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FOCUSING ON GENDER IS KEY TO ACHIEVING REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

“The most comprehensive documentation of gender mainstreaming experiences in reproductive health is found in the ‘So What Report,’ commissioned by the [Inter-Agency Gender Working Group]...These case studies present very important evidence showing that the integration of gender consideration into programmes can lead to a positive impact on gender relations and reproductive health outcomes.”

Gita Sen et al., *Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health* (2007)

Why Gender Matters

Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, and attributes that societies consider appropriate for men and women. When programs challenge the constraints created by traditional gender roles, women and men can enjoy healthier and more equitable lives, and their families, communities, and societies benefit. A growing body of evidence supports the positive impact that integrating gender into the design, implementation, and assessment of reproductive health programs has on achieving reproductive health goals and improving the well-being of women, men, and children. This mounting evidence and heightened awareness have led many development agencies, including the U.S. Agency for International Development, to mandate that improving gender equity and addressing gender barriers are explicit program goals.

Lessons Learned

Governmental and nongovernmental organizations alike need a better understanding of why transforming harmful gender norms is essential to the success of health programs, and how strategies to achieve gender equity can be integrated into their programs and policies. Under the BRIDGE project, PRB has played a leading role in communicating these messages, forming coalitions, and guiding policy on gender. Some key lessons from our work to promote gender equity include:

- An accessible, well-maintained website (www.igwg.org) devoted to gender issues and an interactive e-mail list are essential to creating and maintaining a vibrant Community of Practice.
- Policymakers and program managers need evidence-based materials that answer why it is important to integrate gender, highlight promising practices, and provide detailed guidance on gender analysis and integration.

- Well-organized and strategically planned events and forums, whether live or virtual, can publicize new approaches and trends and galvanize commitment among stakeholders on the priority actions needed to address gender inequities.
- New electronic forums can create virtual conversations that enable global participation and south-to-south exchange on critical topics.
- Highlighting gender-based violence, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), and other issues critical to improving reproductive health can identify gaps and unite a variety of effective interest groups to address them.
- Training and supporting the media on gender issues can yield increased coverage related to women’s lives, and lead to greater access to contraceptives and to knowledge of programs that help survivors of gender-based violence.
- Strategically guided and supported coalitions devoted to addressing these topics will build the critical mass of voices needed to achieve gender equity.

PRB’s Comparative Advantage

For 80 years, PRB has been a trusted global source for up-to-date and reliable information on population, health, and environment. PRB’s reputation for accurately interpreting data and producing credible, policy-relevant print and online materials on reproductive health for global audiences is enhanced by a sustained institutional expertise on gender issues. We not only understand the data, we know how to convey the importance of gender in our training for the media and to busy policymakers; we have a collaborative Community of Practice; and we can identify new gender-related topics and raise interest and visibility around them.

- From clear, concise policy briefs to longer, in-depth manuals, PRB has synthesized the evidence that gender matters, providing guidance to policymakers, program planners, and development specialists on how to integrate gender into family planning and reproductive health programs.
- PRB researches and highlights cutting-edge topics that are key to achieving gender equality and better reproductive health, such as the elimination of cross-generational sex and the constructive engagement of men and boys.

Outstanding Results

Under the BRIDGE project, PRB expanded its leadership role in promoting gender equity. We produced a range of publications and online resources for global policy and programmatic audiences; and we sponsored forums and virtual events that brought together policymakers, program planners, and donors to strategize and share lessons and insights. PRB has been instrumental in building coalitions on FGM/C, the constructive engagement of men and boys, and gender-based violence. Our leadership also facilitated increased collaboration and coordination among organizations and donors. Noteworthy achievements under the BRIDGE project include:

- **Definitive gender publications**, such as the *Manual for Integrating Gender Into Reproductive Health and HIV Programs*. This manual provides step-by-step guidance and has been requested by the education sector, funders, and NGOs who have used it as the basis for trainings and program design. Policy briefs, such as *The Crucial Role of Health Services in Responding to Gender-Based Violence*, offer promising approaches and policy recommendations in concise formats suitable for busy policymakers.

The BRIDGE (BRinging Information to Decisionmakers for Global Effectiveness) Project, funded from September 2003 through September 2010 by USAID's Bureau for Global Health, contributed to improved health, population, and nutrition policies and programs through effective policy-learning activities. BRIDGE disseminated information on priority health and population issues to policy audiences; worked with news media to enhance the quality and quantity of coverage of key health and population issues; and strengthened the capacity of individuals and institutions to use data and research effectively in disseminating information to policy audiences.

- **Technical updates on gender-based violence** highlight new prevalence data and engage the gender Community of Practice in sharing evaluated best practices with policymakers and program managers.
- **Summaries of evidence that gender makes a difference to reproductive health outcomes**, such as the 2004 'So What?' Report, and its 2009 successor, *The New Evidence Report*, demonstrate the impact of a gender approach to improving health. These and other groundbreaking publications have been requested by multilaterals, NGOs, and regional health advisers.
- **Virtual and live events on FGM/C**, including a U.S. congressional briefing, activities commemorating the annual International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM, and a Discuss Online, draw global attention to FGM/C and promising eradication efforts.
- **Increased access to online information** through the popular PRB-moderated Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG) e-mail list enables more than 1,000 members to receive daily news clips; reports; resources; and information about events, training, and job opportunities.
- **Integration of gender issues into training activities** builds support for gender equity. PRB's work with journalists leads them to write more stories that convey women's experiences to policymakers. Our policy communication training encourages graduate students and others to bring a gender perspective on a range of health topics to their future work as teachers, researchers, and policymakers.
- **Enhanced advocacy skills to combat gender-based violence** (GBV) through our regional policy communication workshops, held in Thailand, Senegal, and Uganda. These workshops give researchers, program officers, and activists the critical tools necessary to effectively reach policymakers and influencers for GBV policy and program reforms. To nurture regional communities of practice, each group continues sharing materials and ideas over very active e-mail lists created at the end of the training.



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