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SUCCESS STORY

For the Youth, By the Youth: Empowering Youth for Enhanced Family Planning in Sindh, Pakistan

Youth-led Digital Survey Addresses Youth Contraception Data Gap



PHOTO: FHM Engage

Participants of the Youth Leaders Conference sit together to discuss youth preferences and more regarding contraception.

“This collaboration was a testament to our commitment to leave no voice unheard, ensuring that the diverse perspectives and experiences of the youth in Sindh were captured comprehensively. We engaged with these organizations in ongoing dialogues, aligning our goals and strategies, and forming a unified front to address the pressing issues in youth family planning.” – Sonia Surani, FHM Engage Program Manager and a co-organizer of the Youth Leaders Conference

Pakistan is world’s fifth most-populous country and has a burgeoning number of youths which currently make up about 60 percent of the total population. In addition, according to the Population Council, 35 percent of all females in Pakistan become mothers before they reach the age of 18, and 67 percent have experienced pregnancy – 69 percent of these have given birth – before they reach the age of 19. The need for youth-inclusive health systems is imperative to increase awareness and availability of contraception and to slow the rate of the growing youth population which also has other negative societal and economic repercussions including child labor, low levels of education, malnutrition, and other health problems.

USAID’s Frontier Health Markets (FHM) Engage works to strengthen health markets to improve health outcomes. In Pakistan, FHM Engage, through core consortium partner Pathfinder International, aims to increase awareness and uptake of contraception among youth by catalyzing a youth-inclusive contraceptive health market. However, the road to creating such a market is not an easy one. FHM Engage found that the nation’s Digital Health System (DHS) is missing valuable data concerning modern contraception users, in particular youth ages 15 to 29 in the region of Sindh, Pakistan’s second largest province by population size.

To address the DHS data gap around youth contraception in Sindh, FHM Engage joined together community-based organizations – including those that serve cisgender men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender populations, to ensure that voices and preferences of marginalized communities were also considered – and youth-led organizations for a Young Leaders Conference. The pioneering event engaged 250 young participants to explore youth preferences, identify existing market gaps, and delve into their own – for the youth, by the youth – potential solutions. FHM Engage also recruited and sponsored the attendance of 20 select youth delegates from a diverse group of communities across Sindh to receive trainings on ethical principles and tool piloting. These youth will serve as



PHOTO: FHM Engage



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(Top): Participants discuss topics at the FHM Engage led Youth Leaders Conference 2023. **(Bottom two):** Snapshots from the digital youth survey on addressing the DHS data gap.

researchers and support data collection from their communities.

The qualitative insights from the conference served as a platform for the launch of a youth-led, comprehensive, digital survey aimed to bridge the DHS data gap. The survey seeks to evaluate the need for contraception, determine prevalence and predictors of modern contraceptive use, and understand technological preferences of youth for obtaining family planning (FP) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services. The findings will increase understanding of youth contraception and family planning needs in Sindh and will contribute to strengthening health markets for youth by driving informed decision-making, policy formation, and healthcare interventions tailored to the unique needs of the youth. Understanding the complex landscape of youth family planning in Sindh is critical for designing effective strategies.

Unzila Nadeem, one of the participants from the Young Leaders Conference is optimistic for the survey findings:

“As a youth, I understand we are the future of Pakistan, and our decisions now impact the future of this country. I enjoyed taking part in the Young Leaders Conference because it allowed me to participate with my comrades and be a voice for change. Youth need to have a chance to be heard and understood. Now with the survey, we’re hopeful that we’re taking a step to better protect youth from pregnancy and disease. We’re taking a step to change our future – and the overall health of the people of Pakistan – for the better.”

FHM Engage is committed to ensuring that Pakistan’s health system is not only accessible but also responsive to the evolving needs and aspirations of the youth.