

Male Health Workers Increase Access to Family Planning in Sokoto

The dearth of human resources has a negative effect on the delivery of preventive health services in Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Health (MOH) of Nigeria has implemented task shifting to allow selected health workers to perform functions that they previously could not. Community health extension workers (CHEWs) have limited roles and are the largest cadre of health workers in the country. Several organizations, including USAID/TSHIP, worked with the federal government to expand the role of CHEWs to include technically demanding functions such as the insertion of long-acting reversible contraceptive (LARC) methods. The key challenge was, would the community permit CHEWs, the majority of whom are male, to deliver this form of family planning services in socially conservative Northern Nigeria?

USAID/TSHIP, in conjunction with the Sokoto and Bauchi MOH and the Federal MOH, trained 151 CHEWs to administer contraceptive implants at rural family planning clinics on a test basis. Within six months, the CHEWs had demonstrated 93% proficiency and had provided family planning services that helped

more than 10,000 couples delay pregnancy for a year. Clients rated CHEWs—male and female alike—highly in the overall quality of services delivered. The added value of male CHEWs in delivering this family planning intervention lies in their ability to convince husbands, who are critical decision makers, to support use of contraceptives by their wives. And communities in Sokoto and Bauchi States were willing to accept male CHEWs as LARC providers. The findings are unequivocal.

Communities in Sokoto and Bauchi are willing to accept male CHEWs as family planning providers.

THE FINDINGS ARE UNEQUIVOCAL.

If more CHEWs are trained to insert implants and increase couples' awareness of this service, all factors indicate that the prevalence of women who use LARC methods in Nigeria will increase. In October 2014, the 57th National Council of Health unanimously passed a resolution on task shifting and an expanded role for CHEWs, and guidelines to implement CHEW training at scale is underway.

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