

EngenderHealth ICFP 2022 Abstract

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Abstract title

Increasing Demand and Accountability for Postabortion Care and Comprehensive Abortion Care through Partnerships with Local and International Nongovernmental Organizations: A Zanzibar Case Study

Significance/background

Despite significant reductions in maternal deaths from 279 per 100,000 live births in 2011 to 187 per 100,000 live births in 2015/2016, unsafe abortion, which comprises 16% of maternal deaths in Zanzibar, remains a critical challenge (Guttmacher 2021). While the policy and operational environment for the provision of quality postabortion care (PAC) has improved, several sociocultural and religious beliefs, traditions, as well as myths and misconceptions inhibit the use of services (Norms, 2016).

Zanzibar's Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) Act provides a mandate that allows for more meaningful NGO engagement in the implementation of programs, including those supporting PAC interventions. Embracing the potential to sustain PAC program gains through the government-supported mandate, EngenderHealth partnered with two local NGOs, Zanzibar Fighting against Youth Challenges Organization (ZAFAYCO) and Zanzibar Nurses Association (ZANA), to implement the Expand Access to Postabortion Care in Zanzibar (Expand PAC) project. Through ExpandPAC, we aimed to strengthen local NGOs' capacity in policy advocacy and accountability of PAC and comprehensive abortion care (CAC). We also aimed to generate evidence to inform programming, mobilize PAC clients for services by addressing myths and misconceptions, and advocate for an improved national environment for the provision of PAC and CAC in Zanzibar.

Advocacy intervention/activity tested

In 2021, EngenderHealth trained two local NGOs, ZAFAYCO and ZANA, on policy advocacy and accountability monitoring for PAC and CAC. These organizations worked with local PAC and CAC champions, established open dialogues, and successfully advocated for the prioritization of and resource allocations for PAC and CAC interventions in national and district plans. The project also worked with community members and religious and political leaders to address myths and misconceptions related to abortion. EngenderHealth helped local organizations integrate a gender, youth, and social inclusion (GYSI) lens into programming and supported the development of a local-driven transition plan to sustain achievements.

Methodology

Between January 2020 and December 2021, EngenderHealth collaborated with local partners and government stakeholders to create an enabling environment by implementing advocacy and accountability interventions and by strengthening health systems to plan, deliver, and monitor gender-equitable, youth-friendly PAC and CAC. EngenderHealth conducted a partner mapping that identified the two local organizations (ZAFAYCO and ZANA) and completed organization capacity assessments to identify areas for strengthening. EngenderHealth also conducted a values clarification activity for abortion attitude transformation focused on increasing advocacy and accountability monitoring for services. EngenderHealth similarly conducted a GYSI training to help organizations integrate GYSI throughout programming. The NGOs supported four community and national dialogues targeting girls, women, and men in three districts, reaching over 180 influential people. The local organizations worked with 30 PAC and CAC community- and facility-level champions identified by EngenderHealth to conduct social media campaigns, influence resource allocations, and drive the PAC and CAC agenda in various fora, including with key technical working groups. Government, facility, and community stakeholders (including rural women) co-designed the transition and sustainability strategy. EngenderHealth also collaborated with the NGOs to identify a high-impact, minimum package of essential PAC interventions for institutionalization to enhance efficiency and sustainability.

Results/key findings

As a result of capacity strengthening efforts in policy advocacy and close collaboration with the government, ZAFAYCO and ZANA were instrumental to supporting ExpandPAC in five critical areas. First, these NGOs organized open PAC and CAC dialogues at national and community levels, for the first time in Zanzibar, reaching 180 influential participants. Second, they established a network of 30 PAC peer educators at community and facility levels to amplify the voices and mobilize girls and young women to access PAC and CAC. With support from EngenderHealth, ZAFAYCO and ZANA uploaded relevant PAC and CAC audio-visual messages onto their social media platforms, reaching approximately 15,000 people over three months in 2021. Third, through their understanding of the local context and close ties with community and religious leaders, ZAFAYCO and ZANA were able to collect evidence related to the pathways for clandestine abortions to inform future PAC and CAC strategies and programs. Fourth, ZAFAYCO and ZANA successfully advocated with district health management teams during budget planning processes to include PAC and CAC activities in comprehensive council health plans; as a result, all 11 districts included at least one PAC activity in their 2021/2022 plans—an important milestone for sustainability. Finally, by increasing the visibility of PAC and CAC, facilitating community dialogues, and supporting health systems strengthening interventions, ZAFAYCO and ZANA contributed to an increase in uptake of PAC from 1,458 clients in 2020 to 2,913 clients in 2021, with an 86% adoption rate of contraception through PAC.

Policy or program implications/lessons

Local NGOs and advocates are instrumental to sustaining advocacy outcomes in Zanzibar. However, capacity to influence decisions at national and sub-national levels and to mobilize communities is key. Thus, meaningful engagement and tailored capacity strengthening is critical for creating local ownership and driving the advocacy agenda. Strong local NGOs may be better suited than international NGOs or global partners to finding advocacy entry points, leveraging

existing avenues, and influencing PAC and CAC laws, policies, and budgets. Such local organizations and local champions are also better positioned to reach marginalized populations and underserved groups in hard-to-reach locations, such as youth and people living with disabilities. Partnerships with local NGOs and advocates or champions can increase value for money and can help ensure programs are efficient, adaptable, resilient, and responsive to local systems—which in turn can enhance the sustainability of advocacy efforts.

Long-term funding and capacity strengthening support is necessary to sustain local NGO efforts beyond the life of the project. The success of ExpandPAC's advocacy efforts came as a result of EngenderHealth's partnerships with the Government of Zanzibar and local organizations and activities focused on enhancing advocacy and accountability capacities as well as strengthening health systems focused on integrating PAC and CAC with contraception care.