



Voluntary Information and Price Sharing Database: A Scoping Review of the Pricing and Procurement Landscape across Eight Commonwealth Member States

Background

The Voluntary Information and Price Sharing Database (VIPSD), launched in 2021, aims to support procurement methods with an emphasis on price transparency, reducing costs, and sharing information on health products, suppliers, and supply chains amongst Commonwealth member states. The creation and implementation of the VIPSD has been endorsed by successive Commonwealth Ministries of Health, during their annual meetings, in 2021 and 2022. To date, there has been limited deployment of the database in member states, in part due to various pooled procurement initiatives that were set up during and post-pandemic. In 2023, the Commonwealth Health Ministers meeting highlighted several issues around medicines shortages, of which pricing and price transparency were cited as some contributory factors¹⁻³. VIPSD was seen as a valuable resource to help address some of these issues.

AIM

This scoping review aimed to explore the procurement landscape of medical products and establish how VIPSD can support procurement systems in select Commonwealth member states.

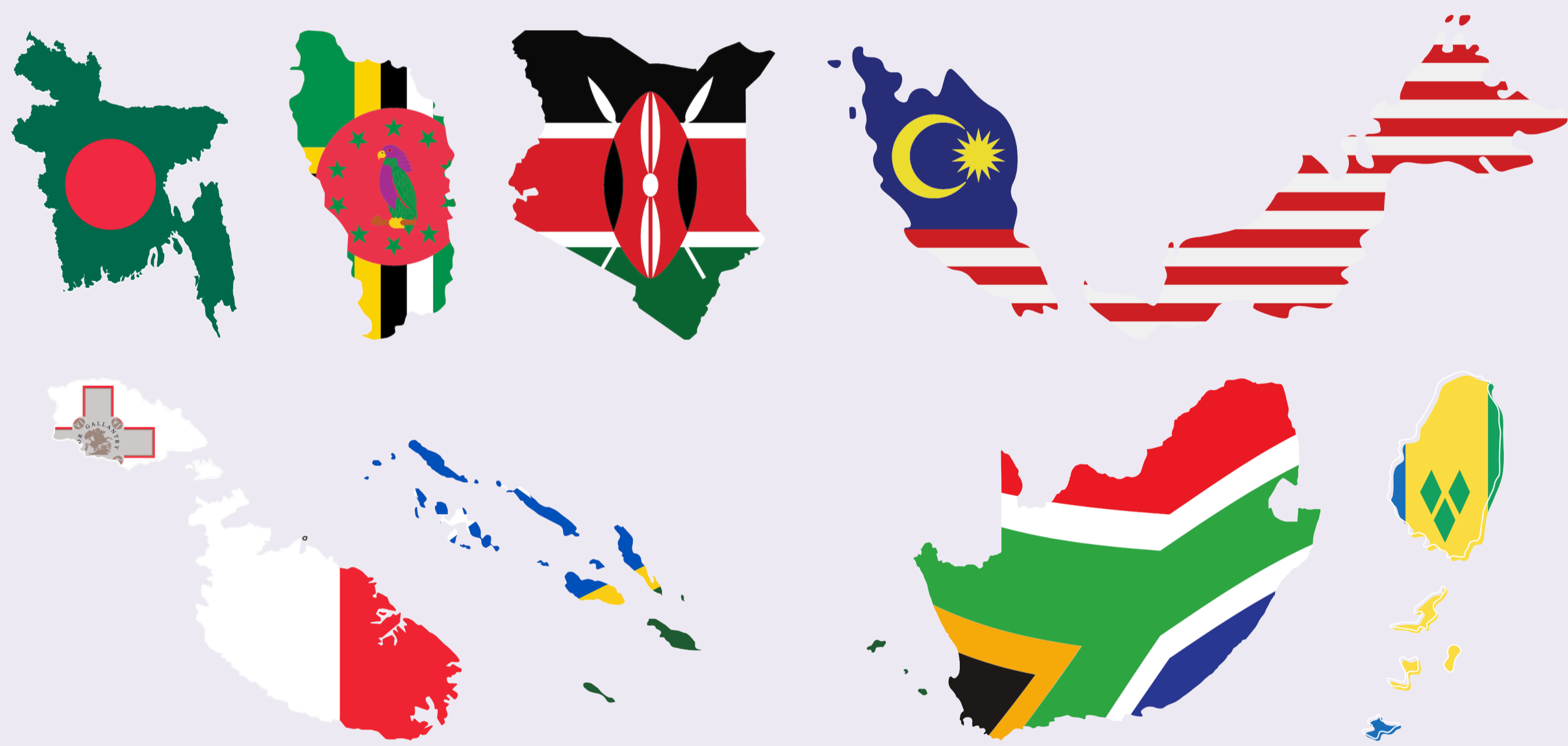


Fig. 1 Flags and borders of target countries for this study: Bangladesh, Dominica, Kenya, Malaysia, Malta, Solomon Islands, South Africa, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Method

Country selection: Eight Commonwealth member states (out of 56) were selected from the regions of Africa, Asia, Europe, Pacific, the Caribbean, and the Americas (Fig 1). Selected countries represented health systems' diversity, larger and smaller populations, established and developing procurement pathways and Commonwealth regionality.

Data collection: Conducted using a standardised proforma and predefined inclusion criteria:

- procurement/pricing of pharmaceuticals, vaccines and other goods;
- public sector stakeholders;
- IT systems/databases and their scope;
- issues to consider e.g. registration, regulation, detection of substandard medicines.

Data analysis: Evidence was screened using Excel and thematically analysed until saturation. No ethical approval was required for this review.

Results

Three overarching themes were identified during the scoping review, focusing on the 8 chosen countries (Fig 1).

Pricing landscape of pharmaceutical medicines, vaccines, and other products.

Diverse range of pricing policies and approaches to ensure affordable access to medicines.

- 3 countries had national pricing policies: Malaysia, Malta and South Africa.
- 3 countries did not have any national pricing policy: Bangladesh, Dominica and Kenya.
- 2 countries the information was unclear: Solomon Island, and St Vincent and Grenadines.

Procurement landscape of pharmaceutical medicines, vaccines, and other products

Diverse array of legislative frameworks, models, success, and challenges of the procurement landscapes.

Scope, remit & functionality of available IT systems/databases for pricing & procurement

Diverse pricing and procurement systems/databases currently in use for different purposes (e.g. medicines and vaccines, medicines, and laboratory supply etc.), mainly led and managed by countries' respective governments, through centralised teams.

Key challenges in the pricing and procurement landscape experienced across 8 Commonwealth countries.

- Lack of structured and comprehensive frameworks
- Medicine price disparities
- Stock-outs and shortages
- Budgetary constraints
- Lack of transparency
- Poor inventory management
- Delayed procurement processes
- Coordination challenges
- Dependence on donor funding
- Obsolete procurement guidelines
- Limited qualified personnel
- Infrastructure and distribution challenges

Key challenges identified across current IT systems/databases used for pricing and procurement in 8 commonwealth countries.

- Data accessibility and integration
- Data quality, completeness and transparency
- Infrastructure and connectivity
- Language and user interface
- Workforce retention and technical expertise
- Deployment and capacity building

Conclusion

Across all 8 countries scoped, our review highlighted that a database such as VIPSD would be valuable in supporting pricing and procurement in key areas such as enhanced transparency and fair pricing, collaboration for improved access, mitigating price disparities, equitable access to innovative health commodities, routine reporting and data driven decision making. However, several challenges of VIPSD, such as the scope and remit of VIPSD, issues around data completeness and transparency in pricing, and funding for VIPSDs' development, deployment and maintenance also need to be addressed.

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