

Community Partnerships

Nepal Safer Motherhood Project

Issue Sheet 7

The Challenge

Maternal mortality impacts heavily on society, and is thus as much a social as a health issue. Increasing access to quality midwifery and obstetric care services is one of the key ways of addressing the problem, and has thus been a strong focus for NSMP. Since the government does not have sufficient resources or outreach capacity to meet the scale of current needs, other stakeholders, such as local civil society organisations, need to be involved to supplement government efforts. Capable local partners are needed to ensure that quality inputs are continued in the long term, to bring real and lasting change in women's lives.

Despite their obvious willingness to support areas of need, such as health and social services, many civil society organisations lack the technical capacity required. Inputs are needed to increase their skills and build strong

Key Issues

Identifying appropriate partners involves consideration of the goals, mandate, membership profile and location of



cross sectoral working relationships and linkages, so that the strengths and experience of different organisations can be combined and utilised to maximise the effectiveness of available resources.

A strong partnership approach is needed, to influence the vision, values and practices of partners and strengthen their capacity, initially to meet project goals, and in the long term, to continue as safe motherhood advocates.

organisations, in order to establish the base of a shared vision with a strong poverty focus. Existing relationships with government and other local organisations and networks are also an important resource that partners can bring to a project, and these need to be effectively developed. Based on the foundation of shared philosophical approaches and joint goals, a strong partnership can be built, into which mutual contractual obligations, long term inputs and performance monitoring are integrated.

Capacity building is an important aspect of the partnership, and may be in the form of technical training in safe motherhood issues, such as emergency funds and transport schemes, or facilitation of the development of improved communication and advocacy techniques, co-ordination and collaboration skills and promotion of organisational development. Joint programming is a key activity, which builds capacity and gives ownership within a partnership.

Ultimately the success of initiatives depends on their sustainability, which in the context of partnerships means reducing dependency on external agencies, and encouraging partners to access resources available through local government

Achievements and Lessons Learned

NSMP's experience shows that a multi-sectoral partnership approach is an effective way to build a critical mass of informed opinion on safe motherhood, and create broad-based institutional support at district level. Combined with this, the creation of collaborative networks among partners promotes more effective strategic planning and helps to overcome any institutional barriers that may exist.



mechanisms and to become effective local networkers, in order to share information and encourage local collaboration.

In Phase 2 of the project, NSMP has successfully worked with twenty government line agency offices, nine local government agencies and twenty-seven NGO partners in nine districts. Each of these different types of organisation has a distinct role to play in the promotion of safe motherhood, which can complement other inputs and partners. Interpersonal relations are a key factor, and long term agreements providing programme support and promoting organisational development have been found to be effective in developing effective and lasting partnerships.

Questions Remaining

While the effectiveness of a partnership approach, and the desirability of scaling up to national level are clear, the future depends on the availability of resources to continue providing the substantial amount of time and inputs required to initiate and sustain good partnerships. Given the resource constraints faced by the government, and the challenges posed by the ongoing armed conflict, it is uncertain how this will move forward. In particular, resources are needed to encourage NGOs from the poorest communities to come forward as implementing partners, to enable initiatives to reach the poorest sectors of society.

The long term sustainability of district Reproductive Health Co-ordination Committees and Safe Motherhood Networks is also in question unless funds are available to enable individual members to remain active in the field.



The Nepal Safer Motherhood Project (NSMP) was initiated in 1997 as a collaboration between the Nepal Ministry of Health and the UK Department for International Development (DFID).