Using Religious Leaders to Reach Women at Household Level with Family Planning/Reproductive Health Services

Authors: Sada Danmusa, Fatima Mamman-Daura, Murtala Mai, Pathfinder International Nigeria

Presenter: Joseph Petraglia
Religion and Family Planning

Traditionally, religious life operates with a masculine space usually dominated by priests, mullahs and ministers.

In Northern Nigeria, however, women have been making their presence felt in the leadership of both Muslim and Christian communities

Despite this, the spaces in which religious activities are held remain dominated by men.

Pathfinder International, with funding from the Packard Foundation’s Private Sector Service Delivery Project therefore sought to create new spaces for religious engagement targeting women.
The Context of Family Planning in Northern Nigeria

• Despite modest uptake of family planning (FP) services in Nigeria (15% contraceptive prevalence rate [CPR]), broad regional disparities exist—in most parts of northern Nigeria, the CPR ranges between 0.5% and 3%.

• Inadequate access to health services

• Cultural and religious resistance to uptake FP services

• Women are not involved in most religious activities outside the home

• Gender-based segregation which is almost universal in northern Nigeria
Project Intervention

• Worked with Muslim and Christian faith-based organizations to reach underserved women, seeking to bring about change in the adoption of FP/reproductive health (RH) practices.

• Implemented in Kaduna State within the Christian community of KafanchanIt and within the Muslim communities of Rigasa and Tudun Wada.

• Female RLs from two faith-based women’s groups—The Christian Women Fellowships and the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria’s (FOMWAN’s) Female Religious Leaders Forum—served as vehicles for reaching women in their homes over a period of six months.
Project Intervention

• These RLs were trained in RH and communication strategies to reach young couples in their homes and provide information about FP within a religious framework.

• RLs also used the opportunity to reach other influential members of the household (e.g., mothers, mothers-in-law).
Methodology

- Personal and RH information was collected from 147 women prior to and at the time of intervention contact.
- Changes in specific indicators (e.g., use of FP, attitudes towards FP use, etc.) were recorded at specific intervals to measure individual FP/RH adoption.

Christian Communities
- Contact was made with young couples at “felicitation ceremonies”.
- Contact was made in church.

Muslim Communities
- Contact established through FOMWAN’s monthly Sisters Forum.
- Contact was made at home and other influential members of the household.
Results

Prior to the intervention
- 69% were unaware of modern FP methods and 47% stated that they did not intend to use FP.
- 40% reported an unfavorable disposition toward FP.
- 24% had a favorable disposition; and 36% reported being indifferent.
- 9% reported current use of a modern FP method.

After the intervention
- 6% reported intended use of a modern FP method in the near future.
- 10% expressed an unfavorable disposition toward FP and the remaining 90% expressed a favorable disposition toward FP.
- 73% reported current use of a modern FP method
Lessons Learned

• Prior work with male RL’s and partnerships with respected religious organizations provided a solid foundation to appropriately address RH/FP in Northern Nigeria

• Women in conservative societies must be reached by agents they trust, complemented by culturally sensitive community-based distribution of effective RH/FP services.

• It may be necessary to be creative in identifying new occasions/spaces for religious engagement focused on women.
THANK YOU

For more information contact: MMai@pathfinder.org