

Zamfara state Islamic scholars and traditional leaders (ISOLs) may take part in the local government budget preparations

22 December 2009

On their return from a 2-week Egypt study tour on family planning/reproductive health (FP/RH) in August 2009, Islamic scholars and traditional leaders (ISOLs) of the three programming states of Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara became well conversant with the position and provisions made by Islam on FP/RH. Their actions towards FP/RH take a new dimension with consistent vibrancy to achieve their goal for the better of their people. Considering that all of them have their constituencies, they begin to disseminate accurate information, clarifying misconceptions about FP/RH from the experience of Egypt study tour and subsequent forums held in their various states for their mentees. Simultaneously, they encourage their people through Friday sermons, town hall meetings and radio programs to patronize FP/RH services. They do so through inculcating the significance of such services in combating maternal mortality and morbidity in their locality. Most of the ISOLs embark on mobilizing institutions concerned and political leaders in charge to intensify their effort towards mitigating maternal mortality.

The ISOLs of Zamfara state in particular, took a giant step on 14 December 2009 to take the bull by the horn in their attempt to create an effective liaison with their political counterparts who attended similar training by USAID/dRPC on FP/RH in Sokoto last August. This attempt is no more than paying a strong advocacy visit to the honourable members of Zamfara State House of Assembly for budget increase on RH. The advocacy visit team comprised the District Head of Tudun Wadan Gusau Alhaji Bashir Muhammad Dan Baba, the District Head of Wonaka Alhaji Usman Kogo Abdulkadir, Sheik Nasiru Muhammad Assamarawi and Sheik Aminu

Mafara. Four dRPC officers, two television reporters and one newspaper correspondent, accompanied the ISOLs.



The District Head of T/Wada is lobbying for budget increase and statewide retreat for ISOLs on FP/RH

Being their foremost request, the ISOLs lobbied the assembly for direct budget increase on RH. Secondly, they requested the Assembly to urge the government to organize a special retreat to all traditional leaders and Islamic scholars of Zamfara state on RH; so that they can have enough knowledge to convince their people that FP is not against Muslim population and to persuade them at last to embrace the services.

Fortunately, members of Zamfara state house of assembly who attended the USAID/dRPC retreat in Sokoto developed their vision in their group action plan as *enacting an enabling law to reduce maternal mortality in Zamfara state as a*

whole. This vision of the House of Assembly members is in congruence with that of the ISOLs and stands to be a turning point in improving the issue of RH in Zamfara by producing the following impacts:

1. The house of assembly accepted the request of the ISOLs and gave them their word by reiterating the house's willingness to give priority to the health sector during the forthcoming budget session. The deputy Speaker, representing the Speaker, expressed the need to involve the ISOLs in local government budget preparations where he promised to send a letter to the Ministry for Local Government to seek for their inclusion in budget preparation.
2. Regarding the state retreat, the deputy speaker promised to convey ISOLs' request to the appropriate channels and ensure that the retreat benefits more than 200 traditional leaders Zamfara state has as well as selected scholars from all corners of the state.



The Deputy Speaker responding to the request of the ISLOs

Out of the ISOLs' commitment and enthusiasm to bring about positive change for the betterment of their people, they, after the advocacy visit, took it upon themselves to follow up, step by step the promises of the assembly in order to arrive at concrete accomplishment. They urged dRPC to help them with technical assistance and professional advice to succeed in that regard.