

EXPANDED MALE AS PARTNERS INITIATIVE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA:

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A CASE OF BAUCHI STATE



Background

Women in Nigeria as elsewhere in Africa receive the bulk of directed messages on reproductive health and child spacing while the men are often omitted. In northern Nigeria, as in other parts of the country, men have great influence on decisions on family size and child spacing. According to the 2008 NDHS, 75.8 percent of married women age 15 – 49 in Bauchi state, who were using a contraceptive method (contraceptive prevalence rate = 2%), were doing so with their husband or partner's consent. To bridge the gap in information, education and provision of child spacing services directed at men, the USAID-funded Targeted States High Impact Project (TSHIP) is pioneering the Expanded Male As Partners (EMAP) Initiative in Bauchi state. EMAP builds on the Men As Partners (MAP) experience in Nigeria with a twofold goal of encouraging full involvement of men in promoting child spacing as well as increasing uptake of child spacing services including long-term methods. The objective of EMAP is to improve men's access to information and to promote and support their spouses to access and utilize child spacing services. To this end, 150 men were selected from communities clustered around TSHIP phase-one supported health facilities and trained as Male Community Champions (MCCs). They were trained on motivational techniques and made aware of the overall benefits of child spacing as a pillar of safe motherhood, and child spacing options for men. Subsequently, the MCCs developed action plans focused on engaging men to participate in child spacing.

The Expanded Men As Partners (EMAP) Initiative

The majority of local government areas (LGAs) in Bauchi state are far apart with about 84% (1999 National Population Commission) of the State population residing in rural areas that are hard-to-reach. The situation makes it extremely difficult to spread information and services on child spacing. The EMAP initiative recruits volunteer male 'foot-soldiers' who spread information about child spacing and provide referrals to health facilities in their communities. The information provided by the Male Community Champions is especially directed to their peers. A major thrust of these outreach activities is the dispelling of myths, norms and socio cultural beliefs about child spacing. Equipped with the appropriate information on the overall benefits, they are able to engage in enlightened discussions. Additionally, they liaise with community leaders to garner support as appropriate. The MCCs plan and report all their activities to the ward development committees (WDCs) in their area. The WDCs are government structures at the ward level and are responsible for coordinating, documenting and reporting all community development activities to the LGA.

Comparison between EMAP and MAP in Northern Nigeria

EMAP INITIATIVE IN NORTHERN NIGERIA	MAP APPROACH IN NORTHERN NIGERIA
Linked with health facilities for referrals	Linked to health facilities for referrals
'Foot soldiers' who promote child spacing not only in their communities, but in surrounding communities.	Promote child spacing in their immediate communities alone
Plan activities with WDCs and provide report of activities to the WDCs. The WDCs in turn report all activities to the LGA. Working with these government and sustainable structures indicates a promising practice	Utilized new structures that were not integrated with the government structures. Hence, was mostly not sustainable.
Not only promote but also practice (are acceptors of child spacing services)	Emphasized promotion of child spacing services only
Improve spousal communication on child spacing	Improve spousal communication on child spacing
Women more involved in decision making about their reproductive health	Women more involved in decision making about their reproductive health

Evidence-Based Documentation

The situation analysis study used two qualitative methods namely focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). The study was conducted in two communities in Yelwa and Bara local government areas in Bauchi State. For both methods, the objectives of the study were to: (i) obtain the attitude and perception of community leaders and ward development committee members on the role of male champions as promoters and supporters of child spacing, (ii) explore the role of male champions in promoting and supporting child spacing services, and (iii) explore male champions' perspectives on barriers to and opportunities for promoting and supporting child spacing services in their community.

Four FGDs were conducted with community leaders and members represented through ward development committees. Two FGDs were conducted in each selected site. Each FGD had 10-12 members mobilized for one focus group. Each group constituted participants who had interacted with the male champions. All the focus groups were conducted in the local language – Hausa.

In addition to FGDs, another qualitative element of situation analysis was to conduct a series of IDIs with male champions within the selected two wards. Key informants provided an

in-depth understanding of the situation in the community with respect of the role of male champions in promoting and supporting community child spacing initiatives. Two male champions per ward were interviewed. An IDI guide was used to structure the interviews and for data collection based on the objectives of the study.

Preliminary Findings

Preliminary findings of rapid focus group discussions aimed at creating a better understanding on the role and responsibilities of MCCs in creating demand for child spacing services show a high acceptability of the cadres by the community and also reveal a high commitment and understanding of their (MCCs) role in improving health outcomes in the community. Additionally community members, particularly men were favorably disposed to child spacing due to their interaction with MCCs.

Recommendations

Key recommendations were: (i) promote the involvement of more males and stakeholders on EMAP training in order to enlist their support for EMAP activities; (ii) provide logistic support (i.e. bicycles) to trained MCC to facilitate transportation especially to hard-to-reach areas; and (iii) provide incentives (non-monetary i.e. recognition), to the MCCs and other community volunteers.

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