

Initiative Francophone Régionale Soins Après Avortement

Success in Dakar:

First Francophone PAC Conference Promotes Access to Quality Services

From 4-7 March 2002, representatives of the World Health Organization, ministries of health, regional health organizations, and US cooperating agencies joined delegations from seventeen countries gathered in Dakar, Senegal – nearly 200 strong in all.

During those four days, speaker after speaker rose to outline the pressing and often tragic dimensions of the need for postabortion care (PAC). They emphasized the urgency of the risk to the lives of women who are endangered by lack of access to quality postabortion care services. They singled out the key roles of primary-level providers and communities in improving PAC services and highlighted the importance of linking PAC with family planning to prevent repeat unwanted pregnancies, and with other reproductive health services. They also discussed strategies for advocacy and the revision of national policies and standards to ensure the provision and expansion of PAC services.

Developed with support from USAID's Office of Population/CMT Division, Africa Bureau; USAID Missions in the region working through cooperating agencies; and other donors, the conference focused on expanding the availability of postabortion care services, concentrating on Francophone Africa. During the first day, participants chose from a wide-ranging curriculum of sixteen topics offered in a mini-university. PRIME II medical advisor Dr. Marcel Vekemans presented three sessions, covering Minimum Competencies for PAC Providers, Dual Protection, and Linkages with Other Reproductive Health Services. All were very well attended, and generated lively discussion culminating in the identification of three or four pearls that distilled the participants' understanding of new and engaging ideas.

During the second and third days of the conference, Dr. Joe Taylor, from the Ghana Ministry of Health, presented two case studies of the Ghanaian experience with postabortion care to the full plenary session. His lively and detailed exposition of PRIME II's work in Ghana, covering the themes of policy and advocacy and the integration of PAC services into national reproductive health structures, sparked considerable interest among his colleagues from the region, and led to intensive discussion during the question-and-answer sessions. His audi-



(Left) Dr. Joe Taylor,
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of Health

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ence was especially interested in the groundwork he laid by involving all stakeholders right from the beginning to create a sense of ownership at each level of the project. Other hot topics were Taylor's success in galvanizing financial support and prioritizing PAC within the spectrum of health care efforts.



Pape Gaye and Marcel Vekemans preparing for the conference



Participants review action plan items for Côte d'Ivoire

By the final day, each country delegation had prepared and presented its own action plan, and teams from Haiti to Burkina Faso were ready to head back home committed to realizing the practical steps they had outlined for expanding the quality and accessibility of PAC services. PRIME II regional staff members Kristin Cooney (Rwanda), Bongwele Onanga (Benin), and Cheick Oumar Touré (Mali) facilitated the action planning process with delegates from the countries where they direct PRIME programs.

Intrah/PRIME II regional director Pape Gaye was one of the conveners of this groundbreaking conference, organized by the Francophone PAC Secretariat housed in the Intrah West, Central and North Africa regional offices in Dakar, in collaboration with WHO and USAID. As Gaye pointed out, "The environment has changed tremendously in this region. When I joined this organization, you couldn't even pronounce the words 'family planning' in our region. Now we've just completed a very successful conference attended by representatives from seventeen countries on postabortion care. So there has been progress, and I believe very strongly that this organization has been there and has been able to change with the times. It's been a great asset. Change is part of our business, pushing the envelope and finding new ways to do business."

In addition to Intrah/PRIME II, collaborators in the conference included Advance Africa, CEFORP, EngenderHealth, FCI, Ipas, IPPF, JHPIEGO, the Policy Project, the Population Council, Population Reference Bureau, and WHO. Participants are committed to building on the momentum generated by the conference. Some delegations have already initiated discussions with donors interested in financing follow-up activities outlined in their action plans, and a roundtable discussion has been scheduled for December in Mali to continue the sharing of PAC experiences among countries in the region.



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