

Health Policy Plus: West Africa

Overview

For seven years, the Health Policy Plus (HP+) project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), supported ministries of health and others in the West Africa region to address HIV and a high unmet need for family planning. The project supported policy and advocacy to remove barriers to services; collaborated with stakeholders for governance and community engagement; and strengthened capacity for health planning, domestic resource mobilization, and private sector engagement. The countries supported were Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, and Togo.

Accomplishments in Family Planning

With the Ouagadougou Partnership drawing attention to family planning in the region, which has one of Africa's highest rates of unmet need and among the world's lowest rates of modern contraceptive use, HP+ engaged to address family planning access and uptake. Political support for family planning is strong—regional and global conferences have helped countries develop prioritized plans and budgets to advance family planning and task-sharing. Box 1 touches on HP+'s support with the development of costed implementation plans for family planning.

Box 1. Family Planning Costed Implementation Plans

The implementation of costed implementation plans (CIPs) in West Africa has generated results not seen before in the region. CIPs have been a foundational policy instrument, accelerating progress in funding and uptake of family planning. A prime example is Burkina Faso, where funding doubled from 15 percent in 2012 to 30 percent in 2019.

In addition to Burkina Faso, HP+ aided CIPs in Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, and Togo with technical expertise for implementing evidence-based family planning CIPs. Where costs exceeded available resources, HP+ helped secure support from subnational governments and the private sector. In 2018, HP+ facilitated a workshop with 36 mayors and leaders from seven countries to develop commitments to create budget line-items for family planning. Among participants, 16 mayors mobilized about 90 million West African francs (USD 165,314).

Task-Sharing or Task-Shifting for Increased Efficiency

Service delivery that relies on physicians limits access to family planning. Task-sharing policies

delegate some service delivery away from scarce high-level providers to mid-level providers or other trained health workers. Building on the Task-Sharing Resolution adopted at the June 2017 West African Health Organization (WAHO) assembly of ministers of health of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), HP+ supported the development of task-sharing policy documents in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Niger, and Togo. The project helped determine priorities for scaling up task-sharing alongside government, youth groups, international organizations, and donors. [Côte d'Ivoire's task-sharing policy](#) provides a model structure for similar policies in other countries. In Niger, HP+ supported the development of a strategic family planning task-sharing scale-up plan for 2020–2022 following the modification of a reproductive health/family planning law. In Burkina Faso, HP+ supported the revision of a family planning task-sharing policy, working with the health ministry to incorporate World Health Organization policies on delegating to pharmacists and user authorization for some contraceptive methods.

Generating Evidence on the Benefits of Family Planning

The [Demographic Dividend Tool](#) demonstrates how combined investments in family planning, education, and the economy can generate faster economic growth. When fertility and mortality rates fall rapidly, the proportion of the working population increases significantly compared to the number of very young dependents. HP+ worked from 2015 to 2019 with stakeholders in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Niger to use the tool to generate evidence on the economic and development outcomes from accelerated family planning uptake. HP+ helped develop and disseminate projections from the Demographic Dividend Tool at regional meetings, including meetings of the Ouagadougou Partnership, advocating for more funding for family planning in focus countries and a wider role for youth.

Engaging Youth

With more than half the region's population under the age of 20, youth should play an essential role in supporting West Africa's development goals. In 2021, HP+ partnered with TechChange, an

online learning tech firm, to provide a month-long interactive training on family planning, sexual health, and rights for over 1,000 youth advocates from nine countries throughout West Africa. The training provided youth with an understanding of the demographic dividend and focused on strategy development around advocacy issues impacting them in their own communities. Participants have remained connected through an ongoing WhatsApp group to monitor and share actions to hold government stakeholders accountable to youth-focused health policies.

Accomplishments in HIV

HP+ supports programs and policies to sustain gains in ensuring that people living with HIV get tested and remain on treatment—particularly key populations, who are at higher risk. The 2015 Dakar Declaration outlined how ECOWAS countries would increase access to HIV services for key populations, backed by policies to reduce stigma, enhance community services, build capacity to serve key populations, improve data use, and advocate for the rights of key populations. In 2018, HP+ advocated to include religious groups and faith leaders as a strategy against stigma and aided ECOWAS countries to review their plans to implement the Dakar Declaration and determine new actions to reduce new infections among key populations.

A More Robust HIV Response in Burkina Faso

Two major HIV efforts were enacted with HP+ support in Burkina Faso in recent years. In 2019, HP+ supported a transition plan, based on 2018 World Health Organization recommendations, that incorporates a generic antiretroviral drug to treat HIV and meets a need for high-quality, standardized care to reduce morbidity and mortality. In 2020, Burkina Faso's minister of health signed a decree for free HIV testing and treatment; HP+ helped draft the decree and shepherd it through for adoption. In addition to providing free HIV services, the decree included important protections for the rights of key populations and their access to services. Following this, the health ministry's Committee to Fight HIV, in collaboration



HP+ supported COVID-19 vaccination campaigns in Burkina Faso and Niger.

with HP+, initiated a revision of Burkina Faso's HIV law, improving the country's fight against the virus.

Addressing Stigma and Discrimination

HP+ provided technical and financial assistance to three civil society organizations in Burkina Faso and Togo to strengthen their citizen watch observatories, carrying out rigorous and effective community monitoring of national HIV policies in service delivery sites for people living with HIV. This work led to notable reductions in instances of stigmatization/discrimination and reductions in fee payments.

Strengthened Local Capacity

In 2022, HP+ developed a competency-based package of nine training modules on governance and management, leadership, networking, project management and resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation, and documentation of results. Two HIV-focused civil society organizations—one from Togo and the other from Burkina Faso—participated in the capacity strengthening workshop. This effort resulted in the creation of an exchange framework for the organizations to share learnings and to invite other organizations to participate.

Accomplishments in Overall Health

In addition to supporting national family planning and HIV policy efforts, HP+ also supported efforts in other health areas (such as COVID-19), with other sectors (like the private sector), and at other levels of the health system, with a greater focus at the community level.

COVID-19 Response

In Burkina Faso, HP+ coordinated national vaccination campaigns and specific vaccination days—including one at the U.S. Embassy and another at a site housing internally displaced persons. These events resulted in more than 1,000 people vaccinated. In Niger, HP+ worked with the U.S. Embassy to engage the Bank of Africa Foundation, which allocated almost USD 2,000 for the COVID-19 response.

Private Sector Engagement

Following an HP+-sponsored workshop that brought private sector leaders together, HP+ collaborated with private sector partners one-on-one in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo to identify opportunities to fund family planning as part of their corporate responsibility pledges for their core businesses. As a result, in Burkina Faso,

1.3 billion West African francs (CFA) were mobilized for contraceptive commodities, and in Niger, CFA 200 million was mobilized for the purchase of contraceptives. For the first time in West Africa, private sector engagement mobilized USD 630,000 to implement CIPs for family planning. In Togo, a private firm provided CFA 3 million for family planning and in Côte d'Ivoire a firm provided CFA 1.4 million to expand family planning access.

Integration of Community Health Workers

In 2019, in collaboration with USAID, WAHO, and others, HP+ held a regional workshop to discuss strategies to bring community health workers into the formal health system. Ministries of health from the nine West African francophone countries attended, devised recommendations to ensure this integration, and conducted advocacy targeting key decisionmakers to secure sustainable financing for it.

The Way Forward

Years of groundwork with stakeholders to strengthen their capacities in policy, advocacy, governance, and finance have helped drive policy changes in the region as stakeholders convene across sectors, form alliances, facilitate and implement evidence-based strategies, and cultivate new supporters in government and the private sector. To cement and extend these gains and to address remaining gaps, HP+ recommends that governments in the region:

- Recognize that policy change is a continuous effort of consistent engagement with communities and community service organizations (including youth organizations) to support activities and assure program accountability through good governance.
- Continue regional efforts to build the capacity of community organizations and civil society to lead development in their countries, especially to establish a cadre of experienced organizations to lead this effort. This will mean strengthening their capacities for governance and establishing mechanisms to engage government structures.
- Continue to support data for decision making, building on the HP+ activity supporting WAHO to develop and train the [West Africa Health Informatics Team](#) (WAHIT) of local health informatics experts to support ministries of health across ECOWAS.
- Continue to mobilize funding at state and national levels for the HIV response using innovative financing mechanisms, strengthen community health workers as a key element in the response, and continue task-shifting to expand resources and reach.
- Examine and scale successful examples of public-private partnerships and provide financing avenues for for-profit family planning providers.

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