



A life-changing opportunity

The wider benefits of our Foundation Year Programme



Benefits for the student

I can do more now because I've mingled with different people. When you travel to a different area you learn from the attitudes and behaviour of others. I'm learning things from my student friends like ways of dressing, cooking and reading.

FYP graduate

People now take my advice – like my husband, neighbours and friends. I confidently advise them and can voice my opinion everywhere without being afraid of anything”.

FYP Student, Jigawa State

Since it began in 2012, the Women for Health programme has worked to address many of the practical and strategic challenges of increasing the number of female health workers, especially midwives, in rural areas of northern Nigeria.

The programme recruits young women from rural areas and helps them to get professional training and return to their community as qualified health workers – where they can have the greatest impact on maternal, infant and child mortality and act as role models and champions.

A key element of this programme has been the Foundation Year Programme (FYP), an access scheme designed to help candidates overcome poor schooling and achieve the academic qualifications needed to win a place on and succeed on a professional course. Three cohorts of students have now completed the FYP and nearly 4,600 have moved on to professional training courses.

This success story considers the broader impact of the FYP – examining other positive impacts that stem from giving young women from rural areas such a life-changing opportunity: greater confidence and social status, raised aspirations for women and girls in the participating communities, and changes to community attitudes to issues such as early marriage for daughters.

■ Raised aspirations

Communities worked with Women for Health to identify suitable candidates for the FYP. Many of those recruited assumed their access to education had ended, as the poor quality of rural school meant they did not have the grades required for entry into tertiary education. The longstanding practice of marrying daughters after junior secondary school combined with other factors – the cost of higher education, lack of information on options, and geographic and social marginalisation – mean that girls' aspirations, higher education and professional training were generally very low. The opportunity to participate in the FYP improves their life prospects and raises their aspirations.

■ Broader horizons

Students on the FYP stay in student accommodation and mix with other young women from different parts of the state and country, as well as from different social backgrounds. Students watch and learn from each other. Moving from rural areas to a large town or state capital also opens their minds and broadens their horizons.

■ Increased confidence and self esteem

When the students begin FYP, the majority are shy and reluctant to speak out in class. At home they were meek and accepting of their subjugated position in the family and community. Being selected for FYP, and the interest shown in them by their community, Women for Health and their tutors, increases their confidence and sense of self-worth. Counselling helps them to overcome personal, social and academic issues and improve self-awareness. Training in leadership, communication and negotiation further enhances their development. FYP graduates feel much more confident, are able to speak in public, and to negotiate with husbands and others.

What makes me happy is because I am about to become a midwife and be able to help my people and myself. It has been my childhood dream. "Zaka samu daukaka sosai" I will gain improved status and recognition."

FYP Student, Katsina State

Benefits for the families and community

The programme has brought great achievement into the community. We have really appreciated this crucial initiative because it has led to the development that the community are proud of. The students too are happier because they have the interest and have been looking for this kind of opportunity.

Traditional Leader, Katsina State

We don't have indigenous female health workers in our community. We only have one from the south and our women here don't want to deliver with her because of differences in religion, language and culture. But I'm sure when I start working more women will be willing to come for ANC and hospital delivery, because I'm from this community, they see me as a sister.

FYP Student, Kano State

■ Economic empowerment

FYP students receive a small stipend each month. For many it is the first time they have had any money of their own. While some send a little home, they are able to spend it as they wish. Students are assisted to open personal bank accounts and taught how to manage their money. Moreover, FYP students and their families have the possibility of a professional salary to look forward to in future. Should they not gain a place on the professional programme, they are given entrepreneurship and financial literacy training as well as seed funding to provide them with a basis for income generation in future.

■ Improved status in the community

FYP students receive a lot of respect from their friends, family and community members. They are seen in a new light and are asked to help make important decisions in the family and community. They provide guidance on health and other issues and act as role models for other young women and girls. They are often invited as guest of honour at special community events. Family members are also more likely to be invited to important events and their advice sought by other parents or husbands.

■ Raised community aspirations and hope for the future

An opportunity for anyone to study at tertiary level rarely comes to rural communities. The selection process is undertaken by, and through, the community itself, which raises its status in the district. This kind of interest in the community is unusual and gives hope to people that often get very little attention and support.

■ Educational opportunities for other women and girls

As a result of a young women studying on the FYP, other parents in participating communities begin to see the value of education for girls. Many are now encouraging their daughters to study hard and stay in school in order that they might get a similar opportunity, even if not in health. The FYP students themselves encourage this, by mentoring young women and girls in their community and ensuring their own siblings are educated. Investing in educating women and girls can kick-start a virtuous cycle of development as women are more likely to invest back into their family and community. As one traditional leader from Jigawa said:

"The most significant change is that a lot of girls want to further their studies because of Women for Health assistance which has inspired them"

■ Transforming norms on child marriage and early pregnancy

While deeply-rooted gendered social norms in communities take a long time to transform, there are signs that the Women for Health programme is beginning to contribute to some changes in FYP students' communities. With greater potential for an alternative future, parents are now less likely to 'give' their daughters to child marriage and therefore these girls are less likely to get pregnant early.

■ Women's health needs addressed by female health workers

Having a trusted female health worker who is from the community, encourages women in that community to use health facilities and seek support from trained health professionals – which will ultimately contribute to reducing the current high levels of female and infant mortality and morbidity in rural areas.

Health Partners
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