

GEN November Forum Report

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GLOBAL EXCHANGE NETWORK FOR REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

A Virtual Forum

“Strategies to Reposition and Strengthen the Demand for Sexual and Reproductive Health Services”

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BACKGROUND

The Global Exchange Network for Reproductive Health (GEN) is a virtual network of the USAID-funded Leadership, Management and Sustainability Program, implemented by Management Sciences for Health. Its goal is to contribute to improving the capacity and effectiveness of family planning and reproductive health programs and organizations by supporting the exchange of information about the management, leadership and organizational processes necessary to improve organizational sustainability and service quality. GEN has held a variety of virtual events such as conferences and forums to promote knowledge exchange between reproductive health practitioners and advocates.

I. FORUM OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this forum was to share the experiences of organizations using market promotion strategies, the obstacles they encountered along the way, and the benefits they obtained. When appropriately applied, these strategies can help managers and their teams address the many challenges they face. The first step is to learn from those who have been successful, and so the forum provided participants with the opportunity to:

1. Familiarize themselves with the concept of strategies, market strategies, and market promotion strategies, and learn how to select the most appropriate ones, according to their particular needs.
2. Learn about the benefits obtained by other organizations that were able to increase the demand for their products and services, and strengthen their financial sustainability.
3. Discover how market promotion strategies can help position reproductive health services with a view to expanding service coverage and strengthening financial sustainability.
4. Share successful experiences with other organizations from around the world.

II. INTRODUCTION

The forum, “**Strategies to Reposition and Strengthen the Demand for Sexual and Reproductive Health Services**”, offered in three languages (English, Spanish and French), took place on November 3 to 7 on the Global Exchange Network website. The forum was facilitated by Hector Colindres, MSH Senior Program Associate, and Cecilia Boada, an international consultant working with MSH.

Forum participants were provided with reading materials to guide the proposed activities. These included:

1. An article titled “Market Promotion Strategy”, outlining the concepts of brand and product positioning and repositioning. This article provided participants with the opportunity to reflect upon the usefulness of market promotion strategies for organizations working in reproductive health, and the value of brands.
2. Interviews with three representatives from organizations/networks providing reproductive health and family planning services in Latin America:
 - a. Edilzar Castro Quiroz, Marketing Manager at APROFAM, Guatemala.
 - b. Vicente Diaz, Executive Director MEXFAM, México.
 - c. Enrique Suarez y Toriello, Executive Director FEMAP, Mexico.

III. PARTICIPATION AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE FORUM

Over 2,000 health professionals from NGOs, health ministries, universities and international organizations, such as the United Nations and the Pan-American Health Organization, and USAID Missions, were invited to participate in the forum. During the week of the forum, 170 participants from 53 countries accessed the site, and 39 posted to the discussions. Eleven participants also completed their evaluation forms, and received their participation certificates.

Of the 11 participants who completed the evaluation form provided on the website,

- 9 found forum discussions **very useful** for their work, and
- 2 found them **useful**

Regarding the documents provided,

- 6 participants found them **very useful**, and
- 5 found them **useful**.

All respondents said that they had **acquired skills or knowledge that they could apply in their work**.

The examples of lessons learned included:

- Planning to ensure sustainability.
- Using market promotion.
- Implementing new strategies targeting youth, to promote friendly medical services.
- Developing campaigns to strengthen the organization’s position as a leading FP and RH service provider.

IV. FORUM DISCUSSIONS

Before the forum, participants received instructions on how to carry out the proposed activities.

On **Day 1** of the forum, discussions focused on the need to be constantly present in the minds of users, in order to influence their decisions to use/buy the products and services offered.

Market strategies were seen by participants as actions taken to face perceived threats or seize opportunities relating to the services and products provided by an organization. The only way to provide potential users with information regarding the benefits of the products and services provided, was to put in place a marketing strategy.

We also talked about the concepts of brand positioning and repositioning, and concluded that when products and services are visible, clients will easily identify them and the organization will reach a larger share of the market.

Days 2 and 3 were dedicated to discussing the ability to know how to reach users, as a determining factor in FP and RH. Participants also shared their views and comments on the interviews with the three special guests.

On **Day 4**, participants were requested to imagine that during the first days of the forum, they had been working in three different discussion groups, and that it was time to share conclusions by reflecting on the following questions:

1. What do you understand by market strategies?
2. What do you understand by brand/product positioning and repositioning?
3. Why are market promotion strategies important for RH organizations?

After the presentation of conclusions, participants shared, once again, the lessons learned from the interviews included in the Reading Material section.

Day 5 was a summary of conclusions and lessons learned from the interviews. Participants highlighted the following:

- Market promotion is a powerful tool for organizations working in reproductive health that comprises working with community networks of voluntary health workers, IEC activities, conducting campaigns, offering promotional service packages, advertising in the media, and organizing health fairs.
- The strategies used to promote products, APROFAM's health fairs, and MEXFAM's efforts to expand market coverage by using voluntary workers to promote their products.
- Team work is crucial for effective market promotion, as well as market segmentation to identify the demand for RH products and services.
- Positioning experiences can be adapted to any environment.

Regarding how to benefit from these experiences and effectively increase the demand for RH products and services, participants suggested:

- Developing strategic partnerships with private and public health product providers.
- Building on lessons learned.
- Adapting experiences to national, regional and local realities and contexts, and incorporating them into continuous health quality improvement projects.
- Ensuring political support in order to secure the resources needed to sustain the experiences.
- Developing a strategic plan, based on a cross-subsidy model, to ensure program continuity once funding from donors is suspended.