



As written

Statement by Representative of the World Bank at the Hague Forum

Looking back over the nearly five years since ICPD, and indeed over the three decades since the World Bank started working on population and development, it is clear that much has been accomplished. Because of effective investments in education, health and family planning, more couples want smaller families and have safe and effective means of regulating their fertility. Women and children now have a better chance of surviving pregnancy and childbirth, and of living healthier, more productive lives.

Despite this progress, many challenges remain. Because service capacity has not kept pace with increased demand, there are large numbers of poorly timed, unwanted pregnancies that put the health and welfare of mothers and their children at risk. Too many mothers are dying from complications of pregnancy that could be treated. Too many people, particularly the young, are exposed to the risks of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. Too many girls do not have the opportunity to go to school or fail to complete their education because of poverty, gender bias, or early pregnancy.

While many countries have succeeded in slowing population growth, others face large increases in numbers that undermine their efforts to achieve economic and social development. Africa is a special concern. It lags behind other regions in social and economic development, and it is being hit especially hard by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This epidemic is reversing earlier steps toward poverty reduction and sustainable development. African women suffer the greatest risks of unwanted pregnancy, maternal mortality and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

To address these challenges, the World Bank is working with borrower countries and other partners to implement the agreements made at Cairo – linking population to our core agendas of poverty reduction and human development – ensuring that services and information address a broader range of reproductive health needs.

Cairo changed the focus of population work from demographic targets and control to a client-centered, rights-based approach that puts people first. This shift parallels the World Bank's own move toward greater emphasis on social development and on balancing its goals of poverty reduction and human development with more traditional concerns about public finance and macroeconomics. The ways in which these changes inform the Bank's approach to population and reproductive health are summarized in the booklet "Population and the World Bank: Adapting to Change." It summarizes the Bank's strategic approach to population and reproductive health.

For all aspects of population and reproductive health, empowering women is a critical factor. This requires careful analysis to identify synergies across sectors such as health education, and social programs. Coordinated support for programs in reproductive health,

girls' education and access to income-generating opportunities and employment for women will yield gains in welfare for individuals, families and communities.

In recognition of these facts, the Bank has extended over \$2 billion in loans and credits since 1994 to support initiatives linked directly to population and reproductive health. Even more has been provided through support for child survival, girls' education, and the empowerment of women, where the links to population and reproductive health are indirect. The social sectors now account for a fifth of overall Bank lending. The proportion is over one-third in the case of low-interest credits for the poorest borrowers through IDA, the Bank's concessional lending arm.

In many countries the Bank is working in partnership with other donors to mobilize an even larger pool of loan and grant assistance to support population and reproductive health programs. These partnerships include UNFPA, WHO, UNAIDS, UNICEF, bilateral donors and NGOs. Together, we are able to provide countries with most of the technical expertise as well as significant financial assistance for their programs.

In addition to the Bank's role in resource mobilization, partners look to the Bank for support in talking to governments about the multi-sectoral dimensions of population and reproductive health. Because of the Bank's access to both finance and **planning** ministries, as well as to **sectoral** ministries such as health, education and women's affairs, it is well positioned to facilitate synergistic policies that link investments in different sectors to achieve optimum impact.

The Bank also plays an important role in sustained financial and policy support for such initiatives. It is generally accepted that a horizon of at least fifteen years may be needed to achieve results in human-development interventions. For population and reproductive health, horizons might need to be even longer. For example, female education and women's empowerment are powerful determinants of reproductive behavior. While education has many immediate benefits, some of the impact of increased female education will come only when better-educated girls enter their reproductive ages.

The Bank is also working with its partners to address the underlying constraints that make health and education systems unresponsive to the needs of the poor. Examples of such constraints are financial incentives and civil service rules – guaranteed employment no matter how poor the performance – that undermine efforts to improve quality and strengthen institutional capacity. Improving the performance of health systems is particularly important for such initiatives as Safe Motherhood, which requires an effective referral of obstetric emergencies in order to save women's lives.

Another constraint that is particularly relevant to the expanding reproductive health agenda is the inability of restricted national budgets to finance the relatively heavy proportion of annual expenditures required for salaries and consumables, including essential drugs and contraceptives. Investments in facilities and equipment go to waste if

there are no medicines and if facilities are poorly maintained and not open when people need help.

During the past few years, the World Bank has focused intensely on improving the effectiveness of the social sectors. Many of the initiatives described in the Bank's health and education strategy papers, and in the new population and reproductive health strategy, are aimed at improving effectiveness – through better division of public and private sector roles in the financing and delivery of services, better organization and management of service-delivery systems, and greater community participation in the design and monitoring of programs.

The Bank is also developing its own capacity to address these challenges through effective recruitment and staff training, and by expanding partnerships with other organizations. For example, the Bank's Economic Development Institute is launching a new learning program on population economics and reproductive health that expands the knowledge base and trains borrowers, development partners and its own staff to work more effectively in these areas.

Streamlined administrative procedures and more flexible lending instruments are also enabling the Bank to respond more effectively to the rapidly changing global economic environment. The Bank is positioning itself to support sustainable human development over the long run.

Again, let me thank the organizers of this Forum for giving the Bank an opportunity to reaffirm its commitments to the goals of ICPD. We know what we have to do, and we will continue to work with you who are partners in borrower countries, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations to improve the lives of poor and vulnerable groups.

The Bank will continue its support for high-quality reproductive health services – it will seek to empower women through education and other initiatives – and it will work to ensure that the policy dialogue takes account of the changing social, demographic and economic realities that countries face as they move into the new millennium.