

Success Stories from the Population Council, Abuja, Nigeria

Population Council Nigeria's Advocacy Manual:

Offering a Faith-Based Organization (FBO) Training Curriculum for HIV Abstinence-Based Prevention

The Population Council, in partnership with three Nigerian NGOs, has created a unique training manual for community advocates at faith-based organizations (FBOs) throughout Nigeria. The manual covers a range of topics related to sexual, maternal, and reproductive health, and has been used to train almost one hundred community advocates since its creation in 2006.

The manual is part of the Population Council's HIV Prevention Project for Vulnerable Youth in Northern Nigeria, which is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was produced in collaboration with Islamic Education Trust (IET), Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), and Adolescent Health Information Project (AHIP). These three organizations contributed grassroots understanding of the cultural and religious context of Nigeria, co-wrote the manual with the Population Council, and then used the manual in workshops with FBOs in various states.

The manual draws on religious texts, namely the Bible and the Koran, to deliver messages about behavior and sexual health. As a result, the manual offers an effective, culturally and religiously conscious, faith-based approach to educating young women and their older male partners about HIV/AIDs prevention and other sensitive health issues.

The Population Council has employed the manual in trainings throughout eight Nigerian states, and the trainings have been met with considerable success. Community advocates say that the manual is a practical and versatile tool for delivering health messages. "I find the manual very useful because it is easy to understand and follow and can be used in all the states we are working [in]," says Halima Tukur Yusuf, a community health advocate based at AHIP.

The manual was considered so effective by the US Department of Defense (DOD) HIV Prevention program in Nigeria that it incorporated the manual in its own trainings in host communities surrounding Nigerian military bases. The Population Council will continue to use the manual to reach additional vulnerable youth in Nigeria through faith-based messages. Given the manual's early success, it promises to remain a cornerstone of the Population Council's future efforts to reach and educate additional vulnerable youth in Northern Nigeria.

Population Council Nigeria's Behavior Change Communication (BCC) Workshop: Protecting Young Girls by Delaying Marriage and Promoting School Attendance

On July 16-20th, 2007 the Population Council Nigeria, supported through funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), organized and conducted a week-long participatory radio workshop that brought together various stakeholders interested in protecting young girls by delaying marriage and promoting school attendance. The workshop's aim was to raise awareness of early marriage and its sexual and reproductive health outcomes, as well as identify steps that can be taken to prevent the practice and mitigate its detrimental effects.

The workshop, which took place in Kano state, was unique in its participatory nature and in its ability to generate and air citizen-produced religiously and culturally sensitive radio spots in a rapid time frame. The project's design served a dual advocacy purpose: it increased the skills and knowledge of workshop

participants, and simultaneously produced grassroots-generated behavior change communication (BCC) material that was then aired for a wider audience on Radio Kano and Pyramid Radio, two local radio stations.

The workshop's 38 participants comprised all segments of the community, including religious and community leaders, politicians, parents, husbands, mothers-in-law, young unmarried girls, married and post-marriage young women, and representatives of NGOs. With the guidance of three facilitators, including Population Council staff, participants defined, developed, produced, and pre-tested a series of nine radio spots all within the week-long workshop. The spots were then aired and reinforced with a series of popular radio call-in shows. The entire process from message development, to production, to airing and feedback lasted less than two months.

This rapid media development model allowed stakeholders to develop the messages based on highly segmented group interactions, and then produce radio spots on-site. This enabled each group to evaluate its own messages as they would be heard on the radio, as well as give other stakeholder groups in the workshop an opportunity to critique the messages and spots of others. During a third pre-test stage, the spots were shared with and critiqued by community members external to the workshop. By the end of the workshop, Population Council had facilitated the creation of a dynamic community-supported and constituent-engaged media campaign on a highly controversial subject.

The workshop succeeded in getting various stakeholder groups who normally have little opportunity for constructive interaction, such as divorced mothers and religious leaders, to work together to shape effective BCC material. Initial feedback from workshop participants and radio call-in shows suggests that this is a considerably more participatory—and potentially more effective—approach than consultant-generated spots, or even spots that are pre-tested on target group members.

Based on post-workshop evaluations, participants perceived the project to be empowering and unique in design and effect. "Producing culturally and religiously sensitive radio spots with religious leaders in Kano is the first of its kind," said one participant, religious leader Sheikh Ibrahim Nuhu. "In some cases we are only called to pre-test after [the spot has been] developed by people [who are] probably not even Muslims or Hausa-speaking people."

Participant and community leader Alhaji Saiyyadi M. Yola agreed, saying: "This strategy of bringing together stakeholders to develop messages to address an issue or concern in the community is a welcome development, and it shows community ownership."

Given the project's success in Kano, the Population Council hopes to support similar projects that produce and disseminate rapid-development radio messages in communities across the country.