

Guide for Male Engagement during Pragati Community Activities

Why Engage Men?

Recognizing that men are often key decision makers in the family, as well as key determiners of social norms more broadly, the Pragati approach includes male engagement as a key component to enhance family planning utilization, particularly with marginalized populations. Contrary to the more traditional exclusion of men from reproductive health discussions or interventions, FACT seeks to open up conversation and more equitable decision-making around family planning between couples, as well as to encourage wider shifts in social and gender norms by involving men in diffusion of games and conversations about family planning.

A couple of parameters can guide the male engagement strategy:

- The goal for involving men is to encourage more equal conversation and participation with both men and women in reproductive health, not at the expense of women's participation and voice.
- Consistent with the "reflection and action" rather than a message approach to behavior change, we are encouraging men to support exploration and reflection with their peers and in their communities.
- Given the number of absent men and husbands, it may be important to adjust the strategy to also reach migrant men.

Male Friendly Strategy – How to reach men

The FACT Project experimented with different strategies to identify and involve men with the playing of games in their communities. New implementers are encouraged to be creative and thoughtful as they develop this component of their strategy.

Possibilities include:

- Identify men who are already involved with groups of men or mixed groups and encourage them to play games
- Encourage husbands to join their wives to play games in the mothers groups
- Encourage health facility staff and / or Health Facility Operations Management Committees (HFOMCs) – local governing bodies - to play games with peers or groups.
- Consider other options to reach men including radio spots
- Work on reaching migrant men given the large proportion of absent men / husbands in some communities.

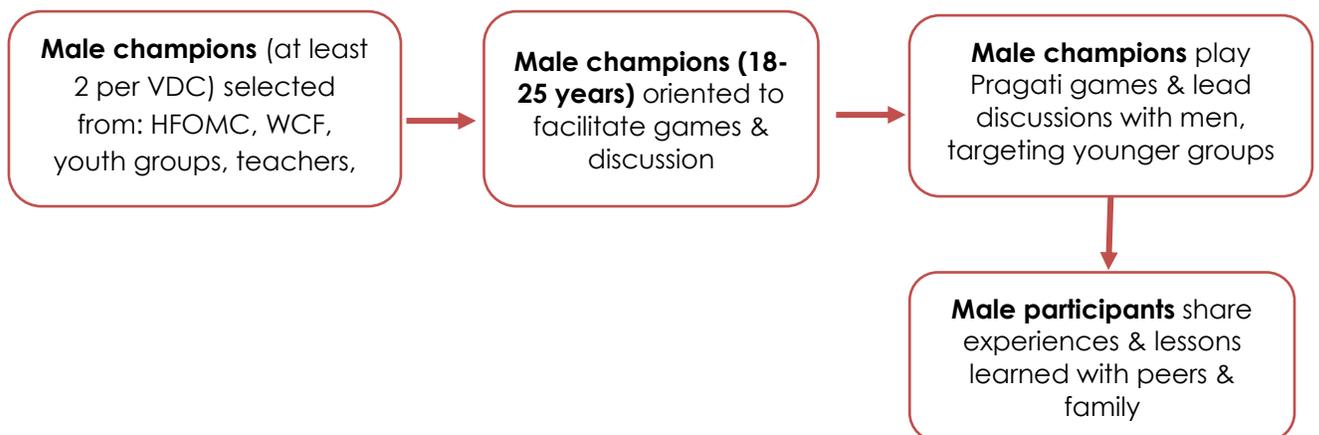
In each context, implementers must "take the temperature" for male involvement, particularly when mixing groups of men and women together. Ask questions and describe how the activities will be implemented, specifically the content of the games, with local stakeholders prior to integrating men and women to ensure all beneficiaries are comfortable in engaging with the project.

Male Champions

One strategy to engaging men with Pragati is to identify and orient male champions to facilitate Pragati games and discussions with other men in the community. Like with identifying influential people, program implementers selecting male champions should consider their level of respect, influence, and leadership in their communities with the potential of them being a positive role model for more equitable gender roles and supporters of family planning use. The FACT Project identified men who were engaged in other community groups, such as the Ward Citizen's Forum (WCF), HFOMC, and schools.

Once identified, the male champions can join the Pragati orientation with other community Pragati promoters. The orientation should emphasize practice facilitating games and reflective discussion, in addition to increasing understanding and familiarity with family planning information and topics. Project implementers or orientation facilitators will need to determine which orientation activities can be done in mixed-sex groups or whether there are activities that need to be in same-sex groups. However, experience led to the recognition that, even if not necessarily comfortable, making an effort to provide the orientation in mixed-sex groups can help break down traditional social and gender barriers and expectations associated with reproductive health. If promoters and champions are to be comfortable discussing reproductive health in mixed groups in the community, they need to begin to be comfortable with the context from the start.

Upon completion of the orientation, the male champions should receive a full set of Pragati materials similar to the mothers' group champions. They will then be encouraged to facilitate game playing and discussion with their groups and peers, specifically reaching out to young men and peer networks who are present in the community. While the FCHV is clearly a support person for the mothers' group champions, it is likely that the support for the male champions will be VDC specific, based on who and how they were selected. Support might come from health facility staff or other influential men with additional support from project staff.



What can men do - Application of male-related gender issues to Pragati games discussions

Regardless of how they are initially reached, men can be encouraged to enhance the diffusion of project content and reflection in a variety of ways.

Opportunities for peer interaction

Men can be encouraged to discuss their thoughts and reflections with their peers. Peer conversations, either individually or with groups, offer good opportunities to exchange information as well as to initiate shifts in the acceptability of family planning-associated behaviors.

Open up opportunities for mixed-sex conversations

Discussion of reproductive health issues publicly, particularly in mixed-sex groups, has been significantly stigmatized. By encouraging men to participate in groups where women also gather, playing the games can help to de-stigmatize reproductive health issues. This will then hopefully facilitate people to get their reproductive health needs, including family planning needs, met.

Provide role models for reconsidering traditional male roles

The Pragati games include reflection on gender roles between couples and in the household, reproductive choices, preference for sons, relative responsibility between men and women for pregnancy and family planning, understanding and applying fertility as it relates to family planning decisions, and understanding misconceptions about family planning methods. By adopting the inclusion of men in the Pragati approach, men are recognized as agents of change: role-modeling conversations about these issues, and by sharing their ideas and information with other men, men can begin to shift the associated social norms.

Emphasize that men's increased knowledge of fertility and family planning topics will benefit their family and community

Traditionally, men have been involved in reproductive health and gender norms as a moderately informed and somewhat outside participant. With information they can act on, men can then share the information with friends who have appropriately aged children, discourage the use of menstrual huts (*Chhapaudi*) in their communities, and be conscious of gender norms – by encouraging discussion about them with friends and families.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by involving men in playing the Pragati games, the FACT Project seeks to include men in conversations about family planning, gender and social norms, and reproductive health with their wives, family members, and peers. Through this involvement, the project aims to influence the social and gender norms associated with reproductive health and family planning to build supportive environments to improve family planning use and meet the needs of communities.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Fertility Awareness
for Community
Transformation