

THE POWER OF NUMBERS: NETWORKING FOR IMPACT

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

Introduction

Why do you hear so much about networking today? Probably because it is working! Just look at the success of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the role of NGOs in securing agreement from 179 countries on a program of action, and consider the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize that was awarded to the coordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines, a coalition of more than 1,000 NGOs in 60 countries. Clearly, networks are thriving.

Networking is simply a process for initiating and maintaining contact with individuals and organizations that share or support common goals and agree to work together to achieve those goals.

Through advocacy, networks can engage in high-level dialogue with policymakers and other influential leaders on broad policy issues and national policies. For family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH), networks might identify issues for advocacy campaigns that focus on such goals as the elimination of tariffs on imported contraceptives or the enactment of a national population policy. Policy issues at the operational level are another potential focus for a campaign. Such issues might deal with the formulation of specific resource allocation and service delivery guidelines. Advocacy includes both single-issue, time-limited campaigns and ongoing work undertaken by a network around a range of issues—conducted at the national, regional, or local level.

By generating public support for reproductive health issues and linking them to other important social and economic topics under consideration by policymakers—such as poverty alleviation and job creation—a network can help change the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of major decision makers. At the same time, a network can help ensure that more appropriate and representative policies and resource allocations are in place for FP/RH activities.

Advocacy Networks at Work

KIDOG is a Turkish NGO network dedicated to improving the health, education, and legal status of women through advocacy. When KIDOG learned that the Ministry of Health had not allocated sufficient funds to maintain the current level of contraceptive commodities available through the public health system, the network went to work—fast. Within two months, KIDOG members organized a national press conference to bring the commodity issue to the attention of the media and developed a plan to target key decision makers. Their hard work paid off when they were granted a meeting with the president of Turkey to present their position on the issue. Based on a specific request made by KIDOG, President Demirel wrote to the Prime Minister to ask that funds be allocated to purchase the necessary commodities.

Advocacy is a set of targeted actions directed at decision makers in support of a specific policy issue.

Advocacy Networks are groups of organizations and individuals working together to achieve changes in policy, law, or programs for a particular issue.

The purpose of Section I of this manual is to help participants—whether they are forming a new network or solidifying an existing network—understand that effective networking for advocacy doesn't happen by itself. Before a network can even begin its advocacy efforts, members must create a network identity, strengthen and practice communication skills, define decision-making processes, and inventory the skills and resources represented among its members.