

# Maternal Health Young Champions Program

## Final Evaluation

### Executive Summary

January 2014

The Maternal Health Young Champions (MHYC) Program was a collaboration between the Maternal Health Task Force (MHTF) at the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) and the Institute of International Education (IIE). The MHYC Program was implemented from October 2012 to December 2013, providing a nine-month internship and leadership program to young professionals working in the field of maternal health.

This Executive Summary presents the evaluation findings from interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires collected from 27 key stakeholders across five countries: Ethiopia, India, Mexico, Nigeria and the United States. The key stakeholder groups included the Young Champions, their mentors and host institutions, and program staff from IIE and MHTF. The evaluation was carried out by IIE's Center for Academic Mobility Research between August and December 2013.

#### Detailed Findings

- **The levels of preparation** the Young Champions (the YCs) received prior to the start of the Program varied across countries. While all ten participants attended the pre-departure orientation prior to their trip to the Arusha Maternal Health Conference, some YCs would have liked more information about their host institution and their mentors prior to starting their internship.
- Attending **the Global Maternal Health Conference and the leadership training that IIE sponsored in Arusha was very useful to all the Young Champions**. The conference was also attended by some of the mentors, and they discussed their satisfaction in being invited to the event and getting to meet their YCs for the first time.
- All the YCs participated in a nine month internship program as part of the MHYC Program. The focus of the program experience varied: six Champions reported that they conducted research during their internship, one YC implemented a community project, and three other participants conducted research and implemented a local project. All of the **projects focused on maternal health issues**, though the size and scope of each varied.
- Eight out of ten YCs were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the expectations that the program had of what they would accomplish as a result of the experience. Only one participant noted that (s)he was not satisfied with the program expectations, and this reflected back to her/his disappointment with her/his host organization and mentor.

#### Young Champion Skills and Development

- All of the Young Champions indicated that through different learning opportunities they have been able to **build on their previous professional experience** and to **improve their research skills in maternal health**. The mentors and MHYC staff agreed that the YCs improved their research skills, leadership skills, and their knowledge in the field of maternal health. However, **improvements in skills varied significantly by country**.

- All stakeholders were asked to rate how much impact the MHYC Program has had on the Young Champions' overall professional development. Using a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being "no impact" and 5 being "very much impact", all of the Young Champions responded that the program had **at least some impact** ( $M=4.1$ ). The MHYC staff, mentors, and host institutions supported the finding that the program impacted the Young Champions' professional development.
- Along with professional development, the MHYC Program also had a strong impact on personal development. During the interviews with the Young Champions it became apparent that the Program has left **measurable impact on each individual**.

### **Mentorship and Professional Networks**

- Asked about the **advantages** of the mentorship component, most mentors and their YCs agreed that the mentors:
  - Provided guidance for the internship;
  - Taught the YC research and management skills;
  - Exposed him or her to issues in maternal health;
  - Assisted in keeping the internship on track and focused.
- The **disadvantages** of the mentorship component from the point of view of the Young Champions centered around three issues: communication, skills mismatch and compatibility, and program outlook.
- In general, the YCs **felt agreeable with the relationship** they shared with their mentor. All YCs agreed or somewhat agreed, for example, that their mentor was responsive and gave them feedback on their research. Six of the ten YCs agreed (and two somewhat agreed) that they were working on a team with their mentor, indicating favorable feelings of collaboration.
- The least favorable views on the mentorship component were related to YC/mentor compatibility. Four of the ten Young Champions **did not feel compatible** with their mentor due to their matching skill set.
- When asked if the mentor had facilitated **opportunities to meet other professionals** in the field of maternal health, six Young Champions responded *yes*, two responded *somewhat* and another two responded *no*. Of those who were provided opportunities for professional networking from their mentor, many stated that they were proactive and asked their mentor to put them in touch with other professionals.

### **Impacts on the Field of Maternal Health**

- All ten Young Champions indicated an **interest to continue to do work in the field of maternal health**. Among the various visions YCs had for their future, they indicated advocating for advancement (7 YCs), joining an organization or staying with the current one (6 and 3 YCs), and advancing graduate studies (3 YCs). All of the Young Champions voiced their agreement in furthering the work of the MHYC Program and continuing to work on their research or implementation projects.
- **The impacts at home country level** include commitment to maternal health nurtured in the YCs, the completed community projects and research within the YCs' internship

programs and the dissemination of their findings to academics, practitioners, and government officials.

- **At the global level** the MHYC Program created a global network of Young Champions that is committed to working together and sharing their experiences and interests in maternal health issues. The MHYC Program can influence global issues in advancing research in the field, particularly through the work of the Young Champions in the program and after. It is important to note that all stakeholders were cautious to attribute major changes in maternal health due to the small number of Young Champions in the program.

### **Lessons Learned in Program Implementation**

- Six of the ten Young Champions felt that they had gotten full support from IIE throughout the program, followed by three respondents who felt they got moderate support. There was only one Young Champion that did not feel that he or she received adequate support.
- The mentors and host institutions also voiced similar support for IIE program management, though almost all of the respondents noted that they would have liked to have received more information about the program and also about the guidelines for their role with the Young Champions.

### ***Key Recommendations***

- **Allow sufficient time to set up the key program elements of a multi-country program for maternal health.** All respondents agreed that the program would have benefitted from a longer startup period, when the individual country teams could have had adequate preparation of the program selection, setting of guidelines, and the matching process.
- **Create clear and transparent selection and matching criteria for program participants, mentors, and host institutions.** MHYC created a decentralized selection process; however, because different selection criteria were used in different teams, the matching process did not appear transparent to program participants.
- **Identify program guidelines for program participants, mentors and host institutions prior to program start, including clear goals and expectations of program outcomes and stakeholder roles.** The program participants and MHYC staff agreed that one of the weakest components of the program was the lack of clear criteria related to the roles of the Young Champions and the mentors, as well as the role of the host institution.
- **Increase program communication between IIE and Maternal Health Task Force to increase the visibility of the program and also include more feedback from the funding partner.** In the YCs' opinion, more communication was required between IIE and MHTF throughout the program. In addition, the lack of communication between IIE and MHTF sometimes appeared as confusing to the Young Champions.
- **Maintain the decentralized, in-country management structure of the program to increase collaboration between program staff and participants in various countries.** All program staff, as well as the Young Champions and mentors, discussed the successful collaboration of the various country teams in the program, and the importance of having effective communication between program staff and the program participants.