

# TOGETHER FOR TOMORROW

## Reproductive Health Insights Across Asia, East Africa, and West Africa



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A Quarterly Summary of Content Published  
on Knowledge SUCCESS.org from  
October 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

I hope this message finds you well. As we step into a new season, it brings me great pleasure to update you on the latest developments and noteworthy achievements within our family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) community in Asia, East, and West Africa.

### **What you'll find inside**

Our commitment to fostering collaboration and sharing impactful stories remains unwavering. This quarter, we published 10 articles, which include inspiring narratives crafted by youth writers, shedding light on the invaluable contributions of young thought leaders towards the betterment of reproductive health in diverse communities.

We've had the privilege of conducting insightful interviews with trailblazing program directors who are making a significant impact in the realms of family planning and reproductive health in Asia and West Africa. These stories not only serve as a source of inspiration but also provide valuable insights we can all learn from during our collective journey of growth.

### **Why we created this quarterly summary**

More than 106,000 people visited our main website, KnowledgeSUCCESS.org, last year to find information that's useful and relevant to their programs. Yet, we understand the challenges faced by our colleagues in rural and remote areas, where high-speed internet access is limited.

And we've heard through feedback surveys that many of you would like to be able to share the content published on the website with colleagues in "offline" ways.

This quarterly publication is designed with these needs in mind. We've summarized articles to ensure a smooth and accessible reading experience. If you wish to find the full text online, URLs are included in an appendix. To optimize download time for those of you accessing this online, we've omitted images that may pose a barrier.

Your feedback is invaluable to us. We strive to enhance the accessibility of our content further. If you have thoughts or ideas on how we can improve, please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly.

To stay updated and engaged, connect with us on social media platforms such as Twitter (@fprhknowledge). We look forward to continuing this journey together and sharing the impactful stories published weekly on [knowledgesuccess.org](http://knowledgesuccess.org).

Best regards,

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Knowledge SUCCESS

# Enhancing Family Planning in Nepal: Peer Communities in the Private Sector

By Srishti Shah



**Acknowledge Diversity**



**Ensure Continuity of Peer Community**



**Utilize Chat Groups for Capacity Building**

Prioritizing the private sector is essential for addressing global contraceptive needs, with 34% of women in 36 low- and middle-income countries relying on it for modern contraception. In Nepal, 23% of women aged 15-49 access family planning services from the private sector. Despite this, private providers often lack support and operate independently. Training private providers for high-quality family planning services and systematic government engagement with the private sector are vital.

The USAID-supported MOMENTUM Private Healthcare Delivery project exemplifies how peer communities among private providers can enhance collaboration, fostering an enabling environment for high-quality family planning services in the private sector. Since May 2021, MOMENTUM Nepal has collaborated with 105 private sector service delivery points across seven municipalities in Karnali and Madhesh provinces.

The project focuses on expanding access to high-quality, person-centered family planning (FP) services, particularly for adolescents and young adults (15-29 years), by strengthening the technical and managerial capacity of private sector facility owners and providers. This includes training in Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health, administering injectable contraception, and fostering an environment that ensures respect and dignity for adolescents and youth seeking FP services.

MOMENTUM Nepal implemented a capacity-strengthening initiative through monthly provider cluster meetings, involving approximately 17 private sector providers and owners in each of the six established clusters. These gatherings focused on improving the quality of FP services to young people, addressing challenges such as counseling, procedure standards, confidentiality, and stock maintenance. Over time, these meetings transformed into supportive peer communities, fostering positive changes in values, attitudes, and practices.

Recognizing the value of peer communities established through monthly provider cluster meetings, MOMENTUM Nepal continues this approach as it expands to over 800 additional private health facilities and pharmacies. Supported private providers and owners emphasize the importance of these peer communities in sustaining positive changes, not only in quality improvement and business growth but also in consolidating the private sector's presence and voicing priorities to local government authorities.

***“Be open to adaptations.”***

# Welcome Our New East Africa KM Officer

By Brian Mutebi, Collins Otieno, and Kiya Myers

Collins Otieno, the Knowledge Management Officer for Knowledge SUCCESS in East Africa, brings a diverse background in graphics design, education for sustainability, and extensive experience in family planning (FP) and sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Serving as co-chair for the NextGen RH community of practice, Collins has facilitated sessions on youth-led family planning programs and hosted events focusing on adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health (AYSRH).

Collins joined Knowledge SUCCESS in April 2023, with a master's degree in Education for Sustainability and certificates in program management and human-centered design. His role includes fostering awareness of knowledge management's value within TheCollaborative, a community of FP and SRH professionals in East Africa, where he has organized knowledge exchange events and discussions on various topics, including climate change's impact on SRH and

government roles in Population, Health, and Environment (PHE) regional agendas. His career journey spans communications, policy advocacy, behavior change communication, and demand generation for family planning services, providing him with a unique perspective in the knowledge management space. Passionate about family planning and SRH as a means to help individuals define and achieve life goals, Collins is excited about applying knowledge management practices in FP and SRH programs in East Africa.

He aims to demonstrate the relevance and value of knowledge management. Collins envisions a future where professionals and organizations actively document, package, and disseminate knowledge, contributing to the development of content about FP and SRH programs in Africa. While acknowledging the challenges of his role, Collins is determined to make a meaningful impact by encouraging intentional use of knowledge management practices across the region.

## AYSRH in Bangladesh: Navigating Challenges

By Sardar Ronie and Kiya Myers

In a society deeply rooted in traditional family customs, it is not common for low- and middle-income families, who live with their parents and siblings together to discuss family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) practices, it remains a taboo. Approximately, 38 million women and girls get married before they reach 18. And of them, 24 percent give birth before the age of 18. Young people, particularly teenage girls, often struggle to assert their opinions to make difficult FP/RH decisions about their bodies.

Research findings further demonstrate that the substantial obstacles and associated stigma, related to cultural norms and taboos, feelings of shame and the associated stigma, and religious constraints hinder the dissemination of information on sexuality within secondary and higher secondary schools in Bangladesh. The country has the 8th highest prevalence of adolescent marriage globally, with 38 million women marrying before 18, and 24% giving birth before 18.

Gender-based violence, cultural barriers, and lack of comprehensive sexuality education contribute to these challenges. Despite this, Bangladesh has made strides, reducing fertility rates and increasing contraceptive use. Family Welfare Assistants have been crucial in addressing challenges. As Bangladesh prioritizes youth engagement in family planning, comprehensive SRHR information becomes crucial for education, reducing healthcare costs, promoting gender equality, and fostering economic growth.

Shahin Sheikh and Nusrat Akter, aliases used for a young couple, defied societal norms and left home to pursue their love. They settled in Dhaka, taking odd jobs to survive. After months, they realized the limitations of love in providing stability and returned home. Facing societal pressure, they agreed to get married, transforming their lives. This story mirrors broader issues in youth access to FP and SRH in Bangladesh.

# TWELVE YEARS OF CHALLENGES AND SUCCESS

By Aissatou Thioye and Marie Ba

**“From the start, it was always meant to be a partnership and not a project.”**

A few weeks before the annual meeting of the Ouagadougou Partnership (OP) was held from December 11 to 13 in Abidjan, we interviewed Marie Ba, the director of the Ouagadougou Partnership Coordination Unit (OPCU). Ms. Ba is a powerful voice for the well-being of West African communities, especially women and girls, and has a great passion for the cause she defends. In this interview, she shares with us the partnership's journey. Ms. Ba lifts the veil on the OP's successes and challenges, 12 years after its founding.

*Please note: This interview is available online with audio content in English and French.*

Despite initial challenges, Marie Ba attributes the success of OP to effective secretariat management, resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement. The OP's achievements in contraceptive prevalence rates, additional users, service quality, and data are highlighted, with emphasis on its unique regional approach tailored to the diverse values and norms of the nine participating countries in the region.

Marie underscores the evolution of discussions around family planning, increased focus on integrating young people, and the significance of meeting the needs of women. Challenges ahead include coordinating diverse opinions, maintaining diplomacy, and addressing socio-cultural barriers. Marie also shares strategies to enhance the employability of youth, emphasizing paid roles and institutional capacity building. The interview explores the OPCU's role in fostering coordination, maintaining neutrality, and ensuring transparency among stakeholders.

Looking forward, the OPCU aims to prioritize decentralization, equity, and inclusion. Efforts to amplify the voices of civil society, representation on the partnership board, and the transition from international to local hosting signify a commitment to decentralization. Listen to segmented clips of the interview on our Knowledge SUCCESS site.

# Exploring Family Planning and Reproductive Health In East Africa

By Brian Mutebi

Making informed decisions in family planning is crucial, given the individualized nature of needs, preferences, and circumstances. Seeking guidance from healthcare professionals, such as doctors and nurses, ensures accurate information about various family planning options, their effectiveness, and associated risks. This approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of contraceptive methods like condoms, IUDs, pills, injectables, and counseling services.

Aside from the gap in male partner involvement, the Ministry of Health in Kenya is employing innovative strategies, such as prioritizing couples attending clinical visits together. Lisa MaryAnne, a social impact consultant, and youth advocate for maternal health shares her journey, emphasizing the importance of empowering communities, opposition monitoring, and the need for small wins in achieving sustainable change in family planning and reproductive health.

Economic empowerment and skills development are identified as crucial elements for young people, addressing the complex interplay between socio-economic factors and reproductive health decisions. Amid growing opposition to family planning globally, the focus remains on movement building and proactive efforts to create a better future for diverse populations.

The interview concludes by emphasizing the significance of consulting professionals, the availability of diverse family planning methods, and the power individuals hold in shaping their reproductive future. Ultimately, the discussion underscores the transformative impact that small wins, community empowerment, and proactive measures can collectively have in reshaping the landscape of family planning and sexual reproductive health.

## Enhancing Family Planning in Kenya

By Nelson Onyimbi and Kiya Myers

The author highlights the evolving landscape of family planning and reproductive health in Kenya, shedding light on the significant progress made while addressing persisting challenges. Over the years, there have been impressive work in the reduction of unmet needs for family planning among women and teenage girls. Despite this improvement, unmet needs remain due to factors such as limited knowledge, access to family planning services, restrictive social norms, and high costs of services and commodities.

Amidst a very strained economy and a large unemployed youth population, the instinct to survive may overshadow the need for family planning services. Efforts have been made to increase awareness and availability of family planning services, with public facilities offering subsidized or free family planning commodities.

Through collaborative efforts involving the Kenyan Ministries of Health and Education, development partners, and community/faith-based organizations, awareness and access to family planning services have significantly improved nationwide. Public facilities now offer subsidized or free family planning commodities, addressing various contraceptive methods and counseling services. Despite a notable gap in male partner involvement, the Ministry of Health has implemented innovative strategies, such as prioritizing couples attending clinical visits together, to narrow this gap and provide joint family planning advice.

Despite gaps in program efficiencies, there has been an emphasis on the importance of including family planning services under Kenya's universal health coverage (UHC) program to address health disparities, reduce unintended pregnancies, and enhance women's agency over their reproductive health.

# The Fourth Annual Family Planning Resource Guide

By Natalie Aparcar and Elizabeth Tully

Knowledge SUCCESS annually curates the Family Planning Resource Guide, aligning with the evolving landscape of family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) programming. This edition showcases 17 resources from 10 implementing partners, emphasizing inclusivity by featuring materials in languages beyond English and integrating diverse perspectives. The guide serves as a valuable collection of tools and insights, fostering a sense of community and collaboration among those dedicated to expanding access to quality FP/RH services and information worldwide. Here are several resources from the guide.

- 1** From MOMENTUM Private Healthcare Delivery, there's a focus on improving health provider behavior, addressing infertility in Sub-Saharan Africa, and providing a training resource package, Person-Centered Family Planning Counseling in the Private Sector.
- 2** Breakthrough ACTION contributes resources on social and behavior change for FP/RH, including tools for youth social accountability, a course on shifting social and gender norms Training Resource Package for Family Planning (TRP), and opportunities to support SBC in FP/RH.
- 3** Data For Impact provides tools for assessing gender competency among FP providers and checklists for high-impact practices in FP. High Impact Practices Core Components Checklists: Addresses questions about defining the essential elements of High Impact Practices in family planning.
- 4** Learning Circles offers a KM training package to strengthen dialogues in global health programs, while Inside The FP Story podcast explores the fundamentals of designing and implementing family planning programming.
- 5** Research for Scalable Solutions (R4S) shares newsletters and webinars, focusing on self-care for family planning and partnering with youth for impact. These resources collectively contribute valuable insights and tools to advance FP/RH goals globally.
- 6** From Propel Health the YouthCount Model Manual and User Guide: Generating Evidence for Youth Advocacy: An Excel-based tool estimating the long-term impact of policy options related to youth sexual and reproductive health on health and economic metrics.
- 7** From MOMENTUM, learn from the experiences of some of MOMENTUM's dynamic youth partners in South Asia, and East and West Africa, working hard to put meaningful adolescent and youth engagement into practice, view Partnering with Youth for Impact: Profiles of MOMENTUM Youth Partners from Across the Globe.
- 8** From MOMENTUM, the Family Planning (FP) Resilience Checklist is an Excel-based tool to assess the extent to which voluntary family planning efforts, particularly in fragile settings, are integrating interventions to strengthen resilience of individual, couples, communities, and facilities to shocks and stresses, with the aim of scaling and sustaining demand, access, and use of family planning.

## **FOCUS ON PEOPLE- PLANET CONNECTION: DR. JOAN CASTRO**

By Kirsten Krueger and Kiya Myers

**“We need to be responsive and adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining a focus on the well-being of communities.”**

Dr. Joan L. Castro, M.D., serves as the Executive Vice-President of PATH Foundation Philippines Inc., a prominent organization dedicated to advancing health equity and innovation. In her transformative role, Dr. Castro exhibits exceptional leadership, unwavering commitment to the organization's mission, and a visionary perspective for a healthier future. Her expertise and advocacy significantly contribute to healthcare accessibility and quality improvement initiatives in the Philippines.

As a champion for healthcare solutions, Dr. Castro addresses critical health challenges, particularly those affecting underserved populations. Her innovative strategies and collaborative efforts have led to positive changes in maternal and child health, disease prevention, health education, and community engagement. Beyond being a healthcare practitioner, she serves as an inspiring figure, motivating others to join the pursuit of healthier societies.

Dr. Castro's dedication aligns with PATH Foundation Philippines Inc.'s mission, guiding others toward meaningful change. Her vision, expertise, and commitment continue to shape healthier communities in the Philippines and beyond. The interview transcript delves into Dr. Castro's background, her organization's cross-sectoral approach to health, the importance of partnerships, and the challenges faced in integrated health and environment programs.

Dr. Castro shares accomplishments, lessons learned, and emphasizes the significance of adaptation and flexibility in the ever-evolving landscape of public health. She highlights the upcoming Population, Health, and Environment (PHE) conference, fostering collaboration and learning within the PHE community of practice in the Philippines. Dr. Castro emphasized adaptation and flexibility in approaches are vital, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.



# When to Stop Publishing a Newsletter

By Anne Kott and Natalie Apcar

After three years, we're ending our popular "That One Thing" email newsletter. We share the history of why we started That One Thing in April 2020, and how we decided it was time for the newsletter to come to a close. Email newsletters are tremendously popular among projects and organizations working in family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH). Email is an effective way to reach many people: It's relatively accessible across many Internet settings and people can keep emails in their inboxes indefinitely, searching them later for information they need.

Newsletters can include a lot of information in one convenient place and they're relatively easy to pull together. But once you start an email newsletter, how do you stop? And if you end a newsletter, is it a [failure](#)? Despite initially high open rates, the click rate of "That One Thing" declined over time, indicating that subscribers were not effectively using the newsletter to access resources.

After a year of observing the data, the decision was made to discontinue "That One Thing" as it seemed to contribute to the problem it intended to solve. The background story of "That One Thing" traces back to 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic, where the sudden shift to online work and an inundation of emails posed challenges in staying updated on crucial topics, particularly in family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH). The newsletter aimed to alleviate this by providing a concise, weekly update on the most important FP/RH developments. Over its three-year span, "That One Thing" shared approximately 165 tools, resources, research articles, and noteworthy items from FP/RH organizations and projects.

**Open rate is the percentage of subscribers who open a specific email out of your total number of subscribers. Click rate is the percentage of people who click on a link or image within an email.**

## TheCollaborative's Steering Committee

By Irene Alenga and Collins Otieno

TheCollaborative," a hub for FP/RH collaboration in East Africa, benefited from an eight-member steering committee in the 2022/23 term, steering the ever-evolving landscape with insights and connecting 376 members from 16 African countries. The outgoing steering committee members played instrumental roles in guiding TheCollaborative. A few members including Shadrack Amponsah, Athnase Rukundo, Njeri Mungai, Collins Otieno, and Katanta Mulenga, shared reflections guiding TheCollaborative's 2023-24 members.

The incoming steering committee, elected to lead for the next 12 months, includes Grace Munisi (Tanzania), Henry Wasswa (Uganda), Amanda Banura (Uganda), Athnase Rukundo (Rwanda), Alliance Ishimwe (Rwanda), Keflie Yohannes (Ethiopia), Howard Akamala (Kenya), and Saraphina Ambale (Kenya). Grace, a gender and health specialist, aims to highlight gender issues in achieving FP2030 goals.

Henry, a public health professional, shares insights from FP/RH initiatives. Amanda, a journalist and youth advocate, aims to connect professionals and advocate for youth voices. Athnase, a medical doctor, values learning and networking opportunities. Alliance, the FP2030 youth focal point for Rwanda, advocates for youth inclusion. Keflie, an SRH professional from Ethiopia, is determined to lead the FP/RH agenda. Howard, a health NGO vice-chair, focuses on community health and youth access.

Saraphina, founder of Eagle Wings Organization, dedicates herself to improving SRH for young girls and women. The secretariat aims to enhance visibility and commitment, tapping into existing networks to advance country efforts and facilitating cross-country learning. With this dynamic steering committee, TheCollaborative is poised to make a positive impact in advancing family planning and reproductive health across East Africa.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This publication is made possible by the support of the American People through the U.S. Agency for International Development under the Knowledge SUCCESS (Strengthening Use, Capacity, Collaboration, Exchange, Synthesis, and Sharing) Project Cooperative Agreement No. 7200AA19CA00001 with the Johns Hopkins University. Knowledge SUCCESS is supported by USAID's Bureau for Global Health, Office of Population and Reproductive Health and led by the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs (CCP) in partnership with Amref Health Africa, The Busara Center for Behavioral Economics (Busara), and FHI 360. The information provided in this publication are the sole responsibility of Knowledge SUCCESS and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, the U.S. Government, or the Johns Hopkins University.

