Activity 2.3: Examining Power Dynamics and Decision-Making

Gather Gender-Specific Information on the Current Situation

Objectives:
- Explore the role of power and decision-making in a relationship.
- Identify who has the power and decision-making around communication topics.
- Determine how power dynamics and decision-making may impact your current program design.

Purpose:
The purpose of this activity is to guide you on how to organize a power and decision-making matrix that examines the gender-related social and behavioral determinants and the role of power within a relationship.

Introduction:
The social and behavior determinants of health have an impact on an individual's health. Power dynamics, roles within the household and community, women’s and men’s involvement in household decisions, and attitudes about sexual norms have been shown to have an impact on the health of an individual.

There are a number of ways power can operate within a society, and as a result affect the social and behavioral determinants. Invisible and hidden mechanisms of power shape the ability for men and women, boys and girls to participate in decisions and, as a result, their health and well-being. These mechanisms can lead to powerlessness, conflict, marginalization and resistance.

The different dimensions of power include:

A Power and Decisions Matrix will help you to use the information you have collected up to this point to identify and look at different communication topics, determine their level of importance, whether the topic is discussed and who may influence the decision-making process. It also helps to question who the decision may favor.

Instructions to complete this activity:
Exploring power dynamics and decision-making is important when trying to understand, address and integrate gender into your program. You can use the Power and Decisions Matrix to organize the data you already have, or adapt this activity to conduct in-depth interviews or focus groups with individuals.

Key Steps:
1. Ask the group to determine “who” you are trying to explore the
power dynamics and decision-making between. For family planning this may be a woman and her partner, or for sexual and reproductive health of youth, it may be the parents and their child. Insert these into the matrix template.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Topic</th>
<th>Male Partner Influencers</th>
<th>Female Influencers</th>
<th>Decision Favors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Perceived Importance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Ask the group to think about the communication topics that would be relevant in these relationships. List these in the table provided. For example, communication topics for family planning between a woman and her partner may include:

- Aspirations for themselves and their family
- Number of children to have
- How their family size affects their aspirations
- Whether they want to delay or limit births
- If they want to have more children, when to get pregnant
- Use of modern family planning methods

3. Ask the group to think about who may have influence over the decisions in this relationship. This may include their in-laws, peers or friends, the health worker, etc. List them in the table.

4. Next, ask the group to go through each of the communication topics and, based on the evidence you have, determine the perceived level of importance. Ask whether communication and agreement exists between the two individuals (i.e., husband and wife, parents and children) around each of the topics.
5. For each of the influencers, place a checkmark (✓) in all the boxes that refer to those who advise or have influence over the thoughts of the individual. Place an (X) in the box of the person who has the MOST influence. Once you have determined who has the most influence, discuss who the decision favors. Place a checkmark in the box.

6. Finally, looking at all the individuals, place a star (★) in the box of whoever made the final decision on the communication topic. If it is a joint decision, place a star in multiple boxes.

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**This activity was adapted using the following resources:**


### Template 2.3.1: Power and Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Topic</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Male Partner Influencers</th>
<th>Female Influencers</th>
<th>Decision Favors:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived Importance</td>
<td>Discussed? Yes/No/Sometimes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Partner Woman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above can be filled out with data regarding the discussion of various topics in the context of power and decisions in a relationship. Each row represents a different communication topic, and the columns include the rank, the perceived importance and whether it was discussed, as well as the influences of various parties in the male and female partner's decision-making process. The decision favors are indicated for both partners, with options for the partner and the woman.