Reproductive Health Promotion

Community-based volunteers improve access and acceptability in Yemen

The challenge

Fast population growth and a precarious health situation are major development challenges in Yemen. Maternal and neonatal mortality are among the highest in the region. They are caused by insufficient quality and accessibility of primary and secondary health care services. Inadequate health education, above all of women, and a low level of confidence in health facilities restrict demand. The outbreak of war in March 2015 has brought the already weak health system on the verge of a collapse.

Our approach

The Community-based Reproductive Health Promotion approach, supported by the Health System Strengthening Programme, aims to increase the access to reproductive health information and care in Yemen’s remote villages. The approach is based on the voluntary engagement of community members. Each community nominates a man and a woman to be trained as community health volunteers. The trainings provide the volunteers with basic skills on how to raise awareness on family planning, antenatal care and skilled birth attendance. In close cooperation with the nearest health facilities, the volunteers are also able to distribute condoms and oral contraceptives.

One volunteer is Ali Ali Ahmed, a 42-year old married Imam in a small village with a population of 650 inhabitants. Together with his female counterpart, he organizes awareness sessions every month. These provide time and space for explanations, especially on the widely spread perception that Islamic principles are contradicting the use of modern family planning methods: “I often have to explain to couples that our religion is not forbidding us to use methods for preventing pregnancies,” he says.

Results achieved so far

In 2009, the approach was introduced in five districts in Yemen. Three years later, the positive results were already impressive: the rate of use of modern contraceptives in the programme communities surpassed the rates in comparable communities by 25%. Today, 240 volunteers ensure low-threshold access to information and modern contraceptives for the mostly rural population in 120 communities. The positive results are also visible in Ali Ali Ahmed’s village and increase his motivation. “I feel that my work is very important and successful. Sometimes, even people from the neighboring villages come and ask for information about family planning and appropriate methods”.

Success Factors

- Highly respected community members are chosen as volunteers by the communities themselves – this increases their leverage, especially on sensitive issues; having a male and a female volunteer in each community further increases access and acceptability of the approach.
- Community health volunteers are connected to the nearest quality ensured health facility to facilitate referrals and obtain family planning supplies and guidance.
Impressum

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