

fact sheet

advocacy

Key statistics:

- we provide information and services to over 4.8 million clients each year
- we help couples to avoid an estimated 5 million unwanted pregnancies each year
- we save approximately 11,000 women's lives and prevent over 159,000 infant deaths each year.

In order to achieve lasting change, people need access to services and information in an environment which is politically, economically and culturally supportive of their basic human right to good sexual and reproductive health (SRH).

Introduction

Marie Stopes International (MSI) is a rights based, non government organisation committed to supporting people's right to choose whether, and when to have children. The MSI Partnership is a global network that spans 38 countries and provides a range of SRH services, information and behaviour change programmes.

The environments in which MSI works are frequently difficult and insecure and in some of these countries exercising even basic human rights can be a struggle. Although providing family planning services to clients in these challenging settings is at the heart of what we do and saves thousands of women's lives each year, service delivery alone cannot ensure that the SRH of a particular population will significantly improve over time. In order to achieve lasting change, people need access to services and information in an environment which is politically, economically and culturally supportive of their basic human right to good SRH. To help achieve this, all of our



Working with younger clients in the Philippines

programmes feature an integrated range of *advocacy* activities which create an 'enabling environment' for SRH and which drive change, ensuring that people can exercise fully their reproductive and sexual rights.

Advocacy is often undertaken by formally recognised groups such as non government organisations (NGOs), in pursuit of a particular goal. Equally, it is also undertaken by civil society when groups form to advocate for a

particular cause, or, as is often the case, when the simple weight of public opinion about key issues exerts pressure on policy makers to make changes.

How advocacy can benefit sexual and reproductive health

Advocacy can benefit SRH by creating an enabling environment to ensure that there are continual and easily accessible SRH services, supplies and information for all and that each individual can realise and exercise their right to good SRH. MSI does this across the world by:

- creating awareness of SRH issues among the general public and other influential groups such as key opinion leaders and government policy makers
- changing attitudes towards SRH among influential groups, for instance, by lobbying for changes to be made to particular SRH-related policies
- guiding decision makers to change the policy framework in a way that leads to sustainable change for target populations
- ensuring the commitment of resources to SRH.

How Marie Stopes International uses advocacy to influence the sexual and reproductive health environment

Like other MSI Partners worldwide, our Partner in the **Philippines**, Population Services Pilipinas Inc. (PSPPI) works directly with its respective government and local groups to input into national policy. In what is an exceptionally difficult political environment for SRH, PSPPI's advocacy work has been instrumental in raising awareness of SRH issues. Just one example of this is its work with Youth Councils, enabling them to gain the support of key political leaders and officials to allow sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) for adolescents to be formally recognised. As a result, Youth Councils across the Philippines are now able to implement campaigns and activities to promote HIV/AIDS prevention among thousands of young people. The impact of this cannot be underestimated in a region where HIV rates are growing, particularly amongst young people.

MSI's Partner in **Ethiopia** is a founder member of COHRA, a network of SRHR organisations, which has created a strong national platform to advocate for SRHR service delivery, including the continuous supply of contraceptives. COHRA also builds the capacity of *Iders* (community women's social groups) to participate in advocacy meetings with high level decision makers. By helping to give a voice to such groups, Marie Stopes International Ethiopia has ensured that the needs of the whole community are acknowledged when health implementation guidelines are developed, resulting in greater numbers of women gaining access to the SRH information and services they need.

The difference that our advocacy work makes to women's lives has been shown to great effect in **Nepal**, where, until 2002, abortion was illegal. As well as risking their lives with back street abortions in the absence of safe, lawful services, women accused of seeking a termination also faced a jail sentence. MSI's Partner, Sunaulo Parivar Nepal, was part of a coalition of NGOs and women's groups who tenaciously campaigned to change this situation and who were rewarded when, as a direct result of their action, abortion was finally legalised. Since this landmark change, rates of maternal death due to unsafe abortion and rates of infant mortality have both fallen. By making their demands heard, the coalition has secured a safer environment for women throughout the Kingdom.

An organisation can advocate by itself, or as part of a network or forum working towards the same goal. Advocacy can also work on many different levels - influencing government policy through a co-ordinated campaign is one form, but there are many other activities undertaken by MSI's Partners that are important too: keeping in touch with other NGOs and community groups; forging links with government or local officials; sending information to supporters; training young people to pass information on to their peers - each such initiative forms a small building

Much of the everyday, client-focused activity of MSI's Partners has the effect of advocating for a more enabling environment for SRH.



Advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights in Ethiopia

block towards positive, sustainable change. In addition, much of the everyday, client-focused activity of MSI's Partners has the effect of advocating for a more enabling environment for SRH. Leading by example - in effect 'advocacy by doing', furthers the acceptance of SRHR. For instance, by establishing a pilot project and offering technical assistance, MSI is helping to upgrade government family planning clinics in **China**. Impressed by the Marie Stopes China You&Me centres for adolescents, health officials in the 73 million strong province of Jiangsu contracted MSI to help remodel their family planning clinic network. As a result of adopting the MSI model, existing clinics in Jiangsu are being transformed into a network of centres which are more client-focused, more accessible to clients, more cost effective and whose providers offer improved quality of care to clients.

In the **UK**, advocacy initiatives have sought to leverage increased funding for SRH work overseas from the government's Department for International Development (DFID). One

such multi-stranded project saw both print and electronic media being harnessed in a co-ordinated campaign to encourage the public to put pressure on the government to address the shortage of condoms available in Africa, Latin America and Asia; condoms being a vital component in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The campaign saw thousands of people galvanised into action to send a specially produced 'condom card' to their member of parliament, urging them to support increased funding for this. As a result of this mass action, Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for International Development, pledged to keep SRH firmly on the international agenda, with the UK government regarding the related issues of HIV/AIDS and SRH as a "very high priority". The campaign was closely followed by DFID, who later announced a £10 million contribution to the United Nations Population Fund, to provide contraception and other essential SRH supplies for developing countries.

To lend support to such national level action, MSI's advocacy teams in London and Brussels

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Women in Nepal, where a coalition of NGOs and women's groups collaborated to secure legal abortion services

provide technical assistance to MSI Partners across our global network, lending their expertise of working with influential policy makers to help Partners tackle country-specific issues. The London and Brussels teams complement the national level advocacy undertaken across the Partnership by working to ensure that SRH is firmly placed on the international development agenda. Focussing international attention on the need for SRHR

to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and by working to ensure that sufficient funding is included in European Union budgets, the teams are at the forefront of efforts to secure global advances in SRH.

For further information about advocacy work undertaken by MSI, please contact Leo Bryant, Advocacy Manager on 020 7574 7400 or email: advocacy@mariestopes.org.uk