2. Accountability in action: Involving women and girls as active participants and in ongoing consultation

WHAT TO DO?

↗ Donors and programs – create open and ongoing spaces to consult with the people you want to reach.

WHY DO IT?

↗ To influence and improve programming and implementation for women, through creating spaces and platforms for women to advocate for their priorities in programs.

↗ To inform women about programs and strategies that affect them.

↗ To make programs and processes less abstract and more tangible and accessible.

↗ To provide an opportunity for bi-directional exchange of information, ideas and perspectives.

↗ Fosters partnerships and collaborations between young women and decision-makers/implementers.

↗ Provides an informal accountability mechanism.

↗ Stimulates new ideas and builds shared interventions, advocacy and community-focused outcomes.

↗ Builds the leadership and advocacy of women involved, creating opportunities for them to bring positive changes, increased funding and expanded services to their communities.

WHO BENEFITS?

↗ Women and girls, who have the opportunity to hold to account and provide insight and feedback on programs and policies that affect them.

↗ Donors and programs, who can improve their services by listening to the perspectives of the women they seek to reach.

STEP-BY-STEP

1. Create a space for ongoing consultation utilizing easy and accessible means of engagement, such as WhatsApp or other social media. Follow the steps in 'How to set up a #WhatWomenWant consultation group'.

2. Convene a group of women, from the community you seek to reach, using snowball recruitment, whereby existing contacts recruit more participants from among their peers. Further, invites can go to a broader group of women through existing WhatsApp organizing groups and other virtual platforms and list-servs.

3. Encourage participants to invite other participants outside of the HIV/SRHR arena as it is critical to have diverse perspectives that span across social, educational, professional, economic, and geographic groups.

4. Engage partners (organizations, informal women's groups and women's leaders). Building the process with partners creates shared ownership, sustained investments and capitalizes on existing networks and connections.

5. Instil a sense of ownership and shared accountability for the success of the group in all participants. This sustains engagement, sharing and collective responsibility for the group tone and content.

6. Recruitment information should highlight the focus of the group. This will help participants to have clear expectations of the focus of the group. It will also allow them to decide if the group's focus is in line with their interest. For example, that it is open to all AGYW interested in issues of HIV prevention.

7. To ensure a diverse representation, it should also be highlighted that the group is open to adolescent girls and young women regardless of professional experience or education.

8. Ensure it is an open platform but moderate the initial discussion carefully. The decision-makers brought into the discussion should introduce themselves and outline their role and the project or program being discussed. The moderator should introduce relevant topics, and ensure the group feels free to also introduce relevant topics, share questions and provide feedback. You might for example ask about experiences of accessing a particular type of service, and ask follow up questions regarding specific types of providers.

IN ACTION: HEARING FROM ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

To connect donors and programs with adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in a simple and accessible way, ATHENA set up a virtual dialogue with adolescent girls and young women with the US President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) Gender Team working on DREAMS, using a WhatsApp group created for that purpose. Three PEPFAR Gender Team staff participated, providing an overview of DREAMS and PEPFAR, and participants were invited to give feedback, ask questions, and make recommendations. For example, one participant called attention to the need for programs for abused AGYW. Another asked how sexual and reproductive health and rights is framed in DREAMS programs, specifically how they are addressing reproductive justice in the area of abortion provision. PEPFAR staff were able to comment on DREAMS violence prevention programs, family planning counselling, and commented on the need for other partners to fill gaps in services. Further, PEPFAR staff offered to connect AGYW to the wider PEPFAR team and further resources on DREAMS. **This provided an opportunity for direct engagement with decision-makers to ensure AGYW are able to directly influence the implementation of programs.**

The nature of the WhatsApp focus group as an ongoing consultation tool also **enabled DREAMS as a topic to come up organically**. For example, DREAMS was mentioned by participants in discussions around: identifying the top challenge young women face in accessing HIV prevention services; PrEP research; PrEP availability; cash transfers and social grants; keeping girls in school; gender based violence programs; and messages from AGYW to decision-makers on HIV, SRHR and education.

The focus group was also asked on another occasion to provide feedback on DREAMS for PEPFAR's Ambassador Birx. The group was asked to identify DREAMS implementation issues and DREAMS implementation successes. Further, they were asked to name their solution for DREAMS. **This time sensitive, directive request for feedback was less successful than organically allowing topics like DREAMS to be brought forward on participant's terms**, suggesting that what works well is allowing AGYW to determine how and when they respond organically or giving them a moderated space to directly engage with decision-makers.