

ACCELERATING BIRTH SPACING PRACTICES IN AFGHANISTAN

*Management Sciences for Health in
Collaboration with the Ministry of
Public Health and in Partnership with
Afghan NGOs*

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**Douglas Huber, MD, MSc
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Why we started

- Reducing maternal deaths through increasing use of contraception.
- Identifying the factors that contribute to successful family planning initiatives.
- Advocacy for contraceptive use with community, religious leaders, and health professionals.
- Identify factors for success of contraceptive use.

The fastest, easiest, cheapest way to prevent maternal deaths is with contraception

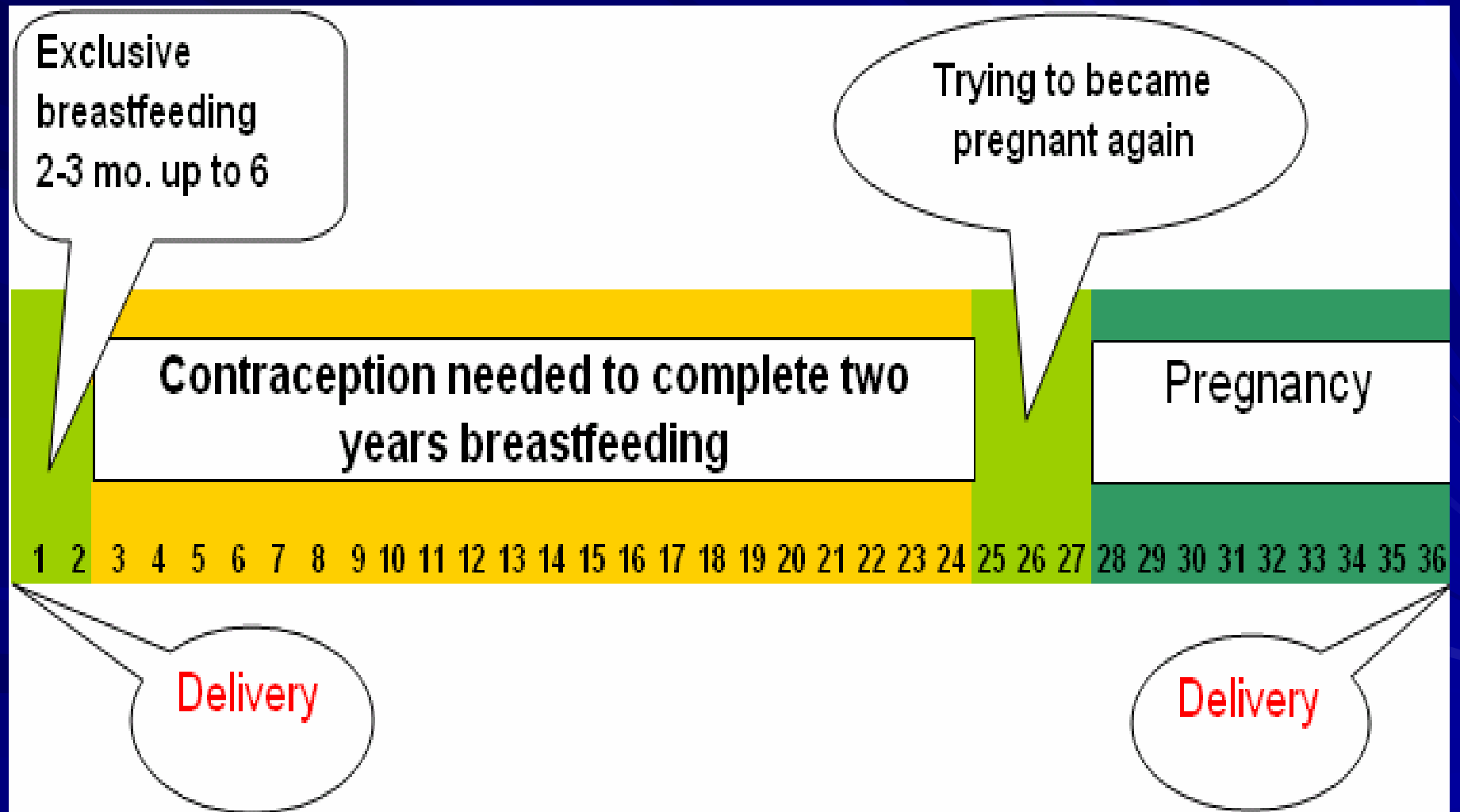


One in seven women will die from pregnancy and childbirth in Afghanistan

Main message

- Wait 2 years after childbirth before trying to become pregnant again, achieving 3 years birth spacing
- Effective contraceptive method needed for 18+ months, starting about 2 months after delivery
 - (many Afghan women supplement breastfeeding early)
- 3 years birth spacing important for child and maternal health

Three years birth spacing needed for health of children and mothers



MSH-Hewlett project Afghanistan 18th of October 2006

Main approach

- Main message supported by Holy Quran:

*And mothers shall suckle their children two full years for those who wish to complete breast-feeding
Bagara (Sura 2:233)*

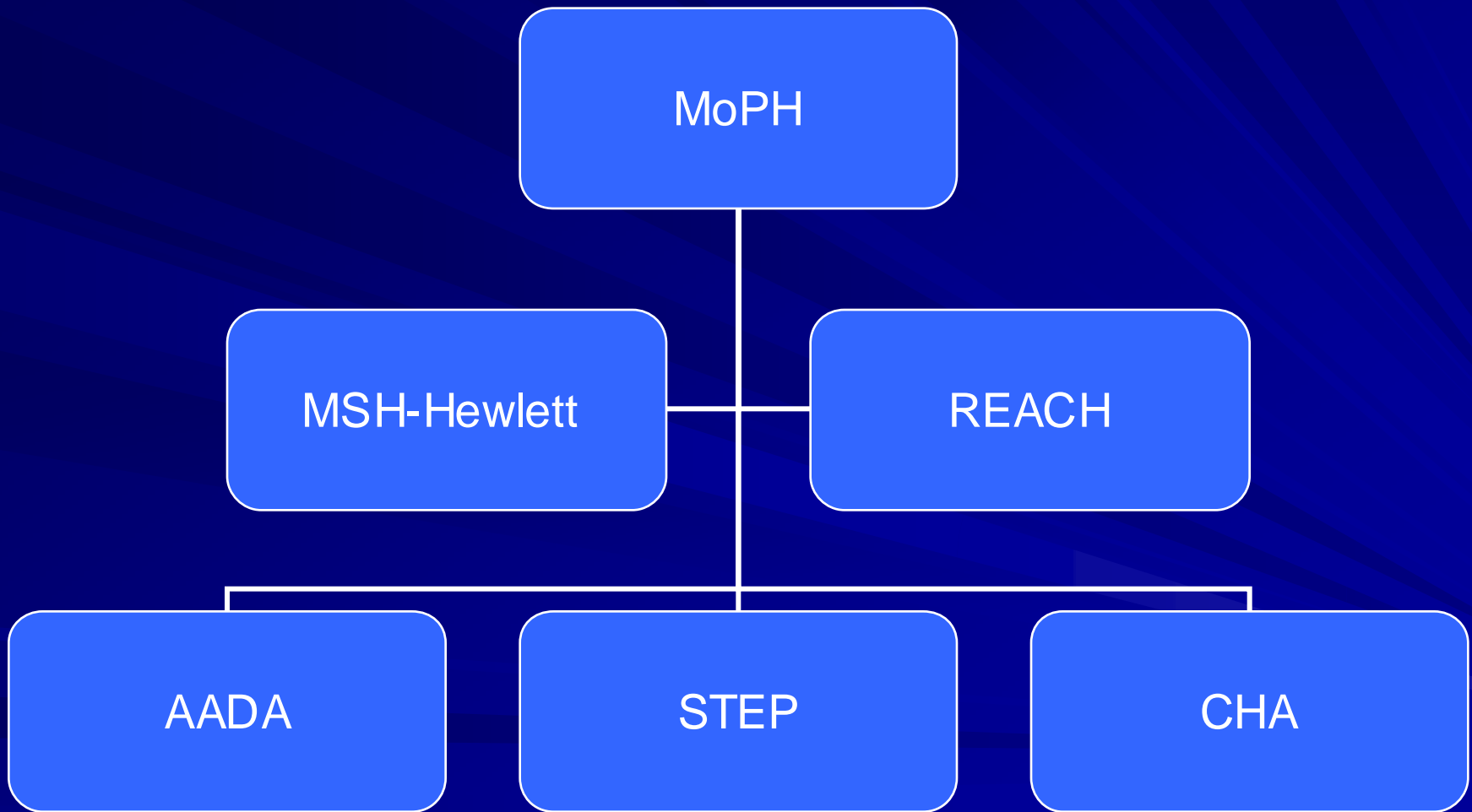
- Approach birth spacing in community and with health providers based on updating correct information on contraceptives

Harmony Between Teachings of Islam and Rationale for Healthy Timing and Spacing of Pregnancy (HTSP)

- “The Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) taught the importance of birth spacing 1400 years before science documented the health benefits for women and children” *Pashtoon Mullah, Farza, Kabul Pr.**

**Discussion in Farza when explaining improved health outcomes with 3+ year birth intervals-D. Huber, 2005*

District's name NGOs/	CHWs	HPs	Households in HP catchment areas only	Total Households in CHC & HP Catchment areas
Tormai/AADA	20	10	732	852
Islam Qala/CHA	15	10	840	1640
Farza/STEP	30	15	2136	3924
Total	65	35	3708	6416



“Myths and Reality”

- Disseminated “Myths and Reality” based on misconceptions about contraception: e.g. pills and injectables cause infertility
- Distributed through NGOs and widely through REACH to 2400 health providers

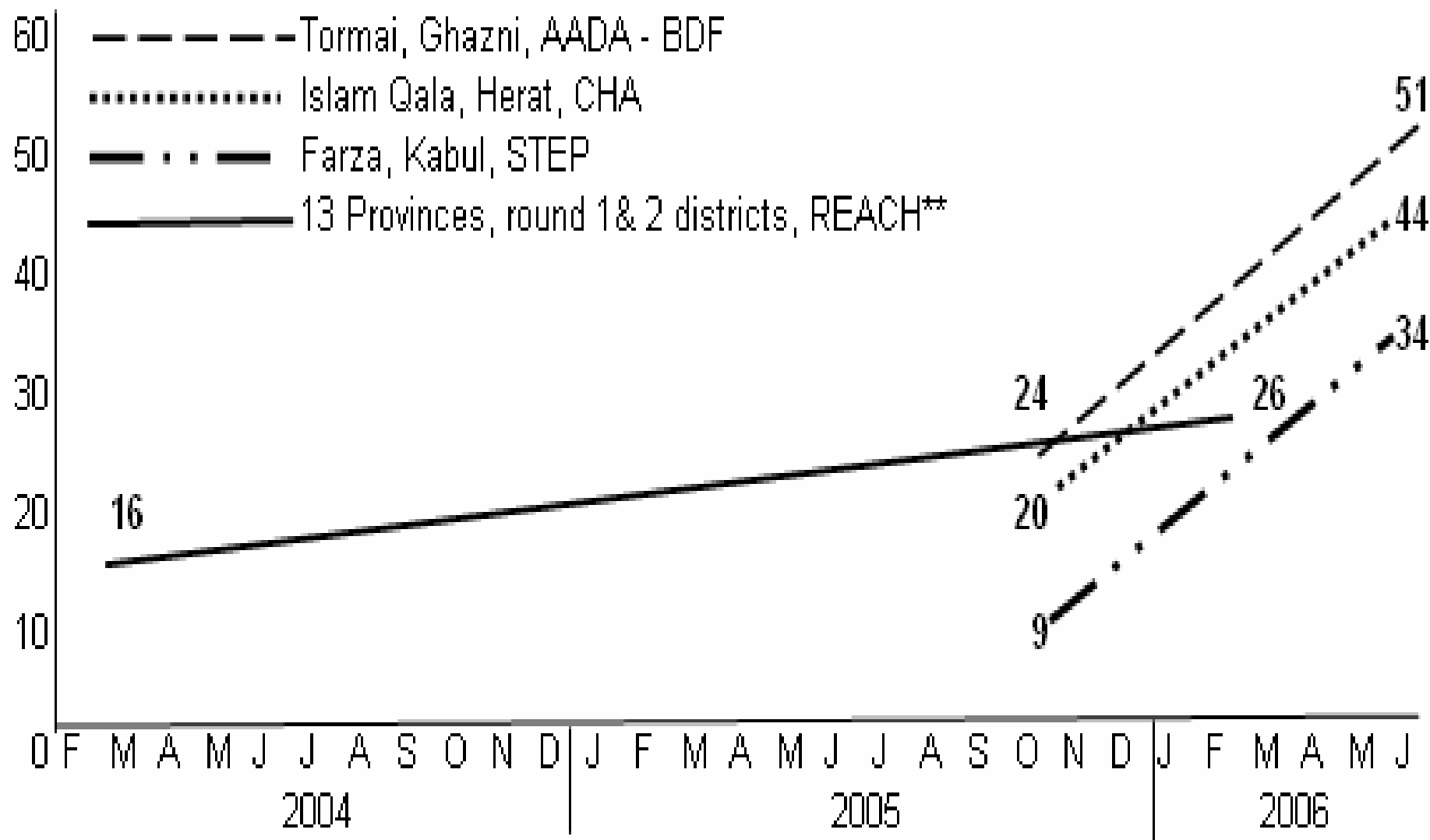
Pilot Interventions

- Injection initiative: CHWs giving first injection, with RL & community approval
- Brochure: 1) essential contraceptive guidance for all households; 2) providers received same & management of side effects
- Health Post sign board
- Condom pictorial instructions: assessed acceptance and use; relig leaders key

CPR



Progress in Contraceptive Prevalence Rates, Hewlett pilot project (3 CHCs, HP only) REACH (13 provinces both HP, HF)*



* HPs Health Post, CHW only; HF Health Facility, Clinic staff

Contraceptive Prevalence Rates (CPR) by method 10 HPs,
Tormai, Ghazni, AADA – BDF Oct 2005 and June
2006; Total MWRA* 732

Methods	Oct 05	June 06
Pill Users	9	6
Injection Users	7	18
Condom Users	6	25
IUD	2	1
Permanent methods	0	1
All methods	24%	51%

*MWRA; Married Women of
Reproductive Age 15 - 49

Contraceptive Prevalence Rates (CPR) by method 10 HPs,
Islam Qala, Herat, CHA Oct 2005 and June 2006; Total
MWRA* 840

Methods	Oct 05	June 06
Pill Users	11	12
Injection Users	6	27
Condom Users	1	2
IUD	1	1
Permanent methods	0.5	2
All methods	20%	44%

*MWRA; Married Women of
Reproductive Age 15 - 49

Contraceptive Prevalence Rates by method, 15
 HPs, Farza, Kabul Pr, Oct 2005 and June 2006--
 Total MWRA 2136*

Methods	Oct 05 CPR (# users)	June 06 CPR (# users)
Pill	5 (102)	13 (265)
Injection	2 (39)	15 (317)
Condom	3 (47)	4 (77)
IUD	0 (0)	1 (8)
Permanent	0 (0)	0 (0)
All methods--TOTAL	9 (188)	34 (667)
*MWRA; Married Women of Reproductive Age 15 - 49		

Community awareness



Religious leaders awareness on FP

Mullah, Sayed Hasson: “I examined the issue of contraception planning from the perspective of Islam. The prophet of Islam was aware that some Moslems were using a simple method. He did not forbid them. Also we can find verses in the Holy Quran that persuade people to prevent life risks. We see frequent births as a risk to life--these should be prevented. I always pass this message to the people on Friday before the pray.

Reception of Contraceptive Guidance Brochures

- One Mullah who initially disagreed with FP became favorable due to the brochures.
- People used and welcomed brochures and illiterate woman asked other literate members to read the brochure.
- Many people retained the brochure in their households, especially with quote from the Holy Quran

Lessons learned

- Correcting misinformation about contraceptives is very important for RL, community, and health staff
- Brochures with brief contraceptive guidance useful for women, men and CHWs, including quote from Holy Quran
- CHWs can be very effective for increasing contraceptive use

Lessons learned (cont)

- Ethnic and cultural differences are not a barrier for contraception
- Community and religious leaders, when well informed, will support birth spacing and modern contraceptives
- Contraceptive method preferences vary widely, and leadership of mullahs may determine method mix
- NGOs, MoPH, and donors should plan for increased contraceptive use with RL support

Religious Leader Support for Afghan Birth Spacing Project

- Approval crucial for new birth spacing initiative in community
- RL concerns overcome with correct information on methods—of 37 mullahs in areas none disapproved and many actively supported the project
- RL advocated for 3+ year birth intervals and need for contraception

Religious Leaders and Afghan Birth Spacing Project, cont.

- Reviewed and approved each innovation—e.g., CHWs giving first injection, quotations from the Holy Quran on brochures
- Actively educated the community
- Advocated contraceptive use on national television

Scaling Up: Next Steps

- Expand correct contraceptive information for public, religious leaders, health professionals—sea change needed
- Make contraception easy and simple for providers and clients—use HTSP
- Strengthen Basic Package of Health Services with support to CHWs
- Link CHWs, with community leaders (Shura) and health facilities

Scaling Up: Plan for Success

- Provide adequate resources for major increase of contraceptive use
- Procure appropriate commodities for increased use
- Monitor performance of CHWs, the backbone for increased use
- Train health providers in clinical methods
- Equip CHWs to manage side effects and counsel well—provide coaching

Religious leader's awareness of contraception

Mawlawi Abdul Jalil from Surkhan Khil village said that by birth spacing with contraceptives we give the opportunity to breastfeed for two years, which is an obligation of Moslems. We can also provide opportunity for children's better education. He added, by practicing birth spacing we reduce deaths of mothers and children. So it is a comprehensive service, not sin.

Story from Islam Qala

A senior Imam in a Pashtoon area of Herat province was asked about the family planning program during a meeting with him and other mullahs. He said, “Yes, I know about family planning. In fact my wife has been using injectable contraceptives for six months. See here in my notebook I keep the date for her next injection to help remind her, because she cannot read.”

The *woleswal* (mayor) of Farza, a Pashto area in rural Kabul Province

“Eight months ago, talking about contraception was a taboo. Now people easily talk about birth spacing practice and its importance. No matter where people get together, birth spacing has become a value within our people and they know it’s the most effective and quick way to reduce maternal and child death.”