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IDENTIFYING POWER DYNAMICS AMONG TARGET AUDIENCES AND INFLUENCERS IN THE PROJECT DESIGN PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Power dynamics between influencers and target audiences can significantly affect a project's success. At times, these dynamics are anticipated, other times they are observed in the design process and sometimes they are only seen during implementation. When designing a project addressing voluntary family planning (FP), influencers play a significant role, often affecting intervention outcomes.

Transform/PHARE (hereafter referred to as PHARE), a five-year (2015–2020) project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), implemented a variety of cross-sectoral social and behavior change approaches outside of traditional health-related contexts. PHARE used innovative practices from marketing, advertising, human-centered design (HCD) and behavioral economics to address barriers to modern contraceptive use, transform attitudes about reproductive health and increase demand for voluntary FP products and services in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger.

The objective of this brief is to describe how PHARE uncovered and addressed power dynamics related to project activities to better ensure successful outcomes.

UNDERSTANDING POWER DYNAMICS

Within every human relationship, power (the ability to influence or control others) comes into play. When using HCD, project leaders must understand how these power dynamics affect participants during the inspiration, ideation and implementation phases of a project. These dynamics can either present themselves as challenges, preventing participants from contributing to the project and engaging with the work, or as opportunities to increase the influence and success of a project.

HCD is a participatory design process in which the community works with organizers to surface challenges and opportunities and generate ideas for new, effective interventions. Given the design process' focus on empathizing with communities to understand their challenges, this process can help identify power dynamics that inhibit current progress and may impact future success.

While user-centric design emphasizes the individual over the collective, HCD allows the ability to design for a community, taking the power dynamics within that community into account. By uncovering these power dynamics early in the process, organizers can address inequalities and/or use power dynamics to positively

WHAT IS HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN?

HCD is an approach to problem-solving that places the people being served and other important stakeholders at the center of the design and implementation process. This allows their needs and expectations to inform the design decisions and therefore contribute to the intervention having a greater impact.

The HCD process has three phases:

- Inspiration: learning and opening up to creative possibilities, grounded in the desires of the people being designed for;
- Ideation: idea-creation stage, testing and refining ideas, building a prototype;
- Implementation: building partnerships and getting an idea out into the world.

influence the target audience and address root causes of problems.

Programs must be sensitive to power dynamics throughout the design process, as they must be addressed not only in the final implementation model, but throughout early phases in order to avoid exacerbating or perpetuating inequalities, which may threaten the success of the project development and its ultimate outcome.

CONSIDERING POWER DYNAMICS IN PROJECT DESIGN

When using HCD, power dynamics can come into play during all phases of the design process. Prior to insight gathering and research, teams should use what they know to inform data collection and research plans (i.e. female data collectors for women, peers for young people, interviews in local language, etc.) to ensure power dynamics are considered from the beginning of the process. During the inspiration phase, focus groups and insight gathering can help create understanding of those dynamics.

Moving into the ideation phase, organizers should plan for how to limit the impact of these power dynamics when creating workshops or groups to generate ideas for interventions. For example, participants may not feel like they can express themselves if others in the workshop or design group exert power over them

implicitly or explicitly. This situation can result in a poor experience for participants, but also a weaker design process, wherein honest feedback is not provided on ideas being considered for testing. By uncovering power dynamics early, groups can be designed to avoid this and ensure engagement and input from all design group members. However, there are many instances when mixed groups are required and/or preferred; in this case, organizers will need to engage participants early in the process to make everyone comfortable despite the underlying power dynamics. One technique for addressing power dynamics between adults and youth is a power sharing exercise in which adults are asked to think about their bias/assumptions of youth and what power they could “give” to youth participants.

When using HCD for voluntary FP programming, gender is an especially important power dynamic to consider. Often in West Africa, men exert power or influence over women’s voluntary FP decision-making. Even if women are interested in FP, they may not use contraception if their partner does not encourage its use and, inversely, women may be more interested if her partner expresses support. FP interventions often must seek engagement from men to succeed in creating a favorable environment for voluntary FP uptake.

However, gender is not the only power dynamic at play. Age, status, class and many other factors can play into a person’s decision on whether to use FP. For instance, many young people look to their parents or religious leaders for advice. Hearing negative information or no information about FP from these influencers may prevent young people from using contraception. Additionally, there may be layers of influence with some of the target audiences’ influencers looking to others in the community to guide their own decision-making.

CASE STUDIES: THE IMPACT OF POWER DYNAMICS ON PROJECT DESIGN

Power dynamics are often studied within the context of business and management styles. However, power dynamics play a role in almost all human interactions. Case studies offer a perspective into how these

dynamics affect behavior and decision-making in interpersonal relationships and give facilitators insight into identifying and working within these dynamics. Detailed case studies are provided below to showcase how PHARE identified and addressed power dynamics while designing projects to increase contraception use.

DOS AND DON'TS OF POWER DYNAMICS

- DO have a strong facilitator.
- DO identify those power dynamics early on (inspiration phase) and throughout the process.
- DO consider the power dynamics at play when planning your workshop design teams.
- DO document those power dynamics.
- DON'T make assumptions about power dynamics.
- DON'T just think about gender dynamics but consider other factors (see diagram).
- DON'T be afraid to ask who influences decisions.

BURKINA FASO: PÈRE BURKINBILA

In Burkina Faso, PHARE used HCD to develop potential interventions with the aim of increasing the use of voluntary FP by young women. PHARE identified power dynamics that affect how young people make decisions about voluntary FP. By identifying these dynamics early through participatory design, they were able to create an effective approach that influenced both young men, and through them, young women to use contraception.

During the inspiration phase, PHARE interviewed women of reproductive age and non-traditional male and female social actors, such as musicians, entrepreneurs and comedians to better understand male perspectives regarding voluntary FP. PHARE confirmed that men were key influencers in women's decisions about FP yet had certain perceptions of sexuality and masculinity that affected the way they interacted with women in order to show masculinity. This influential power dynamic

in the community led PHARE to work with men, who could create an enabling environment for women to voluntarily use FP.

While young men had power and influence over young women's FP decisions, the fathers of these young men had even more influence on their sons' beliefs and behaviors. Fathers wanted support for themselves so that they could better respond to their sons' questions. PHARE identified that elders providing sage advice to the younger generation was a power dynamic that could be leveraged to educate fathers and increase their engagement with their sons about contraception use.

During the ideation phase, PHARE again worked with both male and female non-traditional actors as well as with partners from several non-governmental organizations to create unique ideas for increasing men's engagement with reproductive health. The resulting intervention was called Père Burkinbila, an activity to teach fathers to talk to their sons about voluntary FP.

Fathers were trained on ways to talk to their adolescent sons about relationships, gender equality and contraception. The project included visual aids to help the fathers in their discussions, and trained facilitators conducted house visits to help participating fathers engage with their sons. This intervention used the power dynamics of age and gender to help influence the sons' decisions and, in turn, to increase voluntary FP uptake among young women.

The project was also gender transformative, changing how some young men viewed gender roles within their households. For instance, fathers and mothers have stated some of their sons are now engaging in chores usually performed by girls, such as washing the dishes, which seems to indicate that gender norms and roles could be starting to be interpreted more openly. This may change gender power dynamics in the future, empowering more young women to make their own decisions about voluntary FP.

NIGER: SARARI

The Sarari intervention in Niger aimed to increase voluntary FP uptake among married women and to foster community support for voluntary FP and birth spacing. Using HCD, PHARE identified a number of power dynamics to consider during the design process, however additional dynamics presented themselves later in the process that affected the end results. During the inspiration phase, PHARE conducted interviews with women of reproductive age and couples to gather insights which led to the confirmation of two key influencers: young married men and religious leaders. These interviews highlighted a power dynamic in which women deferred to their husbands about whether to use FP and husbands, in turn, were strongly influenced by imams and religious leaders within their communities.

In the ideation phase, PHARE created two design teams: one team of six male influencers and one team of six women and girls. Due to gender and power dynamics, separation of male and female participants took place to allow both men and women to speak more freely while brainstorming ideas. The design teams developed three interventions for prototyping: Engaged Leaders, Leader Debates and Dede Ruwa Dede Tsaki, a financial discussion and budgeting activity.

The design process helped PHARE uncover additional important power dynamics at play, aside from gender. While implementing the Engaged Leaders intervention, PHARE realized that female religious leaders could leverage their own experiences with reproductive health and provide more practical messaging that resonated with other women. Though women viewed their husbands as key determinants in using voluntary FP, they were still influenced by the female religious leaders who were respected members of the community.

The men's group revealed other issues with power dynamics. During the ideation phase, young men and religious leaders collaborated well together and agreed to have public debates about voluntary FP. However, when it came time for the debates, the dynamics changed. Young men did not feel comfortable debating

an elder in public since it could be seen as disrespectful. To simplify the dynamics at play to gender alone was not enough; age and status within the community also needed to be taken into account. As a result of this power dynamic, the debates did not take place and organizers chose not to include the debates in future activities.

Power dynamics are also often context specific. It is important to note that within the safety of workshops, some power dynamics may not come into play. Participants may feel more comfortable speaking, even around those whom they view as having power and influence in their community. However, once participants return to public view, the rules of power come back into play. When identifying power dynamics as part of the HCD process, facilitators must consider the possibility that dynamics will change in different settings and through the design process. Prototyping interventions is an easy way to stress-test ideas in a real world setting prior to moving forward with full-scale implementation.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

When designing projects, it is critical to consider how existing and potential power balances will affect the outcome and impact of the intervention. Insight generation through observations and interviews can help uncover the power dynamics of age, gender or status so they may be addressed throughout the process.

While power dynamics should be addressed, it does not mean that design groups need to be homogenous. In some cases, it may benefit the groups to be gender-specific or age-specific, but within those groups a diversity of viewpoints and attitudes are useful for creating more effective ideas. Participants from a variety of backgrounds, religions or classes will add context and real-life experiences to ensure an output that resonates with the target audience. The goal is to encourage a wide range of ideas from all participants and help them engage with the project.

Continual adaptation to address gender and power dynamics is key to a successful project. Whenever a power imbalance is noted, it should be addressed as quickly as possible to help the subsequent phases succeed. Even when power dynamics are addressed in early phases, facilitators must continue to observe and note any dynamics that emerge in later phases and change the project accordingly. While it is important to identify existing power dynamics and possibly leverage power dynamics for a positive outcome, programmers should avoid exploiting or further reinforcing negative and unequal power dynamics during the process.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Burkina Faso Innovation Lab
- Burkina Faso Innovation Lab Final Report
- Engaging Religious Leaders in Niger

For more information, please visit:

www.psi.org/project/transformphare/

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