Community dialogues
Promoting reproductive health in communities strongly committed to traditions and customary practices

THE CHALLENGE:
Traditional beliefs and practices impede improvements in women and young people’s reproductive health and rights

There is still much that needs to be done to secure good reproductive health for people living in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Maternal, infant and child mortality rates are high and there is a sizeable gap between women’s wanted and observed fertility. Improvements are held back by a widespread reluctance to access existing services and negative health outcomes associated with early marriage and unsafe deliveries. So far, conventional education and information campaigns have not succeeded in changing this.

THE OBJECTIVE:
Community-driven change leads to the gradual adaptation or abandonment of harmful beliefs and practices

By initiating a series of facilitated community dialogues in Nowshera and Haripur, the Reproductive, Maternal and Newborn Health Project (RMNHP) aims to increase awareness and uptake of reproductive health care in a way that is respectful and sensitive to the traditional local context.

The dialogues have three main objectives:

- To improve inter-generational respect, relationships and communication
- To identify values and traditions that are integral to a shared sense of community identity and that the younger and older generations cherish and want to uphold
- To identify social practices that have harmful effects on the reproductive health and rights of women and young people, such as son preference and unsafe delivery practices in particular, and to create an opportunity for the community to take steps to modify or, where necessary, abandon these practices

Although the RMNHP is primarily concerned with promoting good reproductive health practices, improving communication and identifying important shared values between the generations and the sexes are seen as essential pre-conditions for achieving change that is long-lasting and has strong local support.

APPROACH:
Facilitated community dialogues within and across generation- and sex-specific groups

RMNHP is working with the non-governmental organizations Rutgers Pakistan and Khwenda Kor to implement a series of innovative community dialogues in the Nowshera and Haripur districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. By drawing on the Generation Dialogue...
approach, which multiple other GIZ-supported programmes used to address and overcome harmful traditional practices, the project aims to empower the communities in relation to key sexual and reproductive health and rights issues.

The Generation Dialogue is a participatory approach aimed at initiating a process of social change in communities with a strong commitment to traditions, belief systems and customary practices. It is built around a facilitated, respect-based dialogue process across sexes and generations. It begins with community consultations open to all interested community members, followed by five weekly Dialogue Sessions, lasting half a day each. In these sessions participants share and discuss different views and perceptions about gender-linked life concepts and roles, about traditions and social norms, and about culturally-sensitive topics such as sexuality and gender relations. Through moderated interactive exercises, which proactively bring in and build on elements of local culture, the participants come to appreciate that openness and acceptance of others’ views are the basis for mutual understanding across ages and sexes.

Dialogue participants work together – within, and then across, their sex- and generation-specific groups – to identify traditional values that both generations hold dear and want to maintain, as well as practices with harmful effects, such as son preference and unsafe delivery, which they agree should be modified or abandoned altogether. Over the course of the Dialogue process participants develop strategies to deal with perceived problems and jointly present these at so-called public meetings in order to involve more and more members of the community in this process of change.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Generation Dialogue approach will be combined with Rutgers Pakistan’s Green Ribbon and Daikho, Bolo, Roko campaigns:

The Green Ribbon Campaign focuses on the concept of responsible fatherhood and talking to children about sexual and reproductive health issues. The Campaign will use the dialogues between old and young men as an opportunity to talk to men about responsible fatherhood using key messages that they have developed. The Daikho, Bolo, Roko Campaign seeks to raise awareness about the existing legal age of marriage and the negative consequences of child/forced marriages. It will use radio, text messaging, television and social media to spread awareness about the results of dialogue sessions in the targeted communities and beyond. Daikho, Bolo, Roko will also use the media to strengthen the outreach capability of the Dialogues’ public meetings and will organise round table conferences where these issues can be discussed in greater detail.

OUTLOOK:

In the selected communities in the Nowshera and Haripur districts the Dialogue process began in September 2016. It is estimated that the entire process will take a total of six months to complete. Initial feedback from the community consultation sessions has been positive, with high levels of enthusiasm and engagement reported by community leaders as well as by participants, facilitators and trainers. The project plans to develop a series of Most Significant Change Stories to document and publicize the real life impact of the intervention.