

Strategic Planning & Stakeholder Surveys at Marie Stopes International

The organisation

For over 30 years, Marie Stopes International (MSI) has applied modern business methods to the social goal of enabling low-income women and couples to have 'Children by Choice, not Chance'. MSI Partners in the developing world work closely with governments, health professionals, other non-government organisations and local communities to design and deliver innovative and high-quality programmes of sexual and reproductive health care that are culturally appropriate and responsive to local needs.

The need

Following a baseline Organisational Assessment, contributing Programme Directors (PDs) suggested that the development of an overall MSI strategic plan would provide them with more effective direction than operational targets alone, and would facilitate local decision-making and flexibility in what are often difficult circumstances. A global MSI Strategic Plan was needed to consolidate the thinking on MSI's future and provide the clarity of direction needed for sustainable growth across the partnership. The project was to produce MSI's first global strategic plan and through the process:

- Explain the purpose and importance of a partnership-wide strategic plan to gain the support and contribution of internal stakeholders
- Carry out an analysis of the external environment including an External Stakeholder Assessment
- Set the stage for a more in-depth Strategic Planning exercise to be carried out for the next strategic planning timeframe.

What we did

MSI had already carried out a number of partnership-wide activities in previous years that had contributed to the then current strategic thinking, including Partnership retreats and a Strategic Priorities paper from the Chief Executive, Dana Hovig. So the first stage was to identify what already existed and which gaps needed to be filled by the strategic planning process. Jacqueline guided the MSI team to develop a proposed approach for the strategic planning process and helped to identify the four key questions facing the organisation e.g. how to be financially self-sufficient whilst delivering affordable services to the poorest people. Jacqueline also suggested, co-designed and delivered:

- A global internal stakeholder survey that asked for feedback on what additional information staff and managers required in order to turn the Strategic Priorities into reality
- A global external stakeholder assessment survey with telephone interviews conducted with 16 key international stakeholders and e-mail surveys sent to over 200 external stakeholders identified by PDs and Support Offices.

The outputs from these activities were presented to senior managers across the Partnership at Africa and Latin America, and Asia retreats in Tanzania and Nepal with Jacqueline co-designing and delivering the seminars. Presentations were followed by rich discussions that resulted in concurrence on some issues and the need for further analysis of others.

Following the retreats Jacqueline supported the team in further analysing the survey results,

the outcomes of the retreat discussions and conducting desk research to provide content for the first draft of the Strategic Plan. During this process Jacqueline ensured that MSI took increasing ownership for the development of the strategic plan and her role evolved into providing occasional advice and support to the internal team as they brought the strategic plan ever closer to a document that was clear, accepted by all and used internally as a guide to decision making.

Benefits

- The strategic plan built on existing thinking, documents and questions and the process took advantage of existing forums and international meetings
- The strategic plan was developed in a modular format that facilitated the creation of different extracts for different audiences
- The strategic plan was developed with wide participation internally, ensuring clarity of and buy-in to the results and staff motivated to implement it
- The external consultation provided the basis for a radical rethink of MSI's approach to the outside world, which has resulted in an increased profile and influence
- J Hill Associates provided:
 - o The infrastructure for the internal and external stakeholder surveys including the interviewing, analysis and report, thus ensuring confidentiality and independence of conclusions and recommendations
 - o Templates, tools, and techniques for the strategic planning process and a mentoring approach that transferred skills and knowledge
 - o An independent view and informed challenge based on their work with MSI on the original baseline survey.

Comments from Marie Stopes International

"The reaction internally to the strategic plan has been positive and we feel good about the final result. People are using it and referring to it which I think is always a good sign, e.g. providing to new starters and referring to it to look at where we need to focus to reach the targets. Thanks (Jacqueline) for your contributions and for all your efforts to keep a-not-very focussed group on-track as we found our way through MSI's first ever global strategic planning process."

Stefanie Wallach, MSI's Strategic Projects Manager commented

"Jacqueline came into a complex situation and provided much needed clarity. She coached and mentored the project team, transferring skills, knowledge and confidence."

Michael Holscher, Director External Relations