

# Social Equity and Empowerment



Equity and empowerment are cross-cutting issues in health as well as in other social sectors. In the health sector, Abt Associates seeks to **rigorously and consultatively identify gender and other social determinants of health within each local context**, integrating them into project design to address the impact of activities on women, girls, boys, and men. The goal is to promote equal access to health care for all.

## A Multidimensional Approach to Equity

The concept of gender encompasses the accepted economic, political, and socio-cultural attributes, constraints, and opportunities associated with being identified in the broader society as a girl, a boy, a woman, a man, or as a gender non-conforming individual and the expectations of each of these as defined at the individual, family, community, and organizational levels. Gender also intersects with other forms of social exclusion, such as poverty, age, sexual orientation, and ethnicity, so that vulnerability or marginalization is concentrated for particular segments of the population. As such, a complex and nuanced approach that considers disadvantaged populations with multiple vulnerabilities (e.g., poverty and gender identification) is a best practice that forms the basis for Abt's gender work.

Equity and empowerment is often thought of in relation to interventions that benefit females alone. While it is true that taking a gender-equity perspective often necessitates interventions targeted at girls and women to “level the playing field,” lasting, positive results are not achievable if boys and men are left out of the equation. Males also face specific vulnerabilities related to their gender, such as norms that encourage physical risk-taking and that discourage or limit health-seeking behavior. Because of this, Abt seeks to address the integrated needs of all to promote equitable and sustainable impact.



## Successful Programs

### Providing Access to Family Planning Information for Men and Women

Access to family planning is a cornerstone of health and development initiatives, yet efforts to engage men often fall short. The Saathiya (“Trusted Partner”) helpline, part of USAID-funded PSP-*One* project and supported with additional funding by USAID’s Global Leadership Program for Youth, showed a high and growing demand for family planning information provided by phone to the project’s target audience of youth and young adults in Lucknow, India. Between 2007 and 2009, the number of calls received increased 18-fold, to 13,432 per month. Although open to anyone, the helpline was used mainly by men; between 60 percent and 80 percent of calls each month were from male callers. The majority of callers were 20 to 30 year-old married men highlighting this approach as an effective means to reach young men, who may not feel comfortable asking for family planning information in health facilities. The helpline also effectively reached adolescents (19 percent of callers under 20 years old), women (31 percent), and unmarried youth (43 percent).

### Ensuring Women’s Representation

Under the USAID-funded Health Systems 20/20 project, Abt Associates supported the development of a new national community-based health insurance (CBHI) policy in Mali. Included in the regulation governing these health CBHI schemes was a provision establishing a set percentage of seats on CBHI governing boards for women, who have historically been excluded from public positions of authority in Mali.



## Mainstreaming Gender Equality

The USAID-funded Health Finance and Governance (HFG) project, led by Abt, is explicitly integrating gender

equality and female empowerment into all country technical assistance programs, ensuring that these considerations are incorporated throughout project activities. The HFG approach reflects a broader understanding of gender equity and female empowerment by looking at the intersection of gender and other markers of social status and acknowledging that gender considerations play an important role in diverse kinds of programming.

## Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction

The Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction (MAMPU) program is three-year, \$52 million dollar flagship gender initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) that aims to improve the lives of poor women in Indonesia. MAMPU hopes to contribute to improvements in women's access to services and positive changes in their livelihoods through strengthening partner organisations who will influence targeted government policies and mobilise greater public support for their cause. Across five thematic areas, access to employment, social protection, improving conditions of overseas migrant workers, improving women's leadership to reduce violence against women, and reproductive health, Abt JTA is contributing to research at district and local levels will understand and analyze the complex set of interactions that inform policy making at the local level and prevent or support MPs to advocate for pro-poor/gender reforms.

## Contact

For more information on Abt Associates and our work in Social Equity & Empowerment, contact:

**Abigail Donner, MSc**

Associate/Scientist

+1 617.520.2655

Abigail\_Donner@abtassoc.com

**Abt Associates** is a mission-driven, global leader in research and program implementation in the fields of health, social and environmental policy, and international development. Known for its rigorous approach to solving complex challenges, Abt Associates is regularly ranked as one of the top 20 global research firms and one of the top 40 international development innovators. The company has multiple offices in the U.S. and program offices in more than 40 countries.



## Strengthening Women-led Health Institutions

The National Association of Yemeni Midwives, supported by USAID/Yemen through Abt Associates' PHR*plus* and Health Systems 20/20 projects, has become a truly representative organization. Its role is to support the midwife profession and enable midwives to improve delivery of reproductive health and family planning services to reduce maternal and child mortality and morbidity. To better understand the needs of its members, the association surveyed midwives in five governorates and linked survey data to existing health sector geographic information system (GIS) tools and applications (see [www.moh.gov.ye](http://www.moh.gov.ye)). The association is using this information to analyze gaps in reproductive health and family planning services to better target their assistance. Since its establishment, the association has received funding from USAID, EU, GTZ, UNFPA and others to provide midwife training in home-based safe delivery and care of the newborn as well as health awareness sessions for women.

## Papua New Guinea: The Health and HIV Implementation Service Provider (HHISP)

HHISP supports the integrated Health and HIV Schedule of the Partnership for Development, which commits the Governments of Papua New Guinea and Australia to support the high-level outcomes in maternal and child health and disease prevention, vaccination and treatment. This \$220 million, three-year program has supported gender focused activities through:

- Maternal health grants which promote improved prenatal/postnatal care;
- Participation in the workforce—all grant recipients and advisers under the HHISP are encouraged to support female participation in the workforce and to provide gender disaggregated data;
- Supporting local organizations to provide gender-based violence services to protect those affected;
- Ensuring that the free healthcare policy provides free maternal care and allows for a greater degree of access to healthcare, including health promotion.