



Introducing a Digital Demand Aggregation Platform – askNivi chatbot

July 2024/ Shankar N Subramaniam, FHM Engage and Ben Bellows, Nivi

About this Brief

Family planning (FP) has been recognized as one of the most cost-effective solutions for achieving gender equality and equity as it empowers individuals, particularly women, with the knowledge and agency to make healthy reproductive choices for themselves and their families. India's recent National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) shows that India has achieved replacement fertility levels. However, with the world's largest adolescent and youth population,¹ access to FP information and services is fragmented, and current solutions leave large gaps that threaten to stall decades of progress and undermine women's and men's attempts to achieve their own fertility objectives.

The USAID Frontier Health Markets (FHM) Engage activity in India aims to bridge these information gaps through a host of targeted interventions for market actors across the value chain. Through the creation of the [Women's Health and Livelihood Alliance \(WOHLA\)](#) in partnership with Samhita's Collective Good Foundation (Samhita-CGF), FHM Engage aims to work with multiple stakeholders to create a well-informed contraceptives market. WOHLA will address the information needs of a variety of market actors, providing knowledge of newer contraceptives; product introduction, promotion, and marketing guidelines; affordable financing options; and market demand estimates.

Problem Statement

Fragmentation of FP services and information in India both hamper efforts to prevent unintended pregnancies and compromises the ability of individuals to plan and space their pregnancies according to their desires. Furthermore, disparities in access to FP services disproportionately affect marginalized populations, exacerbating existing inequalities. Existing gaps include:

1. **Knowledge gaps, skewing the use of contraception to permanent methods:** Several research studies have documented a general lack of comprehensive knowledge about contraceptives among clients and providers in low- and middle-income countries, and it contributes

¹ *Adolescent development and participation*. UNICEF India. (n.d.). <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/adolescent-development-participation>

significantly to women's unmet need in India.² While knowledge of any one method is near universal among married and unmarried sexually active women, knowledge levels across all contraceptive choices vary significantly – with knowledge levels highest for female sterilization (97%), followed by pills, intrauterine devices (IUDs) and male condoms (73%), and emergency contraceptive pills (54%)³. Knowledge of new generation pills (3rd and 4th generation), which have fewer side effects and are more suitable for younger women, is quite low.⁴ These knowledge gaps are reflected in the uneven use of various modern contraceptive methods and an increase in the use of traditional methods.

- 2. Hindered access, due to systematic issues in the private and public sectors, and regulatory burdens:** In India, the private sector makes up 45 percent of the market for pills and 40 percent for condoms but supplies a much lower share of injectables (30%) and IUDs (24%). Given that pharmacies are a critical and popular access point – both in urban and rural areas – for medicines and contraceptives (especially for condoms and oral or emergency contraceptive pills), not having a larger basket of options is a missed opportunity for the health system. In the public health system, inefficient supply chains, limited healthcare service options, and frequent stock-outs exacerbate the delivery problem, especially for those who cannot afford private sector products and services.
- 3. High unmet need among youth and adolescents:** Although the unmet need for FP for married women aged 15 to 49 years declined from 12.9 percent to 9.4 percent between NFHS-4 (2015-16) and NFHS-5 (2019-2021), the unmet need for sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care among adolescents and young adults was significantly higher during both years (at 22.2% and 17.8%, respectively).

Vision

FHM Engage envisions a world in which health markets are responsive, equitable, resilient, and driven by consumer needs. In India, FHM Engage is working to create an all-encompassing health consumer engagement platform that enables organizations across the healthcare delivery spectrum to drive better health outcomes. Through user-centric and cost-effective design interventions, FHM Engage seeks to support consumers throughout their health journey – from awareness to action – and broaden access to voluntary FP counseling and related services. Starting with five states in India – Assam, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, and NCR-Delhi⁵ – these efforts will improve supply of and demand for FP products and services to ensure contraception is a lifestyle choice for youth girls and women of reproductive age and their partners.

² <https://fp2030.org/sites/default/files/resources/2020/Choice-Based-FP-White-Paper.pdf>

³ National Family Health Survey (NFHS -5) 2019-21 - https://main.mohfw.gov.in/sites/default/files/NFHS-5_Phase-II_0.pdf

⁴ FHM Engage, Assam Roundtable, 28 August 2023

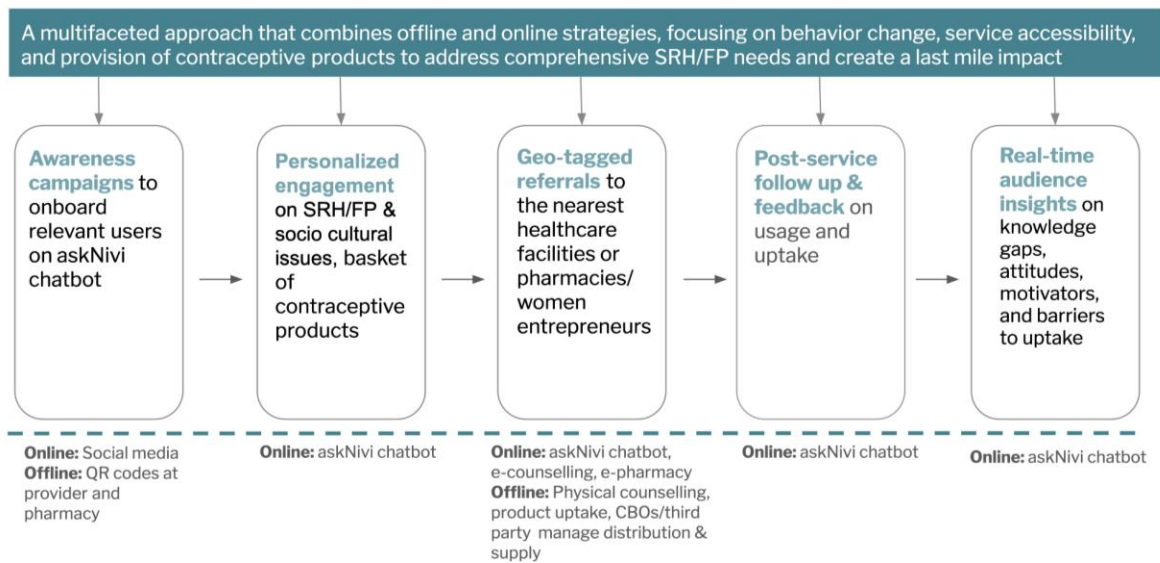
⁵ Nivi is currently reaching men and women across Assam, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and NCR-Delhi, and will be operational in Meghalaya soon

Strategy: A Digital Demand Aggregation Platform

To meet this vision, FHM Engage has partnered with [Nivi](#), a digital health marketplace that connects with and serves today’s health consumer and enables them to navigate a complex and fractured healthcare system. At the center of this marketplace is [askNivi](#) – an AI Powered WhatsApp-based chatbot that meets the unique needs of each consumer and provides on-demand, trusted, and actionable health information that enables consumers to make informed decisions on their own health. [askNivi](#) enables [health promoters](#), [healthcare providers](#), payers, and [pharmaceutical manufacturers](#) to reach, understand, and serve patient populations at scale. The [askNivi](#) platform supports five languages (Assamese, English, Hindi, Kannada, and Marathi).

People discover [askNivi](#) via online and offline marketing campaigns (like QR codes on facility posters). As of March 2024, [askNivi](#) had been accessed by nearly 920,000 individuals across India and enlisted more than 4,500 providers.

The below image captures the key stages of the typical [askNivi](#) journey mapped against key online and offline points as a consumer progresses toward their goal.



For FHM Engage, Nivi will use a digital-first social and behavior change communications (SBCC) approach and deploy [askNivi](#) to connect individuals to actionable information on contraceptives and referrals to geo-located pharmacies, facilities, and providers in each of the priority states. This will be achieved through a combination of digital interventions:

- **Marketing Campaigns:** Run targeted marketing campaigns to reach **over 20 million individuals**, onboard relevant users, and encourage users to explore their options and make informed decisions.
- **Personalized Engagement:** Provide personalized experiences and guidance to **200,000 individuals** and methodically amplify consumer engagement by addressing their specific health needs and behaviors in relation to family planning.
- **Geo-Tagged Referrals:** **Onboard 6500 healthcare providers** and then provide **askNivi** users with geo-tagged referrals to easily locate their nearest health facilities (for FP counseling) or pharmacies (to conveniently obtain contraceptive products). **askNivi** will also follow-up with users after their visits to healthcare facilities to ensure that quality of care and informed contraceptive continuation align with each consumer's personal reproductive health objectives.
- **Audience Insights:** Analyze user interactions to generate valuable insights on knowledge gaps, attitudes, motivators, and barriers related to contraceptive uptake among different audience segments. This will be pivotal in formulating a coherent strategy for long-term market development and to feed into programmatic and advocacy mandates to address specific health challenges and barriers to access.

The overall goal for this FHM Engage activity in India is to demonstrate a financially sustainable and scalable digital marketplace, **askNivi**, that serves girls and women of reproductive age and their partners along their reproductive health journey in a cost-effective manner, leveraging network effects to achieve impact. For instance, discussions are underway with WoHLA partners, such as Exeltis and Pharmarack, and other donors, such as CIFF, for contraception related promotion and marketing.

The Path to Success

Together, FHM Engage and Nivi aim to develop a sustainable health market that is adaptive, inclusive, and capable of addressing the evolving needs of consumers by achieving the following:

- **Define an Effective Marketing Strategy:** Highlight best practices for messaging, creative approach, audience targeting, and offline and online channel mix to reach and onboard the relevant audiences at scale.
- **Identify Drivers and Motivators for Uptake:** Analyze audience journeys and engagement patterns to assess drivers and motivators that lead to contraceptive uptake.
- **Create a Value Proposition for Provider Onboarding:** Understand provider barriers, pain points, and motivators to join the Nivi Marketplace and ultimately create a self-guided onboarding process at scale.
- **Devise Actionable Insights for FP Market Improvement:** Leverage real-time insights on consumer demand patterns and behaviors (what is working, what is not working, and why) with respect to women's health needs and circumstances to enable consortium members including manufacturers, distributors, and policymakers to inform strategic decisions, program development, and advocacy efforts.

By implementing these strategies, FHM Engage and Nivi are committed to transforming the contraceptive market landscape. A digital chatbot for FP information can be highly relevant for multiple market actors like contraceptive suppliers and healthcare providers, to enhance patient engagement, gather valuable market insights, support healthcare providers, and ultimately improve patient outcomes. Digital health marketplaces can play a pivotal role in improving contraceptive access, empowering individuals to make informed reproductive health decisions, while maintaining high standards of care and patient trust. The collaborative efforts of FHM Engage and Nivi will ensure a comprehensive approach to health service delivery, addressing both consumer and provider needs. The focus on effective marketing, understanding consumer behaviors, and creating a robust provider onboarding process will drive significant improvements in contraceptive uptake and overall women's health. Additionally, actionable insights from real-time data will empower stakeholders to make informed decisions, fostering a health market that is resilient, equitable, and capable of meeting the evolving health needs of the population. This initiative stands to make a substantial impact on the health and well-being of women, ultimately contributing to broader economic and social development goals

For further details, please contact:

Dr. Amit Bhanot, MD

India Country Director and Chief of Party, FHM Engage

Phone: +91.9811168266

Email: abhanot@fhm-engage.org

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fhm-engage@fhm-engage.org

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Frontier Health Markets (FHM) Engage works to improve the market environment for greater private sector participation in the delivery of health products and services and to improve equal access to and uptake of high-quality consumer driven health products, services, and information. FHM Engage is implemented by four core consortium partners: Chemonics International (prime and co-technical lead), Results for Development (co-technical lead), Pathfinder International, and Zenysis Technologies, and a host of Network Implementation Partners (NIPs).

In India, FHM Engage is partnering with Samhita's Collective Good Foundation (CGF) to initiate the Women's Health and Livelihood Alliance (WOHLA) as a health marketplace to mobilize resources and improve access for young girls and women to healthcare services and products and livelihood opportunities for economic empowerment. Additional partners for this activity include Access Health International, Nivi Inc. and Pharmarack Technologies

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