



## Global Partners in Action: NGO Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development

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### Family in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The family is a basic unit of society. But many population policies and social programmes make outdated assumptions about family structure – and motherhood is still a life-threatening event in too many places.

More and more women worldwide have paid employment outside the home. Development programmes may still assume that the father is head of all households and target men with training, loans and technology, when female-headed households today are an estimated one in three.

Population efforts often target women exclusively, but men often have the final say on whether contraception is practiced. And in the most stubborn problem, a woman still dies needlessly every minute somewhere in the world from complications of pregnancy or childbirth.

#### The Situation

##### *At work and at home...*

- > Women perform 66 percent of the world's work and produce 50 percent of the food, but earn only 10 percent of the world's income and own 1 percent of the property.<sup>1</sup>
- > In nearly every country, women work longer hours than men, but are usually paid less and are more likely to live in poverty. In subsistence economies, women spend much of the day performing tasks to maintain the household, such as carrying water and collecting fuel wood. In many countries women are also responsible for agricultural cultivation and selling the produce.<sup>2</sup>
- > Even in countries where women are the majority of small farmers and do more than 75 percent of the agricultural work, they are routinely denied the right to own the land they cultivate.<sup>3</sup>
- > Even when women have paid employment outside of the home, they still do the majority of work in the home. In Mexico, women in paid employment devote an additional 33 hours to domestic chores per week, while men's weekly contribution is six hours.<sup>4</sup>
- > Unpaid domestic work – from food preparation to caregiving – governs the health and overall well-being of children and other household members. The need for this labour increases with economic shocks, such as those associated with AIDS, economic restructuring or political turmoil.
- > Poor women do more unpaid work, work longer hours and accept worse working conditions than wealthier women during times of crisis, just to ensure that their families survive.<sup>5</sup>
- > Women's voices and lived experiences – as paid and unpaid workers, citizens, and consumers – are still largely missing from debates on finance and development.

##### *And in pregnancy and childbearing<sup>6</sup>*

- > Fully 42 percent of all pregnancies everywhere experience a complication. In 15 percent of all pregnancies (20 million women each year), the complications are life-threatening.
- > Most maternal deaths occur in developing countries: more than 10,000 women die every week in poor areas from causes that could be avoided, leaving some 19,000 children motherless.
- > Children who have lost their mothers are up to 10 more times more likely than others to die before age 5.
- > The lifetime risk of maternal death for a woman in a least-developed country is more than 300 times worse than for a woman living in an industrialized country<sup>7</sup>-- the worst disparity in all of public health.
- > Fewer than one in 7,300 women will die in pregnancy or childbirth in the developed regions of the world, but one in 16 will die in sub-Saharan Africa. In the worst case, one in seven women will die in Niger.<sup>8</sup>
- > More than 80 per cent of maternal deaths worldwide are due to five direct causes: haemorrhage, sepsis, unsafe abortion, obstructed labour and hypertension (eclampsia and pre-eclampsia).
- > More than 10 million women a year suffer severe or long-lasting illnesses or disabilities from pregnancy-related complications: they range from obstetric fistula to infertility, depression and impoverishment.

- > One in three deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth could be avoided if women who wanted effective contraception had access to it.
- > Although almost all births in developed countries are attended by skilled health personnel, the rate is only 57 percent in less developed countries and only 34 percent in the least developed countries.
- > Since 1990, the base year for the Millennium Development Goals, some 10 million women have died from complications of pregnancy and childbirth, and some 4 million newborns have died each year.<sup>9</sup>
- > A woman who wants to have just two children will spend roughly five years trying to become pregnant, being pregnant or recovering from pregnancy, and three decades trying to avoid pregnancy.
- > An estimated 19 million unsafe abortions are carried out each year, most in developing countries. An estimated 67,000 women die as a result, and millions more suffer injury or long-term disability.<sup>10</sup>
- > The Millennium Development Goal of improving maternal health has seen the least progress of all MDGs.
- > Little progress has been made in saving mothers' lives. The world maternal mortality ratio declined by less than 1 percent per year between 1990 and 2005, well below the 5.5 percent annual decline needed to achieve the MDG 5 target of a 75 percent reduction between 1990 and 2015.<sup>11</sup>

### The ICPD Commitment

The Cairo Consensus called for policies and laws that better support and protect the family, contribute to its stability and take into account its plurality of forms, particularly the growing number of single-parent families. It also called for laws that promote equality of opportunity for family members, especially women and children; and that are fully responsive to the diverse and changing needs of families. Governments pledged action to eliminate all forms of coercion and discrimination in policies and practices, as well as to seek more effective assistance to families affected by poverty, chronic unemployment, and domestic and sexual violence, among other issues.

### Areas for Action

- > Eliminate all forms of coercion and discrimination in policies on marriage, unions and child rearing.
- > Guarantee women's land and property rights through legal reforms.
- > Raise public awareness to reduce girls' domestic responsibilities and prevent early marriage and pregnancy.
- > Establish a "well-woman standard of care" – one that includes access to comprehensive reproductive health care – to help ensure that women can attain good health, maintain it through their reproductive years and age well. Achieving this should be a central and established goal of any national health policy.<sup>12</sup>
- > Effective health care coverage should be universal, affordable, rapid and continuous, maintaining high standards of care and medical necessity and eliminating disparities.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, "Gender Equality – The Big Picture," 2007, [http://www.unicef.org/gender/index\\_bigpicture.html](http://www.unicef.org/gender/index_bigpicture.html) (accessed Aug. 11, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA, "Gender Equality, Women's Work and Empowerment," <http://www.unfpa.org/gender/empowerment1.htm> (accessed Aug. 4, 2009)

<sup>3</sup> UNIFEM, Women's Land & Property Rights, [http://www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/women\\_poverty\\_economics/land\\_property\\_rights.php](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/land_property_rights.php) (accessed Aug. 11, 2009)

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, "The State of the World's Children 2007: Women and Children: The Double Dividend of Gender Equality," p. 37, <http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/sowc07.pdf> (accessed Aug. 11, 2009)

<sup>5</sup> UNFPA, "Gender Equality, Women's..." (accessed Aug. 4, 2009)

<sup>6</sup> Except where noted, facts in this section are from UNFPA, "Facts About Safe Motherhood," New York, 2009, <http://www.unfpa.org/mothers/facts.htm> (Accessed Aug. 5, 2009)

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2009 (accessed Aug. 11, 2009)

<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Population Division and World Bank, *Maternal Mortality in 2005*, World Health Organization, Oct. 12, 2007, p. 23-27, [http://www.who.int/whosis/mme\\_2005.pdf](http://www.who.int/whosis/mme_2005.pdf) (accessed Aug. 13, 2009)

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2009: Maternal and Newborn Health, p. iii, [http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC\\_2009\\_Main\\_Report\\_03112009.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2009_Main_Report_03112009.pdf) (accessed Aug. 10, 2009)

<sup>10</sup> Guttmacher Institute, Facts on Induced Abortion Worldwide, October 2008, [http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb\\_IAW.html](http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_IAW.html) (accessed Aug. 18, 2009)

<sup>11</sup> UNFPA, "Maternal Mortality Declining in Middle-income Countries; Women Still Die in Pregnancy and Childbirth in Low-income Countries," October 2007, <http://www.unfpa.org/public/News/pid/332> (accessed Aug. 18, 2009)

<sup>12</sup> Chavkin, W., and Rosenbaum, S., *Women's Health and Healthcare Reform: The Key Role of Comprehensive Reproductive Health Care*, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, February 2009, [http://www.wellwoman09.org/materials/WHHCR\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.wellwoman09.org/materials/WHHCR_FINAL.pdf) (accessed Aug. 10, 2009)

<sup>13</sup> Chavkin, W., *Women's Health...* (accessed Aug. 10, 2009)