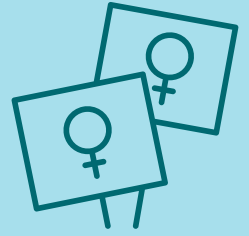


Research & Development
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Forum for Safe Motherhood
White Ribbon Alliance Pakistan Chapter



LISTENING SESSIONS:

Transforming Women's Engagement

Brief

LISTENING SESSIONS: Transforming Women's Engagement



Overview



It is becoming increasingly evident that public health interventions designed without substantive citizen input—including women, girls, and other marginalized and vulnerable populations—are unsustainable and limited in impact. The Forum for Safe Motherhood (White Ribbon Alliance Pakistan Chapter) recognizes this in its theory of change. It believes that healthcare systems and people's confidence in them improves when policy, program, and resource decisions reflect citizens' needs. This in turn leads to increased service utilization and better health.



The Forum has redefined health advocacy by incorporating community voices through its 'What Women Want' (WWW) campaign, which collected reproductive health demands from nearly 250,000 women across Pakistan.



Family planning (FP) was a key demand identified by 4.6% of the women. This underscored an urgent need to advocate with the country's policymakers to address the FP demands of women. Taking a first step in this direction, Forum for Safe Motherhood joined hands with the Costed Implementation Plan (CIP) Secretariat at Sindh's Population Welfare Department to share women's FP demands, inform the government's policy, and work towards the implementation of FP2020 task force recommendations.

What are Listening Sessions?



Like all citizens, women and girls are rightsholders with distinct family planning needs and preferences—and must not be presumed to be passive receivers of FP services. In addition, they can best articulate the challenges they face vis-à-vis practicing family planning. Meaningful and enduring change, especially at the policy and planning level is,

therefore, only possible through opportunities for direct engagement between decision-makers and women.

Listening Sessions seek to bring the right holders i.e. women and duty bearers involved in FP services planning and delivery together in a constructive dialogue in a setting where women participation is deterministic rather than tokenistic. The medium views women's voices as fundamental, and actively engages them for policy change.

How do Listening Sessions Work?



Listening sessions are designed to strengthen the demand side of FP service delivery and inform Sindh's upcoming FP2030 plan. During Listening Sessions:

- Women's suggest solutions for their FP demands raised during the WWW campaign.
- The decision-makers' listen to demands and solutions by women and respond with actions for resolution of demands and advise way forward for demands requiring high level attention.

These are divided into two sub-sessions. The first comprises around 15 women selected from among those involved earlier in the WWW campaign, whereas the second brings together district managers and government contractors involved in health and population.

Considering that women will not feel comfortable discussing family planning with men, holding of joint session is not encouraged. Rather, the women-only session appoints a spokesperson to participate in the district managers' session.

Sub-session 1: Women's Suggestions



During this session, participants discuss and propose solutions and steps with the understanding that these will be shared with district managers in the second



Listening Sessions are need of the time..

*Dr. Allahdad Rathore
DHO, Umerkot*



session, and eventually with provincial stakeholders to formulate and adapt more responsive FP policies and programs.

Sub-session 2: District Decision-makers' Feedback and Suggestions



This session articulates women's demands and associated solutions to district-level decision-makers for feedback and suggestions. Those requiring higher-level actions are recorded for presentation to provincial authorities to inform the policy development and reforms process.



What Do Listening Sessions Achieve?



The sessions help identify women-driven solutions that reflect ground realities and possess the buy-in of both communities and district-level implementers. They also bring forward clear and concrete recommendations for addressing women FP demands at both district and provincial level.

The Listening Sessions arranged by the Forum in Sindh highlighted the option of local solutions for local problems, most of which can be pursued at the district level without additional resources.



They now know what a women living in a remote desert area wants for family planning.

*Dhia Bai
Rural Women, Tharparkar*



For instance, increased coordination between health and population welfare offices and complementarity in use of available resources; came forward as the missing measure required for bringing improvement in FP services delivery and management practices at the district level.

Moreover, several key asks of the women were resolved simply because the sessions provided them a chance to express these before the district managers. These related to provision of information, increasing services availability, providing commodities regularly, ensuring provision of follow up services, and enhancing service delivery coverage.



Commitment from district managers of Health & Population Welfare to hold their monthly meetings regularly, provide more pertinent and frequent trainings to providers especially in client counselling, ensure availability of pictorial brochures in the field to address information & awareness gaps, and increase number of FP camps, etc. came forward as the critical measures required for improving FP governance at the district level.

In addition to facilitating resolution of women demands at district level, these sessions also helped in filtering issues requiring policy level interventions. In this context, the need for increased resources for setting up new & improved FP care facilities; allocating additional and specialized providers; and increasing geographic coverage of services, were identified as key areas for improving FP governance

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These sessions highlighted the importance of coordination between DoH, DPW and other stakeholders at the district level.

*Dr. Shahnawaz
DCO-NP, Qambar Shahdadkot*

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and implementation at the provincial level.

Listening Sessions – What’s Next?



Listening Sessions have come forward as an effective management practice that allows district managers and women to come together for a constructive dialogue and resolution of women’s FP related key asks. These sessions lead to resolution of majority of women’s requirements with respect to FP at district level through provision of timely feedback, and enabling district managers to take focused and timely actions especially with respect to coordination, optimum utilization of available resources, and improving services delivery in the light of what women want.

Women’s regular participation in FP management processes is the key to bringing improvement in FP services delivery and management practices, and Listening Sessions offer the ideal means for doing so. Including these sessions into district management processes will provide a mechanism for ascertaining women’s engagement in the management of FP services delivery.

In the existing system, these sessions can be made a regular part of District Health and Population Management Team (DHPMT) meetings and of the Lady Health Workers (LHWs) Support Group

meetings at the district level, as avenues for inclusion of women voices into FP governance.

Summing up, Listening Sessions demonstrate and document the manner in which women voices serve as critical policy informants and catalysts for change. They are an excellent step towards elevating women voices and incorporating women’s engagement in policy, program, and funding decisions. More importantly, they present a convenient and affordable medium for formulating and calibrating policies and programs in a manner so as to make them more responsive to women’s key asks. Such sessions make the case for citizen-led advocacy and accountability, and will be central to Government’s agendas, especially FP2030.

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Thanks to these sessions, we have now listened to the common woman and know about her choices.

*Ms. Nasreen
ADC-NP, Umerkot*

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