Challenges of Involving Men in Reproductive Health:  
A Study of NGO Programs in Southern and Eastern Asia  

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Abstract

In 1994, the UN International Conference on Population and Development called for the involvement of men in reproductive health programs. In some families, men alone determine whether the couple uses contraception. This is a major concern regarding the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Many men know little about reproductive health. Educating men is particularly important in families where women are expected to ask permission from male relatives before seeking necessary medical care. For these and other reasons, women have insisted that nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) include men in reproductive health programs. The challenge is how to include men without further limiting women’s decision-making abilities.

This presentation will primarily examine reproductive health programs for men in South and East Asia. NGOs in this region have created innovative reproductive health programs that educate, provide health services, and sensitize men regarding the benefits of shared decision-making. NGOs must also support men who are interested in sharing reproductive health responsibilities with their wives but who face familial and social pressures. Even for those men who are not convinced of the benefits of sharing power after participating in NGO programs, NGOs have nonetheless seen improved behavior in supporting contraceptive use and in supporting women's and children's healthcare needs.