFAR/CDC programming as part of CDC's commitment to transparency and accountability. This initiative serves as a basis for ongoing, monitored quality improvement of CDC/DGHA's programs and operations through internal programmatic and financial oversight. CMS is a proactive response on the part of CDC to ensure that CDC/DGHA is supporting the Presidential Initiatives, Department of State, and Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator. The CMS strategy is designed to assess CDC/DGHA's accountability in the following key areas:

- **Intramural Resources:** Ensuring proper management and stewardship of financial resources, property, and human resources within CDC's overseas offices
- **Extramural Funding:** Ensuring responsible and accurate management of financial and other resources external to CDC's overseas offices
- **Public Health Impact:** Ensuring the delivery of consistently high quality interventions and technical assistance that positively impact the populations the program serves

Thailand Country Management and Support Visit

CDC/DGHA conducted a CMS visit to the CDC country office in Thailand, which is headquarters to the CDC Asia Regional Office (ARO), from January 23-27, 2012. The CMS team also visited Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), which is part of the ARO, during this trip. The principal objectives of this CMS visit were to assess:

- Intramural resource stewardship and management, including property, finances, and human resources within CDC office;
- Extramural funding stewardship and management, including funds and other resources used outside of CDC through cooperative agreements with funded grantees; and
- Public health impact of activities, including delivery of services, interventions for HIV-affected populations and technical assistance in support of these efforts, consistent with the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) and other regional governments' priorities and objectives.

CDC/DGHA headquarters (CDC/HQ) in Atlanta, Georgia assembled an intra-agency multidisciplinary team of nine experts in the following areas to perform the CMS assessment: country management and operations, program budget and extramural management, procurement and grants, financial management, and key technical program areas (e.g., Science Office and strategic information).

CMS Methodology

The CMS team conducted a five-day visit to the CDC/DGHA office in Thailand (CDC/Thailand) and a sub-team visit to Vientiane, Lao PDR. The assessment included reviews of financial documents, administrative and technical program implementation and site visits with grantees, one-on-one meetings with staff, data quality spot checks, and reviews of internal financial controls and policies at CDC and grantee offices. Assessment tools and checklists were developed by members of the CMS leadership in consultation with subject matter experts at CDC/HQ. This methodology was designed to provide a “point in time” synopsis of CDC/DGHA Thailand and Asia Regional Office’s operations.

Scope

CMS visits are designed to provide an overview of CDC/DGHA country programs and identify best practices and areas for improvement. These visits should not be considered comprehensive and are not intended to replace Inspector General audits. The scope of this CMS visit focused only on the CDC/DGHA portfolio of global HIV/AIDS activities implemented through PEPFAR.

Program Background

DGHA began supporting Thailand and the Southeast Asia region in 2002 with the establishment of the Asia Regional Office in Bangkok. Countries in the region supported by DGHA/Thailand and ARO include Burma, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), and Papua New Guinea.

The Thailand and ARO operates a technical assistance program that focuses on capacity-building and systems strengthening, which is directly supportive of the Royal Thai Government’s National Strategy as well as specific strategies of the governments in the region. The technical assistance program is based on a four staged process of 1) model development; 2) evaluation; 3) scale-up with host government or the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria funding; and 4) dissemination of lessons learned with other countries.

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Program Administration and Technical Oversight

Country Operations. DGHA/Thailand and ARO senior staff have demonstrated outstanding leadership and management of the program. Staff retention is extremely high and interviews with staff consistently indicated high job satisfaction. Staffs’ ability to use training and technical skills was frequently reported as a source of job satisfaction. Technical staff also felt strongly that in working for a technical assistance agency that they require more technical development support from CDC/HQ and more opportunity to attend optional trainings and conferences to ensure their skills remained cutting edge. Motor pool management and time and attendance are administered very well.

Country Management. DGHA Thailand and ARO staff have strong expertise in the provision of technical assistance to the Thailand Ministry of Public Health and to Bangkok’s Metropolitan Administration. The team also provides a range of technical assistance across program areas to other countries both within and outside of the Southeast Asia Region. The leadership provided by Thai Host Country Nationals (CDC locally employed staff) appears to be of very high quality, provided with great technical skills and through excellent and ongoing communication, both in person and at a distance. DGHA/Thailand’s model of mentoring, through close communication, is exceptional and especially appreciated by the technically assisted country colleagues.

Furthermore, the CMS team found that, in general, DGHA/Thailand and ARO has positive, supportive relationships with their grantees and is working seamlessly with the Thailand Ministry of Public Health. While members of the DGHA/Thailand team work alongside grantees on a daily basis, grantee visits and implementation site visits are generally not systematized, nor well-documented.

Program Management

Procurement and Grants. CDC's Procurement and Grants Office (PGO) visited two grantees during the CMS visit. Both grantees demonstrated robust systems for personnel management, accounting, and procurement. Both grantees, however, could use additional training in order to strengthen their employee timekeeping and budgetary control systems.

Program Budget and Extramural Management. In general, CDC/Thailand and ARO is managing the budget and extramural funding well. Many of the key functions for financial management are performed by the Business Services Office for all CDC programs in-country. When program-specific financial tasks such as budget formulation and tracking are necessary, the CMS team noted that DGHA/Thailand is performing well.

Financial Management

CDC's Financial Management Office (FMO) participated in the CMS visit and found that the locally employed budget and financial staff members are very knowledgeable about both Department of State (DOS) and CDC field office procedures. The process for managing petty cash operations at CDC/Thailand office aligns with DOS established procedures and the CDC/Thailand locally employed budget and financial staff members appear to be committed to ensuring that adequate procedures are in place and consistently followed. It was found that while CDC leadership is held responsible for ensuring that all transactions are consistent with applicable policies, authorities, and regulations, DOS personnel also review CDC expenses for adherence to government DOS regulations. This strengthens internal controls to help ensure funds are used appropriately in the office.

Next Steps

The CMS team shared their key findings and recommendations with the CDC/Thailand office and CDC/HQ. The team also developed a scorecard for internal management use, which is populated with all of the issues identified during the visit, recommendations, due dates, and primary point of contact for each issue.