VILLAGE REACH®

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Measuring the impact of integrating private distributors in public health supply chains

Results from Sud-Ubangi province (DRC)

Photo credit: Wolff Mugos

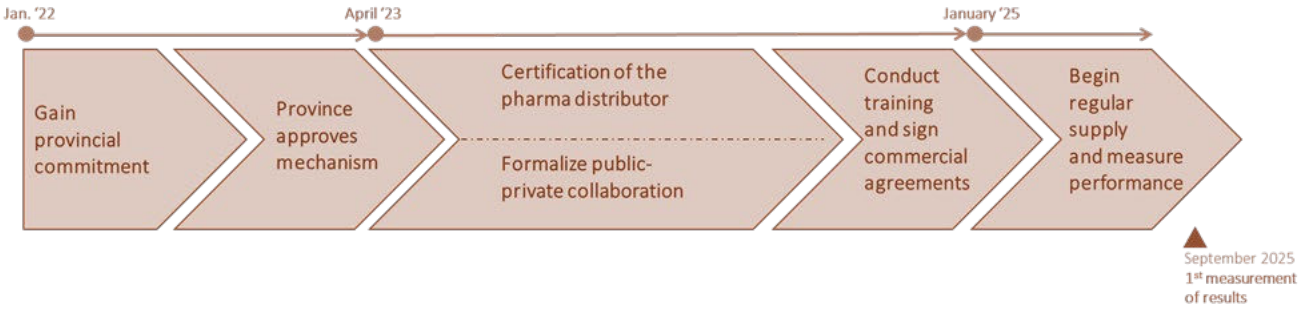
Summary

In September 2025, VillageReach working with government and partners in Sud-Ubangi province, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) conducted an evaluation[1] of the use of private distributors as regular suppliers to the provincial public health system The results of the evaluation highlighted an increase in availability of health products among provincial health facilities, indicating this approach should be replicated in other DRC provinces. The evaluation also highlighted the need for better data collection and management in Sud-Ubangi province to maximize the benefits of private distributor integration.

The Challenge and the Opportunity

Many provinces in DRC suffer from chronic undersupply of medicines, which was an important focus of the World Bank-supported PDSS program (2018-2023), which introduced the use of private distributors in select provinces in DRC to supply public health facilities. The results of PDSS were encouraging, increasing availability of essential medicines from an average of 45% (2018) to 69% (2023).

Figure 1: Roadmap to Integration of Private Distributor Supply in Sud-Ubangi province



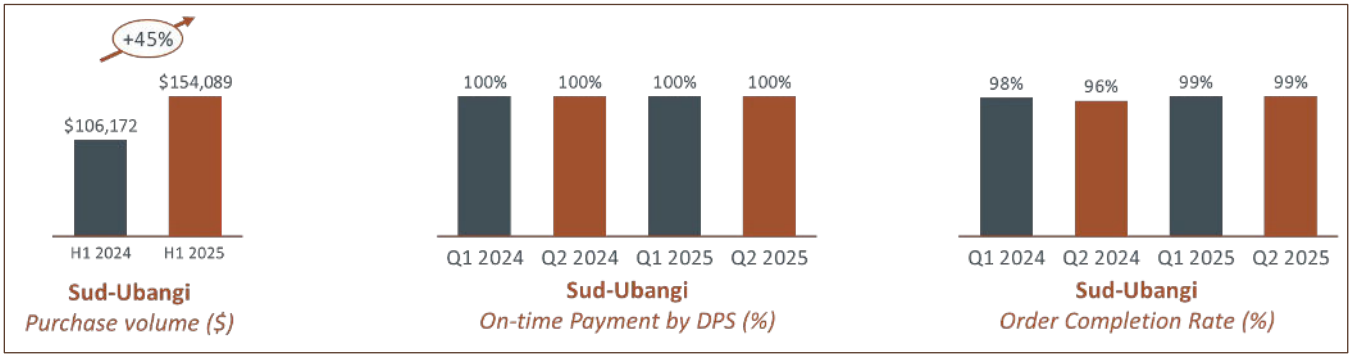
[1] A longer report (French and English) which provides more information on the evaluation is available.

Since 2022, one of the former PDSS provinces (Sud-Ubangi), has benefited from the technical support of VillageReach through the Private Distributors project (Figure 1). VillageReach support targets the ***institutionalization of private for-profit distributors as regular suppliers in Sub-Ubangi.*** by establishing a partnership between the provincial government and its DPS (Provincial Health Division), that oversees the province's public health system, and Phatkin, a local private for-profit distributor. By institutionalization we mean the adoption and full integration of needed processes, tools, and roles & responsibilities. The aim is to achieve a robust, resilient, and sustainable supply chain that relies primarily on local resources to avoid being overdependence on external funding and technical assistance.

What are the Results?

The province is not currently collecting the needed data to verify the frequency or severity of stockouts and this activity has been added to a corrective action plan. However, there are several data points that indicate that product availability has indeed increased significantly since Phatkin started providing regular monthly deliveries to the province.

Figure 2: Key Results of the September 2025 Assessment



The Purchase Volumes (*total value in USD*) have steadily increased showing strong provincial government enthusiasm for the private distributor approach. In Q2 2025, all sixteen of the province's health zones ordered products from PHATKIN in Q2 2025 a large increase compared to Q1 2024 when only eight health zones were supplied by Phatkin. The 45% increase in purchasing volume in the first half of 2025 compared to the first half of 2024 is mostly[2] but not exclusively linked to the increase in health zones coverage.

There is strong ownership by the Sud-Ubangi provincial government illustrated by excellent compliance with the On-time Payment of the private distributor invoices (*invoices paid within 10 days of receipt*). This result is achieved solely by the provincial authorities and demonstrates the seriousness of the DPS in managing the relationship with the private distributor. This ownership of the relationship proves that provincial governments can improve the performance of the public health supply chain with the participation of all stakeholders, including private distributors, for the good of the population.

So, what is the impact on product availability in Sud-Ubangi province? Despite the absence of data to directly assess the evolution of the medicines' availability at health facility level, we can deduce the impact from the results of the Order Completion Rate (*items delivered on time vs orders validated by distributor)* fulfilled by this private distributor.

[2] Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) Implementation Completion Report (ICR) Review DRC -Health System Strengthening Project (P147555) Report Number : ICRR0024550, 2023

If we assume the order volume represents product demand and, excluding the impact of planning errors and financial capacity, the order completion rate of 99% indicates that availability improved significantly.

Next Steps

To emphasize its support of the private distributor approach, the Sud-Ubangi government sent a letter in September 2024 to VillageReach and other government partners. Signed by the Provincial Governor, His Excellency Michée Mobonga, the letter states that "By signing this Act, the Province of South Ubangi formally commits today to supporting this initiative, which is in line with the Central Government's efforts to achieve universal health coverage." As deliveries continue in Sud-Ubangi province, these indicators will continue to be tracked each month. In addition, we will improve the tracking of stock levels and stock-outs.

Advocacy will be conducted in the DRC to promote adoption of the approach in other provinces, for the effective implementation of Decree No. 25/027 of July 17, 2025. This decree establishes the organization and operation of a National Drug Supply System (SNAM) and fully integrates private for-profit distributors into the public health system as a lever for achieving universal health coverage.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT
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