



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

Overcoming social barriers to family planning use: Harnessing community networks to address unmet need

THE CHALLENGE



In Sub-Saharan Africa, significant resources have been allocated for family planning (FP) programs, ranging from service improvement to policy advocacy activities, from mass media campaigns to peer education, and from strengthening contraceptive supply chains to expanding contraceptive choice. Yet, unmet need for FP remains high and sustained FP use remains elusive. In Benin, the situation is similar: modern FP uptake is low (9%) and unmet need for FP hovers at around 33%,¹ despite

multiple government and non-governmental efforts to increase access to information and services. Clearly other factors are at play, particularly social factors and norms that create barriers to FP use. While broad-based community mobilization could lead to community actions to address social issues, most tend to focus on communicating FP facts rather than engaging communities in reflective dialogue on the social and structural barriers related to unmet need for FP. In addition, most current initiatives are not scalable; they are either too complex or too expensive to achieve widespread impact.



Women's and men's perceptions of pregnancy risk, whether accurate or not, shape decisions related to FP use. These perceptions influence unmet need for FP—that is women and men who wish to avoid pregnancy but are not using a FP method.

The results of a baseline survey conducted in 2013 by Tekponon Jikuagou in the Mono-Couffo Department of Benin reveal the importance of social barriers to FP use. In fact, 36% of women reported that it is not acceptable to talk about family planning in public. Gender norms often underlie negative attitudes towards FP; for example 8% of women and 17% of men believe that women who use FP are promiscuous. According to the baseline findings, 11% of women reported discussing FP with their husbands in the last year and only 10% reported that they had taken action to obtain FP (e.g. talking with a health agent) during the last year.



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The baseline results suggest the importance of understanding family planning decisions from the point of individual women and men, as well as the perspective of the FP program. According to the baseline, only 13% of women believe they need a family planning method (and therefore would seek FP services). However, if we take a closer look at the data, parsing the results by *perceived* (by the woman herself) and *actual* (biological risk of pregnancy) unmet need, the data tell a different story. This view of the data suggests that over half of women (53.3%) may need FP.

This nuanced understanding of unmet need can guide the design of interventions to meet the needs of women, including those who erroneously believe they are unlikely to become pregnant and therefore are not seeking FP services or information.

To address these barriers, Tékponon Jikuagou is intervening through social networks, applying network theory and analysis to move beyond a view of women and men as individuals, to an understanding of them as members of formal and informal social networks. An approach with proven results, social network analysis (SNA) has been used to design effective HIV prevention interventions², anti-smoking campaigns for youth³, and substance abuse reduction initiatives⁴. Tékponon Jikuagou represents one of the first applications of SNA in the field of FP.


 According to baseline survey results:
13% *Perceived Need* v. **53%** *Actual Need*

The *actual need* percentage includes women who:

- are not using a method and realize they are at risk of pregnancy (11.1%),
- are using methods that do a poor job of preventing pregnancy (such as withdrawal or charms) (18.6%);
- believe they cannot get pregnant but may be wrong (because they are breastfeeding or postpartum, have infrequent sex, or are believe they are infertile) (23.6%).

EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGN: THE TÉKPONON JIKUAGOU INTERVENTION PACKAGE

Findings generated by Tékponon Jikuagou have informed the development of a package of social network activities designed to catalyze strategically-selected community groups and individuals to address gender and other social factors that silence discussion of FP use. Public

discussion of these issues has the potential to diminish barriers to considering, seeking, or using FP. Radio broadcasts of Tékponon Jikuagou stories and influential leaders who discuss issues underlying FP use, such as gender roles and cultural norms about fertility, provide support and grant permission for community members to talk and act. Creating linkages between providers, community groups, and individuals should lead to greater trust in FP services since most providers are not well-known to influential groups. These activities help build an enabling environment for social change. Tékponon Jikuagou is also incorporating a social diffusion campaign, ‘Each One Invites Three’, which has been shown to lead to significant FP uptake in Madagascar and Rwanda. The ‘Each One Invites Three’ campaign involves members of influential groups and service providers giving invitation cards to their friends not yet using FP, encouraging discussions about FP between trusted friends, and inviting them to seek information and services. If proven effective, Tékponon Jikuagou’s scalable approaches and materials will be ready to be expanded to reach more women and men in new areas through partnerships with other organizations.

SOCIAL NETWORK INTERVENTION PACKAGE

- 1


ENGAGE COMMUNITIES IN SOCIAL MAPPING

Supporting Material: *Community Social Mapping Guide*
- 2


SUPPORT INFLUENTIAL GROUPS IN REFLECTIVE DIALOGUE

Supporting Material: *Catalyzer Orientation Plan, Coaching Guide, Reflective Dialogue Stories & Activity Cards*
- 3


ENCOURAGE INFLUENTIAL INDIVIDUALS TO ACT

Supporting Material: *Facilitator Orientation Packet*
- 4

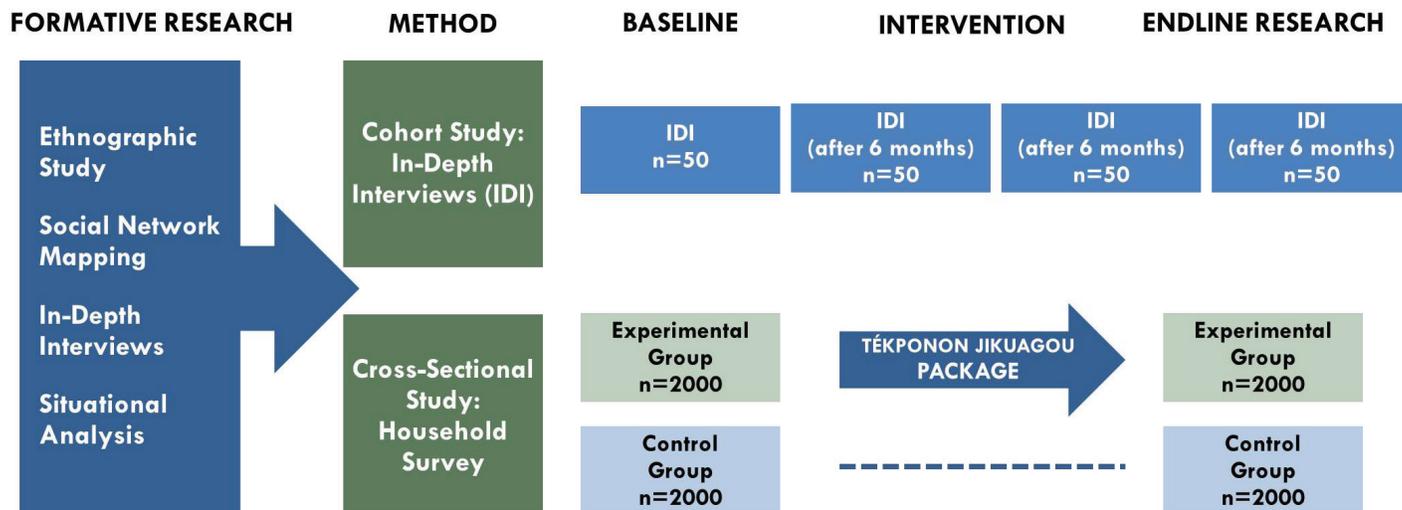

USE RADIO TO CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Supporting Material: *Pre-recorded Stories, Community Discussions, Leader Talk Shows*
- 5


LINK FP PROVIDERS WITH INFLUENTIAL GROUPS

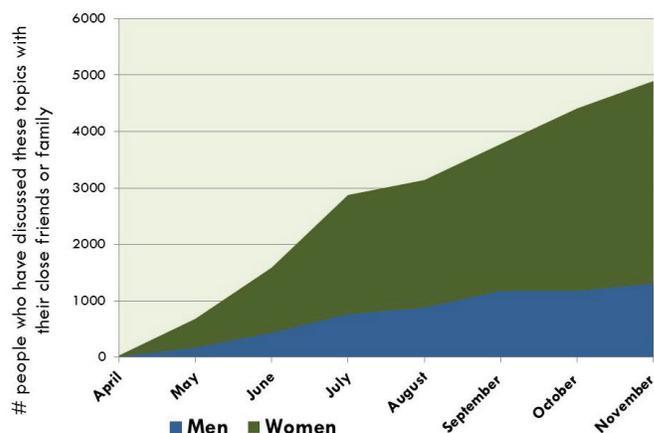
Supporting Material: *FP Invitation Cards, Campaign Orientation Guide*

TÉKPONON JIKUAGOU RESEARCH AND EVALUATION



Research Design. Target Group: Married women of reproductive age and men married to women of reproductive age.

The effectiveness of the Tékpnonon Jikuagou package of social network interventions will be evaluated using a quasi-experimental design. An embedded study will determine the cost of offering the full package, important information for scale-up. A second key objective of the Tékpnonon Jikuagou research agenda is to enhance understanding of unmet need by using social network analysis and qualitative techniques to explore the dynamic nature of unmet need from the perspective of women and men rather than service delivery organizations. To this end, a group of women and men, purposefully selected to represent men and women with met and unmet need, and those who are well-connected within their networks and those who are isolated, will be followed during the pilot phase and interviewed every six months.



Graph of diffusion effect by women and men in groups to their larger social networks. *Source: Project monitoring data*



A group of women and men participates in a community social mapping activity in Couffo.

RESULTS TO DATE

Since April 2013, 192 group catalyzers in 63 villages have been leading reflective dialogue activities with selected groups of women and men. Guided discussions with all Tékpnonon Jikuagou staff in September 2013 indicate that community social mapping has led to identification of influential groups and that most selected groups are actively engaged in discussing stories and activities that inspire reflective dialogue. Project monitoring data from March – June 2013 also indicate that social diffusion of ideas embodied in group discussions and debates are beginning to diffuse to the larger community (see graph). A key challenge is increasing men's involvement in Tékpnonon Jikuagou activities. Monitoring data shows that diffusion is less frequent among men, perhaps because they do not yet see their role in addressing unmet need for FP.

ANTICIPATED ACHIEVEMENTS BY 2016

Assuming the social network approach leads to significant reduction in social barriers to unmet need, the Tékponon Jikuagou package will be expanded to new sites.

By the end of 2016, we expect the following outcomes in areas where Tékponon Jikuagou is operating: (1) decreased gender and other social barriers to acting on unmet need, and (2) significantly more women and men with unmet need seeking FP information and services. At the social network level, women and men will perceive there is greater community approval of discussion and use of FP. At the individual level, there should be greater numbers of women and men who talk about, approve of, believe their spouse approves of, and intend to use FP.

In addition to an increased understanding of the underlying reasons for unmet need for family planning, we anticipate new evidence on: (1) the effectiveness of applying a social network approach to address unmet need, and (2) the feasibility of scaling up the Tékponon Jikuagou package to achieve significant population impact.

Furthermore, we foresee that the Tékponon Jikuagou experience will provide an evidence-based approach to community mobilization based on social networks that is less resource intensive than other approaches, and will contribute to greater efforts in developing programs that are grounded in people's realities and perceptions, and thus, are ultimately more effective.



¹ Ministère du Développement, de l'Analyse Économique et de la Prospective Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Économique (INSAE). 2013. *Benin 2011-2012 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) Final Report*. ICF International.

² Broadhead, R., Heckathorn, D., Weakliem, D., Anthony, D., Madray, H, Mills, R, Hughes, J. 1998. Harnessing Peer Networks as an Instrument for AIDS Prevention: Results from a Peer-Driven Intervention. *Public Health Reports*. Vol. 113, Supplement 1:42-56.

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³ Valente, T. 2003. Social Network Influences on Adolescent Substance Use: An Introduction. *Connections* 25(2): 11-16.

⁴ Latkin, C., Sherman, S., and Knowlton, A. 2003. HIV prevention among drug users: Outcome of a network-oriented peer outreach intervention. *Health Psychology*. Vol 22(4): 332-339.

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