

FAITHFUL VOICES

MUSLIM LEADERS' ADVOCACY GUIDE
ON POPULATION AND FAMILY PLANNING



JULY 2015

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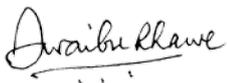
FOREWORD

Malawi is one of the fastest-growing countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Our country's population has more than tripled over the past 40 years, and is expected to triple again by 2040.* As a result, our environment, our economy, and our communities are under increasing strain. It is difficult to meet the basic needs of so many people, much less improve their lives and achieve the development goals of the nation as a whole.

As Muslim leaders, we hold positions of trust. With this trust comes much responsibility—to lead by example, to do our utmost to follow Allah's teachings, and to nourish the spiritual and physical well-being of our congregants. In light of this, we believe religious leaders have a responsibility to raise awareness within our communities about the impacts of population growth, and discuss the potential benefits of planning families.

Islam is a religion of simplicity, tolerance, ease, and openness, in which health occupies a prominent place. Muslims across Malawi are affected by health challenges related to family planning and population growth. Often, differences in opinion on health issues as they relate to Islam have hindered Muslim communities' access to family planning services. However, Islam should not be considered a barrier to the practice of family planning as the Qur'an and *Hadith* demonstrate.

This guide provides Muslim religious leaders with the practical guidance they need to advocate for their religious communities to become more engaged on issues related to responsible parenthood, reproductive health, and population growth. We urge our fellow Muslim leaders to take up this challenge, and help their communities address these vitally important issues.



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* Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. 2012. "Malawi RAPID: Population and Development." PowerPoint presentation, available at <http://www.healthpolicyproject.com/index.cfm?ID=publications&get=pubID&pubID=71>.

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The Health Policy Project is grateful for the dedication and efforts of all religious leaders who participated in the consultative drafting process. We have been inspired by their passion and commitment to addressing population and family planning issues in Malawi, and hope this guide will help them in their future endeavours. We also want to express our appreciation for the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development—formerly the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development—for its participation in the drafting process, and its ongoing efforts to engage religious leaders in efforts to respond to the population and development challenges facing Malawi.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
EAM	Evangelical Association of Malawi
ECM	Episcopal Conference of Malawi
FP	family planning
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
HPP	Health Policy Project
IEC	information, education, and communication
IUD	intrauterine device
MAM	Muslim Association of Malawi
MCC	Malawi Council of Churches
MEPD	Ministry of Economic Planning and Development
MoFEPD	Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development
SDA	Seventh Day Adventists
SRH	sexual and reproductive health
QMAM	Qadria Muslim Association of Malawi
TA	traditional authority
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development



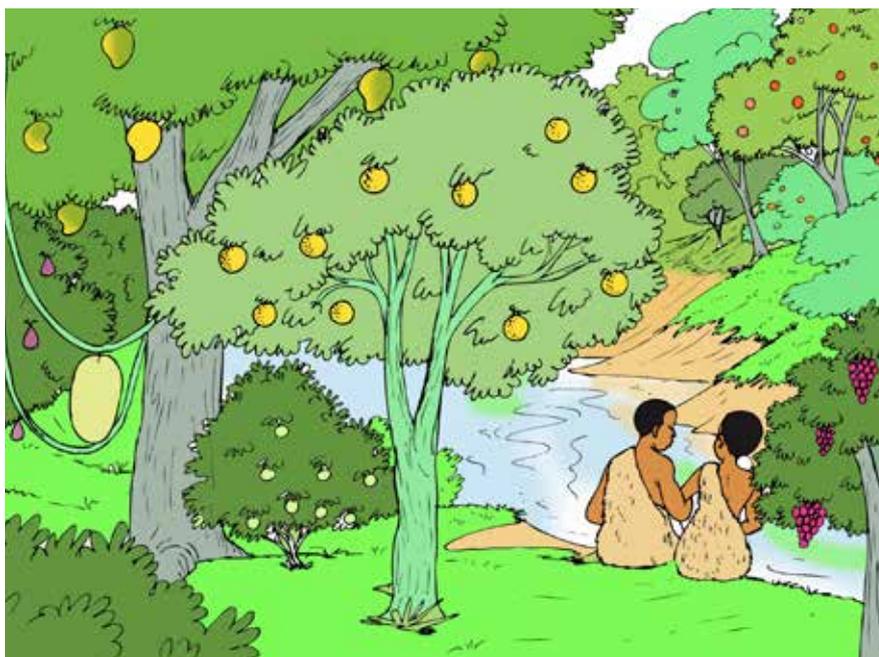
1 INTRODUCTION

High fertility, combined with a lack of services to support the healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies, is causing Malawi's population to grow rapidly. As the population grows, the availability of natural resources does not. We are farming the same land and fishing the same lakes as our ancestors, but there are many more of us today. This is resulting in environmental degradation, with significant impacts on health, education, and the economy. Moreover, the high fertility that is causing our population to grow so quickly is also harming the health and well-being of men, women, children, and families.

Recently, religious leaders from different faith communities have come together to address common concerns related to the planning of families, reproductive health, and population growth. In 2012, representatives from Malawi's religious "mother bodies"—the Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM), the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM), the Malawi Council of Churches (MCC), the Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM), the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), and the Qadria Muslim Association of Malawi (QMAM)—assembled to discuss how they could become more involved in these issues. The result was an interfaith effort, through which religious leaders implemented "population weekends" in several districts (see Box 5). The population weekends were supported by the USAID-funded Health Policy Project, in collaboration with the Population Unit of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD)—now the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development (MoFEPD)—and succeeded in mobilising communities, raising their awareness of the impacts of population growth, and fostering discussions about the benefits of planning families. Our experiences with this work have led to this guide, which is intended to strengthen the role of religious leaders in addressing population and family planning issues.

Religious leaders in Malawi have a key role to play in addressing population and family planning issues. As trusted role models and guides, we have a responsibility to raise awareness in our communities about the impacts of population growth, and to discuss how planning families can increase the health and well-being of families, communities, and the nation as a whole.

In Islam, importance is placed on hygiene, sanitation, and environmental protection. Islam teaches Muslims to protect the environment from degradation; when population grows too fast, the earth's natural bounty is depleted. Anas ibn Malik reported that the Prophet said, "*If the Final Hour comes while you have a palm-cutting in your hands and it is possible to plant it before the Hour comes, you should plant it (Book 27, Hadith 479).*" Surah 7, verse 56 says, "*Do not corrupt the earth after it has been purged of evil.*"



Committing our families to Allah, responsible parenthood includes planning and spacing pregnancies to maximise the health and well-being of mothers, children, and families. When couples are able to better plan their families, it can save the lives of mothers and children and improve families' overall health and economic situation. Better planning of families also helps slow population growth. A smaller population will help ease the pressure on natural resources, putting Malawi in a better position to address the challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation. A smaller population will also enable Malawi to provide more social services (such as health and education) and jobs for its people.

Our past three years of ecumenical work on these issues is only the beginning. We must build on these successes to ensure sustained engagement by all religious leaders on population and family planning issues.

1.1 Purpose of This Guide

This guide is intended to make addressing population and family planning issues a part of religious institutions' routine "way of doing things." It gives Muslim leaders the guidance and information needed to integrate advocacy on population and family planning issues into the policies and activities of our religious institutions on an ongoing basis.

The activities and approaches presented in this guide should be understood as an ordinary part of religious life, rather than as "extra" activities

1.2 Who Should Use This Guide?

This guide should be used by

- Muslim leaders (for example, Sheikhs, Imams, and *Muallims*)
- Anyone else who plays a leadership role within their faith community and would like to see that community do more to address population and family planning issues

1.3 How to Use This Guide

This guide should be used to support advocacy and activities at all levels, from national to local. It offers

- Information on the impacts of population growth, the benefits of healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies, and the need for Muslim leaders to engage on these issues
- Suggestions for faith-based messages on population and family planning issues
- Guidance for planning and carrying out advocacy on population and family planning issues within Muslim communities and institutions
- Overviews of institutional structures of relevant Muslim institutions, and suggestions for how to advocate effectively within these structures

2 POPULATION, FAMILY PLANNING, AND DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Population Growth

If current fertility rates remain unchanged, Malawi's population—13.1 million in 2008—is expected to triple by 2040.¹ This rapid growth, along with water scarcity and declining food production, has led researchers to identify Malawi as one of 15 population and climate change “hotspots”—places in the world where the effects of climate change will fall especially hard.² The impacts of population growth can be seen in many different areas.

Environmental degradation

Too-rapid population growth can seriously harm the environment and reduce the availability of natural resources. The environmental impacts of population growth in Malawi can be seen in water scarcity, deforestation and soil erosion, and reduced agricultural productivity. As the population grows, more and more people need access to fresh water. This leads to water scarcity, as there is less water available per person. Population growth also causes deforestation, as more and more land is cleared for crops, fuel, and building materials. Deforestation leads to soil erosion, as topsoil is washed away without trees and other vegetation to hold it in place. Soil erosion, in turn, reduces agricultural productivity and increases the devastation caused by floods.



All of these challenges are compounded by climate change, which alters patterns of rainfall and leads to droughts, floods, and unpredictable growing seasons. Population growth makes it harder for Malawi to handle the effects of climate change—effects that will only intensify in the coming years.

Agriculture and land scarcity

Malawi's land resources are already under great strain. With an average of 126 people per square kilometre of land, Malawi has one of the highest population density rates in Africa—six times the density of neighbouring Zambia. If the population keeps growing at the same rate, by 2050 there will be six times as many people (803) for every square kilometre of land.

Close to 80 per cent of Malawi's population lives in rural areas, and the majority of Malawians rely on farming for their livelihoods. Over time, land has been divided into smaller plots that make it harder for families to make a living. As a result, they must farm their land more intensively, which gradually leads to soil depletion and declines in agricultural productivity. Land scarcity also contributes to conflicts within families and communities. Disputes over inheritance are increasingly common and have even resulted in violence in some districts.



Access to public services

With more people comes increasing pressure on Malawi's public services, such as health and education. Already, the country faces a shortage of healthcare workers and teachers, particularly in rural areas. In addition to reduced availability of public services, service quality (in health, infrastructure, education, etc.) is compromised in the face of overwhelming need. The MoFEPD's 2012 RAPID analysis projects population growth rates over a 30-year period (2008–2040). The RAPID analysis estimates that if the current rate of population growth continues, the Ministry of Health will require three times as many trained nurses and health centres in 2040 as in 2008. In the education sector, the number of primary school students is expected to more than double, from 3 million to nearly 8 million. With slower population growth, the government could save K116 billion (US\$751 million) in education and K226 billion (US\$1.5 billion) in health over the same period.³ Threats to the availability and quality of education are of particular concern for the Muslim community, which has struggled with illiteracy.

Economic development

Population growth has visible impacts on economic development. Slower population growth would help Malawi's economy grow more quickly, as resources could be shifted from meeting existing needs to investing in future growth. The declines in agricultural productivity resulting from rapid population growth, along with increased pressure on water resources and public services, will also hinder economic growth.

The economic consequences of rapid population growth will fall particularly hard on youth. More than half of Malawi's population (52%) is under age 18. As youth enter adulthood, they will need jobs and other opportunities. If the current rate of growth continues, 4.9 million youth will enter the job market by 2040. Yet, already there are not nearly enough jobs for all those who need them.

Impact on mosques

As the population grows, demands on mosques also increase, as congregations require more assistance. At the same time, congregants have fewer resources available to support their mosques. In some cases, the population is growing so quickly that by the time a new mosque is built, its intended congregation may already have outgrown it.

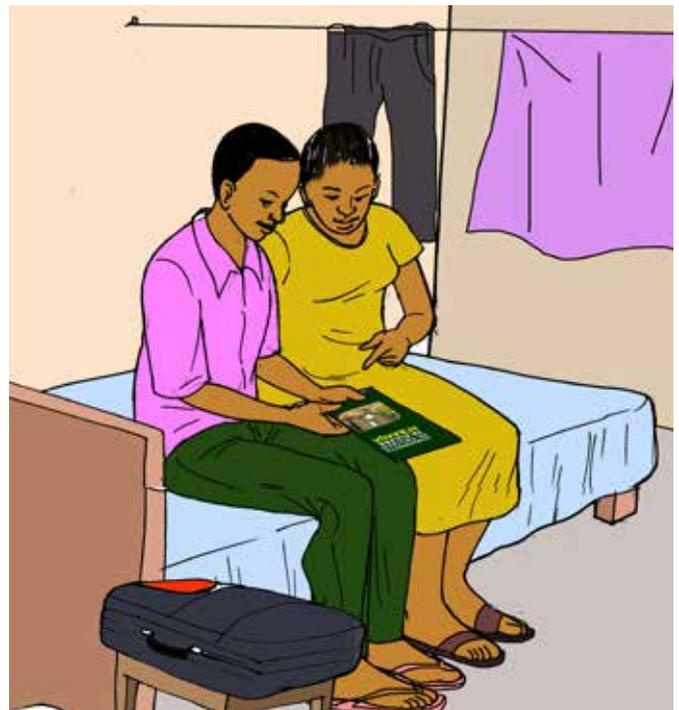
This combination of factors can make life harder. However, as people of faith, we should not be discouraged. Instead, we should trust in Allah and come together to make Malawi's future better by addressing population and development issues.

2.2 Family Planning

What is family planning?

Family planning is when a couple makes informed choices about when to have a child, how many children to have, and how much time to wait between births. Couples should start discussing their plans for a family before they marry and continue talking about this throughout their marriage, as their options, decisions, and life circumstances may change over time. Couples should also teach their children about the importance of planning families—preparing them to become responsible parents when they reach adulthood.

Couples can choose natural or medical methods to plan their families. These methods are widely researched and safe for both women and men. They vary in effectiveness, characteristics, and in who should use them. The latter is based on family planning intentions and some rare medical conditions, so women and couples should consult healthcare providers to discuss their options.



Family planning methods currently available in Malawi include

Natural / calendar methods

Natural methods do not require any medical intervention, although some approaches need instructions and counselling from healthcare providers. Most natural methods are called “fertility awareness-based methods.” These methods help women and couples understand how to avoid pregnancy or how to become pregnant by recognising signs of a woman’s fertile days, when she is most likely to conceive.

Natural methods include

- Calendar-based methods
 - Standard Days Method (cycle beads)
 - Calendar rhythm method
- Monitoring daily changes in the thickness of vaginal fluid
 - Billings Method, TwoDay Method
- Monitoring body temperature to detect ovulation
 - Basal body temperature method
- Breastfeeding/Lactation Amenorrhoea Method
- Withdrawal (coitus interruptus or *Azil*)
- Abstinence



Medical methods

- Condoms (male and female)
- Pills (oral contraceptives)
 - Combined oral contraceptives
 - Progesterone-only pills
- Injectables
 - Combined injectable contraceptive
 - Progesterone-only injectable contraceptive
- Implants (Jadelle)
- Intrauterine device (IUD)
- Vasectomy (male)
- Tubal ligation (female)

It is important to understand that Islam does not permit vasectomy (for men). Tubal ligation (for women) is permitted when there is a medical justification for the procedure.

What are the benefits of planning families?

Today, the average couple in Malawi has between five and six children, but this fertility rate does not reflect couples' desires or plans. On average, both men and women report that their ideal family size is four children.⁴

- Almost half (45%) of pregnancies in Malawi are unintended or mistimed.⁵
- One in four couples would like to delay or avoid further childbearing, but do not use any methods to avoid unintended pregnancies. These couples have an **unmet need** for services that can help them better time and space their pregnancies.



Health benefits

The healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies is vital to the health of women and children.

Malawi has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world (675 per 100,000 live births). Underlying causes of these maternal deaths include early childbearing (35% adolescent pregnancies), high fertility rate (5.7), and high HIV prevalence among women of childbearing age.⁶

Unintended pregnancies can increase the risk of death and disability for mothers and children, especially when pregnancies are

- Too early—when the mother is under age 18
- Too many—when the mother has had many previous pregnancies
- Too late—when the mother is older than age 35
- Too frequent—when pregnancies are spaced too close together

In Malawi, one in nine children does not live to see his or her fifth birthday; however, increasing the time between births can dramatically increase a child's chances of survival. Children born less than two years after a previous birth are more than twice as likely to die before age five as those born at least three years after a mother's last birth.

Family benefits

When couples have only as many children as they can readily support, there are many benefits for the family:

- Stress on marriages can be reduced, as can conflict within families over scarce resources.
- Parents have more time and attention to devote to each child, creating more opportunities to give spiritual guidance.

- Parents are able to provide their children with better nutrition, health, and education.
- Children are less likely to be left to fend for themselves at an early age.
- Economic and educational opportunities increase for both parents and children. Young couples who wait to have children can pursue higher education and obtain better jobs, and both boys and girls can go to school when parents have only the number of children they can afford.
- Women, in particular, will have better health, and may have more time for education, social engagement, and participation in community life.

Gender equality

High fertility contributes to gender inequality by limiting women and girls' access to education, employment, and other life opportunities. Over half of Malawian women (51.6%) are married by age 18, and one-quarter of adolescents ages 15–19 have already had at least one child.⁷ Young girls who begin childbearing at an early age are deprived of their chance for education, and their lives are placed at risk due to the dangers of early pregnancy.

Likewise, when parents have more children than they can support, it is usually girls who lose out—receiving a smaller share of family resources for things like education, healthcare, and food.

Mosque benefits

As families benefit, so do mosques—the benefits of planning families can decrease strains on the mosque. Happier, healthier, more productive families are able to more fully participate in mosque life and support other congregation members and the mosque itself.

2.3 What Does Islam Say About Marriage and Planning Families?

Today, in keeping with the teachings of Islam, Muslim religious leaders recognise signs of the times with regard to environmental degradation, scarcity of natural resources, and climate change. We find that it is important for couples to make thoughtful, informed choices about when to have children, how long to wait between pregnancies (birth spacing), and the total number of children they intend to bear. There are a number of issues related to marriage and family planning that ought to be clarified based on the guidance of Islamic scriptures.

Principles of marriage

“And one of His signs is that, He created you mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them and he put between you love and compassion, most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.” (Qur’an, Surah 30, verse 21)

As the Surah above illustrates, Islam clearly teaches that marriage is based on love and compassion.

Partnership and communication

Communication in Islam is part of life and is perfected within the marital relationship. The consummation of marriage creates new roles for the parties concerned. Each role is a set of equitable, proportional rights and obligations, in which good communication is vital.

Islam encourages partnership and communication. It instructs couples to discuss issues openly with each other, and to plan and make decisions as a couple. Effective communication brings spouses closer to each other. The Prophet even declares that the best Muslim is the one who is best to his family, and that the greatest, most blessed joy in life is good and righteous spouses who are able to communicate and discuss anything within their homes (*Hadith* by Muslim and Tirmidhi).

Intimacy

Marriage involves both physical and emotional intimacy. Within marriage, man and woman express their intimacy when, through their bodies, they engage in a sexual relationship. Sexual satisfaction and emotional connection/support, together with openness, are key to establishing and nurturing intimacy.

Responsible procreation

The preparation for a good and faithful generation falls on the shoulders of father and mother because the child looks to his/her parents as his/her high ideal.

Parents have a responsibility to those procreated (their children) to meet their material (e.g., medical care, education, food), emotional, and spiritual needs, ensuring that they have a dignified quality of life. This is more possible when the number of children in a family is reasonable and manageable.

Some have asked, “Why bother about family planning, if Allah takes care of children?” Allah provides and takes care of children **through their parents**. Failing to care for your children does not please Allah.

Children are born with a natural disposition, and open their eyes to life to see their mother and father attending to them for everything. They see the world through their parents and look at the universe through their parents’ eyes. It will settle in the depth of their hearts that their father and mother are everything in existence. They will derive sympathy and compassion from their parents, resort to them for protection and care, and seek their help in everything big or small. For this reason, parents bear the first responsibility for the education, preparation, and guidance of their children to that which pleases the Almighty God.

“Thereupon Zacharias prayed to his Lord, saying: ‘Lord, grant me upright descendants.’”
(Surah 3, Imran, Verse 38)

Islam prioritises the quality of life, rather than the quantity of lives. As expressed in the Surah above, it is a Muslim family’s duty to ensure that a good quality of life is achieved.

If fathers and mothers should abandon their responsibility to their children and the family, they will be committing a grave sin by betraying the trust that Allah places in their hands. Thus, the glorious Qur’an warned fathers and mothers from such omission, and alerted them to the fact that they are responsible for their families as much as they are responsible for themselves (Qur’an 66:6).

Family planning

“Take care of yourselves. There are no ailments for which Allah has not provided medications. When the drug affects the disease, it cures, God willing.”—Al-Bukhari

Islam is a way of life. As evidenced in the Hadith quoted above, health occupies a prominent place in Islam. Family planning is fundamental to safeguarding life, and Muslim leaders have a vital role in discussing these issues through their teachings on societal norms.

Recent focus group discussions held in Muslim communities in Balaka and Mangochi found that many women, men, and youth believe that birth spacing is not allowed in Islam. Yet Islam teaches that family planning methods can be used in certain circumstances.

In Islam, birth spacing is encouraged for the survival of the child after birth, to ensure uninterrupted breastfeeding for two years.

In Islam, birth spacing is also permissible in the following circumstances:

- Within the confines of marriage
- To save the life of the mother, when health problems related to repeated and close pregnancies threaten her life
- When children's health could deteriorate

Breastfeeding as a means of birth spacing

“Mothers shall give suck to their children for two whole years if the father wishes the suckling to be completed.” (Surah 2, Verse 233)

“We have enjoined man to show kindness to his parents, for with much pain his mother bears him, and he is not weaned before he is two years of age.” (Surah 31, Verse 14)

As the quotes above illustrate, the Qur'an advises a mother to breastfeed her children for two years, during which she should not become pregnant. Therefore, the Qur'an recommends spacing births to allow mothers to sufficiently recover their strength before bearing another child, and to safeguard the health of children by making sure they complete the recommended period of breastfeeding.

Coitus interruptus as a means of birth spacing

“In the time of the messenger of Allah, coitus interruptus was practiced. If this process was subject to prohibition, the Qur'an would have mentioned it, because this time was that of revelation.”

—Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidh, Ibn Majah, and Ahmad

This *Hadith* states that coitus interruptus is permissible as a form of family planning, provided both the husband and wife are in agreement.

Modern / medical contraception

Islamic jurists have found that use of any modern contraception is acceptable as long as it aims to achieve the same results as coitus interruptus.

The role of men in family planning

“Men are protectors of women.” (Surah 4:34)

“The believer with the most complete faith is the one with the best character, the best of you are those who are the best to their wives and I am best to my family.”—Al-Bukhari

Muslim men play an important role in family planning. The above verse and *hadith* encourage Muslim men to protect women—this includes safeguarding their health and well-being, securing their financial status, etc. Family planning, as described above, can be a way to protect the health and well-being of women and children. These texts urge Muslim men to plan for their families and not violate the rights of their wives.

The teachings above show that husband and wife should be in agreement regarding family planning. This requires that husband and wife both understand the importance of family planning and its role in Islam, and are able to discuss and come to agreement regarding family planning intentions and methods.

There is a need for couples to plan their families together and to discuss how many children they wish to have. These conversations require tolerance, faithfulness, and sacrifice. Ultimately, the outcome is in God's hands. If a married couple cannot have a child, they must accept their situation and continue to love one another.

The gift of children by the Almighty is mentioned in Surah 39, verse 40, where it is connected with HIS Sovereignty in the heavens and Earth—dealing with them as He will. If the home is not gifted with a child, it does not mean the couple are not loved by Allah, and this childlessness should not be a reason for divorce—because Allah does everything he wills and everything from Allah is good.

Endnotes

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3 ADVOCACY

With population growth and family planning becoming urgent concerns in Malawi, religious leaders at all levels (from national to community) must become involved in addressing these issues. We can use the teachings outlined above to help our communities understand the impacts of population growth and the importance of making informed choices—grounded in Islamic principles—regarding procreation. However, our efforts should not be limited to discussing these issues with our congregations. Rather, our goal is to make addressing population and family planning part of the everyday work of religious institutions.

Through a series of interfaith discussions in early 2015, we identified seven key activities that we can undertake to achieve this goal:

1. Create awareness among our fellow religious leaders regarding the linkages between family planning, population growth, and development.
2. Incorporate population and family planning issues into our worship services and conversations with congregants, and encourage other Muslim leaders to do the same.
3. Integrate population and family planning issues into our institutional policies and plans, and educational programmes and materials.
4. Get population and family planning on the agendas of discussion groups, events, and meetings.
5. Organise one-off events to mobilise, educate, and raise awareness in communities about the linkages between population growth, family planning, and development.
6. Engage with the media to increase coverage of population and family planning issues and ensure that supportive faith-based perspectives are included in the national conversation.
7. Spread the word!

This section will help you carry out these activities.

- In Section 3.1, we share teachings from Islam that explain why we, as religious leaders, have a responsibility to take action.
- In Section 3.2, we provide an overview of the advocacy process, which is vital to carrying out the key activities listed above.
- In Section 3.3, we offer guidance on applying the advocacy process to plan and implement the key activities listed above, using tips and examples drawn from our own experiences.

3.1 Why Should We Engage?

“And from among you there should be a group of people who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and these it is that shall be successful.” (Qur’an, Surah 3, The Family of Imran Verse 104).

Islam is a way of life. As evidenced in the Surah quoted above, health occupies a prominent place in Islam. Muslim leaders in Malawi should sensitise, educate, and enlighten their community members on various

Box 1. What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is a carefully planned process designed to influence decisions regarding policies, programmes, or resources. Advocacy targets decisionmakers (those who have the power or position to make the change you are seeking) to achieve a clearly defined goal.

health and population issues. Family planning is fundamental to safeguarding life, and religious leaders have a vital role to play in discussing these issues through their teachings on societal norms.

As Muslim leaders, we should protect and guide our congregations. In the case of family planning and population growth, Muslim leaders can help families enjoy a better quality of life simply by giving them vital information that enables them to make informed choices. Yet to fully benefit our congregations, we must work—not only with community members, but also with our fellow Muslim leaders and our religious institutions—to ensure that addressing family planning and population issues becomes part of our day-to-day activities.

3.2 The Advocacy Process

Carrying out the seven activities described above involves advocacy. In this section, we provide an overview of the advocacy process and offer examples of applying it to make addressing family planning and population issues part of the day-to-day work of Islamic institutions at all levels.

The advocacy process has five main steps.

Step 1: Identify the issue

- What problem are you trying to solve?
- Why is this problem important?

Clearly defining your issue and thinking about why it is important will help you choose goals and objectives, come up with persuasive advocacy messages, and stay focused.

Tip: The more specific you are about the problem, the easier it will be to develop clear goals and objectives.

Step 2: Develop a goal and objectives

Alongside identifying a problem, advocates must also propose a solution: What change are you trying to bring about? This is your advocacy goal.

Next, outline the specific objectives that will help you reach that goal. It may help to think of the goal as the “header” of your advocacy effort, and the objectives as “subheaders.”

Tip: The more specific your goals and objectives are, the easier it will be to plan your advocacy strategy.

Step 3: Develop an advocacy strategy

Next, develop your advocacy strategy (your plan for achieving your objectives). Coming up with a strategy requires careful thought about what you are trying to achieve, the circumstances (context) in which you are acting, who needs to be engaged, and how they should be engaged. This involves six key actions.

(1) Assess the situation

Developing an effective advocacy strategy requires assessing the situation, both internally (within your institution) and externally (in the broader community/nation).

Box 2. The Advocacy Process

- Step 1: Identify the issue
- Step 2: Develop a goal and objectives
- Step 3: Develop an advocacy strategy
- Step 4: Implement your advocacy strategy
- Step 5: Monitor and evaluate your advocacy efforts

Key questions include

- Who has the power to make this decision or take this action?
- At what level are these decisionmakers? (e.g., national, regional, district, community)
- What is the process by which this decision will be made?

(2) Identify your target audience

Your target audience should be the decisionmakers identified during your situation assessment. However, you should think strategically, narrowing down your target audience by focusing on the most influential decisionmakers, those who are most supportive of your goal, and/or those in the best position to help you achieve your objectives. Alternatively (see action item 6 below), you may need to identify resistance and focus on persuading those decisionmakers to support (or at least not to oppose) your objectives.

Once you have identified the decisionmakers whose support you need, consider the following:

- What is their existing level of knowledge and awareness about population and family planning?
- Are they supportive of your advocacy goal? Neutral? Opposed?
- What do they care about/What matters to them? How is this connected to your advocacy goal?
- What beliefs do they hold about population and family planning? (For example, some may have the mistaken impression that family planning is contrary to the teachings of the Qur'an.)

(3) Craft advocacy messages

Once you have identified and learned more about your target audience, you are ready to start crafting your advocacy messages. Effective advocacy messages help decisionmakers understand the following:

- What the problem is
- Why it matters (use evidence to support this)
- What you are asking them to do

Advocacy messages should be

- Tailored to the target audience(s)
- Clear and persuasive
- Evidence-based
- Appeal to the head, the heart, or both

Use the list of messages in Box 3 as a starting point for crafting your own advocacy messages.

Tips:

#1—Choose your language carefully, keeping in mind your target audience and avoiding sensitive language. For example

- Avoid sentiments like “population control,” and instead emphasise the importance of ensuring that decisions about reproduction are made by married couples themselves.
- Consider using “responsible parenthood” or “planning of families” instead of “family planning.”

#2—Use evidence to support your position. Ask yourself

- Do you have the information/evidence you need to persuade your target audience(s)?
- If not, how can you gather this evidence?
- Remember, evidence does not have to be numerical. For example, if a policy already exists but is not being carried out, the policy itself can be used as evidence as you advocate for improved implementation.

Box 3. Ideas for Key Messages

This list of possible messages (based on the information in Section 2) can be used as a starting point as you craft your own specific advocacy messages:

- Population growth has huge economic impacts and affects the education, health, and well-being of individuals, families, and communities.
- There is an urgent need for religious leaders to speak out on population issues.
- Support for healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies is beneficial for the health and well-being of women, children, and families, and helps to slow population growth.
- Family planning helps couples achieve healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies.
- Family planning is beneficial and recommended by Islam.
- Religious leaders have a duty to advise couples regarding healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies.
- Family planning leads to healthier and wealthier communities by helping families improve their health, achieve higher levels of education and employment, and put aside savings for the future.
- As family planning involves both husband and wife, Islam recommends planning together as a couple and seeking advice from a counsellor if in doubt.
- Couples are better able to provide for their children if they bear only as many children as they can responsibly care for.
- Having only as many children as they can readily provide for reduces couples' financial stress and helps them better fulfil their responsibilities as husbands, wives, and parents—and also leaves them with more time and resources to devote to their spiritual lives.
- Religious leaders are encouraged to advise couples on the benefits of having only as many children as they can readily provide for.
- Family planning helps reduce the negative environmental, economic, and social consequences of rapid population growth.
- Family planning can help reduce conflict over land, including conflicts within families about inheritance.

(4) Identify avenues of influence/entry points

Once you have identified your target audience(s) and advocacy message(s), you must consider how you are going to reach your audience(s):

- Where and how do they make decisions? How can you gain access to this decision-making process?

For example, if a committee or regional body is involved, how often does this group meet? Do you have access to this meeting? If not, how can you gain access? What needs to be done to get your issue on the agenda?

- If you can't reach your audience directly, who could help you reach them?
- Where does your audience get their information? What media outlets/programmes do they watch/read/listen to?

Tip: Choosing the right spokesperson(s) can be crucial to success. Consider: Who does your audience see as credible and trustworthy? Who will they find most persuasive?

(5) Identify supporters and allies

Often, the success of advocacy efforts depends on choosing the right supporters and allies. Supporters and allies can play a variety of roles, such as providing additional information, advising you on effective messages and approaches, providing access to meetings and policy processes, and serving as credible spokespersons to help you reach your target audiences. Consider

- Which leaders or groups within your institution and/or community are already supportive of addressing issues related to population, family planning, and development?
- How can they help you achieve your objectives?
- How can you strengthen their support?
- What arguments/evidence might help them engage more effectively?

(6) Identify potential opposition and challenges

It is important to think about what opposition and challenges you might encounter during your advocacy efforts. You will be able to respond to opposition and overcome challenges more easily if you have prepared for them. Think about

- Are there individuals and/or groups within your mosque/institution who are particularly resistant to addressing population and family planning?
- How might you be able to persuade them to change their position?
- What is the basis for their opposition? What information and evidence can you provide to counter their arguments?
- What allies/supporters could help you influence the opposition?
- What other challenges might you face?
- How could you overcome these challenges?

Step 4: Implement your advocacy strategy

Now that you have identified your objectives and outlined your advocacy strategy, you must develop a detailed implementation plan. It is important to consider the following:

- What are your available resources? (human, financial, material—books/materials, etc.)
- What resources will you need?
- Which supporters will you adopt as partners?
- Timing: When will you implement your activities? Are there key meetings/events that you need

to be present for? When do you need to begin preparing for these events? Are there holidays or other events you could take advantage of?

- Assigning clear roles and responsibilities will help you avoid delays and keep you on track (accountability).

Tip: Timing is key to effective advocacy. Advocates must choose the right moment to engage and must think ahead. This means you have to understand the decision-making process. For instance, if you want to engage decisionmakers to ensure that they incorporate issues related to population and planning families in policies that guide your religious community, you must know when and how those policies will be developed, and you must start advocating before the drafting process begins.

Step 5: Monitor and evaluate your advocacy efforts

It is important to monitor your progress in carrying out your advocacy strategy, and to take time to evaluate how well your strategy has worked. Having clear, established objectives will help you in this effort. What objectives have you reached? What strategies were most successful? What messages were most persuasive? Were there messages or strategies that didn't work? How could you change your approach to make it more effective?

It is also important to monitor commitments made by decisionmakers. For example, if your religious institution agreed to establish a sexual and reproductive health (SRH) policy, has the policy been drafted? Has it been finalised and, if so, was it adopted? If the drafting process has stalled, you can try to identify why and figure out how to get it moving again.

Advocates continue to play an important role after policies have been adopted. Sustained effort is needed to ensure that policies are implemented effectively at all levels.

3.3 Implementing Key Activities

The key activities outlined at the beginning of Section 3 may be implemented individually by a single religious leader, or collectively by a group of leaders committed to addressing population and family planning issues.

Key Activity 1—Create awareness among our fellow religious leaders regarding the linkages between family planning, population growth, and development.

Raising awareness and fostering support among fellow religious leaders is key to the sustainable integration of population and family planning issues into the work of religious institutions.

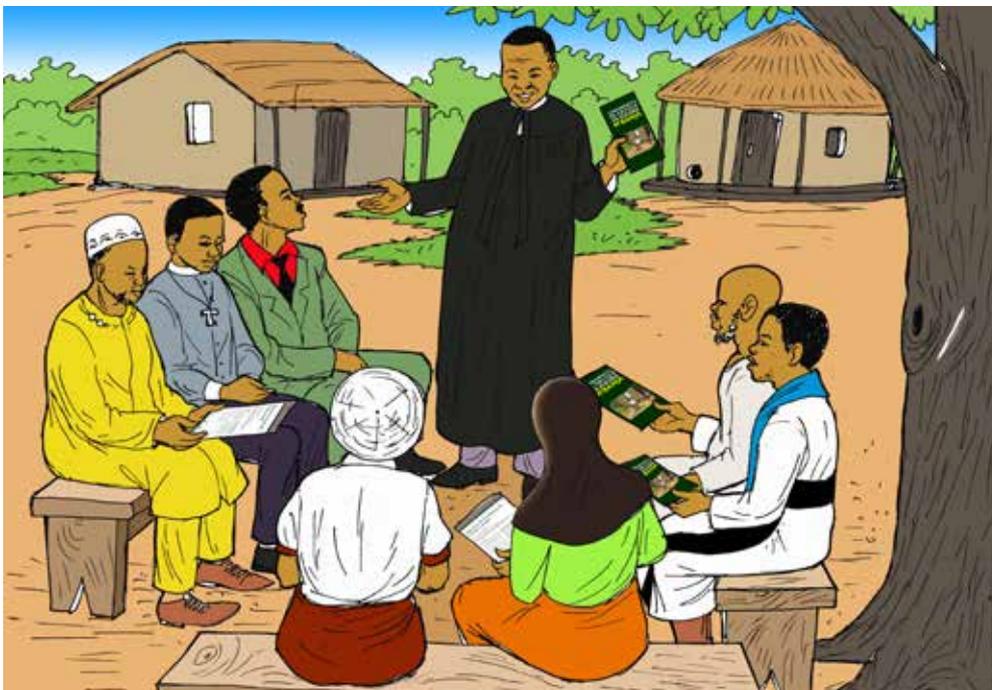
Step 1: Identify the Issue—What problem are you trying to solve? Why is this important?

Insufficient awareness among religious leaders at all levels about the linkages between population growth, family planning and development.

The process of setting goals and objectives involves assessing the general level of awareness among your fellow religious leaders. Effective engagement of other religious leaders requires an understanding of the current state of their awareness and attitudes. This can help you choose a particular group of leaders to target for engagement, or develop an effective engagement approach.

- Where is the weakest awareness of population and family planning issues? You may choose this level/group as your target audience.
- What is your position within the institutional structure? This may affect the focus of your efforts. Awareness may be needed at a variety of levels, but you may want to consider targeting

(a) the level with the greatest influence on your community, and/or (b) the level where you yourself have the greatest potential influence/impact.



Example 1: While the national leadership of my institution (e.g., MAM/QMAM) is aware of the linkages between population, family planning, and development, Muslim leaders at regional and district levels are largely unaware of these connections. This makes it hard to implement plans laid out at the national level, or to reach communities with key messages.

Example 2: Through attendance at population weekend activities in another district, I became interested in addressing population and family planning issues in my *masjid*. However, the other leaders within my mosque don't seem to understand why it's important to address these issues.

Step 2. Develop your goal (What change are you seeking?) and objectives (What intermediate achievements are needed to reach this goal?)

The broad goal is clear—to create awareness among fellow religious leaders. However, you will want to identify specific goals and objectives depending on priorities and circumstances.

Example 1:

Goal: Increase awareness and understanding among leaders at regional and district levels (e.g., regional committees, regional coordinators, district committees, district coordinators).

Objectives

- (1) Reach 10 regional leaders with key messages and information.
- (2) Reach 50 district-level leaders with key messages and information.

Example 2:

Goal: Increase awareness and understanding of population and family planning issues among the other leaders of my mosque.

Objectives

- (1) Hold a special meeting on addressing population and family planning attended by at least four other mosque leaders.
- (2) Persuade a well-respected regional Muslim leader to address the mosque committee on population and family planning issues.
- (2) Reach leaders of the mosque subcommittees with key messages and information.

Step 3. Develop an advocacy strategy

Use the key questions listed under Step 3 on page 13 to guide you in developing your approach.

In *Example 1*, advocates are trying to reach leaders at regional and district levels. If the advocates themselves are district-level religious leaders, they may use gatherings in their respective districts to reach their fellow religious leaders. To reach leaders in other districts, they would likely need to get support from higher levels. For example, religious leaders within QMAM/MAM could use the district committee to reach other leaders in their districts, but would need to go through higher-level bodies such as the regional committee to reach leaders elsewhere.

In *Example 2*, the advocate is trying to reach fellow *masjid* Imams. To be most effective, the advocate should think carefully about the structure

and decision-making processes of the *masjid*. Based on this understanding, he/she can decide which leaders are most important to engage. Thinking about the attitudes and beliefs of other mosque leaders can help the advocate decide how best to engage. For example, Objective 2 indicates that the advocate thinks having a prominent regional-level leader as a spokesperson can help persuade leaders who may be less willing to listen to someone from their own mosque.

Step 4. Implement your advocacy strategy

Now it's time to bring everything together in a single detailed action plan. The worksheet on page 34 can help you with this process.

Step 5. Monitor and evaluate

Think about how you will determine the success of your efforts. How will you know that you have successfully raised awareness among your fellow Muslim leaders? The more specific your goals and objectives, the easier it will be to monitor progress and figure out whether you are on track.

Box 4. Champions

One strategy we have used to raise awareness about family planning and population issues within our institutions is to identify and train “champions.” Champions can educate and motivate others—changing mindsets and/or inspiring them to act.

When picking champions, look for

- Influence
- Impeccable reputation
- Passion for population and family planning issues
- Limited (or no) interest in payment for their involvement

If you are trying to reach a specific group—such as youth—you may want to choose champions from within that group.

Key Activity 2—Incorporate population and family planning issues into our worship services and conversations with congregants, and encourage other Muslim leaders to do the same.

One of the easiest and most straightforward ways to address population and family planning issues is to incorporate them into worship services and conversations with congregants—and to encourage fellow Muslim leaders to do the same. As this is not an “advocacy” activity, the process for implementation is relatively simple.



Step 1. Identify worship services and engagement opportunities with congregants that you can use to discuss population and family planning issues.

Set an overall goal, as well as specific objectives—e.g., to preach one *Khutbah*/sermon every month related to population and family planning.



Step 2. If necessary, secure appropriate higher-level permissions within your religious institution (this may require using the advocacy techniques described under activities 3 and 4).

Step 3. Plan your messages/sermons.

Sections 1 and 2 of this guide provide useful information that can be used for reference. However, the best way to ensure that your messages get through to your congregants is to connect them to real-life experiences. Think about whether any recent events in your or community have shown the impact of



population growth. Has the mosque struggled to meet the needs of its congregants? Perhaps there has been conflict in the community as a result of land scarcity. Also, there may be married couples willing to share their positive experiences of family planning, or the difficulties they have faced due to large family size. Be careful to ensure that couples do not feel pressured to share their stories, as these can be sensitive issues. You must do all you can to protect couples and families from situations that might cause them to feel shamed, embarrassed, or uncomfortable.

To maintain momentum, consider tying your worship service to follow-up activities. For example, you could ask women’s, men’s, and youth groups to include a conversation about the issues during their next meeting. Or, perhaps the mosque development committee could talk about how the mosque experiences strain as a result of population growth.

If you are unsure of how to talk about population and family planning issues with your congregants, reach out to your relevant mother body. They can connect you with a leader who has been trained in addressing these issues.

Step 4. Implement

The worksheet on page 34 can help you bring everything together in a detailed action plan.

Step 5. Monitor and evaluate

Monitoring and evaluating this activity is relatively simple. Did you meet the objectives you set for yourself? If not, what prevented you from doing so? Moving forward, how will you overcome these obstacles?

How were your *khutbas*/sermons received? Which messages and stories did congregants respond positively to? Following the worship services, did congregants talk to you about population and family planning issues?

Key Activity 3—Integrate population and family planning issues into our institutional policies and plans, and our educational programmes and materials.

Integrating population and family planning issues into institutional policies/plans and educational programmes/materials is key to ensuring that these issues are routinely addressed in Muslim communities at all levels. Policies and plans that explicitly acknowledge the role of religious institutions in addressing population and family planning issues lay the foundation for undertaking effective faith-based programmes and activities. Integration into policies and plans also provides support and justification for individual religious leaders who are engaging on these issues.



Step 1: Identify the issue—What problem are you trying to solve? Why is this important?

Begin by identifying the relevant policies/plans and educational programmes/materials for your institution, and finding out whether these policies and plans address population and family planning issues. Annex 1 provides information on the current policies/plans and educational programmes/materials of MAM and QMAM. However, these lists are not exhaustive and are likely to change over time (hopefully as a result of your advocacy efforts!).

Policies and plans

Policies include both written policies and the unwritten rules that govern activities and behaviour in your religious community. Your efforts could focus on (a) crafting written policies to make guidance on population and family planning issues more clear, and/or (b) changing unwritten rules that hinder efforts to address these issues. Where supportive policies already exist, your efforts could focus on improving implementation of these policies.

- What policies and plans guide your religious community?
- What policies (if any) hinder efforts to address population/family planning (FP) issues within your religious community?

- In which policies/plans would it be appropriate to include population/FP issues?
- Do these policies/plans already address population/FP issues?
- If so, are they supportive?

To choose which policies to focus on, it can be helpful to consider

- Which policies/plans, if revised to include population/FP issues, would have the greatest impact?
- Are there any efforts ongoing to integrate population/FP issues into policies/plans?
- What other policies/plans are being developed or revised at the moment?
- How could you integrate population/FP issues into these policy processes?

Educational programmes and materials

Educational materials may include *madrassah* curricula or pamphlets/IEC (information, education, and communication) materials. Programmes may include things like *jalasahs*, workshops, and counselling.

- What educational programmes and materials are used in your religious community?
- In which of these programmes/materials would it be appropriate to include population/FP issues?
- Do these already address population/FP issues?
- If so, are they supportive?

To choose which educational programmes/materials to focus on, it can help to consider

- Which educational programmes/materials, if revised to include population/FP issues, would have the greatest impact?
- Are there any efforts ongoing to integrate population/FP issues into educational programmes/materials?



- What educational programmes/materials are being developed or revised?
- How could you integrate population/FP issues into these revised programmes/materials?

Step 2. Develop your goal (What change are you seeking?) and objectives (What intermediate achievements are needed to reach this goal?)

Identify goals and objectives based on the information you gathered regarding policies/plans and educational programmes/materials in Step 1.

Example 1: You discover that your religious institution has a national HIV/AIDS programme, but no corresponding programme for sexual and reproductive health. You decide to focus on creating such a national programme and ensuring that it includes an emphasis on family planning, population, and development. You believe that this would help your institution address population and family planning issues routinely and consistently at all levels.

Goal: Ensure that the institution addresses population and family planning issues routinely and consistently at all levels.

Objectives:

1. Create a national sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programme for the institution, based on Islamic scriptures and best practices in sexual and reproductive health.
2. Ensure that the SRH programme includes an emphasis on family planning, population, and development.
3. Secure approval of the programme by the executive committee, board, and *Majlis Ulama*.
4. Achieve thorough implementation of the program at all levels.

Example 2: *Jalasa*s provide opportunities to bring together in- and out-of school youth of primary school age to discuss issues of importance to them. You decide to organise a *jalasah* for your community on issues related to population and family planning.

Goal: Raise awareness of population and family planning issues among youth in your community and help them understand that family planning is in keeping with Islam.

Objectives:

1. Draft content for inclusion in the *jalasah*.
2. Secure approval of the *jalasah* and its content from the sheikh.
3. Hold a *jalasah* that reaches at least 15 youth.

Example 3: “Outgusts” and “ingusts” are held on Wednesdays when two groups of five Muslims—one of men and one of women—led by the sheikh, go from house to house after sunset to encourage Muslims to come to the mosque and pray. Outgusts involve outreach to Muslims beyond the boundaries of your mosque community/neighbourhood, while ingusts focus on reaching other Muslims within the mosque community. These door-to-door contacts can be a good opportunity to spread messages about population and family planning, and their place in Islam.

Goal: Raise awareness of population and family planning issues in the Muslim community, and help Muslims understand that family planning is in keeping with Islam.

Objectives

1. Secure approval from the sheikh for incorporating population and family planning issues into outgusts and ingusts.
2. Hold at least one outgust and one ingust that incorporate population and family planning issues.

Step 3. Develop an advocacy strategy

Based on your identified objectives, use the key questions listed under Step 3 on page 13 as guides.

It is particularly important to consider

- Who has the power to incorporate population/FP issues into these policies/plans or educational programmes/materials?
- How are these policies/plans and educational programmes/materials developed? (processes, timing, key players, roles and responsibilities).

Your target audience(s), as well as avenues of influence/entry points, will depend on the structure of your institution, the policy development process, and your own position within the institution.

Step 4. Implement your advocacy strategy

The worksheet on page 34 can help you bring everything together in a detailed action plan.

Step 5. Monitor and evaluate

What advocacy strategies/activities did you use? Which were most successful? Which need to be changed? Which policies/plans and educational programmes/materials were revised to integrate population/FP issues? What lessons did you learn? Moving forward, what is your new advocacy priority for integrating population/FP into policies/plans and educational programmes/materials? Remember, this can include strengthening implementation of existing policies.

Key Activity 4—Get population and family planning on the agendas of discussion groups, events, and meetings.

Step 1: Identify the issue—What problem are you trying to solve? Why is this important?

Start by identifying discussion groups, events, and meetings that exist within your institution/community. Consider focusing on those that (a) are most influential, (b) reach the largest audience, and/or (c) you have the best chance of influencing.



Key questions include

- What discussion groups/events/meetings are active/influential within your religious community? (see Annex I for ideas)
- Are population and FP issues on the agenda of these groups/events/meetings?
- Which of these groups/events/meetings, if they include population/FP issues, could have the greatest impact?
- Which of these groups/events/meetings do you participate in?
- Which of these groups/events/meetings do you have access to?

Step 2. Develop your goal (What change are you seeking?) and objectives (What intermediate achievements are needed to reach this goal?)

Develop advocacy objectives based on the discussion groups, meetings, and events identified in step 1.

Example 1: Population/FP issues are rarely included in the agendas of discussion groups, events and meetings within my religious institution.

Goal: Increase attention paid to population and family planning issues within my religious institution.

Objectives

- Ensure that population and family planning issues are included on the meetings of the Executive Board.
- Ensure that population and family planning issues are included on the agendas of the regional committees in all three regions.

Example 2: Population/FP issues are never included in the discussions of our women's group.

Goal: Increase attention paid to population and family planning issues within my religious institution.

Objective: Include population and family planning issues in at least three women's group meetings in the coming year.

Step 3. Develop an advocacy strategy

Based on the objectives you identified, use the key questions listed under Step 3 on page 13 to guide you in developing your approach.

It is particularly important to consider

- When do these groups/events/meetings take place?
- Who participates in these groups/events/meetings? (key players)
- When and how are they planned? How is the agenda set? (timing, key players)
- Which of these key players are already supportive? Who else could be influential supporters/allies?
- Who has influence over the agenda/content of these groups/events/meetings?

When crafting your advocacy messages, be sure to clearly articulate the importance of integrating population/FP issues into these groups/events/meetings.

Your target audience(s), as well as avenues of influence/entry points, will depend on the structure of your institution, your position within the institution, and the process for planning events/meetings described under Step 1 above.

Step 4. Implement your advocacy strategy

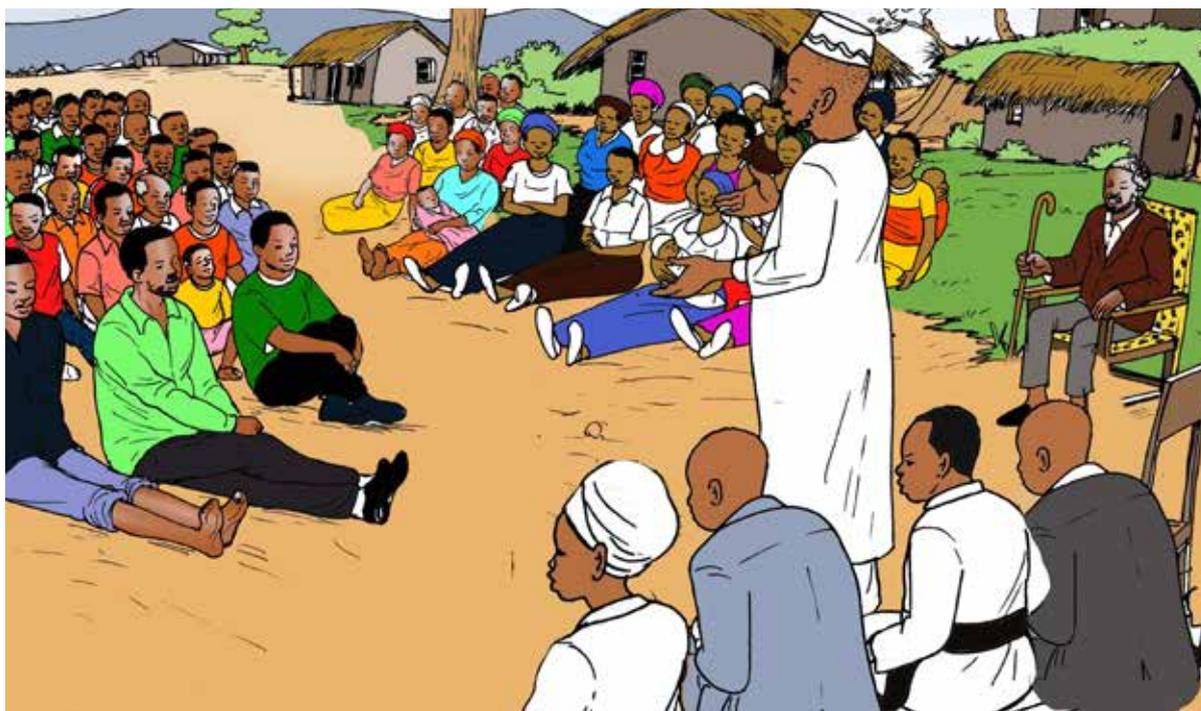
Worksheet 1 can help you bring everything together in a detailed action plan.

Step 5. Monitor and evaluate

What groups, events, and meetings included population and family planning issues? What advocacy strategies did you use to achieve this? What messages and strategies were most effective? Which need to be revised? What lessons did you learn? Moving forward, what is your new advocacy priority for integrating population and family planning into groups, events, and meetings?

Key Activity 5—Organise one-off events to mobilise, educate, and raise awareness in communities about the linkages between population growth, family planning, and development.

Organising specific awareness-raising and community mobilisation events is central to our engagement as Muslim leaders. The planning process for these events is a bit different than the advocacy process, because they are aimed at influencing community members rather than decisionmakers.



Step 1: Identify the issue—What problem are you trying to solve? Why is this important?

Overall: There is insufficient awareness and understanding of the linkages between population, development, and family planning at the community level.

Specific: In my community, there is a widespread belief that Islam is opposed to family planning and that having as many children as possible is Allah's will.

Box 5. Planning a Population Weekend

“Population weekends” are interfaith awareness-raising and community mobilisation events designed to increase understanding of family planning, population, and development issues among Malawi’s religious communities. Various religious mother bodies coordinate to ensure that, on the same weekend, religious leaders in churches and mosques throughout a specific geographical area will all preach about these issues during their worship services. Accomplishing this requires multi-level engagement, from the national level all the way down to traditional authorities.

The idea of population weekends came about through government efforts to implement the National Population Policy. The Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD), in collaboration with the USAID-funded Health Policy Project (HPP), reached out to mother bodies to discuss how religious leaders could become involved in addressing population growth, family planning, and development issues.

Step 1: National-level “buy-in”

Planning for a population weekend starts at the national level, as interfaith collaborations are always a matter for religious institutions’ national-level leadership. Once mother bodies agree to move forward with a population weekend, a joint task force is created to supervise implementation and choose the date and location.*

Step 2: Creating a district-level planning team

Following the institution’s structure (see Annex 1), each mother body identifies district-level leaders to participate in a district planning team to further develop and implement activities. Once the National Executive Committees of MAM and QMAM agree to hold a population weekend, their respective secretariats communicate this information to the relevant district chairmen, assigning them to participate in the district planning team.

Step 3: Planning activities

The leaders identified come together for an interfaith district planning meeting. The district planning team determines which activities will be carried out in the district, and which churches and mosques will be involved. Planning meetings should also include representatives from traditional authorities and district government officials (such as the director of planning and development, the district health officer, and the FP coordinator). Involvement from government representatives is important. The district health officer and the FP coordinator are good sources of information. Moreover, involving government partners keeps them “in the loop” about activities that are being planned in their jurisdictions.

Population weekend activities vary by district, and even among mosques within a single district, depending on the interests and resources of participating mosques. In addition to addressing population and family planning in worship services, common elements include distribution of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials and media engagement.

Mobilising traditional authorities

The district planning team reaches out to the traditional authorities to sensitise and mobilise them, and to include them in planning and implementation. This is necessary to ensure that activities will be carried out all the way down to the community level.

*The geographical divisions of different mother bodies don’t always correspond, so a “catchment area” is identified that may span multiple districts.

Box 5. Planning a Population Weekend (continued)

The district planning team decides on a meeting date with religious leaders from traditional authorities (TAs). TAs play an important role because they know their areas well and can identify appropriate *masjid* or other venues for carrying out activities. They can also identify a given number of traditional religious leaders. These leaders attend the traditional-level planning meeting, at which district-level activities are refined and the date confirmed. The TA-level group decides which mosques to visit.

Step 4: Implementation

Tips: Based on our experiences implementing population weekends, we are able to offer the following suggestions:

- Leave enough time to mobilise your fellow religious leaders (at least one month), particularly as they may be in remote areas.
- Enact good plans (and follow up to make sure they have been carried out) to distribute IEC materials to all participating mosques, particularly those in remote areas, prior to the population weekend.
- Know and engage with local media outlets—this will increase coverage of your events and help ensure that coverage is accurate.
- Whenever possible, arrange media interviews ahead of time—this enables religious leaders to prepare for the media engagement.
- Make time to sensitise and build the knowledge of targeted leaders before moving ahead with planning—religious leaders identified to plan population weekends may not have extensive knowledge and understanding of population and family planning issues. Before moving forward with planning activities, ensure that the leaders involved understand the information you hope to share. Otherwise, congregants might receive inaccurate or conflicting information, which would undermine the goals we are trying to achieve.

Step 2. Develop your goal and objectives

Goal: Raise awareness and change the attitudes and behaviours of community members regarding population and family planning issues.

Objectives: Consider what types of mobilisation and awareness-raising events will help you reach this goal.

Examples

1. Hold “population weekends” in 10 districts between January and December (see Box 5).
2. Hold “open days” in the same 10 districts between January and December (see below).

Step 3. Plan your events

“Population weekends” are one example of a one-off event that we, as religious leaders, have found effective in raising community awareness about population and family planning issues. In Box 5, we outline the steps in planning a population weekend to provide a better idea of the steps involved in planning community mobilisation events.

Tip: Remember that population weekends are a special example. These events are organised starting at the national level and involve interfaith collaboration. Not all community mobilisation activities require such elaborate planning. You should brainstorm and think about other one-off activities you can conduct in your community.

Step 4. Implement

The worksheet on page 34 can help you bring everything together in a detailed action plan.

Step 5. Monitor and evaluate

Think about how you will know whether your efforts have been successful. How will you know that you have achieved your goal? The more specific your goals and objectives, the easier it will be to monitor progress to determine if you are on track.

Open days

Following the implementation of population weekends in 2014, mother bodies came together to plan “open days.” Whereas population weekend activities are held in churches and mosques by the leadership and congregation, open days are interfaith events held at a select location in the district, in which all community members are welcome to participate. Open days also link community members with health services, making FP and HIV testing and counselling services available to participants.

Key Activity 6—Engage with the media to increase coverage of population and family planning issues and ensure that supportive faith-based perspectives are included in the national conversation about these issues.

Engaging the media is intended to support and make transparent faith leaders’ positions on population and family planning issues, to make their positions more visible to their congregants, and to contribute to the national dialogue on these issues.

There are two intended audiences for this section: (1) religious leaders as individuals, and (2) religious institutions. For both audiences, this section offers things to keep in mind when speaking to the media about population and family planning issues, and tips for coming up with successful media strategies.

Media engagement is a broad topic, and can’t be handled in great detail here. This section provides a few key tips to help religious leaders and institutions as they engage the media on population, development, and family planning issues.

Religious leaders’ media engagement has two main focuses:

1. Working with mainstream media to ensure that supportive faith-based voices are included in the national conversation surrounding population and family planning issues.
2. Partnering with faith-based media outlets to encourage them to include conversations about population and family planning issues in their programming.

Benefits of working with the media

Working with the media has multiple benefits for religious leaders. It can

- Counter misperceptions that Muslim leaders are inherently opposed to family planning.
- Ensure that the media reports accurate information.
- Demystify information about Muslim leaders and institutions’ positions for future reference.
- Enable religious leaders to reach wider audiences.



- Be cost-effective (media engagement can help you reach more people; sometimes journalists and media outlets are willing to provide free coverage of important issues).
- Offer space for any views to be heard.

Moreover, keeping track of media coverage (number of stories, attitudes/language/focus) can help you assess changes in attitudes to see whether your advocacy efforts are having the desired impact.

Tips for working with the media

When engaging the media, it is important to

- Follow the media protocols of your religious institution.
- Avoid conflicting messages by identifying specific spokespersons at each level to handle media engagement.
- Choose the right spokesperson. Is this person at the right level? Do they have the authority to act as spokesperson? Do they have sufficient knowledge and expertise? Are they able to answer media questions in an interesting, engaging, and succinct way?
- Prepare for media engagements. Discuss and agree on talking points ahead of time. Practice making these points, and staying on point. Remember, you do not have to answer every question you are asked. If a journalist asks an off-topic question, you can decline to answer and/or use your response to bring them back to the topic at hand.
- Use media engagements as an opportunity to clarify misunderstandings about the position of Islam on family planning and population growth.
- Build relationships with individual journalists, editorial boards, and heads of media houses, and maintain these relationships over time. This can help position you as a trusted source (making it easier to get your story out) and allow you to increase these journalists' awareness and understanding of population and family planning issues, leading to more accurate reporting.
- Hold press conferences. This allows you to pick the topic, control the message, and decide who should be in the room.

When selecting media outlets

- Think about your audience. Who are you trying to reach? Which media outlets reach this audience? (You may need to use several outlets to make sure you reach your entire audience.)
- Consider topical as well as geographic coverage. What issue does this particular journalist, publication, or programme cover? Make sure your story fits this topic. You may need to tailor the “angle” to emphasise a particular aspect of your story (such as maternal health or economic benefits).

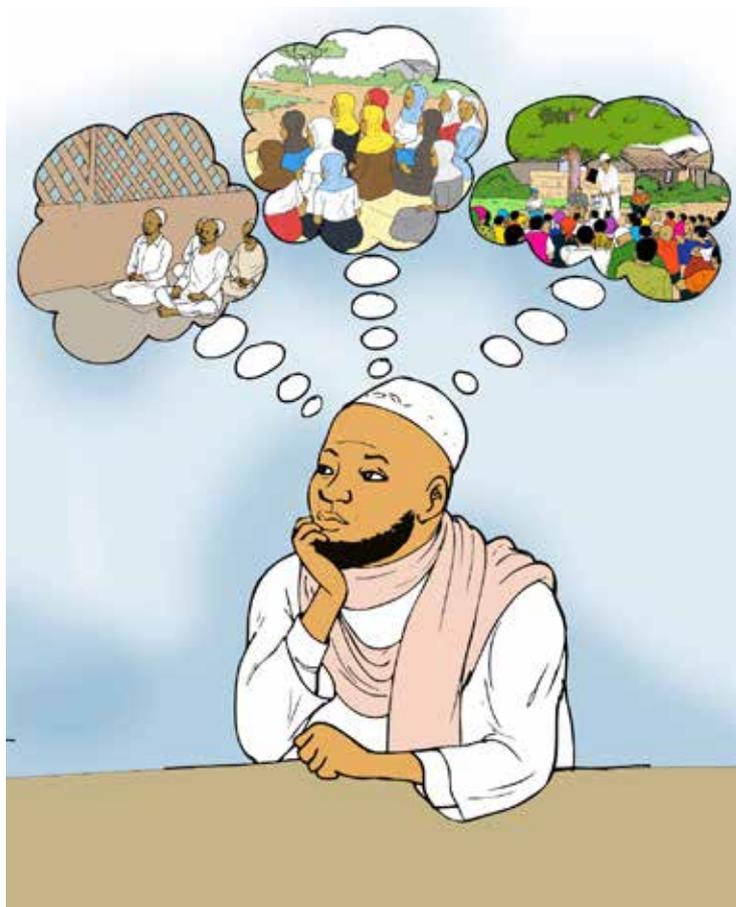
Cautions about working with the media

- When speaking with the media, be clear on whose behalf (or what’s behalf) you are speaking and don’t exceed your authority. For example, you could say, “I am speaking as an individual, not on behalf of all Muslims;” or, “I am speaking on behalf of the Muslim Association of Malawi.” Otherwise, journalists may misrepresent your role.
- Do not underrate the media’s power to build and destroy—handle them with respect and care.

Key Activity 7—Spread the word!

The best way to raise awareness about population and family planning and to spread faith-based messages on these issues is to talk about them. Think “outside the box” and find your own opportunities to raise these issues. For example, Muslim leaders are often asked to speak at weddings, funerals, and other community events. Other ideas include speaking in minibuses or talking about family planning, population, and development issues during one-on-one meetings with other religious leaders or congregants.

Every moment could be a “spread the word” moment. What will yours be?



4 CONCLUSION

Islam is a religion of love, tolerance, and simplicity, in which health and quality of life are held as extremely important. Too-rapid population growth and high fertility have negative consequences on both health and quality of life, with impacts that span all levels, from the household to the nation. As Muslim leaders, there is an urgent need for us to engage on these issues, helping our fellow Muslims understand the relationship between Islam and family planning. As this guide suggests, addressing population and family planning issues must be part of the day-to-day work of religious leaders and institutions in Malawi. We urge our fellow Muslims to put the lessons and information offered here into practice, for the well-being and peace of our community, and for the nation as a whole.

WORKSHEET:

ADVOCACY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Step 1—Identify the issue			
What issue will you address?			
Why is it important?			
Step 2—Identify Goals & Objectives			
Goal			
Objectives	(1) (2) (3)		
Step 3—Develop an Advocacy Strategy			
(1) Assess the situation			
Key decision-makers:	Relevant decision-making process(es)		
#1			
#2			
#3			
#4			
(2) Identify your target	Level of awareness none,low,high	Neutral, supportive, or opposed?	What is important to them?
#1			
#2			
#3			
#4			
(3) Advocacy messages	Evidence needed?		
#1			
#2			
#3			
#4			
(4) Avenues of influence/entry points			
#1			
#2			
#3			
(5) Supporters and allies	How can they help?	How will you engage them?	
#1			
#2			
#3			
#4			

(6) Opposition and challenges	Arguments?	How will you engage/respond?
#1		
#2		
#3		
#4		

Step 4—Implementation

Key events / meetings	Dates	Notes
#1		
#2		
#3		
#4		
#5		
#6		
#4		

Activity planned	Resources needed	Responsible Person(s)	Timeframe
#1			
#2			
#3			
#4			
#5			
#6			

Additional notes/information

ANNEX 1: INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

To effectively incorporate population and family planning advocacy messages into the activities of religious institutions, it is important to first understand the internal structures, processes, and policies that guide their activities. To assist Muslim leaders in planning advocacy efforts, these annexes contain basic information on the institutional structures, policies, and processes of Malawi's Muslim mother bodies—The Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM) and the Qadria Muslim Association of Malawi (QMAM). MAM and QMAM have separate, but otherwise identical, institutional structures. Therefore, this section will describe one institutional structure, which advocates can use to engage either body.

National level

At the national level, MAM and QMAM are led by boards of trustees and executive boards. Technical authority rests with the board and executive, which draft policies to address issues relevant to the Muslim community. However, religious authority resides in the *Majlis Ulama*, a group of Islamic scholars. Before decisions of the board and executive can be implemented, they must be reviewed by the *Majlis Ulama*. The latter considers the issue in light of Islamic teachings and provides detailed guidance on carrying out the policy and how it relates to Islamic teachings.

MAM's mission is to provide sound leadership to the Muslim community in the promotion of principles of good governance, tolerance, and inclusiveness among all stakeholders to achieve socioeconomic development of the whole country.

QMAM's mission is to contribute to the holistic development of the people of Malawi, regardless of ethnic grouping. Its vision is to have a healthy and empowered Malawian society and to uphold the values of integrity and professionalism.

Regional level

At the regional level, MAM and QMAM are led by regional committees. MAM and QMAM each have two committees for each region (north, central, and southern)—one men's committee and one women's committee (a total of 12 committees). These committees are led by a man and a woman, respectively, or by one chairman. Responsibilities include implementation of policies set at the national level, and providing guidance to and supervising the work of district committees.

District level

At the district level, MAM and QMAM are led by district committees. Each district has separate men's and women's committees, which are led by a man and a woman, respectively, or by one chairman.

Masjid Committee

At the grassroots level, MAM and QMAM have *masjid* committees that coordinate the religion's activities in each district. The *masjid* committees are composed of 10-11 members and report to the district committee.

Table 1. List of Key Players You May Need to Engage

National Level	Roles and Responsibilities
Board of Trustees	Provide overall long-term direction for the organisation. Act as custodian of the long-term vision. Direct the Muslim community on issues that affect them.
Executive Committee	Safeguard the mission and strategies. Make sure that management works in line with its mandate.
<i>Majlis Ulama</i>	Review and provide guidance on Islamic-related issues before actual implementation.
Secretariat	Implement MAM/QMAM policies and coordinate all programmes of the associations.
Regional Level	Roles and Responsibilities
Regional committees (north, central, and southern)—separate committees for MAM and QMAM There are separate committees for men and women, led by a man and a woman, respectively, or by one regional chairman.	Make sure that all policies are implemented according to Islamic values.
Regional chairman	Head of the regional committee
Regional coordinator (MAM only)	Expert in technical issues
District Level	Roles and Responsibilities
District committees There are separate committees for men and women. These committees are led by a man and a woman, respectively, or by one chairman.	Implement policies as directed by the authorities.
District chairman	Head of the district committee
Community/Mosque Level	Roles and Responsibilities
<i>Masjid</i> committee	
There are separate committees for men and women.	Run day-to-day activities at a mosque for the benefit of the community (led by sheikhs). Decisions of the mosque committee must be approved by the sheikh.
Subcommittees (education, fundraising, <i>Dawah</i> , youth, etc.)	There are separate subcommittees for men and women.
Women’s committees	Women’s committees have sometimes talked about issues related to family planning using Islamic scriptures. Some meetings have used IEC materials already developed.
Sheikhs	Sheikhs are responsible for the religious leadership of the mosque. Some mosques have multiple sheikhs, but each would play a different role.

National Level	Roles and Responsibilities
Imams	Imams work under the supervision of sheikhs, reading prayers, leading the call to prayer, and teaching children.

Table 2. List of Relevant Discussion Groups, Meetings, and Events

National Level	Schedule / Responsibilities
Board meetings	Twice a year
Executive committee meetings	Quarterly
<i>Ijtima</i>	Annual Islamic gathering conducted by men and women (on separate occasions)
<i>Ziyalah</i> parade	Remembrance of the birth of our Prophet Muhammad
<i>Eid</i> celebration	Celebration day after fasting in the month of Ramadan During the holy month of Ramadan, messages are taken very seriously; religious leaders should keep this in mind, as speaking about population/FP issues during this month could be especially impactful
Muslim Youth Association	Forum at which youths discuss issues affecting them; only for in-school youths
Muslim Youth Assembly	Muslim youth forum that brings together in- and out-of-school youths
Regional Level	Schedule / Responsibilities
<i>Dawah</i> activities Separate <i>dawah</i> activities take place for men and women; <i>Dawah</i> activities are generally planned at the regional or district level, but sometimes the National Executive Committee can organise a <i>dawah</i> activity	Preaching the words of Allah—people meet and can easily receive messages on family planning
<i>Eid</i> celebrations	Celebration day after fasting in the month of Ramadan.
Youth get-togethers	Meeting of youth from different villages and schools to talk about issues that affect them; could be used to talk about sexual and reproductive health issues
District Level	Schedule / Responsibilities
<i>Dawah</i> activities	Preaching the words of Allah—people meet and can easily receive messages on family planning
<i>Eid</i> celebrations	Celebration day after fasting in the month of Ramadan
Youth get-togethers	Meeting of young people (adolescents) to discuss issues affecting them

Masjid / Community Level	Schedule / Responsibilities
<i>Khutbahs</i>	Friday ceremony that can focus on youth, women, or men (depending on the targeting/theme)
<i>Jumah prayer</i>	Friday gathering at which Muslims assemble; can be an opportunity for sheikhs to preach about FP and population issues
<i>Laila tul-qadr</i>	This “night of power” occurs during the last 10 days of the month of Ramadan.
<i>Jalrasah</i>	Education function targeting primary school-aged children in an Islamic setting; <i>Jalrasahs</i> are generally organised by the youth committee, and are important venues for FP messages that involve both in- and out-of-school youth
Mosque committee meetings	May have monthly or bimonthly meetings

Table 3. List of Relevant Policies / Plans

(a) Already include population and family planning issues, or (b) May be suitable for integrating population/FP issues	Level	Includes pop/FP?		Notes
Islamic education policy on the girl child	National	Yes	Yes	The basis of the policy is guidance from the Qur’an. There is a deliberate ongoing effort in Malawi to promote girls’ education through the construction of Islamic girls’ schools. There are challenges in implementation, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of willingness • Limited resources • Lack of advocacy strategy to approach the relevant authorities to implement such policies

(a) Already include population and family planning issues, or (b) May be suitable for integrating population/FP issues	Level	Includes pop/FP?		Notes
Qur'an's policy on breastfeeding	All levels	Yes	Yes	<p>The Qur'an encourages women to breastfeed for two years.</p> <p>There is low adherence to the policy.</p> <p>Challenges include low levels of education for some sheikhs, especially regarding family planning, leading some sheikhs to avoid talking about these issues or incorrectly interpret the teachings of the Qur'an.</p>
Curriculum on Sexual and Reproductive Health for Youth (in development)	All levels	Yes	Yes	The policy is in the process of being developed by MAM and QMAM. The Secretariat is currently drafting the curriculum, after which it must be approved by the executive committees and the boards.
Resolutions on family planning and HIV/AIDS.	National	Yes	Yes	

Table 3. List of Relevant Educational Programmes / Materials

Educational programmes/ materials that ... (a) Address population/FP issues, or (b) May be suitable for integrating population/FP issues	Level	Includes pop/FP?	Supportive?	Notes
<i>Madrassah</i> curriculum (including SRH)	All	Yes	Yes	QMAM and MAM are working together to develop a <i>madrassah</i> curriculum that integrates sexual and reproductive health issues.

Policy Development Process

The policy development process followed by MAM and QMAM generally follows the steps below:

- (1) The executive committee drafts a new/revised policy. Much of the technical work is done by the Secretariat, as they are the technical experts who advise the committee.
- (2) The executive committee and chairman approve the policy.
- (3) The policy goes to the *Majlis Ulama* to be reviewed closely in terms of Islamic teachings. The *Majlis* approves or rejects the policy and elaborates on what guidance should be sent out to the regional, district, and mosque levels.
- (4) Policies are implemented through the regional and district committees.

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