

Breakthrough Conference on Postabortion Care in Francophone Africa

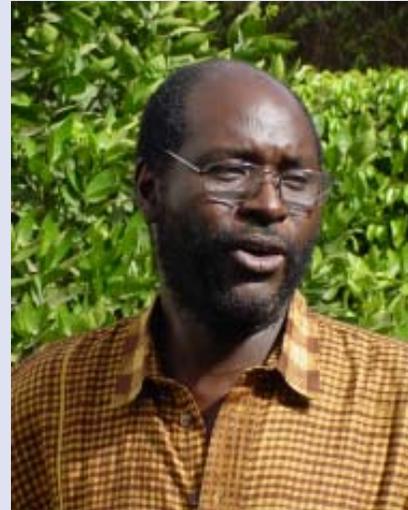
“The environment has changed tremendously in this region. When I joined this organization, you couldn’t even pronounce the words ‘family planning’ in our region. Now we’ve just completed a very successful conference attended by representatives from 17 countries on postabortion care.”

As PRIME II regional director Pape Gaye points out, countries in Francophone Africa have come a long way in recognizing the need to improve the quality and accessibility of postabortion care (PAC). From 4-7 March 2002, ministries of health, regional health organizations and US cooperating agencies joined 17 country delegations in Dakar, Senegal, for the first regional conference on PAC.

Gaye was one of the conveners of this groundbreaking meeting, a central activity in a broader regional PAC initiative. The conference was organized by the Francophone PAC secretariat housed in the Intrah/PRIME II regional office in Dakar, in collaboration with WHO and USAID. Financial support was provided by USAID’s Office of Population, Africa Bureau; USAID Missions in the region through cooperating agencies; and other donors.

Over the four days of the conference, speaker after speaker rose to emphasize the urgency of the risk to the lives of women who are endangered by the lack of access to quality PAC services. They also highlighted the importance of linking PAC with family planning to prevent repeat unwanted pregnancies, and with other reproductive health services. The key roles of primary providers and communities were also singled out in proposed interventions.

During the first day, participants chose from a wide-ranging curriculum offered in four mini-university sessions. The 16 topics included PAC in the context of HIV/AIDS, PAC and gender violence, new technologies in PAC, and the results of USAID’s global evaluation of PAC programs. PRIME II’s medical advisor led the sessions on minimum competencies for PAC providers, dual protection, and linkages with other reproductive health services. All of the sessions were very well



attended, and generated lively discussions culminating in the identification of pearls that distilled the participants' understanding of new and engaging ideas.

The second and third days of the conference included roundtable discussions, case studies, and the development of action plans by the country delegations, while the fourth day was largely devoted to synthesis and sharing among delegations. Two case studies presented lively and detailed expositions of PRIME II's work in Ghana, covering the themes of policy and advocacy and the integration of PAC services into national reproductive health structures.

In addition to PRIME II and PRIME partner EngenderHealth, collaborators in the conference included Advance Africa, CEFOPRE, FCI, Ipas, IPPF, JHPIEGO, the POLICY Project, the Population Council, Population Reference Bureau, and WHO. Participants are committed to building on the momentum generated by the conference, and a roundtable discussion to continue the sharing of PAC experiences among countries in the region has already been scheduled for December 2002, during the next meeting of the African Society of OB-GYN in Bamako, Mali.

The PRIME II Project works around the world to strengthen the performance of primary-care providers as they strive to improve family planning and reproductive health services in their communities.

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Intrah • School of Medicine • University of North Carolina
1700 Airport Road, Suite 300 CB 8100 • Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599-8100
Tel: 919-966-5636 • Fax: 919-966-6816 • intrah@intrah.org • www.prime2.org



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