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E2A EVIDENCE TO ACTION
for Strengthened Reproductive Health

Pathfinder
INTERNATIONAL
A GLOBAL LEADER IN SEXUAL
AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



About the program:

Evidence to Action (E2A) is an advocacy project that aims to address gaps in current Family Planning (FP) and Maternal New Born and Child Health (MNCH) policy and advocacy efforts in Tanzania through evidence based Interventions, funded by the United States Department for International Development (USAID) and Department for International Development (DFID), Pathfinder through E2A project carried out a Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAPs) Survey to a sample of Members of parliament in order to get their Knowledge, attitude and Practices in Family planning/MNCH for informed FP/MNCH advocacy interventions as MPs are the major policy makers in the country and budget endorsers their influence which can affect positively or negatively FP/MNCH in the country.

DEPLOY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT SUPPORT TO ADVANCE CONTRACEPTIVE USE IN TANZANIA

1. Background

The goal of Tanzanian development planning is defined by the 35 year vision (1995-2025) – The National Development Vision 2025 (Vision) which envisions a high quality livelihood for all Tanzanians, including food security, quality universal primary and tertiary education, gender equality and the empowerment of women, access to quality primary health care for all, access to quality reproductive health services for all individuals of appropriate ages, reduction in infant and maternal mortality rates, universal access to safe water, and the absence of abject poverty.

The preparation of the Tanzania Development Vision 2025 started in 1994 and the Government finally launched the Vision in 1999. With nearly 15 years of slow progress towards the Vision, it has become apparent that high pace of population growth is one of the factors impacting negatively on the national development progress. The high population growth is associated with a number of factors that hinder improvements in particular development indicators such as more comprehensive coverage of health and education services, significant improvement in the maternal and child health, environmental conservation and maintenance of sustainable agricultural practices, access to decent employment, especially to the youth, women empowerment, etc.

The rapid population growth rate is as a result of a high Total Fertility Rate (TFR). The population is characterized by bulge of dependent young people as a proportion of total population, which largely erodes the limited resources that could be invested in crucial areas such as public infrastructures necessary for the realization of the Vision. Experiences from Tanzania and other countries with similar conditions clearly indicate that strengthening Family Planning (FP) services is one of the most cost-effective means of slowing down TFR and, would help the country to build upon existing efforts to improve people's lives. Unfortunately the availability and uptake of FP services has not been very encouraging. This calls for deliberate policy actions to advance FP services.

2. Project Interventions

Realizing the critical position that Members of Parliament (MPs) hold in policy development and implementation processes, and their role as community leaders, Pathfinder International in Tanzania, through its Evidence to Action (E2A) project, supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Department of Foreign and International Development (DFID) conducted a knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) survey involving 90 of 357 Tanzanian MPs on specific FP issues during the month of September, 2013.

The aim of the survey was to generate evidence that would help in devising effective advocacy interventions with MPs by demonstrating their interest, knowledge, attitude, and practices regarding FP as well as leveraging their critical position as policy makers and community leaders in the country. The MPs were interviewed voluntarily and responded to a set of specific questions contained in a short questionnaire in Dodoma and Dar es Salaam.

3. Key Findings

75% of MPs believe that there is a relationship between population growth and economic development. They largely perceive this relationship as positive, and believe that the larger the population the more support there is for economic development through expansion of domestic market size, supply of human resources, and effective utilization of available natural resources.

Despite significant perception among the MPs that population growth is desirable for achieving national economic growth, most MPs consider FP to be an important factor with the potential of contributing to the improvement of family welfare and prosperity. They think that FP is beneficial to individuals, families, and communities, and they also think it is beneficial for maternal and child health. Most MPs would recommend FP services to their spouses or someone close to them. In all these cases, the MPs demonstrated a correct understanding of the benefits of FP, including for reasons of balancing family size and available resources, and most of them expressed a commitment to educate community members about FP.

The fact that the MPs demonstrated an inclination towards recommending FP services to individuals and families, while not also demonstrating the same inclination to include FP in national level policymaking and implementation processes suggests there is still stigma associated with FP at the public level. This underscores the need for a new approach to enhance acceptability of FP among policy making audiences and the public in general

4. Recommended Policy Actions

Given its constitutional mandate to oversee operations of the Government on behalf of the citizens and their close interactions with the people they represent, the Parliament is a necessary institution to work with in advocacy efforts aimed at strengthening FP services and increasing the amount of financial resources available for FP.

In order to benefit from the influence of MPs, managers of FP advocacy programs from both Government and civil society organizations will need to make decisions about and effectively implement focused interventions that rely on the relative power of MPs through their role as policy makers and community leaders in helping to scale up FP services in the country. The interventions might include the following:

4.1: Recruit and Support FP Champions among the MPs: Results of the survey indicate that the MPs overwhelmingly support FP. We recommend that FP advocacy programs identify and build the capacity of committed MPs on specific FP issues. Criteria should be established for identifying and selecting MP Champions. FP advocacy programs should support the MPs in a

consistent manner, and should be used to implement jointly agreed upon advocacy actions to ensure MPs use their positions to influence appropriate policy actions and community mobilization efforts. The fact that the survey indicates FP is a stigmatized subject stresses the need to involve influential people who can help reshape FPs public image, clarify issues, and convince others include local CSOs to join the movement.

4.2: Organize Training for MPs on the Demographic Dividend:

The argument of preferring bigger over smaller population size for national economic development, as reflected by most MPs in their responses, is not unusual. In fact, there are many individuals (politicians and other influential persons) who spread that same message in Africa. A carefully designed orientation course on the demographic dividend would help to explain to MPs the benefits of a gradual and well managed reduction in TFR and how it would allow for a transition in the demographic structure by decreasing the number of dependent young children and consequently increase the number of productive adults, creating an opportunity for saving the surplus that can then be effectively invested in infrastructure, modern agriculture, industrial production, and energy. The key point to promote is the need to gradually adjust the demographic structure rather than to cut down the number of people.

4.3: Seek and Maintain Personal Interactions with Particular MPs: The KAP survey was a one-time activity with anonymous responses. Engaging MPs in FP advocacy requires preparation and frequent interaction. The MPs will need to be and feel supported with well-tailored evidence-based data and information to advocate for the best and most effective policies. If MPs participate in formal and public meetings to advance FP they will need to be prepared and briefed. These activities require committed individuals and/or CSOs who will make time for the follow-up required to ensure identified MPs feel supported and valued.

4.4 Complement MPs Support by Popularizing FP: As politicians, MPs are likely to advance and continue rendering support for a cause like FP only if it becomes popular and will not be perceived as detracting from their public image or costing them too much political capital. Therefore, intervention programs will be needed

to popularize and bolster FPs positive public image. Initiatives could include engaging artists, powerful religious leaders, giving regular platforms to other politicians who are willing to raise their voices in support of FP or other means of strategic communication so that MPs increasingly find the task of advocating for FP easier.

4.5: Involve Relevant Government Officials: Since most of the advocacy discussions with the MPs will focus on what the Government (the Executive Branch) is doing or not doing, it is essential and helpful to strategically involve relevant Government ministries and departments such as Departments of Preventive Services / Reproductive and Child Health Section and Department of Policy and Planning of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare; Ministry of Finance (especially if the advocacy action involves allocation and release of financial resources) and the President's Office Planning Commission for actions related to instituting long term planning that recognizes FP. Involving additional relevant Government ministries and departments will help to generate needed information reliably and relatively quickly and build the practical relationships that are needed for policy implementation.

4.6: Leverage Existing Functionary Bodies Used by Members of Parliament: MPs in Tanzania have bodies of their own that are used to advance particular policy agendas, including FP, and population and development issues. Some of these bodies have formed into specific caucuses such as the Parliamentary Family Planning Club (PFPC) and the Tanzania Parliamentary Association on Population and Development (TPAPD). For example, the PFPC, a relatively small and focused body, formed in 2011 with a vision of having a Parliament that champions FP to improve maternal and child health and safeguard the general well-being of the Tanzanian people. The PFPC has operational terms of reference, broader objectives, and planned strategic activities that work to systematically improve the image of FP but also engage the Government on FP issues for policy actions. Such bodies can be pivotal in the success of FP advocacy involving MPs, but CSOs may need to come up with new innovative ways of engaging and raising their interest in the subject as previous engagements have yielded less than expected improvement in FP.

COVER: Tanzania Speaker entering Parliament

Photo: <http://www.tzaffairs.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/spika.jpg>

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