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POLICY ENVIRONMENT: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT FOR CONTRACEPTIVE SECURITY

Contraceptive security exists when people are able to choose, obtain, and use high-quality contraceptives and condoms for family planning whenever they want or need them.

27%

of women used a modern contraceptive in Rwanda in 2008, up from 4 percent in 2000.

An enabling policy environment is critical for family planning programs to be responsive to the needs of women and men.

Achieving contraceptive security requires coordination among the many elements of family planning programs, including funding, procurement, supply chain, and services. Underlying factors that contribute to the success and sustainability of these program efforts are an enabling policy environment, political commitment, and effective policies. A supportive policy environment includes not only the formulation and implementation of appropriate policies and the allocation of sufficient resources, but also a broad political consensus that family planning programs are necessary for the well-being of individuals, families, and society.[1]

Efforts to improve the policy environment for contraceptive security generally require the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. Senior government leaders and civil servants are critical stakeholders because they have the authority to make policy and programmatic changes. However, behind those changes is the active support and involvement of civil and community leaders from the public sector, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and other influential leaders at the national and local levels. This brief examines the importance of advocacy, data use, and capacity-building in creating and sustaining political commitment, and the roles that stakeholders from government, civil society, and the private sector play in efforts to achieve contraceptive security.

Political Support Is Necessary for Family Planning to Thrive

Most countries have demonstrated basic levels of political support for family planning by signing the Programme of Action that emerged from the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development.[2] Similarly, global support for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other international agreements also indicates a degree of political commitment to reproductive health and family planning.[3] At the national level, the existence of reproductive health and family planning policies and programs and contraceptive security strategies within ministries of health further demonstrate commitment to contraceptive security.

However, deeper political commitment requires looking at other ways that support is given. A program's organizational structure can also reveal how a government expresses political commitment. For example, Kenya's National Coordinating Agency for Population and Development, which is a semiautonomous government entity charged with ensuring that population growth remains on the national agenda, is indicative of a commitment to population issues at the national level. Madagascar's health ministry was renamed the Ministry of Health and Family Planning to demonstrate greater political support for family planning and contraceptive security. Similarly, Pakistan's creation of a Ministry of Population Welfare suggests that family planning and reproductive health are a priority to the national government.

Political support for family planning and contraceptive security also translates into specific demonstrations of commitment and the availability of resources. In Rwanda, a high level of political support is visible through the inclusion of family planning in development strategies (see Box 1). Sufficient funding and staffing levels are important signs of political support for family planning. Peru's creation of a protected budget line item for contraceptives and designating them as "strategic commodities" also reflect the government's commitment to contraceptive security. These examples illustrate different

BOX 1

Political Commitment in Rwanda

In recent years, political commitment to family planning and contraceptive security in Rwanda has increased dramatically. The government has demonstrated its support through several important actions, including:

- Incorporating family planning into its 2008-2012 poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) and setting a goal of 70 percent contraceptive prevalence among married couples.
- Prioritizing family planning in *Rwanda Vision 2020*—the government's plan for economic development.
- Rwanda President Paul Kagame speaking out in support of family planning on many occasions.
- Improving training efforts for providers of family planning services.
- Expending funds from the national budget for contraceptives.
- Including family planning indicators in its successful performance-based financing strategy.

Rwanda's commitment to family planning is showing results: Modern-method prevalence has increased from 4 percent in 2000 to 27 percent in 2008, according to the Demographic and Health Surveys.

Source: Julie Solo, *Family Planning in Rwanda: How a Taboo Topic Became Priority Number One* (Chapel Hill, NC: IntraHealth International, 2008).

approaches to keeping family planning and contraceptive security as priorities within the public sector.

Civil Society Improves the Policy Environment for Family Planning

Civil society—which includes NGOs, women's groups, professional associations, and the media, among other actors—can play an important role in improving the policy environment for family planning and contraceptive security. Civil society can be involved in policy development by taking the role of raising awareness about contraceptive security issues, undertaking advocacy efforts for supportive policies and improved access to services, and fostering policy dialogue among stakeholders on issues related to family planning policies and programs. In Mali, civil society engaged religious leaders in policy dialogue to gain their support for family planning and contraceptive security.

Building consensus within civil society and between civil society and policymaking groups (such as ministries, parliamentarians, and district health teams) is another vital role of civil society in supporting contraceptive security. Implementing policies should involve civil society through providing services, continuing to advocate for accountability, and supporting the development of operational guidelines. Civil society often monitors the implementation of family planning programs and policies, serving as a watchdog to ensure that governments fulfill their obligations.

Through awareness-raising activities, civil society can provide critical information to policymakers that support decisionmaking. The use of timely information can also support advocacy efforts. In many countries, civil society has used data, such as applications of the RAPID model, market segmentation analysis, national health accounts, and reproductive health subaccounts, to support its causes (see Box 2). Civil society can raise awareness about contraceptive security by drawing on data related to the market for contraceptives, groups not being served, and future anticipated demand for family planning from the public and private sectors. By using data effectively, civil society mobilizes responses to a range of contraceptive security issues.[4]

Civil society also has a role in directing advocacy efforts that reinforce the importance of contraceptive security on the national policy agenda (see Box 3). Advocacy efforts have successfully led to many policy changes at the local and national levels, addressing key issues such as identifying target audiences for government services, increasing and ensuring funding for contraceptives, and expanding the role of community-based providers—to mention a few examples. Civil society groups in Guatemala successfully advocated to the congress for a law that would increase funding for family planning and reproductive health based on a tax on the sale of alcohol.[5]

Engaging civil society in policy dialogue helps ensure that policy changes are responsive to a broad group of stakeholders. Civil society's participation in the process to achieve consensus on contraceptive security contributes to its ownership of and commitment to policy recommendations that result from the process. It is also useful to engage the private and commercial sectors in dialogue, because their input can help government policymakers better understand how current or proposed policies may affect their involvement in contraceptive security efforts.

An Enabling Environment for the Private Sector

An important public-sector function in addressing contraceptive security is coordinating the involvement of the public, commercial, and NGO sectors. The public sector can further engage the private sector by creating and implementing policies that segment the family planning market and foster appropriate roles for the public, commercial, and NGO sectors. To ensure the active participation of private and public sectors, public-sector leadership is needed to develop a comprehensive contraceptive security strategy that supports an enabling policy environment. To foster

BOX 2

Using Data to Advocate for Improved Family Planning

Among the analytic tools used in family planning advocacy efforts are the RAPID model and market segmentation analyses.

RAPID is a computer simulation model that uses data to promote policy dialogue about the effect of population growth on socioeconomic development. The model examines the increased demands on the labor, education, agriculture, and health sectors arising from rapid population growth. When policymakers compare the consequences of higher and lower fertility on development indicators, they can better understand the benefits of slower population growth.

A market segmentation analysis uses data to create family planning profiles based on women's background characteristics, such as household wealth, education, or geography. These profiles often include contraceptive prevalence, the mix of methods used by women in each group, and where they obtain family planning services and products. By understanding these family planning behaviors, advocates can support policies that promote complementary roles for the public, commercial, and nongovernmental sectors in meeting the needs of women based on these different background characteristics.

BOX 3

Advocacy Efforts in Mali Support Contraceptive Security

In places with low contraceptive prevalence, it can be challenging to discuss contraceptive security because family planning is a low priority. However, that situation can change. Family planning advocates in Mali have worked to raise the visibility of contraceptive security. Civil society organizations paved the way for the inclusion of family planning in the 2006 poverty reduction strategy, which helps secure funding for program efforts by identifying reproductive health as a priority issue. More recently, civil society groups effectively used evidence on how family planning can help the country reach its Millennium Development Goals to convince the government of Mali to invest its own funds in purchasing contraceptives. These efforts led to the national government contributing 10 percent of the funds needed for commodities, and represent an important advance toward contraceptive security.

Sources: Anita Bhuyan, Maria Borda, and William Winfrey, *Making Family Planning Part of the PRSP Process* (Washington, DC: USAID | Health Policy Initiative, 2007).

greater involvement of the private sector in the family planning market, the public sector can work to eliminate restrictive importation and tax policies that limit the number of contraceptive products that are available. Similarly, public-sector efforts such as targeting subsidized or free contraceptives only to certain groups—rather than to the entire public—can also enhance demand for private-sector involvement in family planning among the untargeted groups. These changes in the policy environment can facilitate the growth of the private sector, which in turn, will allow the public sector to use its limited resources to respond to the family planning needs of the underserved.[6]

One challenge to involving the private sector is that it is composed of many different types of organizations—private pharmacies, individual practitioners, clinics and hospitals, and retailers—that are not necessarily organized into a cohesive group. As a result, it may be difficult to find the appropriate organizations or individuals for partnerships. However, professional organizations, industry groups, or civil society groups may be able to work with the public sector to address contraceptive security issues, and serve as an information conduit to related organizations or individuals (see Box 4).[7]

For the private sector to be willing to be involved in contraceptive security, it needs both an adequate market to tap into and a financial incentive. An effective approach used by some contraceptive security committees is to segment the family planning market so that the commercial sector focuses its resources on those people who are most able to pay higher prices; social marketing and NGO programs direct efforts toward the lower- and middle-income groups; and the public sector reaches the poor and underserved. This strategy, referred to as a whole market approach, can effectively involve multiple sectors in addressing family planning needs, but does so based on identifying their rational and complementary roles. Applying the whole market approach does not necessarily mean a major overhaul in the family planning market. As shown in Box 5, it can be as straightforward as identifying a small niche for a new commercial product.

Addressing Contraceptive Security in Decentralized Settings

A global initiative in health-sector reform has led to decentralizing many functions of national ministries of health to subnational levels, which includes states, districts, and municipalities. This type of transition increases local autonomy to identify programmatic and budgeting priorities. Decentralization should also lead to better management, greater efficiency, and higher quality of services, and make local programs more responsive to market forces, local needs, and local decisionmakers.

As decentralization moves forward, contraceptive security efforts will also need to expand so that they include subnational levels, where an increasing number of decisions are made (see Box 6). Without strong political commitment at both the national and subnational levels, local decisionmakers may lack the capacity to manage their new and expanded responsibilities. Commitments to family planning and contraceptive security, as well as

BOX 4

Private-Sector Engagement in Contraceptive Security

One approach to increasing the private sector's commitment to contraceptive security is to include representatives from that sector on contraceptive security committees. Because family planning generally has a low profit margin compared with other areas of health, involving the commercial sector may be challenging. Nevertheless, the private sector is a stakeholder in contraceptive security. Some of the following are examples of groups that could provide a private-sector perspective to the process:

- Associations of medical, nursing, and midwifery professionals.
- NGOs involved in family planning and reproductive health.
- Social marketing franchises.
- Associations of professional women who have an interest in women's reproductive health.
- Service organizations (for example, Rotary and Rotoract).
- Youth organizations (for example, Africa Youth Alliance).

In addition, many private sector organizations—including pharmaceutical manufacturers—have been involved in family planning research and interventions around the world. These past partners could be tapped again for further involvement in contraceptive security efforts.

national commitments to the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the Millennium Development Goals may not translate into local priorities without adequate direction.

Through decentralization, the roles of the national health sector often shift toward coordination, norms, and stewardship. Decisionmakers at subnational levels increasingly identify program priorities and determine how resources will be allocated. To ensure that support for family planning programs remains a priority at the local level, national governments can provide leadership in developing a strategy and action plan that both strengthens the policy environment for contraceptive security and supports the capacity of subnational decisionmakers. Subnational governments may be expected to take on additional responsibilities that include developing policies that reflect local priorities and realities. To ensure that contraceptive security remains a priority, subnational political leaders, health officials, and civil society need to have a solid understanding of key family planning and contraceptive security issues, as well as skills in consensus building and conflict resolution.

BOX 5

Whole Market Approach—Two Examples

Involving the private sector in family planning is a critical aspect of achieving contraceptive security in most developing countries. The following examples illustrate how, through segmenting the market and targeting those smaller segments with specific products and services, the whole market approach can stimulate the private sector to reach a larger share of the market for family planning services and products.

In Nigeria, there was no mid-priced commercial brand of oral contraceptives available. Indian and Thai manufacturers of generic oral contraceptives were interested, but did not have the funds to position the new product in the Nigerian market. A local social marketing organization committed the time and resources to introduce the new product, which ultimately led to a newly formulated contraceptive at an affordable price being introduced into a market where choice had been limited.

In Ukraine, the public sector referred clients to the commercial sector for contraceptives, which meant that method choice was limited and prices were very high. To foster a whole market approach, the "Together for Health" project focused on the middle class by developing and promoting a contraceptive product line made up of commodities already in the marketplace but not actively promoted by the pharmaceutical companies. The program also worked with the government to procure the products that are included in the mid-priced product lines so the poor would also have access to affordable family planning methods.

Sources: Barbara O'Hanlon, personal communication, Dec. 2, 2009; USAID, *Contraceptive Security, Ready Lessons II No. 7, Fostering Public-Private Collaboration for Improved Access*, accessed at www.maqweb.org/ReadyLessons/EN/RLIIL7.pdf, on Feb. 15, 2010; and Francoise Armand et al., *Private Sector Contribution to Family Planning and Contraceptive Security in the Europe and Eurasia Region* (Bethesda, MD: Private Sector Partnerships-*One* project, Abt Associates Inc., 2007).

Next Steps

The policy environment for contraceptive security is complex and it poses challenges. An enabling policy environment is critical for family planning programs to be responsive to the needs of women and men. At both the national and subnational levels, efforts to raise political commitment and increase the involvement of civil society and the private sector have proved successful, and are contributing to improved and sustained access to high-quality family planning programs. To foster an enabling policy environment for contraceptive security, stakeholders need to:

- Advocate for visible demonstrations by policymakers of commitment to family planning and contraceptive security through statements by national leaders and by including family planning in development strategy documents.
- Foster a supportive environment for greater involvement of the commercial and private sectors in addressing contraceptive security.
- Build the capacity of decisionmakers and civil society in decentralized settings so that contraceptive security remains a priority at subnational levels.
- Use timely data and information—market segmentation analysis, national health accounts, and reproductive health subaccounts—as the basis for awareness-raising efforts by civil society and evidence-based decisionmaking by policymakers.
- Become familiar with the different advocacy rationales to support family planning and contraceptive security, especially the economic and health benefits.

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3 United Nations, *Millennium Development Goals*, accessed at www.un.org/millenniumgoals, on Feb. 15, 2010.

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7 USAID, *Contraceptive Security, Ready Lessons II No. 7, Fostering Public-Private Collaboration for Improved Access*, accessed at www.maqweb.org/ReadyLessons/EN/RLIIL7.pdf, on Feb. 15, 2010.

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BOX 6

Checklist for Advocacy Efforts During Decentralization

Contraceptive security efforts can get lost during the decentralization of a country's health sector. To ensure that it remains a priority, experts recommend the following advocacy activities at the central and local levels:

- Form strategic working groups at national and subnational levels that include the public and private sectors, NGOs, civil society, and community leaders.
- Conduct a situation analysis that includes access to and demand for services, identification of new decisionmakers and stakeholders, and the roles of different sectors and the local policy environment.
- Gather and analyze data available for advocacy to help understand different aspects of contraceptive security.
- Identify clear goals, objectives, and indicators for advocacy efforts.
- Identify target audiences for awareness raising, advocacy efforts, and policy dialogue at the national and subnational levels.
- Build support and strengthen relationships through networking, partnerships, and links with the ministry of health.
- Develop appropriate messages for each specific audience.
- Select communication channels to deliver the messages, with supporting products to hold the target audience's attention.
- Develop plans of action that identify activities, responsibilities, time frames, support, and accountability.
- Foster evidence-based decisionmaking among policymakers and program managers.
- Monitor and evaluate to determine progress, and revise strategies as needed.

Source: Adapted from Margaret Saunders and Suneeta Sharma, *Mobilizing Political Support and Resources for Family Planning in a Decentralized Setting: Guidelines for Latin American and Caribbean Countries* (Washington, DC: USAID | Health Policy Initiative, 2008).

For More Information

Advocacy tools for contraceptive security

- USAID | Health Policy Initiative, Task Order 1, *The RAPID Model: An Evidence-Based Advocacy Tool to Help Renew Commitment to Family Planning Programs*, available at www.healthpolicyinitiative.com/Publications/Documents/808_1_RAPID_Model_Handout_FINAL_July_2009_acc2.pdf.
- USAID I Health Policy Initiative, *The Impact of Family Planning on the Millennium Development Goals* (CD), available at www.healthpolicyinitiative.com, under Resources/Online CDs.
- Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition, *Leading Voices in Securing Reproductive Health Supplies*, interactive guide and toolkit available at www.rhsupplies.org/guide-new.html.

Data on family planning and population issues

- Demographic and Health Surveys, available at www.measuredhs.com.
- USAID, *How Data and Information Contribute to Contraceptive Security* (2007), available at www.healthpolicyinitiative.com/Publications/Documents/334_1_How_Data_and_Information_Contribute_to_Contraceptive_Security.pdf.

Civil society and contraceptive security

- USAID, *Contraceptive Security, Ready Lessons 4: Advocating for Sustained Commitment,* available at www.maqweb.org/pnacw664.pdf.
- Phyllis Cuttino and Juan Carlos Negrette, *Media Advocacy for Contraceptive Security: A Tool for Strategy Development* (2006), available at www.jhuccp.org/pubs/cp/family_planning/mediaadvocacy.pdf.

Contraceptive Security: A Toolkit for Policy Audiences

A seven-part series of briefs designed to explain different aspects of contraceptive security to policymakers, program managers, media, and civil society. The topics included in the toolkit are:

- Contraceptive Security for Policy Audiences: An Overview
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- Procuring Contraceptives: Options for Countries
- Supply Chain: Getting Contraceptives to Users
- Policy Environment: Understanding the Context for Contraceptive Security
- Priority Actions and Recommendations for Contraceptive Security

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