The Lasting Power of Social Change
Emphasizing the “social” in social and behavior change for family planning

The “social” aspect of social and behavior change (SBC) is a critical component of achieving behavior change and improved health outcomes, and is particularly vital to attaining family planning (FP) goals. Social change is complex. It includes normative dimensions, policy and structural factors, and social accountability approaches that enable communities to hold health providers, services, and governments accountable for their performance. SBC strategies implemented to date include addressing cultural norms and religious beliefs, challenging inequitable power relationships between couples and within communities, and strengthening community structures to support access and use of FP. SBC is an evidence-based approach to addressing social norms and improving FP outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

- Coordinated advocacy and policy; behavior change communication (interpersonal communication, folk media, drama, dance, sports, mass marketing campaigns); youth-friendly services; institutional capacity building; and life and livelihood skills development efforts in Ghana, Uganda, and Tanzania improved sexual knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors among females participating in the African Youth Alliance (AYA) program. Young women participating in the program were at least 10 percentage points more likely to have used contraceptives at last sex. Additionally, while difficult to detect through the evaluation measures, AYA may have had an impact at higher levels of the system through its policy and advocacy efforts and partnerships with faith-based organizations.

- Religion is a well-entrenched factor influencing the FP decision-making processes across different settings in Nigeria. Evidence from the Nigerian Urban Reproductive Health Initiative’s advocacy activities with religious leaders to promote contraceptive use established a significant association between exposure to FP messages from

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Catalyzing community-level dialogue about gender, sexuality, and FP significantly increased use of FP among women in Kenya. Greater levels of spousal communication, and higher self-efficacy to discuss and use FP, were significant predictors of FP use for women at endline.

The Bandebereho couples’ intervention engaged men and their partners in participatory, small group sessions of critical reflection and dialogue. Bandebereho used a structured 15-session curriculum to address gender and power; fatherhood; couple communication and decision-making; intimate partner violence; caregiving; child development; and male engagement in reproductive and maternal health. The intervention led to substantial improvements in multiple reported outcomes, including modern contraceptive use.

The Senegal Urban Health Initiative mobilized district leaders to play a leadership role in implementing a simplified package of supply- and demand-side FP interventions. Couple-years of protection increased by 82% and 56% respectively in these two districts. The experience suggests it is feasible for districts to play a leadership role in implementing FP services and mobilizing some of their own resources.

Summaries of the articles referenced here as well as additional studies on the influence of SBC on social norms are accessible through the SBC for Family Planning Evidence Database and Reproductive Empowerment Evidence Database. The six SBC Evidence Databases, which together host over 600 articles, compile and highlight key SBC successes spanning over 20 years.


This factsheet is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Breakthrough ACTION and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.