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BUILDING MEDIA CAPACITY TO COVER POPULATION AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Vasectomies in Kenya increased markedly following news stories by journalists who participated in a PRB study tour.

Why Media Matters

The media plays a vital role in setting a country's policy agenda by deciding what is "news" and how it is presented. Policymakers often need to be persuaded by evidence and advocacy that attention to reproductive health and population will further national development. When journalists who are knowledgeable about population and reproductive health issues report effectively on their country's population growth, unmet need for family planning, and levels of maternal mortality, policymakers are likely to take notice. Informed media coverage helps advocates and health personnel reach high-level policymakers with key messages about the benefits of addressing reproductive health and population as part of a comprehensive development strategy. The media can raise public awareness of family planning as a basic human right that underpins progress on many fronts. Media attention is also critical to holding policymakers accountable for spending public resources wisely and equitably to improve citizens' lives.

Lessons Learned

Trained journalists who are skilled in reporting about health and population issues and are familiar with the policies and programs needed to address them can help shape policies and public opinion. They can link the evidence on population growth and the environment, and factors that influence the quality and uptake of family planning services, to long-range planning, finance, and improved health outcomes.

Through participation in stimulating seminars and study tours, interaction with health and development experts, and networking with colleagues, journalists gain understanding of how family planning, reproductive health, and population growth are critical to national development. And through receiving ongoing information and technical support, the quality of journalists' reporting continues to improve.

PRB's key strategies for improving media coverage of reproductive health are to:

- Focus on a core group of journalists, regularly communicate with them, be responsive to the issues they want to learn about, and help them see problems and solutions from a policy perspective.
- Keep population and reproductive health issues on media radar screens by continually supplying journalists with information and easily accessible online resources.
- Bring journalists together with health experts and policymakers to open lines of communication and foster productive working relationships that help journalists report more accurately and effectively.
- Organize country-level training activities where journalists can focus on their country's most pressing reproductive health issues. A series of stories in the national media can be the impetus needed for a change in policies.
- Reinforce the capacity of veteran health journalists to mentor and train younger journalists.
- Arrange site visits to successful reproductive health programs and facilities and to underserved areas to give journalists first-hand exposure to the problems faced by women, men, and couples and how those problems are being addressed. These visits empower journalists to demand accountability from local and national policymakers.

PRB's Comparative Advantage

PRB is a trusted global source for reliable and up-to-date information on population, health, and the environment. And PRB has trained hundreds of

researchers in developing countries to understand and communicate effectively to policymakers.

For nearly two decades, PRB has strengthened the capacity of journalists around the world, especially in East and West Africa, to produce credible, policy-relevant reporting on reproductive health issues through these major activities:

- Conducting seminars and study tours to give journalists background on essential policy and programmatic issues.
- Supporting regional networks of journalists to sustain their capacity and enable them to share their experiences and ideas.
- Sponsoring trained reporters to cover regional and international conferences.
- Providing online and print resources, a Graphics Bank, and webcasts to enhance reporting.

PRB's global Women's Edition network, a cadre of influential journalists and editors, now provides high-profile coverage of issues critical to improve women's health and gender equity. PRB's *A Journalist's Guide to Sexual and Reproductive Health in East Africa* (2009) includes statistics and a glossary on the complete range of sexual and reproductive health topics.

Outstanding Results

With USAID support under the BRIDGE project, PRB has trained 428 journalists from 27 countries, resulting in more than 2,000 articles, radio, and television programs on reproductive health and population issues that reached millions of readers and listeners. PRB-trained journalists often become newsroom experts on popula-

tion and reproductive health issues and are promoted to influential positions within their media institutions.

And their contributions are recognized: the 5th African Population Conference awarded the top prizes for print and broadcast journalism to PRB-trained reporters. More important, the articles and programs produced by PRB-trained journalists stimulate actions that improve the lives of women and girls. Here are just a few examples of this impact:

- After a three-year lapse in funding contraceptives, government officials in Senegal were prompted to resume funding by news articles resulting from a PRB workshop.
- More men in Kenya chose vasectomy following a PRB study tour and journalists' stories about a gynecologist who performs vasectomies and underwent the procedure himself.
- Tanzanian reporters who used their PRB training to profile shortages in family planning supplies won credit for helping to persuade the government to increase funding for contraceptives in 2010.
- After a PRB-trained Indian journalist published a magazine cover story on child brides, the state government of Tamil Nadu, India, initiated a child marriage awareness campaign and sent mobile health units to areas where early marriage is common.
- The daughter of the president of Malawi spearheaded efforts to develop a comprehensive center for rape victims in her country after a Malawian reporter who attended a PRB-sponsored study tour wrote about an innovative "one-stop" rape crisis center she visited in South Africa.

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.



POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

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POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

1875 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 520
Washington, DC 20009 USA

202 483 1100 **PHONE**
202 328 3937 **FAX**
popref@prb.org **E-MAIL**