



INDONESIA: NEPAL

Muslim Religious Leaders Engage in Local FP Actions



Students from Batik Islamic High School welcome SSTC participants from Nepal. Solo, Central Java, Indonesia, 2019



Under this initiative, the government of Indonesia provides technical assistance to the government of Nepal to improve the adoption of family planning among its predominantly Muslim Districts. This partnership is part of an on-going South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) on Strategic Partnership with Muslim Religious Leaders (MRLs) in Family Planning (FP) organized by BKKBN – the National Population and Family Planning Board, and the Ministry of State Secretariat, with technical assistance from UNFPA.

CONTEXT

Many Islamic countries or regions with majority Muslim population are facing problems with low participation in family planning programmes. The average contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) among members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is 36%, a rate much lower than that of the world average of 63%. Nepal belongs to the lower end of this CPR spectrum. Its Hindu majority population started its family planning programme in the late 1960s, but the CPR has remained at 43% in the last fifteen years. The non-use of FP contraceptives and the unmet need for FP is higher in Nepali ethnic minorities such

as Dalits and Muslims. It is lowest in the Muslim community of Kapilvastu District, but still at 26%. These communities also have the highest incidence of poverty in the country.

PROGRAMME APPROACH

Indonesia, with a population of around 267 million in 2018, has the biggest Muslim population in the world. Unlike other developing countries with predominantly Muslim populations, Indonesia has an advanced FP programme. The total fertility rate decreased from 5.6 in the 1970s to 2.28 in 2015. The CPR according to the Indonesian Demographic and Health Survey (IDHS) of 2017



SSTC participants from Nepal discussing ASRH education in an Islamic Boarding School. Solo, Central Java, Indonesia, 2019

was 57% for modern contraceptive methods and 63% for all methods. Unmet need for FP is at 10.6%. The Indonesian FP programme has been considered among the success stories in the world, largely attributed to the commitment and support from the highest religious leaders of the country.

The two biggest Muslim organizations in Indonesia: Nahdatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have endorsed fatwas on family planning as early as in 1968 and 1969 respectively, highlighting that family planning is in line with Islamic principles. The Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI) also endorsed several fatwas on contraceptive methods. Women Muslim organizations have also educated their members on FP through Majlis taklim Islamic gatherings. Hospitals owned by Islamic institutions provide FP services including long-term methods such as IUD, male and female sterilization.

As a part of this programme, Indonesia regularly provides 20-25 scholarships yearly to other developing countries. Since its start in 2013, Indonesia's SSTC has supported the participation of 231 participants from 22 countries in Asia and the Africa, including 16 Muslim religious leaders and 10 government officials from Nepal.

The collaboration with Nepal focuses on involving MRLs in designing country action plans and working with them at community levels. Using three different languages for simultaneous interpretation – English, Arabic and French – the SSTC employs

innovative teaching-learning methodologies and expert resource persons to discuss concepts and Islamic teachings about FP. The programme, which also includes field outreach and interaction with local Muslim leaders has increased its relevance at grassroots levels.

The action plan developed with Nepal, under this collaboration, has been transformed into a four-year project, subsequently funded by DFID and initiated in December 2016. The programme reaches out to the ulamas, men and women from Muslim communities to disseminate FP related messages. In 2019 alone, a total of 175 community-based Muslim leaders were oriented on the Islamic perspectives on FP.

As a result of this engagement, the uptake of FP among the Muslim communities has increased almost two-fold in 2019 compared to 2017. In 2017, UNFPA Nepal invited Indonesian MRLs and officers to facilitate a first ever national level workshop on FP that was attended by ulamas and government officials. In addition, a book entitled *"Family Planning, Reproductive Health, and Gender: Islamic Perspective"* developed by UNFPA Indonesia and BKKBN, has been translated into Nepali language and now being used by MRLs for community level orientation. To date, MRLs from Kapilvastu district have launched a five-point declaration to promote family well-being within their community, calling it a "Khusahal Parivar Approach" meaning, a Happy Family Approach. This has encouraged marginalized ethnic and religious minorities to prosper in four key dimensions - education, health, nutrition and finances in order to attain a happy family life. This SSC has further reduced the stigmatization of FP in local Muslim communities.

Submitting country offices:

UNFPA Indonesia

Samidjo,
National Programme
Officer for Advocacy/
Communication
samidjo@unfpa.org

Anjali Sen, Representative
sen@unfpa.org

UNFPA Nepal

Amit Dhungel, Advisor FP &
RH Commodity Security
dhungel@unfpa.org

Lubna Baqi,
Representative
baqi@unfpa.org