

Working with men: Lessons learned



ENGENDERHEALTH

Participants in EngenderHealth's Men As Partners initiative report lessons learned from engaging men in family planning programs.

Spurred by the recognition that men's attitudes and behaviour can either undermine or promote sexual and reproductive health, many sexual and reproductive health organisations around the world have launched initiatives to encourage positive male involvement. This fact sheet describes the lessons learned by one such initiative: the Men As Partners (MAP) programme at EngenderHealth... We also share lessons that we have learned as a result of implementing the MAP programme in a variety of contexts and countries to address a diversity of reproductive health issues.

Lessons learned

- ***Present men as potential partners capable of playing a positive role in the health and well-being of their partners, families, and communities***

Despite gender norms that often lead to men's control of different aspects of their partners' lives, it is important to recognise that many men care deeply about the women in their lives, including their partners, family members, co-workers, neighbours, and community members. Given the opportunity and the know-how, many men are eager to challenge customs and practices that endanger women's health and are willing to participate in reproductive health decision making that supports the well-being of women. Approaches that view men in a positive way – as partners or allies – are especially useful in redefining men's involvement in the promotion of gender equity.

- ***Reach men where they are***

Instead of seeking or creating new arenas in which to engage men, programmes should utilise the existing key venues where men congregate or can be reached. These include sports and religious events, workplaces, and social locations such as bars or cafés. All of these are important places where information and discussion on a variety of issues can be shared with men. Scaling-up a programme is also easier when working through existing institutions that can reach large numbers of men, such as unions, the military, and industries such as mining or transportation, where men predominate.

- ***Provide private spaces for men to obtain services***

Most reproductive health services offered around the world in service delivery settings are geared almost exclusively to women. Having realised the importance of constructive male involvement in reproductive health, these settings have started providing facilities for men only. On many sites, these are provided within the same clinic as the services for women, but special areas within the site are designated for men, or clinic times are established only for men. This has helped to make men feel more comfortable and has encouraged them to seek help.

- ***Build organisational cultures that are committed to working with men***

No amount of training and capacity building is likely to be effective without the buy-in of the senior leadership within partner organisations – regardless of whether these organisations are service providers, large trade unions, or corporations. To ensure that key decision makers and managers support the MAP

approach, the MAP methodology includes possible workshops and training with senior management and key staff in each institution on the relationship between gender equity and reproductive health. In the longer-term, MAP hopes to address other aspects of organisational culture, such as recruiting appropriate staff, and more systematic training of staff at all levels.

- **Respond to staff needs**

Understanding the needs and roles of clinical staff is an integral part of ensuring successful provision of reproductive-health services for men. A provider's own attitude to sexuality, his or her own feelings about gender, and previous training all play a role in how he or she may interact with a male client (either as an individual or as part of a couple).

- **Conduct research to identify how men can serve as allies**

A substantial amount of work has been done to date to identify men's reproductive-health needs in different settings and to understand how they might put themselves at risk. However, there is still a need to understand how to encourage and support men to become allies in improving their own health, as well as the health of the women and children who are often placed at risk by traditional gender roles.

- **Integrate a strong social-justice emphasis into work with men, and build coalitions with progressive social movements where feasible**

Many movements to involve men, including the growing movement to end men's violence against women, share several goals with civil rights and other social-justice movements. Working together offers many advantages. Social movements gain strength and credibility when they pay attention to issues related to gender equity, and gender-justice activists gain important understanding about activist strategies and the communities in which they work. Given their commitment to

principles of equity and liberation, men involved in these movements are, in theory, likely to be natural supporters of constructive male involvement, and are more likely than most to do so actively in their personal and public lives.

As the evaluations and learning indicate, significant progress has been made in terms of men's involvement, and changes in attitudes and practices are visible.

About MAP & EngenderHealth

EngenderHealth is a New York-based organisation working internationally on reproductive health. Developed in 1996, the original goal of the Men As Partners (MAP) programme – in collaboration with local partners – was to increase access to information and services that could contribute to men sharing the burden of disease and pregnancy prevention with women, who have shouldered this responsibility for too long. The programme currently focuses on promoting the constructive role that men can play in reproductive health, including the prevention of HIV, STIs, and gender-based violence, and in maternal care and family planning. Most importantly, the MAP programme is working actively to promote gender equity by engaging with men to challenge the attitudes and behaviour that compromise their own health and safety and that of women and children.

For more information on the Men As Partners programme, and the full Men's Reproductive Health Curriculum, go to:

<http://www.engenderhealth.org/ia/wwm/>

This fact sheet is excerpted from:



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