



an evidence-based advocacy initiative

CASE STUDY

Ugandan Parliament Sharpens Focus on Family Planning through Passage of National Population Council Bill

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On July 23, 2013, the Parliament of Uganda passed the National Population Council Bill 2011, which will create a new, autonomous government body to oversee the country's population, reproductive health, and family planning policies. Though it awaits assent by President Yoweri Museveni before it becomes an official Act of Parliament, the bill's passage is a significant milestone for family planning and reproductive health advocates seeking to improve the quality of life of Ugandans.

The Population Secretariat (POPSEC), the current implementing body of the nation's population plan, has advocated for the creation of a National Population Council for more than a decade. It is anticipated that the new council will be more autonomous, more influential, and better funded than the current

POPSEC and that it will provide more harmonious population and development plans, which previously were created separately.

A first reading of the bill to establish the National Population Council was made in Parliament in 2012. However, the bill languished in limbo for more than a year, and was not put on the "order paper," the agenda for parliament discussions. Working with leaders in Parliament; POPSEC; Partners in Population and Development, Africa Regional Office (PPD ARO); and Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU), the Advance Family Planning (AFP) initiative helped to develop and implement a focused advocacy strategy to reenergize the debate on the National Population Council Bill in Parliament in an effort to pass the bill.

WHAT WILL THE NATIONAL POPULATION COUNCIL DO?

- Provide strategic direction on objectives of the National Population Policy: to ensure reproductive health commodity security, strengthen youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, and increase budgetary allocation for reproductive health services;
- Ensure that the most up-to-date research and evidence on demographic trends including fertility, mortality, and their impact on socio-economic development are applied;
- Coordinate efforts among implementing partners; ministries of health, education, and finance, gender, labor, and social development; and other government bodies such as the National Development Authority and local government.

Struggling to Meet Population Needs

Uganda has one of the world's fastest growing populations, with an annual growth rate of 3.4%. An average Ugandan woman will have six or more children in her lifetime. With a population close to 35 million people, the government spends barely US\$1 on each Ugandan per annum on essential medicines, and a small proportion of that is allocated and spent on reproductive health commodities and services. The country's health system is overburdened, struggling to meet the demands of a rapidly growing population vis-à-vis the funding.

The result is large numbers women who wish to prevent pregnancy, but are not using contraception as well as high pregnancy-related deaths and one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Africa, at 25%. These unfavorable indicators are linked to limited access to family planning services that can be improved by a supportive policy environment in addition to more financial investment by the government at all levels.

With regard to increasing access to voluntary family planning information, services and supplies, the National Population Council is expected to act on one of the guiding principles of the National Population Policy: "Recognition that all couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly

the number and the spacing of their children, and to have access to information and education in order to make an informed choice; and the means to do so."

Moving from Parliamentary Support to Action

In early 2013, POPSEC, RHU, and PPD ARO began meeting informally to coordinate advocacy efforts around the council bill. In June, RHU staff and program officers from POPSEC conducted a workshop using AFP's SMART advocacy approach, adapted from the Spitfire Strategies Smart Chart™. A key part of the strategy was to connect the bill to other government policies and objectives in family planning, health, and development and to provide arguments for harmonizing population-related activities.

Workshop participants determined that a breakfast meeting for Members of Parliament (MPs), especially the Parliamentary Committee on Finance and Budgeting, would be an effective way for presenting the advocacy ask. About 20 MPs attended the breakfast, where Andrew Tiondi, Director of Programs at POPSEC, spoke passionately about the need for the council and urged inclusion of the National Population Council Bill on the Parliament's business agenda. Barely a week later, the bill was among the items for parliament business discussion; within two weeks, Parliament passed it.

Next Steps: Counting on the President

Once the President assents to the bill and it becomes an Act of Parliament, AFP will continue advocating to ensure that the National Population Council is budgeted for in the next financial year, 2014/2015. AFP will also monitor implementation of the bill—assembly of a governing board, recruitment of a director and staff, and action on the National Population Council’s mandate. Just as one-on-one

meetings by PPD ARO played a big role in moving the National Population Council Bill forward, similar engagement will be needed in the next steps. If the President does not assent to the bill, a new advocacy strategy will be needed to ensure that it is supported within the next session of Parliament and the process begins anew.

Photos by Geoff and Relaw Snellac Photography (cover), and Richard Mugenyi (pg. 3).





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About Advance Family Planning

Advance Family Planning (AFP) aims to increase the financial investment and political commitment needed to ensure access to quality family planning through evidence-based advocacy. An initiative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, AFP works to achieve the goals of the FP2020 initiative: to enable women and girls in some of the world's poorest countries to use contraceptive information, services and supplies, without coercion or discrimination.

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