

Summary and closing remarks

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"In patriarchal societies, should Family Planning programs use limited resources to further empower women or involve men? "

If the question is very clear, the answer, on the other hand, is not as obvious. Opinions are divided as shown by the arguments developed by the two sides of debaters. What can we learn from these arguments?

For those who are in favor of "further empowering women" we can highlight the following arguments:

- Empowering women allows them to act freely in the society and exercise their rights, fulfill their potential, and take up leadership.
- Giving women decision-making power has many positive social and economic consequences: helps reduce maternal and child mortality, increases voluntary use of family planning services, more educated women have lower fertility, when women are empowered that helps reduce household poverty.
- It is thus crucial that policies address women's needs and the barriers to family planning,
- Although demand side is important, actions must prioritize the supply side and provide women with i) better and safer contraceptive options, ii) a full menu of short and long-term contraceptive methods, iii) a consistent supply without stock-out, iv) quality services

For those who are in favor to "involve men" we have the following arguments:

- In patriarchal societies, men are key decision-makers, they provide social recognition, they are traditional breadwinners.
- Involving men has a ripple effect transferring to the next generation.
- Involving men can help increase women's position in the household.

- It also helps clear up myths and misconceptions (e.g., “FP is women’s matter”).
- Male involvement can play a buffer role between women and cultural custodians (e.g., mothers-in-law).
- Involving men in family planning programs, make sense culturally and morally. Culturally, we cannot ignore the context. Morally, women’s FP and SRH decisions impact their partners and their families.

It seems there is a need to have a mixed position. Even if resources are limited, it seems important, depending on the context, to see to what extent one can consider both approaches at the same time. If “empowering women” is about giving women greater access to education and higher levels of education, enabling them to access greater economic resources so they can make individual choices in matters of fertility, even there, the involvement of men is important in some contexts, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa patriarchal societies. In a recent study on the determinants of women’s socio-economic success in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, even the most educated women responded that the consent of their husband is key for them to undertake an economic activity. This is to say that although education is an important driver in empowering women, considering gender relations is particularly important in many contexts.

In conclusion, I would say: Yes, it is key to empower women, but at the same time we cannot avoid social norms and values regarding gender relations. One point raised during the debate can be considered as the main concluding idea, and both sides have agreed: “It is possible, to some extent, to find a compromise between the two positions: empower women & involve men”.