

PERSPECTIVE : Leadership in Population and Reproductive Health

For leaders in the population and reproductive health (RH) sector, aiming to serve and work with the poor, marginalised and disadvantaged, the tasks are daunting and the responsibilities enormous. Among the challenges endemic to the sector are:

Yet leadership matters even more in such an environment. This is because leaders emerge and shine the brightest in challenging or difficult situations, that is, environments of change. ICOMP has been working with leadership capacity development since the 1990s, with women and community leaders, as well as government and NGO programmes. This issue of Feedback highlights two [recent projects](#).

Leaders get elders and youth together



Leaders communicate



Challenges to the Sector

- Weak political and community will and commitment
- Unpredictable and inadequate funding coupled with shifting global thematic emphases
- Resistance from traditional cultural practices
- Weak policies and programmes, and inadequate implementation capabilities including infrastructure
- Shortage of well-trained staff and low morale
- Threat of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases
- Health sector reform and more expensive privatised health care

(For a better understanding of the ICOMP strategic leadership framework, please see the "Strategic Leadership Development Newsletters" series at <http://www.icomp.org.my>)

From experience, ICOMP believes leaders in the population and RH sector should ideally have the following:

- ✓ **Self-related individual competencies.** Commitment; innovative problem-solving; sensitivity to gender and equity; share a vision; effective communication and public speaking skills; interpersonal relations.
- ✓ **Organisation-related capabilities.** Updated knowledge of developments in the sector; strategic management skills; ability to inspire and empower people; create a learning environment and ensure accountability.
- ✓ **Inter-organisational partnering.** Skills for advocacy, negotiation and consensus-building to bring a cohesive and consistent process of social decision-making; strategic alliances; sustain policy dialogues.
- ✓ **Development of community capacities.** Create empowered communities to meet their own aspirations; strengthen positive community values, norms and institutions.
- ✓ **Participation in policy and programme activities.** Effectively advocate and manage population concerns, programmes and constrained resources; consolidate actions on population and development at national, regional and international forums; engage in dialogue; keep leaders updated on developments in the North and pioneering initiatives in the South.

Perceptions and expectations about leadership and leaders change over time. Some common concepts are indicated below.

Type	Basic concept
Great man theory	Leaders are born, not made
Trait theory	Leaders have certain traits, competencies and behaviour
Power and influence theory	Leaders have power and influence
Results-based or behaviourist theory	It is what leaders actually do that matters rather than what they are
Situational theory	Different circumstances require different forms of leadership
Leader as servant theory	Leaders are seen as serving others
Transitional leadership theory	Leaders and followers have an exchange relationship
Followers' attribution theory	What do the followers attribute to the leaders
Transformational leadership theory	The leader is a proactive and innovative visionary

Source: Covey, Stephen, 2004. "The 8th Habit". New York: Free Press

ICOMP EXPERIENCES : Leadership Development – 2 recent projects

The recent surge of interest on leadership in reproductive health (RH) programmes commensurate with the growing complexity of and demands on these programmes, particularly given the drive towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, it is not clear what the successful strategies for leadership development in RH sector are.

From experience, ICOMP has learned that leadership training alone is not enough; follow-up support and nurturing of competency development is essential. Individual training is more effective and enduring if it is complemented by organisational (or team) development.

Visionary Leadership Programme in Population and Development (VLP)

With the tagline “Realising the full potential of future leaders”, the VLP (2002-06) had the aim of creating a ‘critical mass’ of visionary leaders in four countries (Ethiopia, India, Nigeria and Sudan) to address some of the pressing challenges in the RH sector. A cohort of 187 participants from more than 150 organisations went through a 10 to 12-month learning process (box 1). An innovative training component of the VLP was mentoring where participants were matched with a seasoned recognised leader in a compatible field for personal learning and informal coaching. As part of their peer exchange and networking competency building, the project encouraged the participants to create informal advocacy groups to take proactive steps to address local challenges, using local resources. Through enhanced skills and self-confidence, many participants were individually recognised by their peers, as evidenced by invitations to serve on various task forces, drafting committees, advocacy networks, and so on. Many of these VLP leaders continue to make progress in their professional lives contributing to the RH sector and to serve their communities better. The VLP was supported by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Box 1 : The VLP Process



For profiles of selected emerging VLP leaders, please access

http://www.icomp.org.my/pub/vlp_profiles.pdf

Strategic Leadership Development Initiative (SLD)

Accelerating improvements in RH through the SLD initiative in the Asian region (2004-07) was aimed at strengthening leadership in the 10 participating countries through (a) Leadership competency development; (b) South-South sharing of experiences; and (c) Exposure to best practices. The SLD used a 2-tier approach: ‘top-level’ was for heads of RH or HIV/AIDS programmes at a central agency while ‘middle-level’ was for senior officers of provincial or state programmes. A total of 56 participants in Asia strengthened their SLD competencies through specialised leadership training, six SLD issue-specific newsletters and follow-up country team work. Additional technical inputs for the training were provided by UNFPA country support teams in Bangkok and Kathmandu as well as three training institutions in China, India and Indonesia that were part of the SLD regional network. These were the International Training Programme of the National Family Planning Coordinating Board (Indonesia); Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad (India) and the Nanjing Population Programme Training Center International (China). The individual country teams – with varying degrees of success – chose to work on challenges that were specific to their locations ranging from “Linked response to HIV/AIDS and RH” (Cambodia), “Low delivery with skilled birth attendants” (Myanmar) to “Adolescent reproductive health” (Nanjing, China) and “High unmet need for family planning in the Muslim region” (Philippines). The SLD was supported by UNFPA Asia and Pacific Division.

PROFILE IN LEADERSHIP : Fazle Hasan Abed

Born in 1936, Fazle Hasan Abed was educated at the Dhaka and Glasgow universities. An accountant by training, he worked as a senior corporate executive at Shell Oil in Chittagong in his native Bangladesh before giving it up to work for the poor.

The Liberation War of 1971 was the impetus for Mr Abed's venture in social development. His fundraising campaign for the war effort, "Help Bangladesh" led to his founding BRAC in 1972 to help with relief and rehabilitation for millions of returning refugees. BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) has grown to be one of the largest NGOs in the world in terms of scale and programme interventions. It has an annual budget of over US\$300 million, employs 15,000 people, and has programmes in all 64 districts in the country. Through its programmes, it provides and protects the livelihoods of about 100 million Bangladeshis. It celebrated its 35th anniversary on 15 February 2008 with a huge festival in Dhaka. (www.brac.net).

A recipient of numerous international awards and recognition, the most recent three being the Yale University Doctorate in Humane Letters, the Henry R Kravis Prize in Leadership, and the Palli Karma Shahayak Foundation Lifetime Achievement in Social Development and Poverty award, Mr Abed is a giant in the field of development, health and poverty eradication.



**Founder and Chairman
BRAC Bangladesh**

After 35 years, BRAC is a success story in sustainability and programme management. ICOMP spoke with Mr Abed, a proven leader with rich experiences to share. Below are some of his thoughts on leadership

What does it take to be a good leader?

One needs to devote oneself entirely to one's work and be free from preoccupations related to accumulation of personal wealth. A leader must regard his work as a lifestyle, rather than a 9-to-5 job. A leader needs to work effectively with different partners to make a difference and change society. We inculcate values of leadership, partnership and ethical practices. At BRAC we regard the poor as our partners in a common struggle.

What is the secret behind BRAC's phenomenal success?

The first thing is our determination to bring about changes in the lives of poor people. Second thing is, we need to think in national terms. We always had a national goal; we never thought in terms of working in a small area. The third thing is inspiration. Paolo Freire got us thinking that the poor could become actors in history and not just passive recipients of other people's aid. It is our duty to empower them. Finally, we need to have the ability to do the work. The organisation must be competent to take on national tasks.

What advice would you give emerging leaders facing similar human challenges as yours?

I made a decision when I founded BRAC. I would not seek any financial or other resources for myself. I would not go after my own financial fulfilment. In a way, some mental renunciation is necessary. Your commitment has to be total. Leadership is not a part-time occupation. Starting BRAC was something I voluntarily chose for myself.

As a leader what have you done consciously to make your leadership a sustainable one?

I think a leader not only gets others to follow him but also develops other leaders. If not, then as soon as he departs, the organisation falls apart. My conscious effort has been to empower people with me and below me so that they can make decisions.

LEADERSHIP CHECKLIST

- Some mental renunciation is necessary
- Commitment must be total
- Able to transmit your vision and values
- Work hard and live an exemplary life so that others are inspired
- A leader must develop other leaders

RESOURCES : A Selection of Influential Books on Leadership

- Adair, John, 2002. *Effective Strategic Leadership*. London: MacMillan
- Bennis, Warren and Joan Goldsmith, 1994. *Learning to Lead*. Reading, USA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co
- Boyett, Joseph and Jimmie Boyett, 1998. *The Guru Guide*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Burns, James MacGregor, 1978. *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers.
- Charan, Ram, Stephen Drotter and James Noel, 2001. *The Leadership Pipeline*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Collins, Jim, 2001. *Good to Great*. Why New York: HarpersCollins Publishers.
- Covey, Stephen, 2004. 8th habit. *From effectiveness to Greatness*. New York: Free Press.
- Goleman, Daniel, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, 2002. *The New Leaders*. London: Little, Brown
- Heifetz, Ronald A and Marty Linsky, 2002. *Leadership on the Line*. Boston: Harvard Business School
- Kotter, John P., 1999. *What Leaders Really Do*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kotter, John P., 1996. *Leading Change*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kouzes, James M. and Barry Z. Posner, 1995. *The Leadership Challenge*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Kouzes, James M. and Barry Z. Posner, 1993. *Credibility*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Maxwell, John C., 1993. *Developing the Leader within You*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers
- Maxwell, John C., 1995. *Developing the Leaders around You*. Nashville: Thomas Publishers Nelson
- McCauley, Cynthia D, Russ S Moxley and Ellen Van Velsor (eds.), 1998. *The Center for Creative Leadership Handbook of Leadership Development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Nanus, Burt, 1992. *Visionary Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Nanus, Burt and Stephen M. Dobbs, 1999. *Leaders Who Make a Difference*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Senge, Peter, 1990. *The Fifth Discipline*. New York: Doubleday.
- Senge, Peter, et al. 1994. *Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday.
- Ulrich, Dave, Jack Zenger and Norm Smallwood, 1999. *Results-based Leadership*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

RESOURCES : A Selection of Websites

Websites with information on leadership or for leadership training courses:

www.ccl.org
www.managementhelp.org/leadership
www.leadershipdevelopment.com
www.leadersinstitute.com
www.secretsofsuccess.com
www.leadershipnow.com

Websites of reproductive health related organisations, academic institutions or donor agencies that fund or have projects on leadership development or offer leadership training programmes:

www.cedpa.org
www.icomp.org.my
www.ihp.org
www.intrahealth.org
www.jhsph.edu/gatesinstitute
www.leadershiplearning.org
www.msh.org
www.pathfind.org
www.thirdwavefoundation.org
www.undp.org
www.population-leaders.washington.edu
www.summitfdn.org
www.iie.org
www.irh.org
www.jhuccp.org
www.macfound.org
www.packard.org
www.reprohealth.usf.edu
www.worldbank.org/wbi



Young leaders have an increasingly important voice in reproductive health

Leaders engage the community

