

Young Women's Support Groups

Women who marry young in Northern Nigeria often find themselves at the bottom of the household social hierarchy. Those women who lack social and moral support within this hierarchy, whether from husbands, co-wives, or mothers-in law, can become extremely vulnerable and isolated. In addition, they can become devoid of the self-confidence, resources and opportunities to access information and services; or to participate in the social networks vital to the creation of self-respect.

The PRRINN-MNCH programme has been awarded funds by the DFID Girls Hub initiative (a partnership between DFID and the Nike Foundation) to add a focus on young women into ongoing programme activities. This will improve health equity by increasing married young women's access to essential maternal and newborn health services (ANC, birth spacing, skilled birth attendance, and post-natal care) and to advice on reproductive health and nutrition. The programme will also help to build other assets such as financial management skills and life skills such as communication and negotiation skills. It will leverage other forms of support from outside the programme, for example business skills training, literacy programmes, or access to Islamiyya schools. The social dimensions of health will be addressed by the initiative, via an emphasis on social inclusion and the provision of social support where appropriate.

The main activities will be to:

- involve married young women in asset-building group activities led by slightly older mentors. The programme will target vulnerable, excluded, and neglected young women and provide them with social and other support;
- provide community based services through female community health extension workers who will also play a key role in identifying and supporting the young women;
- enable Facility Health Committees to support the inclusion and involvement of young married women in health and related activities; and
- provide capacity building support to local and state government teams to lead and oversee implementation of the young women's support groups initiative.

The key results to be achieved by 2013

The additional funds will enable PRRINN-MNCH to increase its end of programme (2013) coverage targets in the following areas:

- Create 2000 young women's support groups
- Increase the number of community engagement intervention sites with active community response systems to MNCH barriers from 487 to 3000
- Increase the number of maternal complications transferred to health facilities via emergency safe motherhood transport schemes from 2000 to 5000
- Increase the number of community intervention sites with doorstep health services from 13 to 200