Tékponon Jikuagou is a USAID-funded six-year project that aims to reduce unmet need for family planning in Benin through social network interventions.

Social networks & social change: New program approaches to reducing unmet need for family planning

In West Africa, after decades of programming, family planning knowledge has increased. Yet modern method use has made small gains, and unmet need for family planning remains stubbornly high. *Tékponon Jikuagou*, which loosely translates as "using all means to reduce maternal mortality," responds to persistent low rates of family planning uptake in Benin. By applying social network theory and analysis, Tékponon Jikuagou moves the focus from targeting individuals with behavior change activities to thinking of individuals as members of formal and informal networks that influence ideas and behaviors. Working through a community resource present in Benin and throughout West Africa—resilient social networks—Tékponon Jikuagou seeks to engage network actors in reflecting on and addressing the social norms and barriers within their local context which contribute to unmet need for family planning.

MODELS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Social network approaches in tandem with communication for social change approaches can be used to influence social norms and family planning attitudes and practices. The social network approach hypothesizes that once family planning ideas and use have been adopted by influential groups and individuals within a community, social interaction can accelerate the pace of diffusion by providing opportunities for social comparison, support and influence – not only for adopting a family planning method but also for continuation or switching. The communications for social change approach hypothesizes that public discussions by women and men on fertility and family planning will lead to greater social acceptance and family planning use by those desiring to space births. Combined, individual and normative changes should result and be sustained.

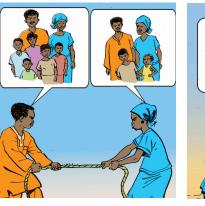## A SCALABLE PACKAGE OF SOCIAL NETWORK INTERVENTIONS

Instead of a blanket community outreach approach, social network interventions work with and through a different set of community network actors who may be more effective diffusers of new ideas and mobilizers of public dialogue than formal leaders or health workers alone.

Within the context of planning for feasible scale-up, the foundation for Tékponon Jikuagou activities is created through community social mapping, which is a participatory form of social network analysis. Social mapping identifies women's and men's groups and individuals judged most influential by their communities. These groups and individuals provide access to larger social networks. They also serve as catalysts of change, taking advantage of their roles as influencers and connectors within communities.

Using stories and activity cards, the project fosters the use of reflective dialogue to encourage women and men to determine for themselves whether their current attitudes and values are consistent with their hopes and vision for their lives, particularly as they relate to fertility, reproductive health and family planning. People are asked to share the story themes and ideas with others. Complementary radio broadcasts of Tékponon Jikuagou sessions reinforce and make use of public

platforms to share more broadly group reflective dialogue materials and discussions. Since formative research indicated limited interaction with local health providers, purposeful linking of these providers to influential groups creates new network connections, allowing information flow about family planning.

In sum, Tékponon Jikuagou maximizes the use of change agents (both individuals and groups) within social networks to facilitate comparison and reflection, to inform, and to

Illustrations, like these, help spark discussion about community or family dilemmas related to acting on child spacing desires and family planning.

model shifts to alternative behaviors, attitudes and norms. Links between change agents and others in the community are purposefully encouraged as a strategy to diffuse new ideas and discussions more broadly. Public discourse, inspired by community leaders and radio, creates an enabling environment for improved attitudes, norms and expectations.

HOW DOES THE TÉKPONON JIKUAGOU INTERVENTION DIFFER FROM CONVENTIONAL FAMILY PLANNING OUTREACH INTERVENTIONS?

On the surface, social network interventions may appear similar to conventional family planning approaches that target women and men by working through existing community structures to provide information and services. The following are ways that social network program frameworks and approaches diverge from conventional approaches.

Different Concept

- Tékponon Jikuagou is focused on unmet need rather than increasing contraceptive prevalence. It seeks to create greater understanding of unmet need, breaking down the unmet need category of those who are not using family planning and do not want to become pregnant into additional categories of those who may think they are

protected when they aren't, and those who feel they are unable to use family planning even when they wish they could. This framework facilitates better understanding of the dynamic nature of unmet need and allows creation of program responses to address each unmet need category.

- Tékponon Jikuagou identifies and addresses gender and other social factors that influence unmet need, e.g., stigma associated with family planning discussions and use of family planning, what is appropriate to discuss and with whom, fertility preferences, and household and couple decision-making around reproductive health and child spacing.

- Tékponon Jikuagou brings a scale-up mindset to intervention design, emphasizing feasibility and cost as important criteria. Tékponon Jikuagou also creates political and technical buy-in for scale-up through establishment of a multi-sectorial national technical advisory group and zonal advisory committee.

Different Process

- In each village, Tékponon Jikuagou is working with community members and groups who are identified by their peers as influential, regardless of having formal leadership positions, in addition to working with leaders who are influential due to their formal roles (e.g. religious leaders, service providers).

ENGAGE COMMUNITIES IN SOCIAL MAPPING
Supporting Material: *Community Social Mapping Guide*

SUPPORT INFLUENTIAL GROUPS IN REFLECTIVE DIALOGUE
Supporting Material: *Catalyzer Orientation Plan, Coaching Guide, Reflective Dialogue Stories & Activity Cards*

ACT!
ENCOURAGE INFLUENTIAL INDIVIDUALS TO ACT
Supporting Material: *Facilitator Guide, Orientation Package for Influentials*

USE RADIO TO CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
Supporting Material: *Pre-recorded Stories, Community Discussions*

LINK FP PROVIDERS WITH INFLUENTIAL GROUPS
Supporting Material: *FP Invitation Cards, Campaign Orientation Guide*

AT A GLANCE: TÉKPONON JIKUAGOU IN COUFFOUETTE, AN IMAGINARY VILLAGE IN SOUTHWEST BENIN

Establishing a foundation of social network action

After an initial meeting with village leaders, Tékponon Jikuagou staff help village volunteers conduct a community social mapping exercise. Different perspectives are represented in these participatory activities, including women, men, youth, health workers, and socially marginalized groups. Through this process, community members inventory existing social groups and rank them according to their degree of influence over health and well-being in the village. A physical map is created that represents the social organization of the village (e.g. most socially important institutions in the village, most forward-thinking neighborhoods, most influential people, etc.).

Tékponon Jikuagou staff then visit selected groups and individuals to engage them in activities to address unmet need for family planning. In Couffouette, the most influential women's group, a savings and loan group, agrees to participate, as well as an influential men's group of weekly domino-

players, and a mixed sex group engaged in youth activities. Similarly, influential individuals are visited to invite them to work on issues of unmet need. In Couffouette, these influential individuals are engaged in a variety of livelihoods, including a female charcoal seller, a male temple priest, a male primary school teacher, a female traditional birth attendant, and a male elder. For groups and individuals, it is not necessarily their livelihoods or formal positions that make them influential; rather it is the advisory roles they play within the community.

A change agent from each group is oriented over three days in the use of Tékponon Jikuagou's story and activity cards and trained in participatory group facilitation skills. About six weeks later, the influential individuals are oriented for one half day about unmet need, discuss baseline study findings on social barriers stopping women and men from acting on unmet need, and commit to actions of their choosing that will help the community talk about and address the issues.

Activating the base and diffusing outward

After orientation, group change agents return home with a package of Tékponon Jikuagou materials. Each time the group

meets, time is spent on a story or activity card and related discussion. The group chooses the order in which they want to discuss the 18 different cards. At the end of each discussion, the change agent asks all group members to share with others outside the group. Sometimes other groups or individuals ask if they can borrow the materials.

About six weeks after groups begin Tékponon Jikuagou discussions, influential individuals begin to act on their commitments. A temple priest might encourage couples to discuss using family planning, for example, before a ceremony begins. A market woman might engage her regular customers in discussions of why men and women don't talk about child spacing in public. Through public actions, people see influential people talking about sensitive issues and will feel freer to talk. About once per month over several months, staff visit the change agents to encourage and build skills.

Creating a socially-enabling environment for family planning use

Once groups commence activities, radio programs begin weekly broadcasts. Pre-recorded group discussions and call-

in lines for community members allow more public expression of views. Disk jockeys promote a local family planning hotline so listeners can talk with people who are well-informed about family planning.

During their orientation, group change agents meet and exchange phone numbers with the family planning provider from the local health clinic. This resource person may visit a Tékponon Jikuagou group to talk about family planning. Providers and groups may work together to implement a family planning campaign based on social diffusion processes. Women and men in Tékponon Jikuagou groups are given 'family planning invitation cards' to share with friends and relatives not using family planning. The cards encourage people to share positive family planning experiences and seek information and services at the local health center.

Closing the Tékponon Jikuagou catalyst period

After a year of activities, all who have been actively involved come together for a celebration of service to their communities. Many will leave with a commitment to continue efforts to engage their neighbors and peers.

- Implementation of the Tékponon Jikuagou intervention is based on strategic versus community-wide participation. In a typical village, Tékponon Jikuagou activities are supported by three influential groups and five influential individuals, with the idea these people will diffuse new ideas and information to others.

- Tékponon Jikuagou's intervention goes beyond using a behavior change communication (BCC) approach that focuses on information and messages at the individual level, and catalyzes discussions among groups that help to break down family planning stigma and social norms that prevent women and men from talking about and acting on their unmet need for family planning.

POTENTIALLY DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

Although too early to know—the evaluation of the pilot social network package will be conducted in early 2015—social network approaches that work with community-identified influencers, connectors, and important social groups, offer a new way to mobilize communities to address unmet need for family planning. Tékponon Jikuagou applies a program paradigm based on strategic participation of a small set of influential actors, coupled with public discussion and diffusion of new ideas raised through reflective dialogue. A community-based approach designed with scalability in mind, this low-resource, low-technology approach has potential to reach large populations. Ultimately, the Tékponon Jikuagou approach may be effective in reducing social barriers to women and men acting on their unmet need, getting at a core but poorly-addressed issue in many family planning programs.

THE PARTNERSHIP

Tékponon Jikuagou is implemented by a consortium led by Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH), in collaboration with CARE International and Plan International (including what was previously CEDPA). IRH is responsible for overall project direction and management as well as research, monitoring, and evaluation; while CARE and Plan International in Benin are responsible for developing and implementing social network interventions.

Each partner brings unique skills and experiences to the consortium: IRH brings expertise in social network theory, measurement methods, and experience in testing and scaling up pilot interventions; CARE brings expertise in grass roots sexual and reproductive health programs, including its Social Analysis and Action approach to influencing social norms through community reflection and dialogue; and Plan brings expertise in gender to build social and cultural contexts that support women's reproductive health, and its holistic, Child-Centered Community Development approach to working with communities. Together, consortium members provide a strong foundation of experience and community knowledge from which to develop, pilot, and if effective, expand a social network approach that is scalable, systematic, and broad in transforming communities.

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