

Communicating Research Results on Population and Reproductive Health Issues to Policy Audiences

Assiut

December 19-24, 2009

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

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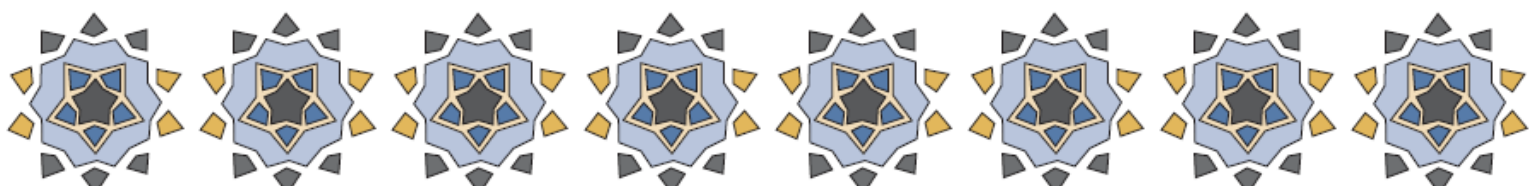
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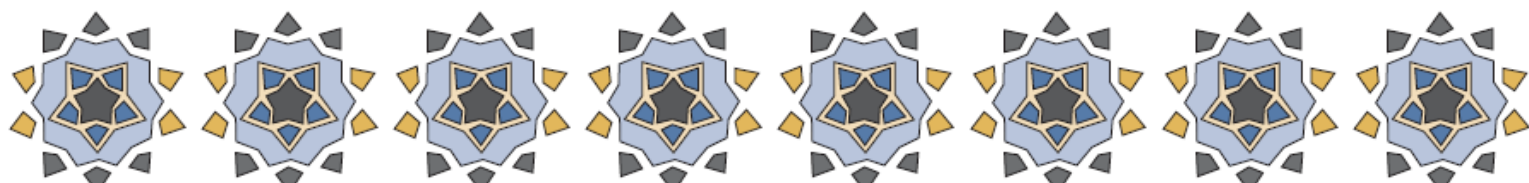
Executive Summary

With the support of the Ford Foundation office in Cairo and in collaboration with Assiut University's Department of Public Health and Community Medicine (AUDPH), the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) held a workshop on "Communicating Research Results on Population and Reproductive Health Issues to Policy Audiences" in Assiut, Egypt during December 19 – 24, 2009. The workshop was made possible with funding through PRB's Ford Foundation grant and Assiut University's grant from Johns Hopkins University' Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health.

PRB has been conducting its Policy Communication workshop series since 1996 in Washington, DC, as well as in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The goal of PRB's policy communication workshops is to increase the use of data and information on effective interventions for the improvement of policies and programs. The workshop in Assiut was the first such effort for PRB to hold this training in Egypt, or in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. For the workshop in Assiut, PRB shortened and condensed its standard two-week training into a 5-day program and adapted exercises and case studies to topics relevant to Egypt. The Assiut workshop sessions were designed to help participants identify the policy implications of their dissertation research, understand how research can influence the policy process, and communicate their research findings in simple and compelling formats to policy audiences.

The call-for-application was announced in summer 2009 and 11 Egyptian graduate students and a Sudanese researcher were selected through a competitive process—two males and 10 females. Seven participants were from Assiut University. Others were from Alexandria University, Cairo University, and El-Minia University. Farzaneh (Nazy) Roudi and Marissa Yeakey of PRB, and Ghada Salah and Omaima El-Gibaly of Assiut University's Department of Public Health organized and facilitated the workshop. Dr. Mamdouh Wahba, the head of Egyptian Family Health Society, attended the first days of the workshop.

Overall, the Assiut workshop was a successful experience for both organizers and participants. The organizers worked closely and collaboratively. The participatory nature of the workshop and hands-on assignments engaged all participants. The workshop involved a lot of readings, presentations, and exercises over the course of five days, and was an intensive training session for participants. While many complained about too much homework or not enough time for sessions, at the end most said they learned a great deal and would have liked more! One of the main themes that came out of an open discussion and responses to a questionnaire was the need for more time for exercises and reading assignments. All participants marked the workshop highly on both substance and organization.



Why This Workshop?

Population and health studies, demographic surveys, censuses, and other research findings can play a key role in guiding policy and resource-allocation decisions. Yet every year, millions of dollars are spent to produce research results that fail to reach policymakers and, consequently, are not used to shape policies and programs. PRB's Policy Communication workshop series was designed to help bridge the gap between researchers and policymakers. Sessions are designed to help participants identify the policy implications of their dissertation research, understand how research can influence the policy process, and communicate their research findings in simple and compelling formats to policy audiences. Since 1996, PRB has conducted this workshop in several formats around the world, including the annual Policy Fellows program in Washington, DC, as well as stand-alone workshops in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Thailand, and Costa Rica, and has trained over 850 professionals in policy communication.

In June of 2008, with funding provided through the Ford Foundation's grant to PRB for the MENA program, Ghada Attar was selected in a competitive process to participate in the two-week Policy Fellows policy communication workshop. Ghada found the workshop immensely helpful in her own work. Upon returning to her home institution, Assiut University, where she is an Assistant Lecturer, Ghada continued the efforts she had started in policy communication to produce a policy brief, based on her dissertation research, for publication on PRB's website. Ghada also looked for a way to carry forward what she had learned through some training sessions for members of her faculty and students at Assiut University. After discussions and negotiations with Nazy Roudi at PRB, the Ford Foundation, and members of the Gates Institute partner project at Assiut University, it was agreed that PRB and Assiut University would co-sponsor and organize a condensed (five-day) version of the policy communication workshop, using funding from PRB's Ford Foundation grant and Assiut University's Gates Institute grant.

In order to condense the traditionally two-week workshop into a five day period, several sessions were eliminated or adapted. For example, the presentations and exercises on developing a communication strategy were excluded from this workshop due to time. Participants were instead provided with references and materials about developing a communication strategy if they wished to read them on their own. The primary writing exercise, writing an individual policy brief, was adapted into a group (rather than individual) exercise in writing a two- to three-page policy memo. In addition, because the workshop was taking place in Egypt for Egyptian researchers, several of the case studies used in the exercises were replaced with case studies from Egypt or other Middle Eastern countries. All of the case studies and data-specific examples used actual research or publications; in this way, technical updates and discussions relevant to current issues in reproductive health were incorporated throughout the policy-communication learning process.

