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ENGAGING INFLUENCERS AND NON-TRADITIONAL ACTORS IN PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES FOR FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAM DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

This Process Brief is intended for program implementers who would like to use a participatory approach to inform program design in family planning (FP) and reproductive health (RH). This brief pulls from experiences and lessons learned during the USAID-funded Transform/PHARE project (hereafter referred to as PHARE). PHARE's objective was to develop and test innovative approaches and solutions to increase FP acceptability and voluntary uptake in Francophone West Africa. To this end, in Niger and Burkina Faso, PHARE used a Human Centered Design (HCD) approach to develop creative approaches and solutions supported by existing qualitative and quantitative data. The HCD approach highlighted the importance of careful planning and management of the participatory process. Involvement of target audiences and key influencers, in particular, has emerged as a critical area of learning. This brief reflects on PHARE's engagement of influencers for program design and offers lessons and recommendations for a successful and meaningful participatory process for future FP programming.

CASE STUDIES FROM PHARE: ENGAGING INFLUENCERS AND NON-TRADITIONAL ACTORS IN THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS¹

The following case studies provide two examples of how PHARE engaged influencers and non-traditional actors in the participatory process.

BURKINA FASO'S PÈRE BURKINBILA²

The Père Burkinbila intervention aimed to increase voluntary uptake of FP by adolescent and young women in Burkina Faso³ and encourage a more favorable environment for FP use. PHARE interviewed women of reproductive age to better understand their needs, challenges and desires to identify potential areas for intervention. Through these interviews, the team confirmed men as a key influencer in FP decision making.

The project also chose to involve non-traditional actors (e.g., entrepreneurs, musicians, comedians, both male and female). The idea behind inviting entrepreneurs and artists was based on their ability to innovate

¹Non-traditional actors in this context include people who have typically not been involved in FP or RH programming, but who have significant influence on the decisions that women make regarding their health, such as men or religious leaders

²More information about the project Père Burkinbila

³The engagement of men and boys is considered a Family Planning High Impact Practice

and create responses that resonate with the public. Non-traditional actors brought ideas from multiple angles, which ensured richer content and approaches, contributing to the success of the pilot project. For example, one of the proposed interventions was built around St. Valentine’s Day as an entry point to talk to young couples about family planning.

Selection of participants for the design process took into consideration balanced gender and age representation and anticipated power and gender dynamics that could potentially hinder the process and drown out young boys’, women’s, and/or girls’ voices. Throughout each phase of the process, the PHARE team aligned with the PSI [Commitment to Ethics in Youth Powered Design](#), to ensure informed consent, confidentiality, compensation of youth for their time and work in design processes, as well as staff training to appropriately support youth engagement.

The resulting intervention, Père Burkinbila, consisted of organizing fathers’ clubs to provide training for fathers on ways to talk to their adolescent sons about sexuality, gender equality, and contraception. The emphasis on the father-son relationship was a new approach to engaging men, based on similar approaches used with young women and mothers. Following four months of implementation, the project implementation team noted that fathers started talking to their sons about sexuality and knew to refer them to a health center if they were not able to answer all their questions. Parents also stated that some of their sons started engaging in chores usually performed by girls around the home (e.g. washing dishes).

NIGER’S SARARI⁴

The Sarari intervention aimed to increase voluntary FP uptake among married women and to foster community support for voluntary FP. The PHARE team conducted interviews with women of reproductive age and couples to gather insights which led to the identification of two key influencers: young married men and religious leaders. Women cited their husbands as primary determinants of their voluntary uptake of FP with men, in turn, being strongly influenced by religious

leaders. Young men respect religious leaders but do not necessarily consider them influential in reproductive health issues. Based on these insights, two design teams were formed during the Ideation Phase (see below for description of HCD phases): one team of six male influencers and one team of six women and girls to generate intervention ideas.

The design teams developed three interventions for prototyping: Engaged Leaders, Leader Debates and a Discussion and Budgeting Activity. The Leader Debates, which consisted of open debates between religious leaders and youth, was popular among participants during the prototyping/ideation phase. However, during implementation, the activity was unsuccessful because of challenges related to power dynamics between (male) religious leaders and youth. Youth did not feel comfortable debating an “elder” in public, which was perceived as disrespectful. At the same time, while implementing the Engaged Leaders intervention, the team realized that female religious leaders could leverage their own experiences with reproductive health and provide more practical messaging that resonated with other women.

Niger’s PHARE experience illustrates the importance of identifying key insights about power dynamics during all phases of the participatory process. Despite these challenges, the end of project results showed progress. By the end of the Sarari Implementation phase, 82% of religious leaders reported support for women’s use of FP methods to space births, compared to 68% at baseline.

THE VALUE OF A PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

The participatory process described above highlights many of the benefits of engaging influencers in program design generally. First, the target audience’s voice in the design phase ensures that interventions resonate with other target group members and increases ownership throughout program implementation. Second, highly targeted discussion groups allow for a deeper dive into social dynamics that affect the target audience and influence gender equity, thus creating a more responsive program design. Similarly, participatory design helps

⁴More information about Sarari

HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN

HCD is a collaborative, rapid and iterative design framework that facilitates the target population’s participation as equal partners in the development and implementation of an intervention. HCD helps solve old or entrenched problems via new perspectives and new solutions.

PHASES OF HCD PROCESS

Inspiration: understand the target population by observing their lives, hearing their hopes and desires, and understanding key challenges they face.

Ideation: use information gathered in the Inspiration Phase to generate ideas through ideation workshops. Ideas are stress tested through prototyping.

Implementation: bring the prototype interventions to life through an iterative process of continued learning, adjusting, and refining prototype ideas.

to identify challenges and power dynamics that may negatively affect program results. These challenges can be addressed through adjustments during subsequent phases, including during implementation.

STEP 1 IDENTIFY TARGET AUDIENCE(S) AND THEIR INFLUENCERS

Based on insights generated through data segmentation, observation, other qualitative approaches, and previous experience, the PHARE team refined the target audiences and identified influencers. For example, in the Père Burkinbila⁵ intervention in Burkina Faso, the PHARE team established an objective to generate ideas that were less traditional and therefore sought to involve non-traditional actors to provide unique and less biased perspectives.

 **WHO:** Led by program team based on qualitative and quantitative data and buy-in from stakeholders (i.e., MOH, Implementing Partners).

 **WHEN:** Prior to beginning the participatory process. To gather insights, PHARE reached

out to members of the target population as well as potential influencers, who in turn also helped to orient and recruit other influencers. In the case of Niger’s Sarari project, the team developed an archetype⁶ to help define influencers in a woman’s life, as well as envision her life and reproductive goals. Archetypes make a target population or population segment more relatable, which makes it easier to develop effective interventions tailored to their specific needs and preferences. Influencers were further refined during the process through additional insights and data segmentation.

STEP 2 PLAN THE PARTICIPATORY GROUP WORKSHOPS

The PHARE team undertook a multi-step planning process to prepare for the participatory workshops. First, the team decided on the number of workshops and attendees needed, based on the number of target audiences and groups of influencers (see step three for selection process). Ethical considerations and related permissions were considered at this stage (e.g., informed consent, staff training to appropriately support youth engagement). Second, the team budgeted time between the Inspiration and Ideation phases to carefully review and analyze the information collected to inform next steps of the process. Lastly, the teams identified approaches to manage workshop attendance to ensure that all participants would be engaged and heard. As learned from the Sarari intervention, it is critical to pay attention to potential power dynamics during the workshops, which could affect gender equity during implementation and the overall success of the program (for more information, refer to the process brief on Identifying Power Dynamics.)⁷

 **WHO:** Led by program team.

 **WHEN:** After the Inspiration Phase.

⁵More information about Père Burkinbila

⁶An archetype is a profile of a fictional person intended to represent a “typical” member of a target population. Creating archetypes can help design teams understand the target population as real people and gain insights into their behavior, motivators and barriers, attitudes, perceptions, and decision-making process that would not be obvious from demographic data alone.

⁷Link will be shared and included when it is finalized with a title and a publication link (as part of the PHARE series)

STEP 3 SELECT PARTICIPANTS

As described above, the PHARE team primarily selected participants who provided insights during the Inspiration phase. Other participants were recruited through interpersonal communication agents or through snowball sampling by the initially selected participants and based on specific criteria (i.e., gender, age, occupation). The aim was to have a diverse group of participants who were representative of the target audience, influencers, and non-traditional actors. Most participants were contacted by phone.

The team reviewed the composition of the groups prior to finalizing the participant list to ensure that the different influencers and intended audiences were adequately represented. For example, for religious leaders, the PHARE team was careful to recruit various profiles of religious leaders (i.e., across age, gender, viewpoints on FP, years of experience).



WHO: Led by program team.



WHEN: Before the Ideation Phase, as well as during Ideation but prior to Prototyping. At both points in the process, the same participant groups were selected for prototyping. In some cases, it may be necessary for teams to select a different group of participants if the prototypes can benefit from receiving feedback from a different subset of the target population or from potentially under-represented groups in the workshop. For example, in a case where the Ideation Phase moves to develop an idea related to interventions in the pharmaceutical sector, the prototyping should involve pharmacists and should reach out to pharmaceutical stakeholders even if these participants were not initially included in the prior stages.

STEP 4 CONDUCT THE WORKSHOPS

It is important to use different brainstorming methodologies throughout workshops to enable all participants to share their views especially if they come from different backgrounds. PHARE had participants alternate between working in pairs and with the wider group to brainstorm ideas. A popular methodology is to view a topic from different angles (e.g., Asking the question “How would you engage men to support women competing in national sports leagues?”) as ways to cultivate ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking and generate ideas that could be applied to the main objective. Workshops were conducted in large rooms to allow participants to move around freely. Suggestions for room layout include ensuring sufficient open space to foster creative brainstorming and avoiding traditional room layouts where participants are sitting at tables facing the front or the center of the room, as these tend to convey a didactic workshop. For small groups of fewer than ten participants, it is best to remove tables and have the participants sit in a circle. For larger groups, participants can be divided into groups of 3-4 sitting around a table, fostering a sense of teamwork. Facilitators may choose to bring construction paper, colorful gadgets, pipe cleaners or other interactive tools to foster creativity and alertness.

Design teams may be tempted to separate men and boys from women and girls or separate youth from adults to balance power dynamics in larger groups. However, this separation can have the unintended consequence of creating separate dialogues without gaining insights from different perspectives. Facilitators should ensure that both women and men have opportunities to speak in small groups as well as in plenary sessions.



WHO: Workshop facilitator, with support from the program team. Facilitators encourage reflection, as compared to trainers, who encourage learning. A facilitator should maintain a neutral position in discussions and help participants stay on track, without dictating

ideas. It is essential that the group feels they have ownership of the outcomes without having been told or offered solutions.

 **WHEN:** Ideation Phase, including Prototyping.

STEP 5 FEEDBACK

At the end of the workshop, it is helpful to have participants provide feedback in person or through a tablet-based or paper questionnaire. This was not formally done in either of the interventions under PHARE but would have been useful to gather feedback in a standardized way, as this has been helpful in other participatory processes led by PSI. Questions should focus on participant likes, criticisms, suggestions for improvement and questions about the process.

 **WHO:** If done in person, it is best to have someone who was not involved in the workshops collect feedback.

 **WHEN:** At the end of each workshop during the Ideation Phase.

STEP 6 ITERATION

Each phase of the participatory process is an important learning opportunity, where target audiences and influencers need to remain co-producers of the intervention design, as opposed to just being “engaged” in the process. Insights gathered from participants and communities during Inspiration and Ideation may reinforce cultural norms and biases. Design workshops provide a space for facilitators and participants to observe these dynamics and question whether adaptations are needed. In addition, the team may learn during the Implementation phase that key information was missed during the Ideation and prototyping phases. Teams should remain flexible and allow for modifications of the program design throughout all three phases.

Given the availability of time and funds, program teams can decide to take a step back to the Ideation Phase and include additional participants in a workshop. In the case of Sarari, with more time, the team could have invited male and female religious leaders to discuss their perspectives and learn from one another to further improve the intervention.

 **WHO:** Program Team

 **WHEN:** Ideation, Prototyping and Implementation Phases.



SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR FEEDBACK PROCESS

- How did you feel sharing your point of view?
- Did you feel heard by the facilitator and by other participants?
- Do you feel like you have ownership of the workshop outcomes?
- How was the overall group dynamic?
- What did you like about the workshops?
- What would you do differently?
- What aspects of the workshop did you dislike?
- Do you have any ideas for how to address [this] challenge?
- Do you have any questions about the process?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Aside from reinforcing the value of participatory processes in program design, Niger’s Sarari and Burkina Faso’s Pèrè Burkinbila projects also yielded the following key takeaways:

- Since the participatory approach is a co-production, it is necessary to build a strong foundation during the initial stages by finding the right people who are willing to be involved in an equal and reciprocal partnership in the process.
- Key influencers may not be identified until later in the process (e.g., female religious leaders in Niger) but they should be included in all subsequent co-production workshops. The process should be iterative and program teams must be receptive to adapting their intervention as well as their methodology throughout the process. It is important to allow sufficient time for learning and adaptation to fully benefit from this iterative process.
- Facilitators should look for how power and gender dynamics play out at each stage of the process. Continual adaptation to address these dynamics is key to a successful project outcome.
- Involving non-traditional actors, who are neither from the target audience nor key influencers, can bring unique and fresh perspectives to solving a challenge. A participatory process that involves only target audiences and their key influencers offers a cognitively narrow view of the problem, making it difficult to break down established pre-conceptions. This is especially true when designing with those who experience the problem. Introducing non-traditional actors can bring new ideas and a diversity of perspectives.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Information for Transform/PHARE](#)
- [Information for Sarari](#)
- [Information for Pèrè Burkinbila](#)
- [The Field Guide to HCD](#)
- [HCD Methods](#)
- [Process Brief on Power Dynamics by Transform/PHARE](#)

Promoting Health- Adjusting the Reproductive Environment (Transform/PHARE) is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This brief is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This brief was prepared by PSI for USAID, Contract Number AID-OAA-TO-15-00037. The contents are the sole responsibility of PSI and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.