



Pragati: “Fertility Awareness for Quality of Life”

LOCATION

Five districts in Nepal: Bajura, Pyuthan, Rupandehi, Nuwakot, and Siraha

PARTNERS

Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University, Save the Children

DONOR

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Fertility Awareness for Community Transformation (FACT) Project (2013-2018)

FOCUS POPULATIONS

- Married and unmarried women and men (15 to 25 years old)
- Marginalized communities (Janijati, Dalit, Muslim, Chhetri)



A Participatory Fertility Awareness Intervention to Increase Family Planning Acceptability and Use

Sensitive conversations may require an enabling environment with just the right set of questions to get the ball rolling. With the aim of increasing acceptability and the use of family planning in marginalized communities in rural Nepal, the Fertility Awareness for Community Transformation (FACT) Project developed Pragati.

This set of nine community level games sparked challenging conversations around fertility and family planning, side-effects of family planning methods, and social norms driving family size and gender relations. They facilitate discussion around social and gender norms—unspoken rules that govern behavior—to challenge those norms that negatively influence access to family planning.

Through the games, participants critically reflect on social barriers, and their personal values. Pragati defines 'critical reflection' as asking participants to analyze existing assumptions about a topic through new information or experiences and deepen one's understanding in pursuit of a more refined and nuanced meaning.

Games and topics are introduced and facilitated by influential community partners to share information and promote reflection among their own family members and peers. A detailed manual, including game materials, guides Pragati influencers in facilitating the games in the community. The use of community-level networks and the inclusion of service providers encourages linkages to long-term support and care in the communities where they work.

Pragati Influencers



Health Mothers Group Champions: Deliver and promote the *Pragati* games in the community



Male Champions: Engage existing men's groups, such as Ward Citizen's Forum, to catalyze reflective conversations around social and gender norms related to family planning.



Female Community Health Volunteers: Deliver and promote the *Pragati* games in the community alongside the Health Mothers Groups champions



Roving Auxiliary Nurse Midwife: In Rupandehi, these mobile service providers played the *Pragati* games with community members to build rapport and share accurate information about family planning

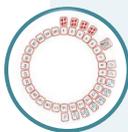
Fertility Awareness

is actionable information about fertility throughout the life course and the ability to apply this knowledge to one's own circumstances and needs. It includes basic information about the menstrual cycle, when and how pregnancy occurs, the likelihood of pregnancy from unprotected intercourse at different times during the cycle and at different life stages, and the role of male fertility.

COMPONENTS: GAMES

Menstrual Cycle Game

This game provides concrete information around fertility and the menstrual cycle. It challenges existing social norms limiting open communication about menstruation, fertility, and reproductive health. In small groups, this game visualizes the menstrual cycle: 'bleeding days,' 'fertile days,' and 'safe days.'



Son or Daughter Determination Game

Using different colored beads to represent male and female, this game demonstrates how the sex of a baby is randomly determined by the composition of men's sperm.



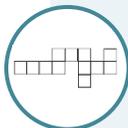
Side Effects & Method Matching Game

Recognizing that managing side effects and fear of long-term consequences are significant barriers to family planning use for many women, this game raises awareness about normal side-effects and their management.



Life Cycle Hopscotch Game

By defining hopscotch squares as different age ranges, this game encourages discussion about reproductive health decisions at different stages of life.



Hot Potato Game

While social norms in Nepal dictate that women and men should not discuss fertility, reproduction, or family planning, this game challenges those norms by promoting open conversations about the benefits of family planning. Topics include fertility, delaying first birth, and couple communication.



Agree/Disagree Game

Using two cards with the words "Agree" and "Disagree," this game challenges participants to reflect on statements related to family planning, fertility, decision making, and what contributes to a happy family.



Method Match Memory Game

This matching game asks participants to connect family planning methods and how they should be used, their effectiveness and an illustration, allowing women and men to learn more about their reproductive health options.



Side Effect Puzzle

Participants assemble a picture of a Nepali family using 20 cards that include a common side effect or a myth related to family planning methods. Through the puzzle pieces, participants distinguish between actual side effects and myths.



Role Play Game

Conversations about family planning can be difficult. This game asks participants to act out conversations about family planning with key individuals in their identified on the playing cards.





“ I have very positive thoughts about these games. It has made it a lot easier for us health workers to bring forward these messages.... I've learned things that I hadn't learnt in my 10 years as a FCHV, and that makes me very happy.”

– Radha Thapa, FCHV

Project Implementation

The Pragati games were implemented in 30 Village Development Committees* within each of the five districts from January 2017 to March 2018. Orientation was provided to promoters, health facility staff, and Health Facility Operations Management Committee members, and a structured coaching model was implemented to support promoters to facilitate the games.

- 9,315 total game sessions were held across the five districts and 118,123 contact points were made through the games.
- 78,373 points of contact (66%) were individuals identified as marginalized in their district.
- The Menstrual Cycle and Son or Daughter Determination games were the most frequently played games.
- Male champions contributed meaningfully, leading 329 games and achieving 5,737 points of contact.
- The games transcended their original mechanism of delivery and were integrated into various community groups.

Research & Evaluation

A mixed-methods, quasi-experimental study was conducted to assess the impact of the intervention on uptake and intention to use family planning. To obtain a community-level representative sample, participants were recruited across the five districts (n=3,645; 2,430 women, 1,215 men) at baseline and end-line. Complementary qualitative data was collected through 81 focus groups and in-depth interviews to describe how fertility awareness information was diffused through the community and to understand factors influencing family planning use.

Three arm research design in each district

- Pragati arm: Service provider orientations and all nine fertility awareness/family planning and social norms related games with continued FACT support & supervision
- Family planning games only arm: Service provider orientations and three family planning -related games only
- Control arm: No additional intervention

The study was designed with three research arms to test the association between fertility awareness and family planning use or intention to use family planning.

* Small community unit within a district in Nepal

Note about the findings: One district (Nuwakot) was heavily impacted by earthquake recovery efforts. As a result, the evaluation results presented are limited to the other four districts.

RESULTS

Game Acceptability

100% of the study participants reported enjoying the Pragati games. Over 97% suggested that they would recommend the games to others.

Reaching Marginalized Communities

Four out of five women from marginalized communities in the Pragati study arm reported knowing about the games. Close to 70% of women from marginalized communities played two or more games and 42% played four or more games. In the Pragati study arm, women and men from these communities played an average of 4.5 and 3.0 games, respectively.

Increased Fertility Awareness

Among participants exposed to all nine Pragati games, women's and men's knowledge of general fertility and the fertile window increased significantly from baseline. More than 90% recalled the inclusion of fertility awareness messages in the games. Additionally, there was a positive association between the number of games played and increases in individual fertility awareness scores. Men/women who played at least four Pragati games were 7.4 times** [CI: 4.3 – 12.6] more likely to have a high fertility awareness score when compared to individuals in other study arms‡.

More Positive Social Norms

Evaluation data reflected changes within community norms suggesting that the games helped to establish a supportive environment for family planning. Compared with women in the other study arms, women in the Pragati study arm were‡:

- 1.9 times** [1.5 – 2.4] more likely to report positive attitudes toward family planning in their community
- 1.6 times** [1.3 – 1.9] more likely to view communication between couples positively
- 1.4 times* [1.0 – 1.8] less likely to feel pressure to have a son

‡Controlling for district, ethnicity, religion, age, and marital status *p < 0.05; **p < 0.001

Family Planning Results

In the Pragati study arm, women's current family planning use was higher than in the other study arms, increasing from 31% at baseline to 35% at endline. Fertility awareness and acceptance of family planning norms were positively associated with increased current use of family planning.

Analyses revealed that individuals with a high fertility awareness score were 1.7 times more likely to be currently using a family planning method; women with a high acceptability of family planning were 2.1 times more likely to be currently using a family planning method.

Acceptance of family planning was also related to women's intention to use family planning. Women with high acceptability of family planning scores were 1.9 times more likely to report using a family planning method in the next three months and 3.6 times more

Predictors of Family Planning Use & Intention to Use Family Planning	
Odds Ratio‡ (95% CI)	
Impact of high 'Acceptance of family planning' score on:	
<i>Current family planning use</i>	2.1 (1.1 – 4.0)*
<i>Intention to use at 3-months</i>	1.9 (1.0 – 3.5)*
<i>Intention to use at 6-months</i>	3.6 (2.0 – 6.6)**
Impact of high 'Fertility Awareness' score on:	
<i>Current family planning use</i>	1.7 (1.0 – 2.6)*
‡Controlling for pregnancy, pregnancy intention and husbands' migration. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.001	

CONCLUSIONS

The *Pragati* games effectively sparked conversations, engaged both women and men in communities, were successful in reaching marginalized populations, and moved beyond the original implementing mechanism to reach a larger audience. Developed through an active community engagement approach and concentrating on key determinants of family planning use, such as fertility awareness, social norms, and fear of side-effects, the *Pragati* games clearly tapped into relevant themes for the participants.

At the heart of the *Pragati* games was fertility awareness as reflected through the *Menstrual Cycle*, *Lifecycle Hopscotch*, and the *Son/Daughter* games. These games provided salient messages that participants retained. As core reproductive health knowledge, fertility awareness provides women and men with information that can improve decision-making and challenge deeply embedded social norms around family planning use, menstruation, and gender roles.

The immediate impact of the *Menstrual Cycle* game was clear upon first implementation, as women insisted that the games be shared with men. Men also enjoyed the games, understood their messages, and demonstrated improved fertility awareness. Some games, particularly the *Menstrual Cycle* game, are well positioned as facilitators to introduction and education of Menstrual Hygiene Management in the community.

All communities expressed their appreciation for the games as a way to challenge the taboos of discussing reproductive health within a safe space. The fun and communal nature of game-play also provided opportunities to engage individuals from marginalized communities. Developing and implementing relevant tools to link these communities to services is essential for health development initiatives in Nepal and other settings.

POSITIONING FOR SCALE UP

Community-based champions implemented the games effectively, though as more games rolled out in more communities new opportunities emerged. Through systematic and continuous community engagement, project teams in the target districts facilitated the spread of games to schools, women's groups, and agricultural groups with the help of community influencers.

Adoption of the *Pragati* games in Nepal and beyond indicates that the relevance of the games' content and format transcends its' initial scope and in many ways the traditional health sector.

Globally funded projects in Nepal also received technical assistance to integrate the *Pragati* games such as:

- Family Planning Association of Nepal
- Helen Keller International (Suaahara Project – Nutrition)
- Save the Children (Sponsorship Program)
- Contraceptive Retail Sales (CRS) – USAID funded social marketing project

The *Pragati* manual and associated implementation materials are available at www.irh.org/pragati-fertility-awareness-games

