

Guidance for Staff Working in Health Departments at the Subnational Level



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Introduction

Securing sustainable domestic funding for family planning programming and commodities is essential for long-term program viability, especially as countries deal with the risks from donor funding transitions. While national-level stakeholders such as the Ministry of Health (MOH) and Ministry of Finance (MOF) play a key leadership role in ensuring that sustainable financing is available and that there are clear commitments and guidelines for the family planning program, health officers working in local health departments are tasked with ensuring implementation and delivering family planning services to the population. In a devolved health system, district, municipality, and other local health officers are responsible for planning and budgeting for the family planning program for their jurisdictions, and thereby contribute to the MOH's national-level needs assessment as part of a bottom-up planning process. To support sustainable domestic financing for family planning, health officers working at local health departments should:

- Inform planning and budgeting needs of the program by providing reliable, current, and timely data to the health department and local treasury (if applicable) to support budgetary negotiations and resource mobilization.
- Advocate the need for sufficient and sustainable resource allocation to family planning program commodities and supplies, including consumables, which often does not get the attention it deserves and makes

up a considerable share of family planning expenditure that is passed on to clients.

- Identify family planning service gaps and commodity stockouts by participating in and informing national family planning commodity quantification exercises. Ensure that the quantification data is accurate, reliable, and timely and it reflects the needs of health facilities and family planning service providers.
- Assess and track expenditure of budgeted funds on a regular basis. Analyze alignment between budget expenditures, possible bottlenecks, and the program goals and performance.
- Explore ways to increase efficiency of resource use in collaboration with local health department finance and administrative staff.

The purpose of this brief is to provide practical action steps that health officers working in local health departments can take to improve the sustainability of family planning financing by strengthening domestic financing mechanisms. Actions offered are provided for varying country contexts and the financing mechanisms used.

Understanding the Context in Which the Family Planning Program Operates

To identify appropriate family planning financing mechanisms, health officers working in local health departments need to understand the country and local context in which the program operates, as well as the opportunities to build upon existing financing structures at the national and subnational levels. To understand the context of a family planning program, health officers

should review the landscape analysis in the national or subnational family planning costed implementation plan, which provides a thorough review of the different aspects, priorities, and gaps in the family planning program. Health officers should also review country Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), and Reproductive Health Surveys (RHS) that characterize the current levels and trends of family planning indicators both at national and subnational levels. USAID's [Family Planning Financing Roadmap](#) website and interactive tool can serve as a resource for health officers to review [health financing concepts](#) and fill-in [country-specific data](#) to receive a recommendation for family planning financing solutions appropriate to the context.

Through this step, the health officers should try to understand current public health financing mechanisms for the family planning program and determine what kind of financial projections or indicators to look at to inform discussions with other stakeholders. They should also gather any additional evidence needed to inform those discussions.

Engaging the Right Stakeholders

With a comprehensive understanding of the family planning context, health officers working at local health departments can identify the key decisionmakers and stakeholders with whom they should build stronger relationships to advance the family planning financing agenda (see Table 1). Because there is frequent

Table 1. Key Stakeholders and Their Contributions to Family Planning Financing

Key Stakeholder	Responsibility	Contribution to Family Planning Financing
Local MOF/ treasury budget department	Sets and maintains the health sector budget at the district/county level, especially in decentralized contexts.	Approves and disburses health budget including allocation to family planning budget line, if already instituted.
MOH family planning department	Gathers evidence on the value of investing in family planning programs and coordinates with other stakeholders within and outside of the government.	Articulates national family planning budget needs to departments and ministries within the government as well as to development partners.
Local assemblies	Drafts and passes local legislations that support increased domestic resource allocation and create an enabling environment for health and family planning programs.	Advocates to the local treasury and county leadership on the health and economic benefits associated with family planning programs.
Civil society organizations	Promotes accountability and transparency; advocates for support for family planning generally and for specific populations (e.g., adolescents).	Holds the government accountable to follow through on commitments and act with transparency; advocates for family planning contributions from the government and development partners.
National medical procurement agency	Procures, warehouses, and distributes drugs and medical supplies.	Assesses, quantifies, and distributes family planning commodities, as well as collects information and provides regular reports to national and county governments on the status and cost-effectiveness of procurement, distribution, and value of medical supplies.
MOH finance and administration department	Manages, monitors, and reports on the MOH budget and spending.	Advocates for appropriate inclusion of family planning in the health budget, particularly specific budget line items.

turnover in key staff positions, particularly in the government, staff will need to re-engage with new decisionmakers and stakeholders as necessary, presenting the same evidence and advocacy cases repeatedly to ensure continued collaboration.

Taking Action to Advance Family Planning Financing Strategies

After examining the country context, health officers working in local health departments, in collaboration with other stakeholders mentioned in Table 1, need to identify the financing solutions that are the most feasible. The following are action items for different financing mechanisms—some or all of which may be appropriate depending on the country and local context.

If government budget line allocations to family planning are non-existent or insufficient (national and local):

- Work with the MOH family planning department and support them to build an advocacy campaign targeting the national and local treasury departments and key members of parliament and local assemblies by providing evidence on the health and economic benefits of family planning to the local population served.
- Collaborate with local government leadership, civil society actors, and partners to integrate family planning into subnational/ local development and implementation plans to ensure local ownership for financing family planning programs. The following resource provides an example: [*Integrating Family Planning Interventions into District Implementation Plans in Malawi*](#).
- When building national and local advocacy coalitions, make the case for:
 - Establishing a national and/or local budget line item for the family planning program and/or family planning commodities, if not already instituted.
 - Increasing budget allocation for the family planning program and commodities in national and/or local health budgets

during annual or multi-year planning and budgeting exercises.

If there is a limited health budget necessitating a more efficient family planning program:

- Explore steps to improve technical efficiency, i.e., using the available resources to achieve the maximum possible improvement in outputs:
 - Work together with the national family planning program leadership and use the forthcoming Health Policy Plus [family planning technical efficiency tool](#) to identify potential inefficiencies in the family planning program. Steps to improve efficiency in service delivery may include integration with the HIV program, inclusion of adolescent-friendly services, ensuring availability of commodities, and conducting in-service training for providers. Additional measures to improve efficiency may involve improving program management and increasing demand for services—for example, through health insurance or voucher programs, media campaigns, and community-level social marketing.
- In collaboration with the finance and administration officers in the local health department and with the budget officer from the local treasury, assess, identify, and address public financial management bottlenecks at the local level that impede efficient and full budget execution of health and family planning budgets (if a specific family planning program budget exists at the subnational level), including release of funds, fund flow, and cash planning and management.

If quantification of family planning commodities does not accurately represent stock levels at the subnational level:

- Work with the central procurement agency to periodically coordinate assessment of family planning commodity stock levels and of consumption projection needs as well as build local supply chain and stock management capacity.

- Collaborate with the subnational branch of the central procurement agency to build the capacity of facility staff in collecting, processing, and analyzing accurate and timely data on commodity stock levels.
- Advocate for the establishment of an integrated procurement and commodity security system that allows for real-time monitoring of commodity consumption and stock levels and provides insights on future needs.

If the evidence for advocacy and financing of family planning programs are not being generated and/or consistently used:


- Meet with local and national family planning advocates, particularly civil society organizations, to develop an advocacy plan based on the [SMART](#) approach to strengthen accountability and transparency around existing national and local government commitments on funding and sustaining family planning and reproductive health programs. For example, the Nigerian government recently launched guidelines to strengthen the country's Family Planning 2030 commitment by mobilizing additional domestic resources for family planning through specific budgetary commitments at both national and subnational levels (Adebowale, 2022). Regular advocacy and tracking such commitments strengthens accountability and transparency and supports sustainable financing of the family programs.
- Support civil society organizations to compile evidence on commitments, allocation and

expenditure trends, budget gaps, total resource needs, implementation plans, and the return on investment. For example, if consumables make up a considerable share of family planning expenditure but are not reflected in budget allocations, tracking expenditure trends can build a case for higher budget allocation for consumables.

References

Adebowale, N. 2022. "Self-Care: Nigeria Launches Guidelines to Improve Sexual, Reproductive Health." *Premium Times*, March 12, 2022. Available at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/516914-self-care-nigeria-launches-guidelines-to-improve-sexual-reproductive-health.html>.

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