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STORIES FROM THE FIELD

In Ethiopia, Engaging Men in Reproductive Health Promotes Progress for All

Consultative meeting on International Women's Day underscores the role of all Ethiopians in ensuring gender equity and improving health



PHOTO: OMAR J. ROBLES

Participants in the 2010 International Women's Day celebration in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

"A new way to view gender was discussed today. We must continue to work and explore in this area more."

—Representative of Hiwot Ethiopia

The theme of this year's International Women's Day—observed worldwide on March 8—was *"Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities: Progress for All."* In Ethiopia, the USAID | Health Policy Initiative supported the Women's Affairs Office of the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) to commemorate the occasion and facilitate dialogue around engaging men and boys to promote gender equity and improve health outcomes. More than 80 representatives from government ministries, civil society organizations, USAID, and implementing partners attended the consultative meeting.

The key message was that *progress for all* requires engaging *all* Ethiopians—women and men, girls and boys—to ensure sustainable societal changes around gender equity and health. Dr. Medhin Zewdu, Director General, Office of the Minister, affirmed the government's commitment to promoting gender equity, outlined FMOH priorities, and reviewed advances in health. Next, Wz. Alemnesh, USAID gender advisor, emphasized that constructive male engagement is a key strategy for addressing gender issues by many USAID partners in Ethiopia. Participants then shared local initiatives and programs that engage men and boys. Civil society organizations and implementing partners presented programmatic evidence that confirms it is possible to change men's attitudes and practices. Personal testimonials and a Population Council multimedia feature, *Supporting Men to Support Families,* further demonstrated how effective programs have led men and boys to stand against gender-based violence; adopt behaviors that reduce the risk of HIV transmission; support maternal and child health; and promote gender equity in their personal lives, families, and communities.

During the consultative meeting, stakeholders acknowledged that programs involving men and boys are rooted in—and honor—the pioneering work and leadership of the women's movement. They also noted the need to jointly engage male and female youth to promote long-term social change. In closing, Yamrot Andualem, Head of the Women's Affairs Office (FMOH), called for increased dialogue and community-level programming around partnering with men and boys. Such programs should continue in alignment and solidarity with initiatives promoting women's empowerment, as partnering with men and boys complements efforts to achieve gender equity and improve health for all Ethiopians.

The meeting is part of the Health Policy Initiative's broader efforts to help stakeholders engage men in reproductive health, HIV, and gender issues in Ethiopia. The project is facilitating policy dialogue and assessing opportunities for inclusion of gender programming that engages men and women across ministries. The project is also supporting networking mechanisms that focus on addressing men's reproductive health needs, involving men as agents of change in their communities, and encouraging men's support for improved health of women and children.

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