

African Women Add their Voices to Development



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Nyokabi Ruth Musila was one of 24 participants in a workshop to strengthen the role of African women leaders in defining their countries’ priorities in family planning and reproductive health.
Photo by CEDPA

“We bring the African voice to the table in development,” says Nyokabi Ruth Musila, knowledge translation scientist at the African Institute for Policy Development (AFIDEP).

Ruth is one of 24 participants who attended a Health Policy Project workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, to strengthen women’s participation in defining country priorities for family planning and reproductive health in Africa. The three-week workshop has convened women leaders from Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Uganda to build their skills in leadership and advocacy.

“Africans are aware of what the problems are, and we should be contributing to the solutions,” Ruth explains. “I want people to appreciate the link between family planning and the larger goals: improving health and national economies,” she says. “We need to move from making commitments to implementing policies.”

Ruth, a native of Nairobi with a doctoral degree from the University of London, is a strong advocate for family planning. Access to affordable, high-quality family planning services is one of the most important health interventions to decrease maternal and child mortality, reduce poverty, ensure environmental sustainability, and promote development. She feels that “breaking misconceptions” is vital, and providing policy makers, civil society advocates and other key decision makers with evidence they can use to do that is the way forward.

Many of the research and informational programs Ruth works on at AFIDEP – which conducts research on public health issues in sub-Saharan Africa including reproductive health, family planning and maternal health, and synthesizes evidence-based knowledge to advise policy development, support advocacy, and inform the design of programs – are at a national and regional level. Working on those programs requires an understanding of cultural differences and perspectives about health. Having lived abroad for part of her life, Ruth has come to value the contribution that such differences in perspective make to working with others to achieve common purposes. The emphasis on understanding is something she appreciates about the workshop.



“I think the key thing [about the workshop] is the networks we create here, having advocacy partners for the same goal,” she says. Ruth found that working in teams to develop implementation plans for advocacy on family planning and reproductive health was particularly useful. “I’ve identified things that, as a leader in my organization, I can do differently,” says Ruth. “It’s a really good holistic overview of how to move forward.”

The Women Leaders for Family Planning and Reproductive Health workshop is an activity of the Health Policy Project, led by Futures Group. CEDPA, one of the partners on the project, is conducting the workshop, which covers skills building in leadership and mentorship; advocacy; governance and accountability; gender and social inclusion; and networking. Upon returning to their own countries, workshop participants will ensure that women’s voices are prominent in defining national and regional priorities for family planning and reproductive health. Helping women access reproductive health services and helping couples achieve their desired family size can improve the health and lives of millions of people, while contributing to important development goals.

About the Health Policy Project

The Health Policy Project is a five-year cooperative agreement funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-10-00067, beginning September 30, 2010. It is implemented by Futures Group, in collaboration with the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), Futures Institute, Partners in Population and Development, Africa Regional Office (PPD ARO), Population Reference Bureau (PRB), RTI International, and the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood (WRA).