

Preface

It is ten years after the Cairo conference and such a disappointment that so little progress has been made in the actual status of sexual and reproductive health [SRH] and rights and people's access to affordable comprehensive SRH services. We NGO's had such high hopes due to strong commitments made and targets set for the implementation of the inspiring rights-based ICPD Programme of Action.

We are shocked, sad and angry to find out that as a consequence of this slow progress since Cairo, one million women have died unnecessarily in the eight countries that participated in this ICPD monitoring study alone due to unsafe abortion, pregnancy, or childbirth.

Millions more women and young people have suffered due to the consequences of unsafe abortion and childbirth, and lack of access to respectful, caring, quality health services to which they have a right as citizens of this millennium world. The same scenario of continued ill health and suffering was found to exist for women with HIV/AIDS, reproductive cancers and infections, and unwanted pregnancies despite the necessary technology and medical interventions being known. Poor women who are unable to afford to pay for transport, blood, and medical supplies as required in a number of countries with floundering health systems, still have the hardest time.

Without this eight country ICPD monitoring study by ARROW and NGO partners, the region and the world would not have known the situation was generally so grim with only a few bright areas of progress. Encouraging policy progress is the new legislation on violence against women in most of the eight countries and new liberal abortion laws in several countries even though implementation of these laws has been slow and women are thus yet to fully benefit from them. Population and reproductive rights policies have had big setbacks, while in India and the Philippines, there is a swing back towards pre- Cairo right-wing positions which limit people's right to make their own sexual and reproductive choices.

This Asian study which includes Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, and the Philippines is the only study in Asia and one of the few globally to provide such much needed evidence of progress for the ICPD's ten year review. This is surprising and an issue in itself, as evidence is critical for systematic assessment of ICPD progress and identification of strategic action to take for the next ten years. Without facts, action or inaction is based on unverified assumptions and opinion which is particularly dangerous when people's lives and wellbeing are at stake.

ARROW and our NGO partners are therefore very pleased that we were able to complete the country and regional ICPD monitoring reports in time to be used as evidence for the three regional and international roundtables of Countdown 2015 that were held in 2004 as well as at other ICPD-related meetings.

To meet this tight schedule meant intense and dedicated work which was fuelled by deep commitment to improving women's lives and rights and a belief in the importance of achieving the ICPD objectives. To date, the findings and recommendations have been widely presented and disseminated in four international, six regional, and seven national policy dialogues and seminars. This includes the three Countdown 2015 Roundtables in Kuala Lumpur, Kathmandu and London and an ICPD 10 policy makers' seminar in Stockholm.

As an outcome, ARROW was invited to participate as the only women's NGO in the Sweden-UNFPA Technical Meeting on Promoting SRHR held shortly after the

London Roundtable. This high level policy meeting analysed evidence to elaborate arguments for investing more resources in SRHR and pay more attention in the Millennium Development Goals.

The findings have already been used as a reference in two 2004 Beijing 10 publications, one being WEDO's global monitoring report *Beijing Betrayed; Women Worldwide Report That Governments Have Failed To Turn The Platform Into Action* and the other the Asia Pacific Women's Watch report on Beijing 10 *The Small Purple Book* presented to the Commission on the Status of Women.

It is our hope that with this publication in hard copy and on the website, the findings and recommendations will be more available for use by governments, NGO's, UN agencies and donors for policy and programme analysis and strategic planning at all levels.

Among the critical recommendations we have put forward are that we urgently need to have an agreed upon country ICPD monitoring and accountability system involving all stakeholders including diverse and critical NGO's. We need UNFPA's strong support for this but the real push has to come from country level NGO's and governments because it is our people who are suffering and we know and care the most about these realities.

To effectively establish and implement an ongoing monitoring system, NGO's need to close ranks and work much better with one another and in advocating on SRHR to government. Our dream is that this country monitoring system will be working well by 2015, producing up-to-date evidence and analysis as the basis for strategic planning and decision making which will lead to real improvements in women's and people's sexual and reproductive health and lives.

ARROW is immensely grateful to the Ford Foundation officers in Asia and New York for funding the project including this publication and to Novib which provided additional funds. Our gratitude also goes out to our wonderful NGO partners for wholeheartedly joining us in this work. Please find full acknowledgements on page v.

The ARROW Team