



March 2011

Social Mobilization: A Powerful Component of Sustainable Change

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a Muslim women's network is leading the way forward for reproductive health by working through existing social structures to mobilize their community. Mamans An'Sar is a faith-based organization (FBO) founded in 1998 to promote and protect the rights of Muslim women and girls while teaching them the principles of Islam. Women from this network identified the Standard Days Method[®] (SDM) with CycleBeads[®] as having the potential to empower their network members through raising awareness of fertility management and the benefits of birth spacing. SDM, a natural method of family planning, is immediately acceptable in the context of their religious beliefs and serves to "open the door" to family planning. The women of Mamans An'Sar encouraged their networks to approach religious leaders in their communities to be powerful channels for disseminating reproductive health information. IRH offered technical assistance at critical moments, but it was the initiative and know-how of the Mamans An'Sar women who brought this project to fruition.

Mamans An'Sar developed a strategy to integrate health messages about birth spacing and family planning into Friday sermons. They convened Imams and other influential male leaders in the community and provided information about SDM and birth spacing. By using SDM to initiate the family planning discussion with male leaders, Mamans An'Sar was later able to encourage acceptance within the community for a broader range of family planning methods. The experience of this women's network showcases the power of social mobilization and the strength within communities to bring about change.



To document the exciting work of Mamans An'Sar, a detailed case study was commissioned by IRH. [Click here](#) to read it.

Announcements

New Briefs on Underused RH Technologies. The Caucus on New and Underused Reproductive Health Technologies is a community of practice established under the auspices of the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition, for which PATH serves as Secretariat. Caucus members developed [this series of peer-reviewed briefs](#) on underused reproductive health technologies. See the CycleBeads product brief [here](#).

In This Issue

[Social Mobilization](#)

[Announcements](#)

[Upcoming Events](#)

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New Award from the Innovation Fund. The Innovation Fund, supported by the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition, recently awarded IRH, in partnership with John Snow, Inc. (JSI) and Population Services International (PSI), a 20-month grant titled, "How to forecast product demand when there's no trend data: A guide for programs." The purpose of the project is to develop and disseminate a guide to help countries and RH/FP programs meet their forecasting needs when trend data is not available. The forecasting guide will equip programs to make the necessary assumptions on which to base projections for any method that is new and/or will be expanded considerably in a particular setting. It is anticipated that this guide will be widely applicable to new and underused methods and other reproductive health commodities for which use is expected to increase significantly.

New Award from the World Bank. IRH was recently awarded a 1-year grant by the World Bank to implement a project with the goal of strengthening the capacity of faith-based health networks to improve access to family planning (FP) information and services, emphasizing opportunities for regional scale-up. In this project, IRH and Christian Connections for International Health are partnering with the Christian Health Association of Kenya (CHAK) to strengthen family planning capacity of facility-based providers and revitalize family planning services provided by community-health workers in CHAK's network in Kenya. Through this project, health workers will be able to offer appropriate family planning information and services at the community level and refer clients to the facility as needed. Special consideration will also be given to increasing the commitment of religious leaders to mobilize community demand for family planning.

iCyclebeads Now Available in Spanish

The [iCycleBeads iPhone app](#) is now available in Spanish. With over 35 million people in the U.S. and 400 million worldwide speaking Spanish as a first language, this new feature will make this family planning option available to even more women. Based on SDM and CycleBeads, women can use iCycleBeads to monitor their fertility and prevent pregnancies. A user can see her cycle information on a virtual set of CycleBeads and on a calendar. iCycleBeads was developed by CycleTechnologies, the licensed manufacturer of CycleBeads. Read more in the [press release](#).



Upcoming Events

Come visit IRH or hear us present at the following upcoming events:

- **Symposium on mHealth strategy for Latin America, Lima, Peru, March 25-26.** Presentation: "CycleTel and iCycleBeads: Opportunities for Using Family Planning with Mobile Phones," on the Panel: Education with Mobiles: mLearning and Reproductive Health
- [National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association, Washington, DC, March 27-20, 2011](#)
- [Sex::Tech 2011, San Francisco, California, March 31-April 2.](#) Presentation:

"CycleTel™ & iCycleBeads™: Family Planning on Your Mobile Phone,"
during the session "Mobile & Social Media: The Next New Thing"

- Planned Parenthood National Conference, Washington, DC, April 7 & 8, 2011
- [Contraceptive Technology Conference](#), Boston, MA, April 13 - 16, 2011

Sincerely,
Your colleagues at IRH

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