

Executive Summary

Ensuring that women around the world have access to high-quality family planning (FP) information, services, and commodities requires commitments such as those made as part of Family Planning 2020 (FP2020). However, a myriad of bottlenecks, including diversion of funds due to competing priorities, delays and leakages of resources, limited contraceptive choice, poor quality service provision, and inadequate protection of women's rights, can prevent these commitments from translating into real progress in family planning access, quality, and rights. Further, limited resources and disincentives often limit government efforts to monitor and address these problems. New solutions are needed.

In recent years, accountability initiatives led by citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) have proliferated, particularly in the health and education sectors. These initiatives, also referred to as social accountability (SAC) initiatives, are designed to empower citizens and ensure that government policy, spending, and services are high-quality, efficient, and responsive to citizens' needs. There is growing evidence that when appropriately designed and implemented these interventions produce important results including greater citizen agency and engagement, higher quality and more appropriate services, improved provider performance, increased service utilization, more efficient allocation and use of resources, and improved development outcomes. With appropriate support, social accountability initiatives in the FP sector can address bottlenecks and help FP programs achieve their goals.

This study – led by the Results for Development Institute (R4D) with generous support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation – was designed to identify options to support stronger monitoring and accountability (M&A), particularly social accountability, around Family Planning 2020 and family planning more broadly.

Options for strengthening social accountability around family planning

To inform the design of these options, R4D participated in numerous FP events and activities, interviewed major stakeholders in the FP community, reviewed the literature on family planning monitoring and accountability, and benchmarked M&A efforts around comparable international initiatives in other fields. In addition, in February and April 2013, R4D teams made visits to India, Indonesia, Senegal, and Uganda to observe family planning activities on the ground, assess the plans and early impact of FP2020 at country level, and consider new ways in which M&A could be strengthened.

Overall, R4D's fact-finding and analysis suggest that significant progress is being made in family planning monitoring and accountability, in great part thanks to FP2020's focus on M&A. Over the past year, FP2020 has established the systems and infrastructure necessary to monitor the impact of family planning programs and to strengthen accountability for the implementation of financial, policy, and programming commitments. Core indicators were selected, corresponding baseline data was collated, tracking of family planning expenditures was improved, and electronic data collection was launched in select countries. Monitoring capacity is being expanded in government agencies in 23 high fertility countries. New survey methods are being designed and tested. A yearly global report on FP2020 could help to stimulate and channel key information on progress and problems to senior decision-makers and donors, and hold them more accountable for committed funding and results. An upcoming DfID program will build civil society capacity to hold their governments to account for their commitments and to ensure that women's and girls' rights are upheld through the provision of resources, expertise, and a robust lesson learning strategy.¹

However, civil society-led (CS-led) accountability remains an underdeveloped mechanism for improving family planning, despite proven success and widespread adoption of these approaches around primary health care, basic education, and water and sanitation services. The energy and momentum created by FP2020 are an opportunity to strengthen civil society M&A; however, civil society needs

¹ DfID support to Family Planning 2020: Monitoring and accountability at global and country level – Extracted sections from the Business Case.

to be equipped to carry out sustainable M&A beyond FP2020 commitments. The report is timely given the upcoming DFID tender for CS-led accountability.

Using a “design framework” that we developed for this project, we have laid out three broad options for possible support by the Hewlett Foundation and others who wish to sponsor CS-led M&A around family planning in a number of high fertility countries in Africa and Asia. These options include: (1) M&A around national plans, funding commitments, and policies affecting family planning efforts; (2) M&A on program performance targeted at selected levels and dimensions of national family planning programs (e.g., flow of funds and contraceptive commodities from the center to the periphery; coverage and quality of service delivery); and (3) citizen voice and engagement as well as monitoring of service quality, user satisfaction, and respect for rights. Under each of these options, we have highlighted a recommended approach to capacity building, experimentation, documenting and sharing best practices, and joint learning among CSOs within and across countries.

Any of these individual options would make a significant contribution to monitoring and accountability in the sector and to improved access and quality of family planning services. If implemented together, there is even greater potential to build a consistent, cohesive, and sustainable model for the improvement of family planning worldwide. We believe that by investing in these options, or a combination of them, high fertility countries, donors, and civil society groups can spur important improvements in the design and implementation of FP programs. These options will help identify and rectify issues in FP programming and service delivery, uphold clients’ rights, and enhance the quality, appropriateness, and uptake of FP information, services, and commodities.

Some components of the options require tailoring at the country level. It is therefore critical that any option should be coordinated and led by a coalition of international organizations with substantial experience in both family planning and CS-led accountability. The design and implementation of the actual interventions will involve identifying and partnering with relevant national, subnational, and local stakeholders. To effectively implement these options, we recommend that they be carried out in a minimum of three high fertility countries, ideally in a larger number (four to six or more). Countries should be selected on the basis of need; a preliminary assessment of the key bottlenecks to faster progress in expanded family planning; commitment from country-based organizations; the current strength of civil society institutions; and donor preferences.

While the costs and efforts needed to implement the options will vary significantly across contexts, we estimate that Option 1 is the least expensive and easiest

to implement. Option 2 is likely to be the most costly but could reinforce other efforts in expenditure tracking and service delivery monitoring with large resulting benefits. Option 3 would be challenging to implement, as it would entail managing a group of CSOs and community-based organizations, but could yield enormously valuable results and lessons on how to promote citizen engagement in family planning.

Vision for the Future

The implementation of these options would contribute to a family planning sector that is widely responsive to citizen and civil society voices at the local, subnational, national, and global level. Ultimately, this would lead to a vibrant global network of civil society organizations undertaking effective accountability work around family planning and documenting, sharing, and learning from their collective experience. This network would complement and augment government-led accountability efforts, monitoring and influencing national FP policies and budgets, tracking the implementation of FP programs, service delivery, and the protection of women’s rights. Where policies, programs, and services are found lacking, civil society groups would engage communities and ensure that women’s voices are heard and advocate at the subnational, national, and global level for changes in policy and practice to improve access to and uptake of high-quality FP information, services, and commodities.

While the family planning sector does not yet have the necessary experience and skills to realize the vision described above, it is not outside of reach. The options in this paper provide a pathway for building social accountability skills and activities around family planning and creating the foundations for this vision. If the options presented in this paper are supported and social accountability for family planning developed, citizens will be better informed and more engaged around family planning, FP programs and services will improve, and women will have better access to FP information, services, and commodities that are high-quality, appropriate, and respectful of their rights.