

International Women's Health

AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S HEALTH HEALTH AND AGEING

Across the globe, women are oppressed, marginalized, under-represented and neglected. They make up a huge majority of the world's poor, illiterate, exploited and abused, but only a tiny minority of decision-makers, power-brokers and influence peddlers. Sustainable solutions to the world's economic, health, political, and social problems will not be found until the rights and full potential of women are achieved. Improving women's sexual and reproductive health plays a substantial part in poverty reduction, better health, enhanced education, gender equality and environmental sustainability.

Our Action Plan

“Gender equality will never be achieved until women have the freedom to make choices and have access to opportunities that are not constrained by sex. At the heart of these freedoms lies the right to reproductive health, reproductive choice, and reproductive freedom, for these are essential to the control of a woman's life. They can only be achieved by guaranteeing women's fundamental human rights.”

**Special Report by
Countdown 2015: ICPD At
Ten *Where are we now?***

- Significantly increase the percentage of Australia's overseas aid directed at sexual and reproductive health to at least 10% of the overall aid budget to support universal access to sexual and reproductive health services including
 - Comprehensive sexuality education and access to contraception
 - Safe abortion and post-abortion care
 - Skilled birth attendants at all deliveries and access to emergency obstetric care
 - Specialised services to treat obstetric fistula and end female genital mutilation
- End the current ban on AusAID funding to allow for the provision of information, education and training on safe and unsafe abortion
- Systematically incorporate the recommendations of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in civil and military missions, including peace keeping missions, in particular to take into account sexual and reproductive health in humanitarian responses to crisis and conflict situations
- Reform the existing visa framework so that all trafficking victims are eligible for visas regardless of their involvement in the criminal justice system and increase funding and extend eligibility for victim support services
- Increase support for programmes that reduce the gender gap in education
- Support the establishment of a new fully-fledged UN women's agency, with on-the-ground presence in every country, a guaranteed budget (of \$1 billion to start) and a full complement of expert staff and targeted programmes

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The Issues

Over the next 10 years an estimated 100 million girls will marry before their 18th birthday. About 14 million adolescent girls become mothers every year. More than 90% of them are in developing countries

More than half a million women die unnecessarily from preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth every year—all but 1 percent of them in developing countries. One in 16 women giving birth in Africa die in childbirth. In rich countries like the United States, one in 2800 die.

For every woman who dies, 20 - 30 others suffer from acute complications. At least 2 million women in Africa, Asia and the Arab region are living with obstetric fistula (a hole in the birth canal caused by lack of appropriate care during labour which results in chronic faecal or urinary incontinence), and some 50,000 to 100,000 new cases develop each year.

200-350 million women have an unmet need for effective contraception each year. There are 19 million abortions under unsafe conditions a year and almost 70 000 women die each year as a result.

HIV infection rates in girls and women are rising in every region of the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, 76% of young people ages 15-24 living with HIV/AIDS are females. This region represents 60% of all people living with HIV. Four-fifths—80%—of all women living with HIV/AIDS worldwide were infected by their husbands or primary partners, not by their own behaviours.

Aside from HIV/AIDS there are 340 million new cases of curable sexually transmitted infections each year in the reproductive age group, many of which are not treated.

Worldwide girls and young women have experienced female genital mutilation. An additional 2 million are at risk every year.

Between 600,000 and 800,000 women, men and children are trafficked across international borders each year, mostly for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. Of these, the majority—up to 80 per cent—are women and girls.

Support for family planning within the Australian aid programme has collapsed since 1995, with most population and reproductive health funding going towards HIV/AIDS programmes.

62 million of the estimated 115 million children in the world who are not in school are girls. 85% of all girls out of school live in Sub Saharan Africa, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific. Two-thirds of the world's 781 million illiterate adults are women.

Girls' education is a key instrument for empowering girls and women and for improving their health, including their sexual and reproductive health. Being in schools is protective – delaying sexual initiation, increasing chances of condom use and decreasing forced sex.



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