Family Planning is a Basic Social Service

Summary report of a side-event at the Ministerial Roundtable for the Central Sahel

On October 15, 2020, the OASIS Initiative, a project of University of California Berkeley and its partner l’Initiative OASIS Niger organized a side event at the Ministerial Roundtable for the Central Sahel. The meeting was titled “Family Planning is a Basic Social Service” to remind stakeholders that family planning is part of the Minimum Initial Services Package (MISP). The panel was moderated by Dr. Nouhou Abdoul Moumouni. Panelists included Alisha Graves (context and justification), Dr. Audrey-Marie Sonzia Teutsong (women’s empowerment and gender-based violence) and Florence Kodidio (family planning in humanitarian context).

The overall goal of the side-event was to bring to key stakeholders’ attention to the need to include family planning services as part of the initial response in humanitarian crisis in the Central Sahel. Panel organizers noted, with regret, that neither family planning nor reproductive health more broadly, were included in the report on Regional Consultations on Access to Basic Social Services.

While OASIS does not have sufficient resources to more carefully monitor whether family planning is meaningfully included in the humanitarian response, we are encouraged to hear it was included in the final remarks of Mark Lowcock, Under Secretary General, Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief, UNOCHA, “...we need to see the international community and national authorities make far bigger investments in basic services, especially education, health, clean water, sanitation and family planning. And we need to adapt to the pressures of climate change and demographic growth by continuing to improve agricultural productivity, adopting urban planning, and investing in sustainable economies that take into account the impact of climate change.”

Our recommendations to UNOCHA and its partners are to fully implement the activities outlined in the 2018 revision of the Inter-Agency Field Manual on Reproductive Health in Humanitarian Settings. This includes a new objective on preventing unintended pregnancies, along with the following activities:

- Ensuring availability of a range of long-acting, reversible and short-acting contraceptive methods (including male and female [where already used before the crisis] condoms and emergency contraception) at primary health care facilities to meet demand
- Providing information, including existing information, education, and communications materials, and contraceptive counseling that emphasizes informed choice and consent, effectiveness, client privacy and confidentiality, equity, and nondiscrimination
- Ensuring the community is aware of the availability of contraceptives for women, adolescents, and men

The specific objectives of the panel were that participants would learn:
Adolescents, women and men’s need for reproductive health services, including family planning, do not disappear in times of conflict and unrest, in fact they may be greater;

Displacement can increase women and couples’ family planning needs, because some people do not want to expose newborns to the increased risks of displacement;

Being displaced significantly increases barriers to access services;

Being displaced exposes adolescents and women to increased risk of sexual assault;

Family planning contributes to women’s empowerment and can change the age structure of the region. These outcomes, in turn, can help improve security and promote sustainable development.

Based on high levels of participation (35 participants) and active engagement in the questions / answers and discussion session, we believe these specific objectives were met. Presentations were shared with participants and are available upon request (email: oasis@berkeley.edu). Below is a key excerpt from the presentation:
Select References

1. Inter Agency Working Group. Minimum Initial Services Package for Sexual and Reproductive Health, 2018. Available at: https://iawg.net/resources/minimum-initial-service-package-misp-resources


This report was prepared by Alisha Graves, MPH, Founder the OASIS Initiative. Questions and comments can be directed to Alisha at: oasis@berkeley.edu