

Burkina Faso

Association Burkinabè pour le Bien-Etre Familial (ABBEF)



Improving quality of life for volunteers in Burkina Faso

Volunteer community outreach workers have experienced significant life changes following their involvement with ABBEF.

Volunteers play an important role in supporting the work of IPPF's Member Association in Burkina Faso, Association Burkinabè pour le Bien-Etre Familial (ABBEF), including in Koudougou where this review took place. Community outreach volunteers, referred to as "Leaders", run community sensitization and information-sharing activities about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the villages surrounding Koudougou. They also ensure effective referrals to ABBEF and public health structures. There are currently 20 of these volunteers affiliated with ABBEF's Koudougou branch.

While volunteering clearly brings about changes to the lives of the community members they support, the volunteers themselves have experienced significant changes to their own lives as a result of their involvement with ABBEF.

Burkina Faso has one of the world's highest fertility rates (six children per woman), and a significant unmet need for modern methods of contraception.* Working with ABBEF has exposed the volunteers to modern methods of contraception. The subsequent birth spacing in many of the volunteers' families has significantly improved the quality of their lives by reducing financial pressures and improving the overall well-being of the mothers.

The volunteers have also benefited from the increased confidence and sense of pride that they have experienced as outreach workers.

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Above all, it's the knowledge I have received with ABBEF. I studied, but I never learned this kind of information at school, especially in terms of sexuality... even if I leave volunteering, this knowledge will stay with me.

Community outreach volunteer, male

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She has four children; between the first two and the last two, it changed her life. She rested before having the third and fourth.

Community outreach volunteer, female

Positive changes

Increased SRHR knowledge

The training and supportive supervision offered by ABBEF has helped the volunteers to greatly increase their knowledge and understanding of SRHR issues. Prior to becoming community outreach workers, many of them had little or no knowledge about contraception, birth spacing, abortion or other SRHR issues. One man, for example, used to be a proponent of female genital mutilation, but now he is a strong advocate to eliminate the harmful practice.

As a result of the new SRHR information, several male volunteers have changed their sexual behaviour, including increased condom use, decreased occasional and extra-marital sexual relations and decreased concurrent sexual partners.

Increased sense of pride

The community outreach volunteers expressed a great deal of pride in volunteering for ABBEF. They see their role as helping improve the health and well-being of others by being intermediaries between ABBEF and their communities. They consider themselves as reliable sources of SRHR information and accessible counsellors on SRHR issues including forced marriage, contraceptive methods, birth spacing and sexually transmitted infections.

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The changes in my life have also changed my environment and my community. Many people come to ask for information because they see the changes in my life as an inspiration to help them.

Community outreach volunteer, male

The volunteers' role as ABBEF "Leaders" has enabled them to gain a well-respected status in their communities, as they are now perceived as reliable sources of information and advice. The volunteers take great pride in knowing they are valued and trusted members of their communities.

Contraceptive uptake

Another significant change was the volunteers' own uptake of contraceptive services. Several volunteers had previously had an unmet need for contraception, due largely to a lack of information about modern methods including injectables. Their volunteer work with ABBEF enabled them to gain sufficient information to start using contraception and plan the timing and spacing of their pregnancies.

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When people see my [four] children, they envy me. My children have all been successful at school. Otherwise, I could have had eight, ten children. But we decided to rest for good and we both agreed on this.

Community outreach volunteer, male

The volunteers' use of contraception has led to greater socio-economic empowerment and resilience in their households. Birth spacing has helped their families to become more productive and better able to meet the needs of their children, particularly as women are now able to work. It has also decreased women's vulnerability to economic shocks and financial pressures. It is easier to pay for school fees and ensure all of their children can attend school. According to one volunteer, birth spacing has "helped the women to be strong".

Increased confidence

The community outreach volunteers have gained considerable confidence through their volunteer work with ABBEF. Many value their increased ability to speak openly about sexuality and other issues, compared

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She is confident now. She isn't afraid to disagree. Before, she was scared and embarrassed. But now, she speaks without concerns. She addresses subjects that others don't talk about at all.

Community outreach volunteer, female

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It enabled a dialogue...even when I notice that someone in my family isn't happy, right away I say 'Come and sit. What's wrong? What is the cause of the problem?' And together, we look at the consequences and we propose solutions right away. It has really helped a lot.

Community outreach volunteer, male

to before when they felt shy or ashamed. As a result, they feel they are able to effectively tackle cultural taboos that prevent the fulfilment of SRHR.

Improved family relationships

Becoming a volunteer with ABBEF has enabled the volunteers to improve communication and strengthen relationships in their own families. Some volunteers have experienced improved communication with their spouses, due to feeling more comfortable speaking about sexual and reproductive health issues. Others have successfully created dialogue more generally within their families.

Positive changes in the community

In addition to changes in their own lives, the volunteers also value the changes they

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I was the first to adopt contraception in my village and that's what I use as a testimony

Community outreach volunteer, male

have seen in their communities, including increased uptake of contraceptive services, positive changes in sexual behaviour, and more willingness to speak about SRHR issues. The volunteers have become role models for their communities; when others saw the positive changes in the volunteers' lives, they approached them to see how they, too, could make such changes.

For one volunteer, "the messages she brings to her community create a relationship of love and fraternity between her and her community."

Lessons

✓ Community outreach volunteers play an integral part in ABBEF's ability to reach rural communities with important SRH information. They refer clients who otherwise would not seek services at ABBEF. However, insufficient transport allowances challenge the work of the volunteers. An important element of their role is to run sensitization activities and home visits in neighbouring villages which can be quite far from the volunteers' homes. Without transport allowances, it is difficult for the volunteers to make regular visits to other villages.

The community outreach volunteers' ability to make effective referrals is also limited by the lack of transport

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The roads and streets are not good. The climate is not favourable. If she doesn't have a means of transportation, she has to go negotiate to come and drop off her monthly reports. She also has to travel from one neighbourhood to another to run discussions and debates. It's really a challenge.

Community outreach volunteer, female

allowances. Often, villagers ask the volunteers to accompany them to ABBEF's Koudougou clinic, either because they don't know where it is located or because they don't feel confident to go on their own. Volunteers often use their own funds to accompany community members in such situations. However, they don't always have personal funds available to pay for these transport costs.

✓ The work that the outreach volunteers do to sensitize communities is invaluable. However, persistent cultural barriers can make it difficult to share information about SRH including contraception. Despite some positive changes in the communities, it is still taboo to speak about sexuality in many villages. Volunteers face reticence from religious leaders, which obstructs their ability to discuss SRHR issues in the communities.

Widespread myths about contraception are perpetuated by many villagers, especially men, who often believe that contraception will encourage their wives to be promiscuous or that modern contraceptive methods will lead to infertility. Such myths are often difficult to dispel, again reinforcing the importance of sustained sensitization by the volunteers in their communities. This also illustrates the importance of the community outreach volunteers to ABBEF.

Burkina Faso

Country context*

Population (millions), 2010	16.6
Proportion of population that lives in rural areas (%), 2010	80
Proportion of population that lives below the poverty line (%), 2010	44
Total fertility rate (births per woman), 2010	6.0
Proportion of women currently aged 20-24 married before the age of 18 years (%), 2010	52
Unmet need for modern method of contraception (% of married women aged 15 to 49 years), 2010	25

* Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie (INSD) et ICF International (2012) *Enquête Démographique et de Santé et à Indicateurs Multiples du Burkina Faso 2010*. Calverton, Maryland, USA: INSD et ICF International.



This case study is one of a series of qualitative reviews called "IPPF Changing Lives" which capture the stories of IPPF's beneficiaries and clients from around the world. A rapid PEER (participatory ethnographic evaluation and research) approach was used to train project beneficiaries to interview people in their social network. These voices provide us with powerful testimonies on lives changed (and, in some cases, lives saved) and illustrate how IPPF is making a difference. To learn more about this methodology, see <http://www.options.co.uk/peer>.



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