



**Advance
Africa**

Technical Brief

Expanding family planning and reproductive health services in Africa

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Strategic Mapping:

A Tool for Managers to Revitalize Reproductive Health Programs in Africa

Implementing family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) programs in sub-Saharan Africa has become an increasingly complex challenge for program managers. In an era of rapidly changing environments and HIV/AIDS, the need for coherent, innovative, flexible, and participatory management strategies is apparent. Recent trends in program management, however, have generally focused on the development of “fixed” long-term strategic plans. Such plans have not proven effective in the current sub-Saharan African context. To develop a successful approach to FP/RH service delivery in these unstable times, new emphasis needs to be placed on strengthening and monitoring ongoing programs in the short term to maximize results.

Now and in the future, FP/RH program managers in Africa must be able to:

- Regularly refine their program activities
- Clarify and coordinate stakeholders’ roles
- Build the morale and skills of their team
- Improve communications strategies and effectiveness

To offer program managers a flexible way to meet these objectives and strengthen FP/RH program implementation, Advance Africa has developed the Strategic Mapping tool.

What Is Strategic Mapping?

Strategic Mapping is an innovative way to design and direct FP/RH activities, based on what is likely to work. It brings together professionals with different levels of responsibility and from different sectors to analyze all available data relevant to their program. Using this approach, they can then reach consensus about program gaps, weaknesses, and opportunities. The consensus building fosters effective

coordination and teamwork, and the research analysis allows participants to draw upon available human and financial information and resources in order to discover and apply appropriate corrective measures using existing resources. While the primary objective of Strategic Mapping is to strengthen FP/RH programs, it can also be applied to various other health or non-health programs.

“The accelerating pace of change [everywhere including Africa] requires the creation of ‘fluid maps’ and methods to manage performance that continually stress change and shifting directions.”¹

The Phases of Strategic Mapping

The overall Strategic Mapping approach follows a three-phase process:

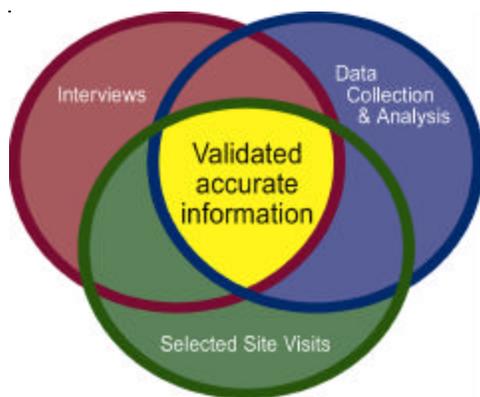
- Participatory Rapid Assessment
- Interactive Group Planning
- Program Implementation and Monitoring

Phase I: Participatory Rapid Assessment

Strategic Mapping begins with a qualitative assessment of ongoing program activities and an analysis of various sources of data. The analysis uses a multidimensional approach that combines published and unpublished data, interviews of selected key informants at all levels, focus groups with various stakeholders and others, and field observations at selected sites.

The results from these sources are cross-matched through a triangulation process (Figure 1) designed to retain only overlapping information. This information is validated if the group agrees it is the most accurate information for use.

Figure 1. Triangulation Technique



The major strengths and weaknesses identified can then be summarized by using an analytical grid that asks for “yes” or “no” responses in each area. The completed grids will reveal the gaps that exist and will provide a basis for group discussion at various levels. These group discussions will raise awareness and create consensus among stakeholders—including policy makers, managers, and service providers. An example of a grid for FP/RH services is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary Gaps Analysis Grid

Structures Areas	Public Sector	Private Sector	Community	Non Health Sector
Availability	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
Accessibility	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
Demand/ Needs	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
Quality	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No
Sustainability	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No

The Strategic Mapping team uses completed grids to prioritize major gaps and to examine the root causes of the gaps as well as the implications of taking action. This information results in additional analytical grids for each major gap. For example, the team could create separate grids exploring the availability of information about a variety of health concerns (such as FP, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, post-abortion care, or maternal/child health) for each of the structure sectors.

Phase II: Interactive Group Planning

The Interactive Group Planning phase follows the assessment. This second phase focuses on the identification and implementation of selected corrective actions for each gap, and requires the active participation of all key partners. The partners aim to assess and select the most feasible and potentially effective alternative solutions to correct the gaps and weaknesses identified in Phase I. An Action Plan Matrix (Table 2) is used to identify the corrective activities and the steps necessary to complete activities for each gap.

Table 2. Action Plan Matrix

Gaps	Corrective Activities	Responsible	Dates	Outputs	Indicators	Assumptions
1						
2						
3						
Etc						

The completed action plan is used as a short-term plan for periods of no more than one year. It focuses the process of interactive group planning on:

- The corrective measures (or what to do) for each of the selected priority gaps
- Who the key players should be for each measure
- The dates for completion of each step
- The outputs (or expected performance) for each measure

The indicators for monitoring progress are the means of verification, and the assumptions cover possible constraints.

Phase III: Program Implementation and Monitoring

The implementation of these action plans must be monitored regularly by group members, and the plans should also be evaluated periodically to refine activities. In this way, Strategic Mapping becomes an ongoing process of developing, evaluating, and adapting action plans. This process helps to ensure that activities always remain relevant, even in changing environments.

Strategic Mapping examples and more information about its application in Senegal and Benin are available from Advance Africa upon request.