

SEPTEMBER 2010

# BUILDING POLICY COMMUNICATION CAPACITY

“This is an excellent workshop! The teaching methods allowed for mastery of skills. Everyone who is in contact with policymakers should take this course.”

Participant, Kenya Family Planning/Reproductive Health Workshop (2009)

## Why Policy Communication Capacity Matters

Policymakers are constantly making decisions about which priorities to address, what actions to take, and how many resources need to be allocated to get the job done. Yet frequently, policymakers work without the benefit of data and information that would help them make informed decisions. As a result, vital issues such as strengthening family planning, combating gender-based violence, and planning for contraceptive security do not get the attention they deserve. To address this need, PRB conducts policy communication training to help local policy champions—who are often program officials, researchers, and advocates—understand how data and information can influence the policy process, mobilize support among committed individuals, and communicate information simply and powerfully.

## Lessons Learned

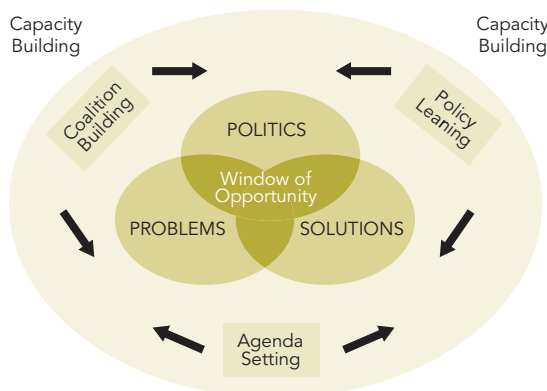
Convincing policymakers to take action requires credible information, strategic thinking, sound communication skills, and persistence. Our training is centered on a theoretical policy communication

framework (see figure). In the PRB model (which draws from earlier work by John Kingdon, Robert Porter, and Jeremy Shiffman), the policy process is an interaction of problems, solutions, and politics. When the three intersect, a window of opportunity opens for program and policy reform. The technical content of our training focuses on three factors that help create the window: policy learning (translating evidence into policy actions); coalition building (strengthening a group’s ability to collaborate for policy change); and agenda setting (helping participants get their priority issue on policymakers’ agendas). The skill-building content of our training helps advocates learn how to write in a concise, user-friendly style and to make compelling oral presentations.

After decades of strengthening the policy communication skills of professionals across the globe, we have learned to:

- Maximize the use of the framework to help advocates structure their communication strategies and understand where they need to focus their time and resources—on coalition building, policy learning, or agenda setting, for example.
- Require that workshop participants bring their own research or data to carry out a variety of policy learning skills: developing a communication action plan, writing a fact sheet, and creating an effective policy presentation that is videotaped and critiqued. As a result, participants go home with products that they can use immediately.
- Strengthen advocates’ skills in working with journalists and mobilizing the news media as a critical channel for maintaining issues high on national agendas.
- Mix workshop trainees from both the government and private sectors to encourage exchange, bring diverse perspectives to the discussions, and support coalition building.

## Theoretical Policy Communication Framework



- Draw on alumni from our regional and country-specific workshops as training facilitators to maximize investments and foster south-to-south learning experiences.
- Create an e-mail network following each workshop to foster ongoing exchange among alumni and support communities of practice. Alumni share salient information, respond to requests from each other for policy materials and strategies, and feed new ideas to group members to promote policy reform.
- Building and strengthening coalitions of committed individuals to advocate for policy change in country, and supporting global and regional communities of practice through online services.
- Dedication to working as partners and fostering local ownership.

## PRB's Comparative Advantage

Since the 1980s, PRB has been a frontrunner in designing training programs and teaching others how to communicate with policy-makers for policy reform. We have adapted and applied many of the key principles that form the foundation of policy communication practices today. As an organization internationally recognized and respected for expertise in understanding and interpreting data and research, and excellence in communicating complex information to nontechnical audiences, PRB is well positioned to strengthen policy communication skills. PRB offers:

- More than 25 years of providing training in policy communication for government, parastatal, and civil society representatives.
- Expertise in raising the visibility of priority issues through innovative policy presentations and working with the news media to keep issues front and center on national and policymakers' agendas.

## Outstanding Results

The BRIDGE project has trained scores of government officials, researchers, advocates, and civil society members to communicate research and to advocate for policy and program improvements. Below are a few examples of our results:

- **Making a difference in policies.** An alumna from a policy communication workshop on gender-based violence (GBV) in Uganda, inspired by workshop discussions, advocated to district health officials for the integration of domestic violence services into local women's health clinics. Her efforts resulted in the implementation of a GBV counseling training program for health providers.
- **Institutionalizing new practices.** An alumna from an East African research center institutionalized a process whereby each research proposal from the center has a dissemination strategy and budget incorporated in the early stages of the research design. This step helps ensure that at least initial funding is available for later communication and policy activities.
- **Nurturing tomorrow's policy champions.** In Tanzania, the Institute of Resource Assessment at the University of Dar es Salaam introduced a new master's program that built on selected modules from PRB's policy communication training in population, health, and environment.
- **Promoting policy dialogue.** Drawing on skills developed at a BRIDGE workshop, a participant from the Democratic Republic of the Congo organized a policy dialogue on protecting women and girls from sexual violence. She brought together members of the provincial government, including the governor, ministers, parliamentarians, and religious leaders, with women who had been victims of sexual violence. As a result, the policymakers have supported the BRIDGE-trained community leader in expanding her advocacy efforts to the country's rural areas.

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.



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