

The Role of Family Planning Champions in influencing Policy Actions: A Case study of intervention in Delta State - South South, Nigeria.

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Background

In the past few years, Family Planning (FP) programme in Delta State had not received enough attention. The government had not prioritized FP leaving a weak implementation footprint and issues that negatively affect programming. Some of these issues which border around visibility, advocacy, policy, voice and accountability, are due to non-availability of specific budget line for FP, poor funding mechanisms and non-supportive policy environment for FP.

In addition, religious and traditional beliefs also affect the uptake of FP services as some of the leaders still view FP as standing against the principles of their religious books as well as population growth which is the pride of traditional institution. There is high percentage of women not currently using contraception (71.3%) with unmet need of 16.1%. All these indicates that access and uptake of FP is low, and it calls for policy actions to address them.



Program Intervention

The Challenge Initiative (TCI)-a demand-driven program supported the State with building blocks activities such as netmapping, identification of Key Influencers/ champions and effective engagement of the identified Influencers/ champions to promote FP. The Net Mapping of Reproductive Health stakeholders helps to determine the flow of influence, advocacy, resources and commodities. This process reveals the key stakeholders that can influence policy and strategically promote FP programs in their different spheres. Identified influencers were ultimately engaged and decorated as champions to add voice and accountability to FP programme.

Methodology

- ↳ A Net Map process was conducted.
- ↳ 26 actors with varying levels of influence regarding access to modern contraceptives were identified.
- ↳ Actors were rated using the influence tower approach.
- ↳ From the process ratings, two persons identified to have high influence (The State first lady and a female prominent traditional leader) were identified and inaugurated as FP champions.
- ↳ The two champions who are highly positioned in the state have passion for FP and women's health and are willing to use their positions to openly speak in favour of FP

Result and Key Findings

Three months after their identification and engagement, the FP champions stimulated discussions around FP visibility in the state using existing health activities such as the Maternal New-Born and Child Health week (MNCHW). Specifically, the First Lady of the State, an FP champion, was instrumental in bringing FP issues to the front burner during the MNCHW. This also provided a good opportunity to create awareness, visibility and increase uptake of FP services. Over 2000 Women of Reproductive Age accessed modern contraceptives.

For the first time in the history of MNCH week celebration, FP had a dedicated exhibition for service uptake. Riding on the successes of the MNCH week, the first lady has also used her office to initiate the process of domestication of Primary Health Care under One Roof in the state.

The Omu of Asaba, being the only 1st class female traditional ruler in a male dominated traditional council in the state is also using the council of Traditional rulers' forum to encourage other traditional rulers to embrace and openly speak in favour of FP- thus helping to garner more support for FP.

Program Implication

For a successful FP programming in any setting, major building blocks activities such as net mapping is needed to properly understand the state, the stakeholders and the flow of influence. Through this, the FP champions who influence policy, funding are also stimulated to speak publicly in favour of FP. Their roles therefore as FP champions in creating positive policy environment, visibility and uptake of FP services can not be overemphasized.