

BETTER CONTRACEPTIVE ACCESS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE - THE OVERDUE AGENDA FOR ADVOCACY AND ACTION

From 4-6 March, 2019 80 advocates, experts, religious leaders, donors, and host-country government officials came together in Cotonou, Benin to strategize on how best to increase contraceptive access for young people in their countries. The focus on reducing pregnancies in schools enabled them to capitalize on public and private-sector interest in helping students to prevent unwanted pregnancy. It also allowed participants to prioritize advocacy opportunities to pursue with coalitions in their own countries.

The advocacy strategies are part of a coordinated effort by Advance Family Planning (AFP), in collaboration with PAI, Family Planning 2020 (FP2020), and the Ouagadougou Partnership Coordination Unit (OPCU) to accelerate progress on meeting adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health (AYSRH) needs in the Ouagadougou Partnership (OP) countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania¹, Niger, Senegal, Togo.

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

- *Strong leadership from young people.* About half of the meeting participants were under 30 years of age. The majority are influential in their country, have their own organizations, and are experts in family planning advocacy thanks in part to investments made through the OPCU's Youth Think Tank, IntraHealth's Civil Society for Family Planning Plus project, IPPF's Youth Action Mouvement (YAM), and others. In addition, FP2020 has included the OP's youth ambassadors among its country focal points.
- *Strategies driven by evidence.* In developing their advocacy strategies, countries considered the latest research and interventions on AYSRH from Track 20, the World Health Organization, the Population Reference Bureau, Equilibres & Populations, and The Challenge Initiative. Another 10 projects and initiatives highlighted additional technical resources around AYSRH in the region in a knowledge cafe. Experts worked with country teams on their strategy development throughout the meeting.
- *Encouragement from Benin.* The host-country government is a frontrunner in addressing barriers faced by adolescents and youth in accessing contraceptive information and services. Representatives from the Ministries of Health, Youth, and Families joined the meeting to share their experience and lessons learned.
- *Concrete outcomes.* Using AFP's SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound) advocacy approach, participants developed focused, country-specific, collaborative advocacy strategies to be refined and implemented with broader coalitions in their countries. Each country left the meeting with a preliminary objective and plan.
- *Diverse advocacy objectives.* Policy issues to address ranged from scaling-up or improving existing efforts in schools, to expanding the roles of school nurses, to

¹ The Mauritanian delegation was unable to participate due to a canceled flight.

multisectoral approaches to engage policymakers in the education sector and to engage religious leaders².

- *Funding opportunities and other resources.* The meeting concluded with a session on avenues for securing financial and technical support for AYSRH advocacy.
- *Synergies, collaboration and documentation of advocacy efforts.* Participants identified in-country and regional opportunities to learn from and reinforce each other's advocacy strategies as well as document best practices and lessons learned.
- *Consensus that now is the time to act on improving contraceptive access for adolescents and youth.*

NEXT STEPS

Collaboration among AFP, PAI, the OPCU, and FP2020 will focus on ensuring that advocacy in each country progresses as envisioned. PAI and Marie Stopes International (MSI) will work with meeting participants and locally-led coalitions to discuss and finalize the preliminary objectives and strategies identified in Cotonou. All of the work will aim to support country commitments to the OP and FP2020 and national policies and plans. Strategies developed as a result of the meeting are eligible for technical and financial support through AFP's Opportunity Fund, managed by PAI. In addition, other funding mechanisms like FP2020's Rapid Response Mechanism, the OPCU's Learning and Exchange Fund, AmplifyChange's Opportunity Grant, and SECONAF's Fonds SECONAF are available to fund these strategies. In all cases, applications must be submitted and approved according to specific grant's terms. AFP, PAI, MSI and other country-level advocates will monitor strategy implementation and communicate results through a dedicated listserv. Ongoing selective communication to broader audiences, including advisors and donors, is also planned.

WHY NOW?

In the eight years since the launch of the OP, policymakers have worked hand-in-hand with donors, researchers, nongovernmental initiatives, and civil society to successfully reposition family planning in Francophone West Africa (FWA). These partnerships have improved access to contraceptive services and supplies as well as addressed maternal mortality and morbidity in the region. All nine OP countries are committed to the FP2020 goal of enabling 120 million more women and girls to use modern contraception by 2020. The OP has its own FP2020 commitment of reaching at least 2.2 million additional family planning method users and reducing the region's high unmet need for family planning. Consultations with stakeholders confirmed that collective action by all OP countries is needed to accelerate progress, and all identified increasing youth access to contraception as the top priority. Since nearly 43% of women and men aged 15-49 in the OP countries are between 15-24 years of age³, not only is increasing access to contraception essential for young people, but so is having them lead AYSRH

² Religious leaders from Benin, Burkina Faso, Senegal, and Togo participated in the meeting thanks to support from PAI's Faith + Family Planning Fund.

³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *Population by age and sex (thousands)*. World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, custom data acquired via website.

advocacy efforts as they truly are the next generation to take the family planning agenda forward.

Committed to the realization of Family Planning 2020 commitments and universal health coverage, AFP has always focused on improving policy and increasing funding for family planning. In 2018, AFP renewed its focus on high-quality and equitable contraceptive access for adolescents and young people. In January, AFP and its local partners convened a similar working meeting in Anglophone Africa (Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia were represented).

With more programs and organizations applying AFP SMART to the urgent issues of teenage pregnancy and low contraceptive uptake among sexually-active adolescents and youth, the collective efforts of advocates and government have the potential to catalyze efforts regionally, nationally, and subnationally.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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