

# Communication Building Blocks for Community-based Programs

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One of the most important lessons we have learned from our experience on community-based behavior change programs is usefulness of communication building blocks or cornerstones. Five such tools, developed by AED BCC teams in Madagascar and Ethiopia, have served as special impact boosters for community volunteers and health professionals.

- **The Child Health Card:** this “family-friendly” health record covers the period from a baby’s birth through her first five years. As such, it is a fundamental tool that both parents and health workers value highly. Mothers frequently carry the health card back and forth from their house to the health clinic for 3 years or more. The card includes pages that health workers use during illness and focuses parental attention on the 25 or so most beneficial health actions that they can carry out to promote growth and prevent disease.
- **The Mother’s Card** includes safe motherhood, family planning and HIV/AIDS messages. It can be used to record important health information for three pregnancies. Like the Child Health Card, this tool is valued by mother and health workers. It also can be designed to promote actions that fathers can carry out to help their wives give birth to a healthy child.
- **The Youth Passport:** this tool helps adolescents learn life skills related to their personal health and safety. It puts all the essential HIV/AIDS-related information in the hands of a youth. For many young people the Passport acts as a personal journal. Programs have also had success when encouraging youth to work through the Passport with a friend or buddy and to discuss its themes together.
- **Vaccination Diploma:** this incentive (who doesn’t like to receive a diploma?) dramatically simplifies the messages surrounding immunization. Instead of the whys and wherefores of immunization, the central message becomes, “Make sure your child receives his vaccination diploma before his first birthday.” If a family has received the diploma, they are encouraged to brag about it and to be sure that each child has one. Health workers like this tool as well because of the appreciation mothers express when they receive the diploma.
- **Buzz materials:** these materials are postcard size (or smaller) and generally are available in note pads of 100. They are the lowest priced print material around and as such literally hundreds of thousands can be put into circulation to create a “buzz.” Community volunteers and health workers hand out buzz materials as reminders to complete the immunization series, or to continue breastfeeding or to give an extra meal to a child each day after she’s had diarrhea. One buzz material that is particularly useful is the “family planning invitation card.” Providers ask clients if they know anyone who might be interested in family planning services. Sure enough, everyone does, even in regions with very low contraceptive prevalence. Giving the card to a friend triggers dialogue around family planning. For a certain percentage of the population simply being invited to the FP clinic is all the encouragement they need to take action.