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Australia's Report Card – How are we doing internationally?

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Abstract

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 was a milestone in that a gender and human rights context for addressing population issues was articulated. Adding to its importance was the development of an explicit framework for international policy action – the Cairo Program of Action (PoA). At Cairo, 179 countries, included Australia, adopted the PoA which involved a 20 year plan to create sustainable development and sustainable population growth. This paper will examine the extent to which Australia has met its commitments to the ICPD PoA at the 10 year anniversary of the Cairo conference and the midpoint of the PoA. The paper will include a review of relevant Australian policy as it relates to the PoA; in particular the amount of Australia's overseas aid budget that is directed toward population assistance. Australia's record will be compared to that of other Western nations. The paper will then look at possibilities for cost-efficient policy changes that could be enacted within Australia to contribute to ICPD goals. The recent appointment an Australian Ambassador for HIV/AIDS is an example of such an initiative. The paper will conclude with an examination of the role the non-government sector can play in advocating policy action and possible strategies to support this.

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Who is the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance

The Australian Reproductive health Alliance, or ARHA is a non-government organisations, we have no connections to the Australian Government, and do not provide Family planning services. Services are provided by Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia. Our primary role is to advocate for matters relating to sexual health and family planning.

Being independent of the Australian Government means we are unable to access government funding, we rely solely on funding from organisations outside Australia. We receive funding from Hewlett and Packard foundation, UNFPA and some money from Population Action International.

We often work in alliance with many different bodies who have an interest in family planning and these will be discussed later in the presentation.

The Australian Reproductive Health Alliance's mission is to promote public support for enhanced reproductive and sexual health in Australia and internationally, and promote the advancement of the status of women and girls by means of and including:-

- the production of educational materials;
- the organisation of seminars and workshops;
- the preparation of briefing materials for members of the press;
- networking with parliamentarians, government departments and other interested parties as required; and
- the support and promotion of alliances with opinion makers with comparable aims and objectives.

Promote knowledge, education and research relating to the development of family planning and other reproductive health services, paying particular attention to the needs of indigenous people, both within Australian and internationally.

Where appropriate, to identify and support specific development projects which promote reproductive health, and enhance the status of women and girls, either working independently or with partner organisations.

Today's presentation will look at the way in which we advocate for policy change, the issues we do this on and the work that we do to support this.

ADVOCACY ROLE IN AUSTRALIA

Advocacy undertaken by ARHA generally falls into two categories. Advocacy that relates specifically to promoting the ICPD, and then advocacy that relates more broadly to issues and themes relevant to the ICPD Program of Action.

The primary role as already discussed here today is to advocate for the Australian government to act on the commitments it made in Cairo in 1994. For us as an organizations working in a developed nation this means we focus primarily on the actions undertaken by the Australian Government in regards to the foreign aid budget i.e. what are the amounts of funding they are providing, what types of funding they are providing and the manner in which they use this funding . In doing this ARHA has generally tended to act in alliances with other organizations or networks.

This year is a major milestone year for the ICPD PoA as it is a twenty year program of action, this year marks the half way point for the program. So coinciding with this there has been a great deal of action and momentum among many family planning and reproductive health bodies to increase the pressure on governments to meet their commitments. We recognize that as a small organization of just 8 people our capacity to influence such major national and international matters is limited, therefore this being such a significant year we have had many opportunities to engage with a global audience and networks who are also actively involved in maintaining their countries commitment to ICPD. This has come about through participating in

international meetings and supporting the work of other's - such as collecting data for a global scorecard, which we did earlier this year for Population Action International Global scorecard on the ICPD Program of Action.

We are also able to advocate for ICPD through networks such as EuroNGO, which is an international network of non-government organizations involved in reproductive health care and rights. Participating in this network has a dual effect. It provides us with a forum in which we can source funds to support our advocacy - as well as allowing us to network with other similar organizations. Australia is uniquely placed, as we are not dependent / not able to access government funding, this has benefits as well as disadvantages. This network allows us to work with others who are very similar to ARHA and provides us with the opportunities to seek out new possibilities and ideas.

The Common Ground Alliance gives us the opportunity to engage with organizations in Australia and to gain their support for ICPD action within Australia. This strengthens our position within Australia as we act as Reproductive Rights, Family Planning and Environmental Alliance. This strengthens both our capacity and credibility to advocate on ICPD matters.

Domestically recent advocacy and policy issues we have been involved in includes improving to reproductive health services and supplies including abortion services, emergency contraception and RU486

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Programs occur at three different levels. We conduct small projects, country programs and regional programs. When we speak of regional activity in regards to our international work we generally mean the Pacific region.

As an organization we conduct these programs for two main reasons.

Firstly we have been able to develop some programs that service a niche market, or area of family planning. Our projects are delivered by ARHA project officer Ms Maggie Kenyon. Our recent projects have focused on men's and midwives involvement in family planning - this is two areas in which Australia's official aid program has provided only limited attention too. Their focus to this point has been primarily on maternal and child health programs, as well as providing infrastructure such as hospitals and roads.

These are all areas in which vital gains can be made in improving the sexual and reproductive health of communities; what we have realized through project experience is that men have their own reproductive health needs, which are generally overlooked by general modes of family planning service delivery, and that their health overall is quite poor: in most if not all countries throughout the Pacific men have a lower life expectancy than women. Engaging them in family planning programs and projects is providing men with a forum in which they can also explore other health issues.

Alongside recognizing men's own reproductive health needs, we ARHA conducts a men's program as men have a great deal of influence over their wives and children's abilities to access family planning services and supplies. Some "Big Men" and "Chiefs" also tend to have a great deal of influence over entire villages and communities capacity to access family planning services and supplies.

Conducting the men's conference and developing materials for men's family planning programs has seen immediate positive change in some area's and has began a process of change in others that is leading to improving the environment for and acceptance of family planning programs. Men need information on how to help improve their own health and that of their families. The work undertaken by ARHA with men recognizes this, and feels it is

especially important in areas where men act as gatekeepers, to services and supplies.

Community Theatre: Was used to introduce young people in men to family planning issues

Traditional Birth Attendants: Have been provided with training to update and complement the skills and knowledge they already have.

Counseling Training: Was given to family planning providers to enable appropriate and sensitive service delivery.

Support to Pacific Parliamentary Group: We supported family planning providers in the pacific to come to Canberra to participate in training relating to family planning advocacy.

Reproductive Health Training in PNG: We support reproductive health students studying at the Divine University in PNG. Currently our project officer is in PNG providing preceptor training.

Midwifery trainer: We have worked with a midwife trainer in Bougainville, who has acted as a resource person for midwives in the Bougainville area.

Pacific Men's Conference: I have already mentioned the men's program, the practicalities of the program was that key male leaders throughout the region were brought together for a three day conference, they participated in training and discussion regarding family planning matters. Many of these men returned to local areas and continued on with much of the work covered in the workshop, and we have supported this by developing materials to assist them in doing this.

The other reason for providing international programs is that it keeps our advocacy and policy work relevant and up to date. Feedback we gain from these projects plays a valuable role in informing work we do with parliamentarians.

Organizing Conference and Seminars

1. Each year the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance supports United Nations Population Fund by launching on their behalf their annual report: The State of the World Population report. In doing this we have gained access to different ministers and members of parliament: Recent reports have focused on adolescents, linkages between population and the environment, the role of men and women in family planning, and the linkages between poverty and population issues. Being involved in this process has given us the opportunity to engage with many different federal ministers and members of parliaments who have an interest in matters relating to youth, poverty, the environment, and gender equity and provide them with information on how matters of population can greatly impact on these areas.

It has also increased our engagement with different audiences including young people, academics and through the media the wider community.

2. The 2nd Asian women parliamentarians and ministers meeting on population and development. 90 ministers and members of parliament from all over the Asia Pacific region attended the meeting. There were three representatives from China: From the National Peoples Congress Mrs. Fang Xin attended, and was supported by the Director of the population Division, Population Health and the Sports Department, and a member of the Education, Science, Culture and Public health Committee.

Organizing this meeting provided us with the opportunity to have a great deal of influence over the conference focus and outcomes. Reproductive health was a strong focus throughout the conference program. It allowed us to communicate to a diverse and influential audience the role family planning and reproductive health in population and development programs and projects.

This conference again through the media gave us the opportunity to engage with the wider community issues regarding family planning and the many positive ways in which governments can support this.

3. As well as these larger conferences we also organize seminars for parliamentarians as part of our services to the All Party Parliamentary group on Population and Development. Seminars are held for different reasons. Sometimes the group will request for a seminar to be held on certain topics: the group has requested seminars on different countries throughout the Asia Pacific region and family planning issues relevant to them. This is generally influenced by Australia's current foreign relations and focus. Increasingly members of the parliamentary group are becoming interested in issue relating to Timor Leste. This coincides with an increase in developments in the relationship between the Australian and Timor governments.

We have also held seminars with the parliamentary group to complement and coincide with the work undertaken by organizations similar to ARHA. When Community Aid Abroad brought members of the Global Fund to Australia to meet with policy makers we were able to run a seminar for the group and give the Global Fund access to a many policy makers at one time. Events such as these can also be used to garner media attention.

Members of the group who have traveled, representing the parliamentary group at international meetings and events will also hold a seminar / meeting for other group members, as a means of sharing knowledge they have gained.

A common thread through this is the power of these events to attract media attention - although it should be recognized and acknowledged that a lot of time and energy into gaining this media does play a powerful role in engaging the public in policy matters.