

**THE ROLE OF THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK IN REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND
POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

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It is a pleasure for me to address this distinguished forum on behalf of the Asian Development Bank. This forum provides an opportunity for the international community to refocus on agreements reached during the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, particularly the implementation of the Program of Action. The important issues that need attention are: reproductive health and reproductive rights, gender equality, the empowerment of women, and interrelationships between population and development.

The Bank is committed to assisting the health and population sector in the Asia-Pacific region. Many successful national programs in the region have resulted in decline of fertility rates. Despite these successes, sixty percent of the world's population growth in the 90s has taken place in our region. There are still more than half a million women worldwide who die of maternal complications each year, and 43 percent of maternal deaths occur in South Asia.

We realize that investing in the quality of human resources is the key to long-term productivity and sustainable growth. Two important elements of the Bank's strategic focus on human development are appropriate population policy and the integration of women in development. As evidence of our commitment to the population sector we adopted our population policy prior to the ICPD, in July 1994. The policy was prepared in consultation with all of our member governments, leading international agencies and interested NGOs. The Bank's policy anticipated ICPD discussions and is fully consistent with the ICPD Program of Action.

The Bank's population policy is gender-sensitive. It promotes human resource development to assist in family planning, health, nutrition, and education as well as to promote fertility decline. A fundamental principle of the Bank's policy is recognition of the critical importance of supporting the right of couples to determine their family size in accordance with accepted cultural and ethical norms, while respecting freedom of choice.

The Bank believes that basic education and basic health services are essential. They are services that every person has the right to receive. The Bank's policy calls for greater integration of reproductive health care, which includes family planning services, with basic health services and assists our member countries to move towards sustainable integration as rapidly as possible. We acknowledge that the preferred approach to design and delivery of services is that fertility regulation should be offered as a reproductive health and not a population control approach.

The Bank has assisted its member countries through loans and grants in reproductive health related projects such as family planning, mother and child health, population, safe motherhood, women's health and reproductive health care -since 1978. We have provided technical assistance for reproductive health care to Indonesia and will support other member countries that are seriously implementing the ICPD Program of Action. The Bank is also supporting a regional technical assistance to strengthen safe motherhood in some member countries with relatively high maternal mortality rates.

With the current economic and social crisis in the region, the Bank has provided Social Protection Sector Development Program Loans for affected member countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. The Loan for Thailand supports policy reforms for the poor, HIV/AIDS, and maternal and child health, including safe motherhood. The loan for Indonesia covers health, nutrition and education issues, which include assistance to maintain reproductive health and family planning programs as well as population related policy reforms during the crisis.

Distinguished delegates, the Asian Development Bank appreciates the initiative of the organizers to hold the Hague Forum, an international forum for operational review and appraisal of the implementation of the ICPD Program of Action. We will use the insights of this forum to make our program of assistance to our member countries stronger in all sectors relevant to reproductive health.