

## DFID MSP PROJECTS: FERTILITY POLICY AND GUIDELINES

**Project title: Development of National Policy & Guidelines for Fertility Options for South Africa**

**Service Provider: MIS Research Designs**

**Partner: National Department of Health**

### **Aims and objectives**

This project aimed to develop a national policy, guidelines, and M&E framework on fertility options for men and women in South Africa. The objectives were to improve and increase access to affordable, accessible and safe fertility services for men and women of reproductive age.

### **Background**

HIV infection has been shown to reduce fertility levels. Because there are more women infected than men, women tend to be the worse-affected gender group. International and national evidence has shown that HIV-positive women are 25-40% less fertile than their counterparts.

### **Project description**

The process of developing a national policy involved a review of a number of reproductive health policies in South Africa, including the Choice of Termination of Pregnancy, the National Contraception policy, the Sexual Assault protocols, the National Maternity Care guidelines, the National Cervical Cancer Screening guidelines, the Comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment and care plan, Prevention of Mother to Child HIV Transmission (pMTCT) and the national committee for confidential enquiries for maternal death guidelines.

The desk review identified gaps in the implementation of the above mentioned policies across provinces. Some of the challenges and complications that influenced policy were high prevalence of HIV and AIDS, gender based violence, variations between districts and provinces and lack of accessible appropriate and relevant services.

The policy sought to ensure integration of sexual and reproductive health, HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment and care. The process involved promoting an enabling environment for understanding fertility

challenges experienced by HIV positive women, men and the youth. Numerous provincial consultative workshops were held with experts from public and private sectors and civil society organisations to identify current evidence, identify challenges and to begin to outline the framework and specific, measurable, appropriate, relevant and time-bound indicators (SMART).

## **Results**

By the end of the project, a policy was developed, which fosters integration with existing reproductive health policies. The six objectives of the policy are:

1. Creation of a legal framework that facilitates universal and equitable access to fertility control and infertility management for men and women in their reproductive age at all levels of health care delivery.
2. Adapt public health services to meet the needs of all clients to increase uptake of fertility control and infertility management services.
3. Establish and expand services for the provision of fertility control and infertility management at all levels in the health care delivery system.
4. Create mechanisms to increase consumers and health providers' knowledge, skills and practices on fertility options.
5. Facilitate, support and maintain partnerships between the public and private health care delivery system.
6. Create a platform for the articulation of the policy and guidelines on fertility options with existing reproductive health policy and guidelines.

The policy themes include options for men, women, youth, minority groups, people with disabilities, and HIV positive persons. It also involved the participation of non-traditional carers including traditional healers, traditional birth control methods, assisted reproduction and alternative care and management care providers.

An implementation plan was also developed that outlines the activities, time frame and actions to be taken by the MCWH&N cluster to ensure implementation of the policy and guidelines.

## **Lessons learned**

The lessons learned from this project were that, it is important to:

- Conduct a situational analysis of current reproductive health status and service delivery in the provinces in order to inform strategies for the implementation of the policy;
- Ensure that the policy is inclusive and addresses the needs of various groups that are likely to be affected including: HIV positive women, men and youth and those with medical conditions and other minority groups;

- Avoid exclusion or neglect of sexual and reproductive health care needs of HIV positive women.
- Ensure linkages between the reproductive health policies.
- Involve the public health sector implementers so that corrective measures be implemented immediately.