

Rights-based Family Planning

What is a rights-based approach to family planning?

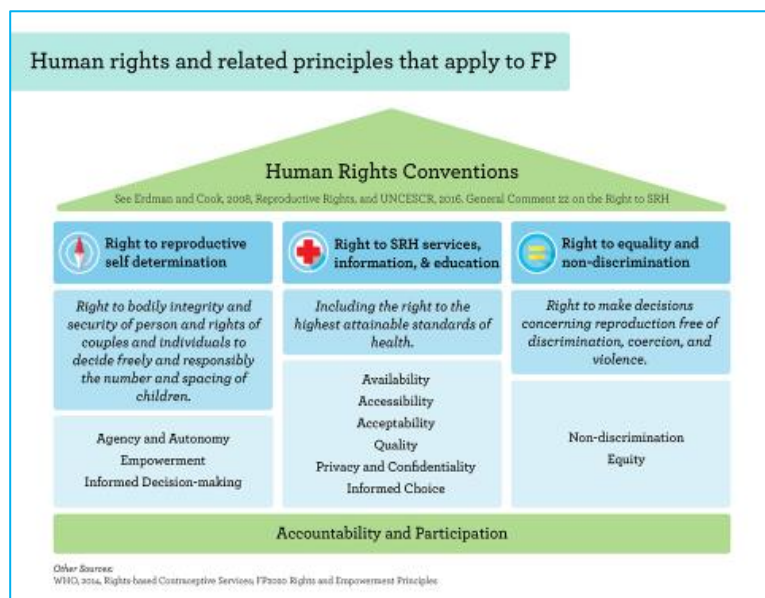
A rights-based approach to family planning (FP) is one in which all phases of a program (needs assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and management) are viewed through the lens of individuals' human rights and how rights are or are not upheld in communities and in FP programs. The goal of this approach is to fulfill the rights of individuals to determine freely and responsibly the number and timing of their children with access to quality information and services, free from discrimination or coercion. Rights-based family planning is driven by the needs and rights of people the program is meant to serve, rather than the program's structure, systems, staff or numeric goals.

Applying a rights lens reframes the way we typically think about programs, including how we define goals, what we value and what we measure. This approach strives to give everyone – no matter their sex, what community or ethnic group they come from, their marital status, age or circumstances – equal access to the family planning information and services they want. It is characterized by treating people equitably, with dignity and respect, and providing high quality care to all. It rewards respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of individuals and couples to make and act on their FP decisions. This approach focuses on both clients and those not being served, and pays particular attention to meeting the needs of hard-to reach populations. In addition, this approach recognizes the role of communities --- in working to change community conditions that limit rights (e.g., gender norms that give men authority to make decisions about women's health) and in working with service providers to ensure quality rights-based services. Taking a rights-based approach is not only the right thing to do; it is a legal commitment governments have made to their people.



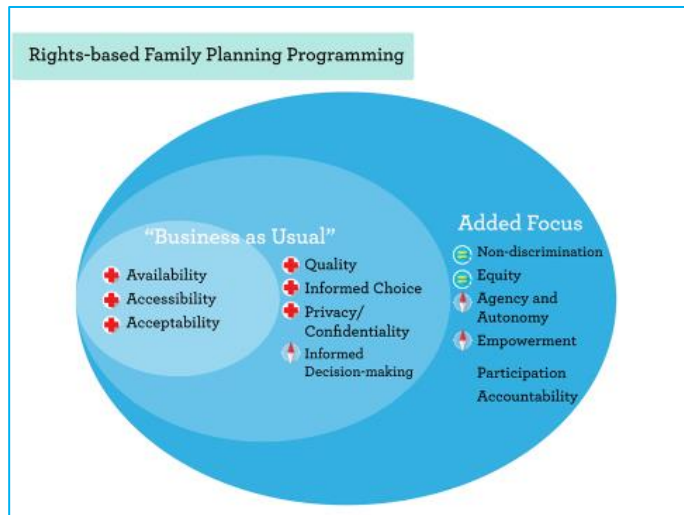
How is a rights-based approach different from what we normally do in family planning programs?

A number of rights and empowerment principles help guide implementation of a rights-based approach. Most family planning programs are already applying many of these elements to strengthen essential components of rights-based programming- like increasing access, improving quality, expanding method options, ensuring voluntary, informed choice, and promoting gender equality – even if staff don't think of these interventions in terms of human rights. For a true rights-based approach, more is needed.



Rights literacy among all FP program staff, including policymakers and healthcare staff responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling individuals' human rights ("duty bearers") is necessary for them to understand their role, and to define the practices that support or hinder human rights. Rights literacy among individual clients and potential clients ("rights holders") is essential to ensure that they know, and can demand their rights.

In addition, community participation, individual empowerment, equity and accountability need to be valued and supported as essential program elements. This entails demand generation and SBC activities that address gender norms and other inequalities that disempower women relative to men, that constructively engage men in family planning, and that help people understand their rights. It requires structures (like Health Committees) and opportunities for collecting input from community members regarding program planning as well as feedback on implementation, including provider-client interactions, and the availability and quality of services. It requires high quality counseling that supports clients' voluntary,



informed decision making. It invites routine review of service data to identify who you are, and are not, serving and why, and to track method mix for indications of free choice or provider bias. It means that rights-explicit elements are built into staff performance expectations and appraisals. Importantly, a rights-based program establishes mechanisms for monitoring, investigating, managing and redressing rights violations to hold its staff accountable. This includes the adoption of rights-explicit monitoring indicators, establishing routine client feedback mechanisms, conducting periodic client record audits, instituting protocols for researching and reporting on alleged violations, taking corrective action to prevent recurrence and providing legal recourse to clients whose rights have been compromised.

The biggest difference between a rights-based approach and "business as usual" is in the mind-set of those designing and working in the program. In this approach, the program is intentional about respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of clients and potential clients in all that its staff does.

What does taking a rights-based approach get you?

Ensuring that human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled is not only a desired end in itself; it can accelerate and enhance desired outcomes programs have focused on for years, such as quality of care, increased access and demand, increased use and continuation, and gender equality. Using a rights lens leads to different performance expectations, rewards different behaviors, makes it easier to identify challenges and unforeseen negative consequences, and suggests different solutions to problems. Due to its emphasis on community participation, this approach also yields more responsive and accountable programs, which results in greater trust and sustainability. Evidence suggests that ultimately, it leads to greater sustained use of family planning.

What's in it for me?

- *If you are an individual being served*, you get the information and services you want to achieve your reproductive intentions, and are treated with respect, without discrimination.
- *If you are a service provider*, you enjoy the trust of your clients and support from your community.
- *If you are a government official or a donor representative*, you get enhanced and accelerated program outcomes, increased sustainability and protection against negative, unintended consequences that can undermine your program.
- *If you work for an implementing agency*, you get an approach that unifies and guides all elements of a holistic, quality family planning program.

For more information on rights-based family planning under FP2020, see

<http://www.familyplanning2020.org/microsite/rightsinfp>