

“Winning” Policy Briefs



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Photo credits (left to right): Albert Gonzalez Faran, Carlos Matos, Akshay Mahajan

Purpose of Session

- Increase your capacity to develop effective policy briefs that clearly convey the
 - Problem/opportunity
 - Specific issue to address
 - Evidence-based options
 - Recommended actions

....to convince a **targeted audience** to take a specific course

Overview of Session

- Basics and key components of a brief
- Three essential steps of a brief's development
 - Hone (the beginning)
 - Transform (the middle)
 - Review (the end)
- Examples from India and Senegal

BASICS AND KEY COMPONENTS

Basics

Briefs...

- Address a timely problem/opportunity
- Focus on a single issue/topic related to that problem/opportunity
- Target a specific audience
- Are concise at 2–4 pages

Components

What is the first component of a brief?

➤ **Title**

- Meaningful
- Short
- Punchy

Components

➤ **Executive summary (approx. 2 paragraphs)**

- Problem/opportunity statement
 - Context, scope, importance
 - Current response
- Approaches and options
 - Assessment of current approach
 - Identification of the specific issue you will address
 - Options for change/progress
- Proposed course of action
 - Your “ask”!
 - Main rationale and benefit—your key message!

Components

➤ **Main body**

- Status of the issue
 - “State of affairs”; central root causes (note any strengths, if applicable)
- Current landscape
 - Current policy environment, approaches, and major influencing factors (all levels)
- Available option(s)
 - Specific course of action
 - Key supporting evidence (rational, emotional, and ethical arguments)

Components

➤ **Recommendations**

- Way forward
 - Feasible, specific actions for the near term
 - Tailored to the audience

➤ **Conclusion (optional for shorter briefs)**

- Reiteration of the main take-aways and urgency
 - What's in it for the audience and the beneficiaries

➤ **Resources (optional)**

- Referral to further information/details

Components

➤ **Graphics (cross-cutting)**

- Figures
 - Simple and meaningful
- Side-bars/text boxes
 - Focused and short
- Photos
 - High-quality and relevant
- Quotes
 - Powerful public statements

Components

So, what do you think are the most important components of a brief?

- Title/headings
- Executive summary
- Graphics
- Recommended actions

THREE ESSENTIAL STEPS

1. Hone (the beginning)

Before you start writing, answer a set of key questions that will help

- Refine your focus
- Organize your content by the brief's components
- Capture and highlight the crucial information

Tool: Policy Brief Drafting Outline (handout)

2. Transform (the middle)

While you are writing, think about how your information/data can be

- Grouped
 - Sub-headings/sentence lead-ins
 - Bullets and numbering
- Called out
 - Side-bars/text boxes
 - Figures and info graphics
 - Photos and quotes

Draw in the reader
and go for
maximum impact!

3. Review (the end)

Conduct a self-review to

- Determine whether you achieved your goals for the brief

...and share your brief with at least one outside reviewer

Tool: Policy Brief Self-Review Questionnaire (handout)

EXAMPLES

INDIA AND SENEGAL

Title

Does the title capture the key message?

Example from India

- Current: Contraceptive Choices
- Alternative: Expanding Method Choice to Increase Contraceptive Use

Example from Senegal

- Current: Senegal's Progress Towards FP2020
- Alternative: Accelerating Senegal's Progress Towards FP2020 Goals

Executive Summary

Does the brief clearly state the urgent issue or opportunity, its broader importance, and the “ask”? Is it clear who the audience is?

Example from India (introduction):

International data over 27 years show that as each additional contraceptive method became available to most of the population, overall modern contraceptive use rose. Family planning programs should strive to provide widespread access to a range of methods. The addition of 1 method available to at least half the population correlates with an increase of 4–8 percentage points in total use of the 6 modern methods, for example, from 40% to 44% or 48%.

Executive Summary (cont.)

Does the brief clearly state the urgent issue or opportunity, its broader importance, and the “ask”? Is it clear who the audience is?

Example from Senegal (introduction):

Two years ago, Senegal joined other world leaders in committing to an ambitious goal: by 2020, an additional 120 million women and girls will have access to contraception and relevant family planning information. For its part, Senegal committed to...[bulleted list of commitments]

Main Body

Given the audience, does the brief have the right level of detail?

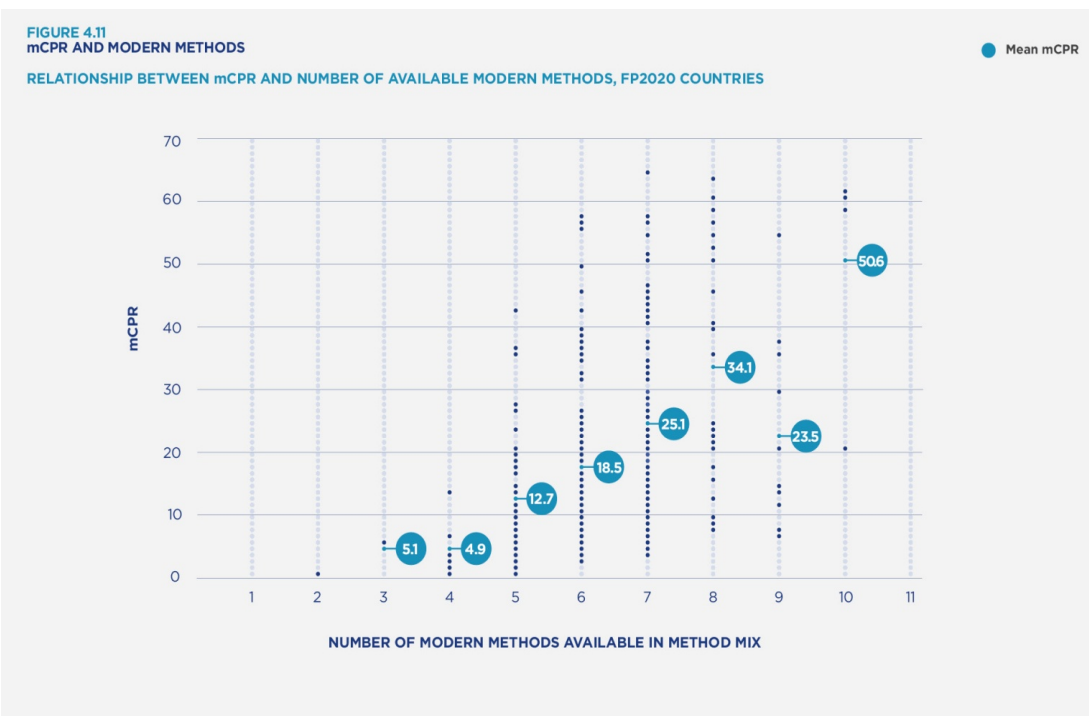
Example from India (see brief)

Example from Senegal (see brief)

Graphics

Are the key messages captured through simple graphics, with meaningful headings?

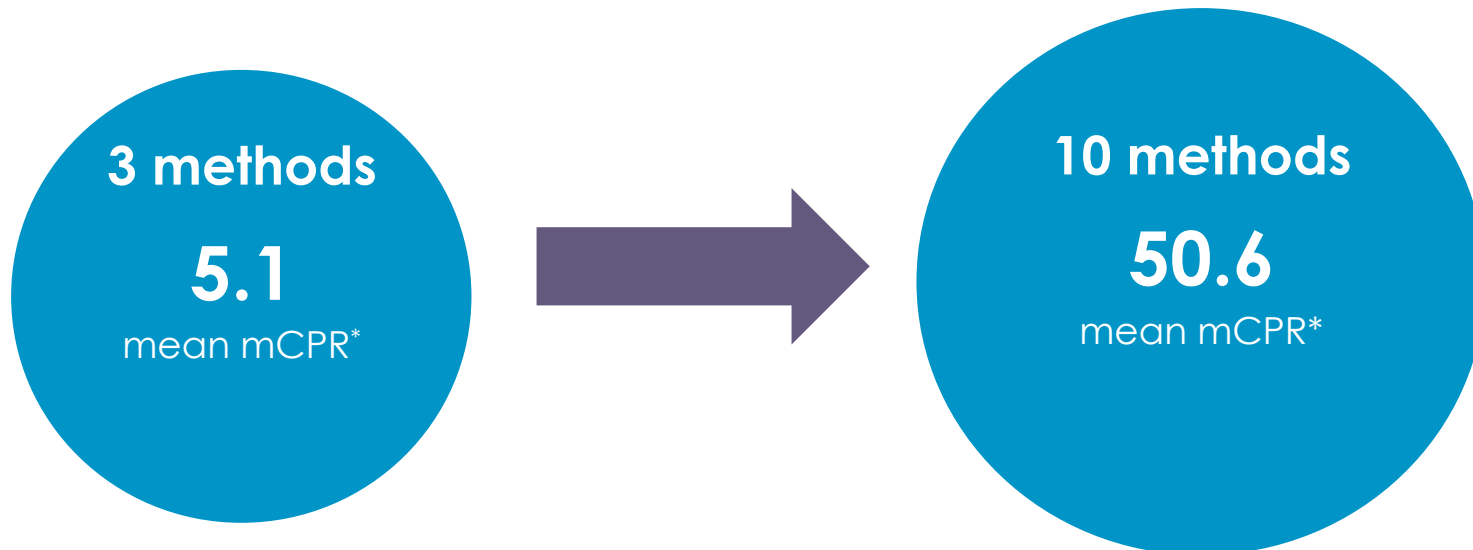
*Example from India:
Current (no external
heading was
included)*



Graphics

Example from India: Alternative

Figure 1. Expansion in modern method mix correlates to increased contraceptive use

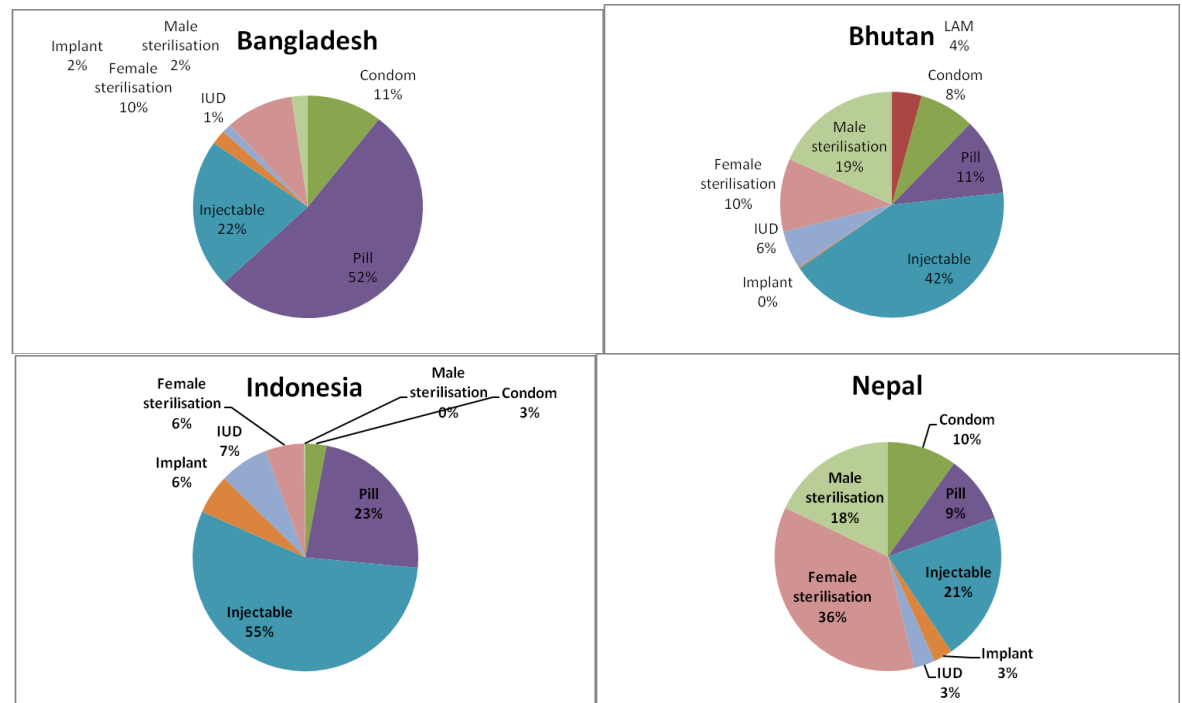


* Reference...

Graphics

Are the key messages captured through simple graphics, with meaningful headings?

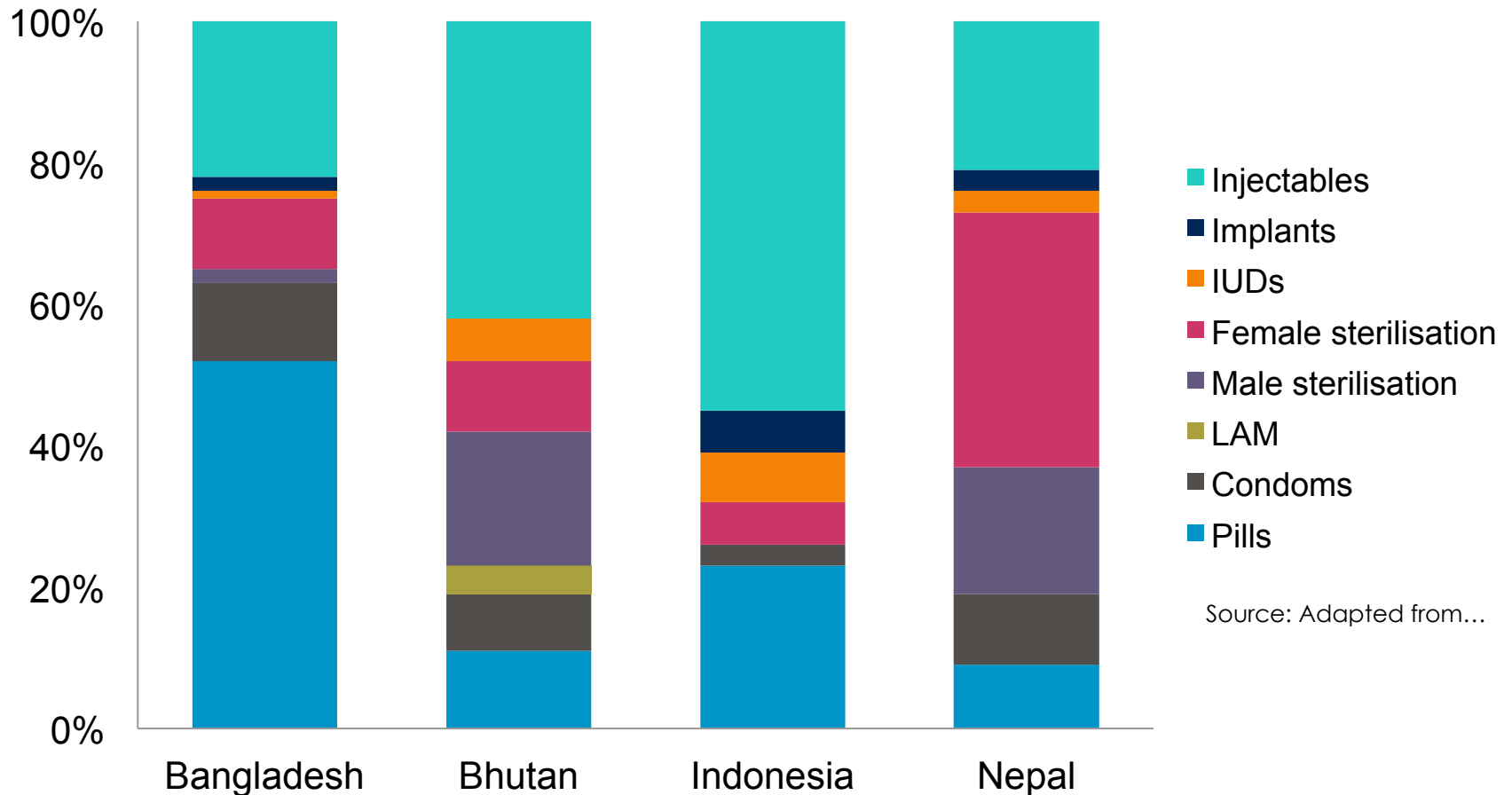
*Example from India:
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was included)*



Graphics

Example from India: Alternative

Figure 2. Eight methods available in neighboring countries

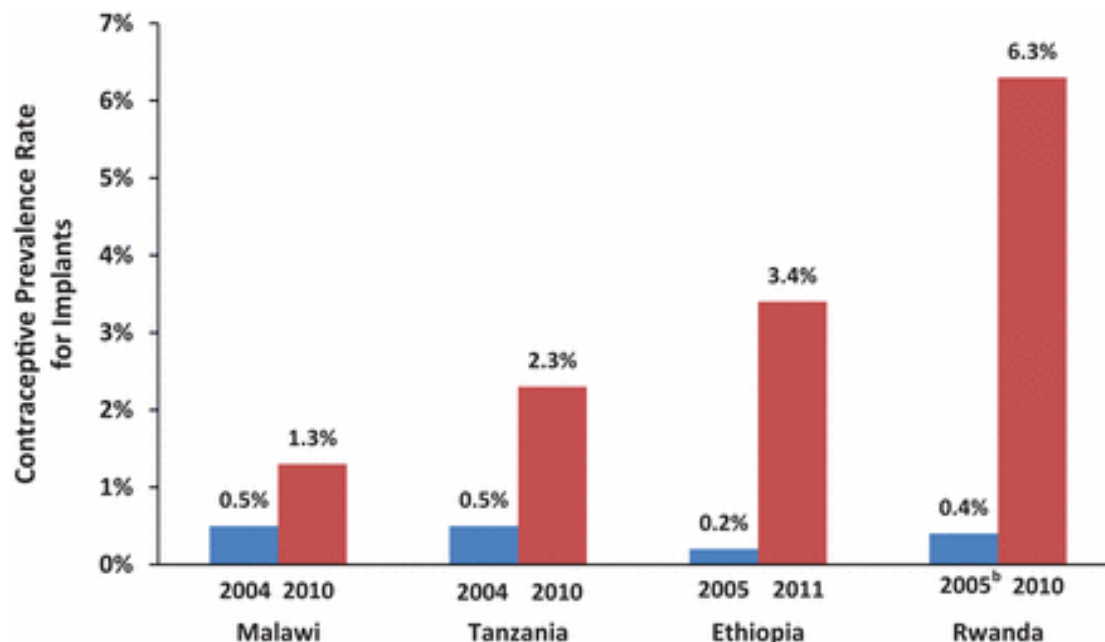


Source: Adapted from...

Graphics

Are the key messages captured through simple graphics, with meaningful headings?

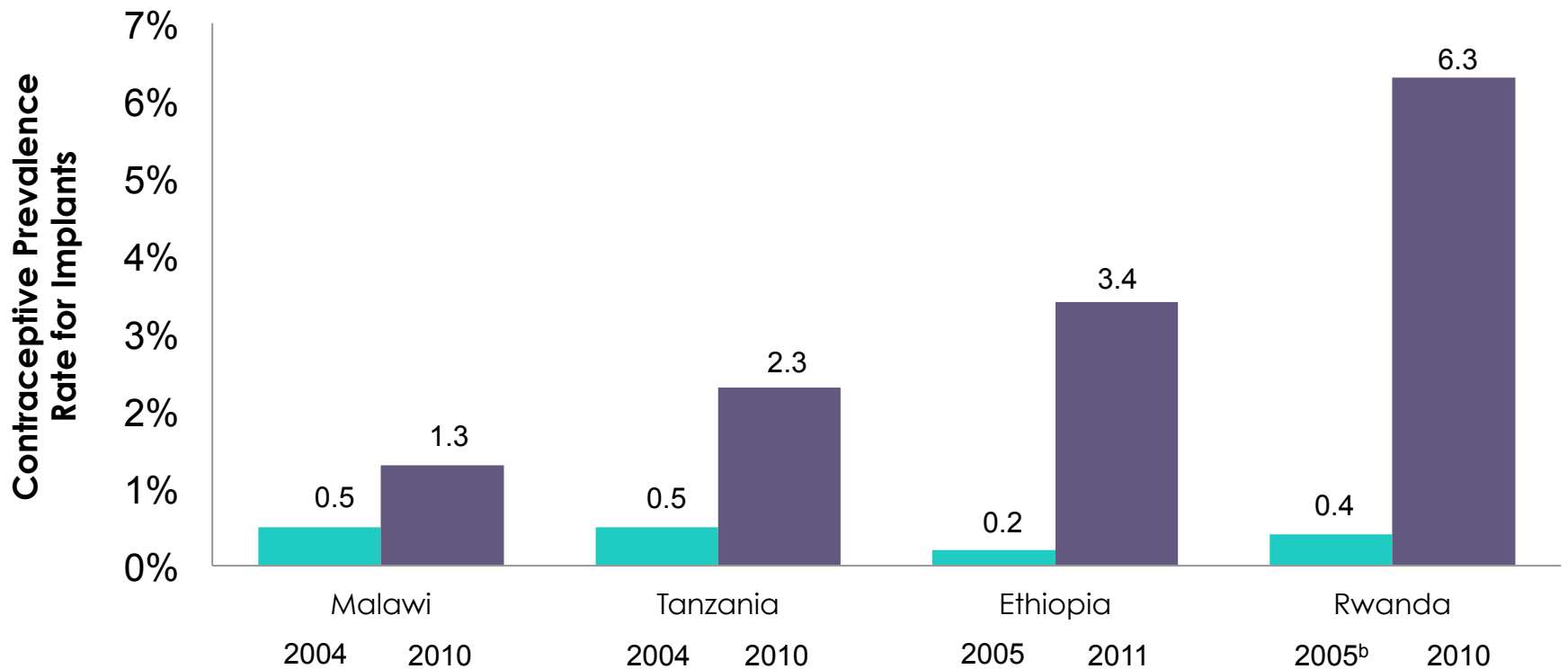
*Example from India:
Current (no heading
was included)*



Graphics

Example from India: Alternative

Figure 3. Satisfaction and continuation rates for implants have led to increased use



Source: Adapted from....

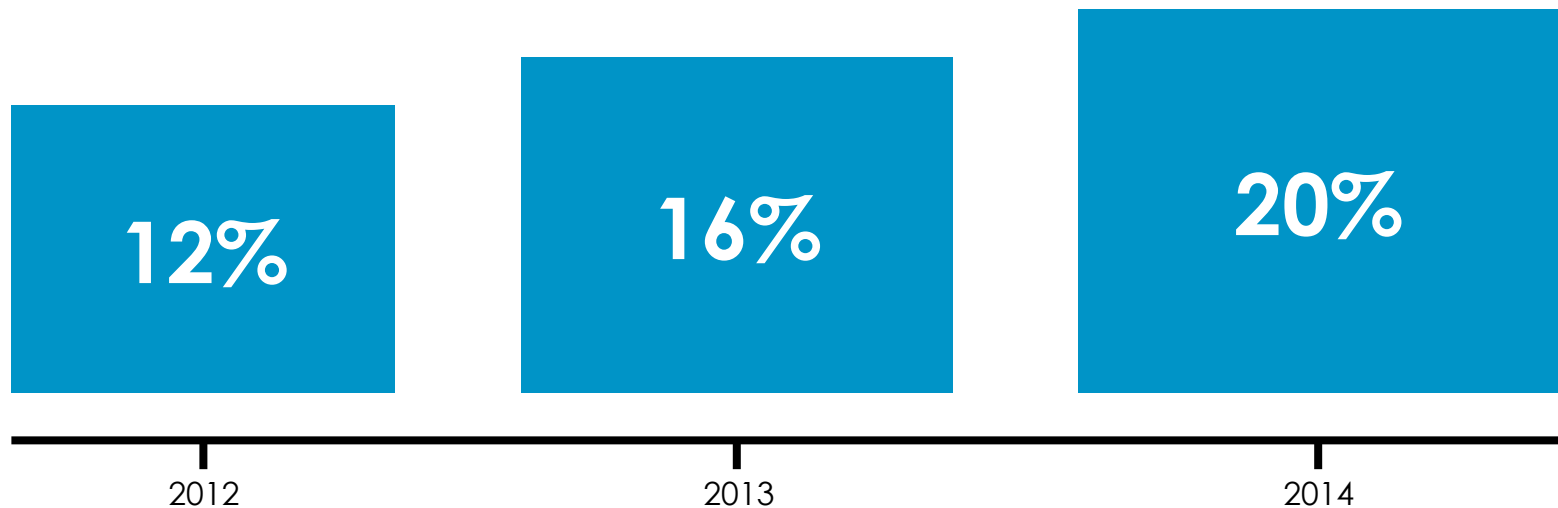
Graphics

Are the key messages captured through simple graphics, with meaningful headings?

Example from Senegal (see brief)

What data could Senegal highlight?

Increased Percentage of Women and Couples Using Modern Contraceptive Methods



Graphics

Example from Senegal (see brief)



Recommendations

Is the “ask” represented by feasible, specific actions? Is the role of the audience clear?

Example from India (excerpt):

- **Focus on clients with unmet family planning need.** In order to successfully expand reach, programs must identify and focus on serving prospective users who lack access to a broad range of contraceptive methods.
- **Deliver high-quality services.** Ensuring high-quality service delivery, including effective counselling for informed choice, at clinical and operational levels, serves as a catalyst for future demand and expansion of service delivery. A positive reputation among clients creates a feedback loop in which existing clients refer new clients.

Recommendations

Is the “ask” represented by feasible, specific actions? Is the role of the audience clear?

Example from Senegal (excerpt):

- First of all, **by expanding the FP2020 commitments from capital cities to communities.** We should reinforce the national political and financial commitments at the local level. Local leaders can and should use their own resources to increase contraceptive supplies and services;
- Secondly, **by providing more women with more contraceptive options.** We can encourage public-private partnerships to make all contraceptive methods accessible in every region across the country. We can ensure that trained community health workers are available to provide necessary quality information and services;

Conclusion

Does the conclusion include the main take-aways and provide a sense of urgency?

Example from India:

The 2012 London Summit on Family Planning, attended by more than 150 leaders and representatives of governments and civil society, endorsed an ambitious goal of providing family planning to an additional 120 million women. India committed to reach 48 million new users. Introduction and widespread provision of new contraceptives in a quality manner offers a substantial way to help achieve this goal. **However, any new contraceptive method that is introduced, will have to be supplemented with a robust supply system, adequate training and infrastructure and improved quality of care in services being provided.**

Conclusion

Should a conclusion be added to Senegal's brief?

FEEDBACK

Useful Resources for Policy Brief Guidance

- Women's and Children's Health Policy Center: Writing Policy Briefs:

http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/womens-and-childrens-health-policy-center/de/policy_brief/index.html

- FAO Communications Toolkit: Lesson 4.1: Preparing Policy Briefs

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/i2195e/i2195e03.pdf>

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