The global lens on gender has evolved in the past five years. Gender champions have transitioned from simply raising awareness to developing new strategies for integrating and mainstreaming gender equality throughout society. The framework of development has shifted from a needs-based to a rights-based approach, and gender equality is now acknowledged as a cornerstone of sustainable development, critical to the success of development goals.

The question is no longer “Why does gender matter?” but “How can we integrate gender equality into all of our work?” Similarly, we no longer ask whether to involve men in efforts to strengthen women’s rights and agency; we ask how we can constructively engage men in transforming harmful gender norms. In addition, organizations that promote gender equality in their programs and services are realizing they must turn the mirror on themselves and pursue greater gender equality in their internal operations and culture.

Activities

Under the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded IDEA project, Population Reference Bureau (PRB) organized or supported dozens of forums, panels, brown bag lunch discussions, and events by the Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG), a network of public and private agencies. These gatherings strengthened the global call for gender equality and focused attention on how transforming gender norms can contribute to sustainable development broadly. Experts quoted PRB’s print and online materials—including wall charts, data sheets, policy briefs, webinars, infographics, and multimedia presentations—and policymakers and advocates around the world turned to them as reliable resources.

Every year under IDEA, PRB marked the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) and 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, and has organized or supported a variety of events on child marriage. Through these events, PRB convened leaders, program experts, and advocates to strengthen collaboration and resolve for addressing these critical issues.

Through Women’s Edition, PRB worked with senior female journalists from developing countries to provide them with tools to write and broadcast strong, high-impact stories on a variety of sexual and reproductive health issues. The knowledge and confidence that Women’s Edition participants gain is often empowering, leading to more influence in their newsrooms, and, in turn, improving coverage of gender issues in the developing world.

Under IDEA, PRB brought together a wide range of partners to advance knowledge of and commitment to gender equality, through technical updates, panels, and online dissemination around major commemoration days and events. PRB has pushed the international development community to reflect on how gender equality within organizations can influence the achievement of gender equality in programs. Through a two-year activity, PRB brought gender mainstreaming—which often takes place out of the public eye—to a more public forum and helped make organizational gender equality a common objective.

With innovative data visualizations, including infographics on FGM/C, Constructive Male Engagement (selected as a featured infographic on Visualizing.org), and a series for the International Day of the Girl Child, PRB has cast familiar gender issues in a brighter light, winning new audiences and more effectively engaging policymakers. The ENGAGE presentation, “Family Planning and Gender Equality: Partners in Development,” has been used by a variety of partners to make the evidence-based case for family planning and gender equality as mutually reinforcing.
Results

Messages from “Who Speaks for Me? Ending Child Marriage” heard around the world. PRB’s brief on ending child marriage has been used as a resource nationally and internationally. USAID used the brief to inform Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff in preparation for the Violence Against Women Act, passed in March 2013. It was cited and quoted directly in UNFPA’s State of World Population 2011 report and referenced throughout the International Center for Research on Women’s publication, Solutions to End Child Marriage.

Working with high profile partners to #EndFGM. PRB assisted the State Department in organizing a high-profile commemoration of the International Day of Zero Tolerance in 2012, hosted by then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. In her clarion call to abandon the practice, Clinton cited PRB materials before an audience of more than 200, including ambassadors and representatives from several African countries. A live stream to U.S. embassies in Africa amplified the global reach and the Twitter hashtag #EndFGM generated thousands of tweets.

IGWG fosters innovation and collaboration. With IDEA funding, PRB has positioned the IGWG at the forefront of thinking and collaboration on gender equality. Through increasing the size (by over 100 percent in five years) and global reach of the IGWG community and offering regular opportunities for members to share information and ideas, PRB has created an essential forum for exchange and growth within the broader gender community.

Gender-Based Violence Task Force leads on 16 Days of Activism. The Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Task Force, which PRB co-chairs, hosted successful events commemorating 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence every year. With more than 100 attendees at each event, attention was focused on subjects ranging from abuse of women in childbirth to engaging men in ending violence to using innovative technologies to prevent domestic violence. PRB partnered and collaborated with dozens of organizations and funders, including USAID, PAHO, and CARE, to reach a wide and diverse audience.

Lessons Learned and Looking Forward

Data are powerful. PRB’s innovative infographics and ENGAGE presentations on gender-related barriers and success stories show that well-presented data can raise awareness, change minds, and drive policy action.

Gender equality is essential for achieving other development goals, and is also an important stand-alone goal. PRB’s gender work under IDEA has generated dialogue and highlighted the potential for gender-transformative programs and policies to positively affect families, communities, nations, and organizations worldwide. As the world moves from the Millennium Development Goals to the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, gender equality should be both a specific goal and integrated into the targets and achievement of other goals.

As more reproductive health and family planning initiatives adopt a rights-based approach emphasizing informed choice, inclusiveness, and equity, gender is fundamental. Gender is intimately linked to rights and equity, and a gender-sensitive perspective will enhance and advance reproductive health and family planning goals.

Over the course of the IDEA project, PRB has worked with stakeholders at the national, regional, and community levels to promote gender equality in different ways. Recognizing that context and the changing local environment matter, PRB has been a partner for change with individuals, communities, and countries.

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