

THE POWER OF NUMBERS: NETWORKING FOR IMPACT

Supplemental Introductory Material

For two decades, advocates have worked to bring the devastating impact of poor maternal health to the forefront of the reproductive health agenda. Every year about 500,000 women die unnecessarily of causes related to pregnancy and childbirth (Hill et al., 2001). Advocacy networks have long been successful in family planning/reproductive health (FP/RH), yet there are relatively few networks working specifically to improve maternal health. There is an urgent need to initiate programs in which advocacy efforts are lacking and to continue the advocacy efforts that have already been developed.

The Safe Motherhood Initiative (1987) marked the first advocacy effort to bring together international organizations to focus global attention on increasing maternal safety and reducing the number of deaths and illnesses associated with pregnancy and childbirth. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), and the Population Council joined forces and developed the Inter-Agency Group (IAG) for Safe Motherhood to assess and recommend solutions to safe motherhood issues. In May 1999, the International Confederation of Midwives and the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics were added; and in December 1999, two developing country organizations, the Regional Prevention of Maternal Mortality Network (Africa) and the Safe Motherhood Network of Nepal, also joined the IAG. These agencies work together to raise awareness, set priorities, stimulate research, mobilize resources, provide technical assistance, and share information according to each organization's mandate. Their cooperation and commitment have enabled governments and nongovernmental (NGO) partners from more than 100 countries to act to make motherhood safer.

The White Ribbon Alliance (WRA) for Safe Motherhood is another example of a global network working to build support for safe motherhood. Formed in 1999, the group focuses its efforts on building awareness and coalitions around the world at the grassroots level. Since its inception, networks have been formed in

Advocacy Networks at Work

The Zambia White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood is a network of 13 NGOs, two government agencies and one international donor formed with the aim to contribute to the improvement of maternal health in Zambia. In May, June and July 2001, the Zambia White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood, Zambia Integrated Health Program (ZIHP), and the Maternal and Neonatal Health (MNH) Program conducted a safe motherhood competition for journalists that generated 40 entries (25 newspaper articles, 12 two-part radio broadcasts, and three TV special news broadcasts). The competition began on May 22 with an orientation for 22 journalists on key issues in maternal and newborn healthcare. Many of the submissions reported on aspects of the maternal health crisis in Zambia.

seven countries: Ghana, India, Indonesia, Malawi, Nepal, Vietnam, and Zambia. In addition to these networks, WRA is active in 20 countries.

Through advocacy, networks can engage audiences in dialogue regarding various aspects of maternal health. For example, at the national level, goals might focus on allocating resources to implement activities described in safe motherhood implementation plans. At the operational policy level, maternal health networks might work to focus on goals such as establishing training programs for midwives and other medical personnel on ways to handle obstetrical emergencies.