

## **WORKSHOP: International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Egypt, 5-13 Sept. 1994 (ICPD) plus 15 years**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

On 15<sup>th</sup> July 2009, a workshop for parliamentarians was organized by the Family Planning Association of Nepal in Hotel Everest, Baneshwor. The workshop was the second in the series to the one held on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2009 in FPAN Meeting Hall, Pulchowk in Celebration of the Passing of Domestic Violence Bill – 2066 and on the Occasion of World Population Day. The first workshop, among other things, had shared facts and figures on the status of Domestic Violence in Nepal among parliamentarians, representatives from line agencies and journalists in particular; analyzed the Domestic Violence Act and talked on the position and the SRH needs of youth and adolescents. This particular workshop however aimed not only to inform the parliamentarians on SRH issues or bear witness while FPAN renewed its commitment to work more for the cause of SRH, but it also aimed to more concretely involve the parliamentarians as a part of a team involved in designing SRH policies and again as a team, entrusting to advocate to work towards fulfilling the commitments Nepal has made in international forums, as a signatory to ICPD and MDG. Present in the occasion were more than a dozen parliamentarians, representatives from the government sector, youth and journalists.

### **OPENING:**

To formally commence the program dignitaries were invited to the dais. The welcome remarks were delivered by the DG of FPAN, **Mr. K.P. Bista**. He explained that the program was a call for the Nepali parliamentarians on the occasion of International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Egypt, 5-13 Sept. 1994 (ICPD) plus 15 years.

He said the event was a part of a larger call where parliamentarians from across the globe would be reminded of their commitments as signatories to the ICPD. The intention for the day, he elucidated was to celebrate the occasion of ICPD plus 15 and make everyone attending the workshop aware of International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Egypt, 5-13 Sept. 1994 (ICPD) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In addition, linking this celebration to further discuss the sexual and reproductive health in the nation FPAN also intended to analyze the future role of ICPD in Nepal and decide how it could be linked to ICPD's global plan of action.

Mr. Bista pointed out that the nation should prioritize on improving the SRH of its citizens and should work towards making available safe abortion services, effective pre and post natal care, and accessible sexual and reproductive health services. Needs and issues pertinent to the youth should be adequately discussed and catered to, urged Mr. Bista. He believed that acquiring these, are acquiring gains on personal, familial and national level. He said, FPAN is making this effort to ensure that the voices of parliamentarians are effective on issues of SRH; and thereby focus the interest of parliamentarians to ensure that SRH portion of the MDGs are met through

provision of contraceptives, fulfilling unmet family planning needs and by working towards ensuring universal access to health.

Adding to the spirit of the enthusiastic opening, Hon. CA member, **Narahari Acharya** explained his prompt attendance in the event as his eagerness to participate in a workshop exclusively directed towards parliamentarians. He admitted that it is always a challenge to synchronize population growth and development. He ventured, while talking about reproductive health and reproductive rights, it is vital that the information reaches to all women, in cities and villages alike, because rights are best exercised only once you become aware of those. He put forth his view that in order to make the flow of information easy, pre conditions need to be met, be it in the form of infrastructures, expertise or policies. Hon. Acharya stressed the need to prioritize girl education and expressed his approval that the provision has been made in this year's budget too, but he affirmed his understanding that the efforts are still insufficient. 'Equipped with a little more information - women will be a little more aware, a little more capable', opined Hon. Acharya, confirming that every effort counts.

Hon. Acharya analyzed the benefits when events are organized targeting the parliamentarians. On the one hand, enlightening the parliamentarians is the short route to enlightening a large mass of audience and on the other, when informed parliamentarians are in better position to carve out sensitive laws and lobby for policies of wider concern. He affirmed, following the workshop, parliamentarians equipped with facts and figures shall definitely lobby much more strongly for SRH concerns. Hon. Acharya applauded men parliamentarians attending the event and emphasized that ensuring women are empowered with Sexual and Reproductive Rights should be of equal concern to men in the power echelons who take the responsibility of laying the law.

#### **PROCEEDINGS:**

CA member **Hon. Prativa Rana** chairperson for the event, formally inaugurated the workshop by lighting the *Panas*. Hon. Ms. Rana acknowledged that parliamentarians inhabit an important place in the nation shouldering the hopes of countless individuals. She understood that tasks are many and challenges are more. Regarding the attendance of parliamentarians for the event, she said, women parliamentarians will be abiding by the cause; and the fact that few, but significant men parliamentarians had attended, was a strength in itself and it needed to replicate. As the President of the Nepal Chapter of the PGA, she expressed her concern on how well Nepal's achievement in the SRH would fare in a global forum. She mentioned that the 197 signatory nations to the ICPD had reached an agreement to work towards separating 10 percentage of the total national budget to reproductive health. In Nepal the current budget has a lesser but still a percentage allocated separately for SRH. Hon. Ms. Rana said that if women comprising 50 percentages of the total population lag behind, their health issues unattended, the country's prosperity would be a far cry. She urged all policymakers to be mindful of these facts.

**Prof. Dr. Balkumar K.C.** presented on the status of Implementation of ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, Egypt, 5-13 Sept. 1994, Delegation from 179 states) and MDG (Millennium Development Goals) Programme of Action in Nepal.

In the ICPD plus 15, Dr. K.C. admitted that Nepal's response to Global Commitments has been limited but he also acknowledged that efforts have been made. Following the Cairo conference, Nepal went on to establish the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Population and Environment in 1995. After numerous conferences and commitments, the population policy agenda remained only on papers till the 9<sup>th</sup> 5 year plan (1997-2003) which finally pledged for preparing a long term-national population strategy.

Speaking on Nepal's commitment to the MDG, as a signatory nation, Dr. K.C. said, regarding the goals that are in line with SRH; it seems probable the poverty rate could be decreased by halve and mortality could be reduced by two-third by the year 2015. However the fulfillment of goals related to girl education seems doubtful. The reduction of maternal mortality by 3 quarters stands a potential chance but it is very unlikely that the spread of HIV/AIDS would be halted and reversed by the year 2015. Dr. K.C. revealed that many goals most probably will yet remain unmet.

**Ms. Binjwala Shrestha** presented on Nepal's Achievement on Gender Equity, Equality and Empowerment of Women vis-à-vis ICPD Plan of Action. She dissected the subject touching on many factors including women rights indicators, socio political and economic status of women. Budget allocation for women issues, girl child's education status, economic opportunities for women, cases of violence against women were other issues central to her presentation. In her recommendation she emphasized on strengthening of service delivery for better catering to women and child health as well as on activities or outcomes that once met, would result in women's economic empowerment.

**Prof. Dr. Ram Sharan Pathak** spoke on Youth and the ICPD. He stated the decisions and targets set at various ICPD celebrations till ICPD plus 15 and followed with suggestions as to how the situation can be enhanced. While he touched upon topics of investment on youth, their empowerment and capacity building, he also pointed out the targets set in the ICPD meetings. Dr. Pathak insisted, countries must ensure that the programs and attitudes of health care providers, do not restrict the access of adolescents to appropriate services and the information they need including on STDs and sexual abuse. While talking of gaps between policies and reality, he pointed out that even though a national health policy states the right of youth population to have access to RH services, in reality it might not be the case.

On behalf of the FPAN Youth volunteers, **Ms. Shreejana Bajracharya** talked of the many challenges faced by the young population everyday. She referred to adolescence as a time when career concerns, attraction to the opposite sex, puberty all would be on their platter at the same time. She also touched upon the need to change the educational curriculum to give the students a perspective wider than biology while understanding SRH. She informed of many good programs tailored by FPAN are carried out in schools/colleges. She also spoke of the youth

information centre in FPAN working for the youth, the production of IEC materials, the conduction of street dramas and the Friday classes taken by youth volunteers in different schools.

Youth Representative Ms. Bajracharya explicated that at a point awareness alone on SRH is not sufficient. It should be supplemented with an easy access to contraceptives and health services. She emphasized that more youth would benefit from services that are youth friendly. She appealed to CA members to involve youth in their agendas, especially in those programmes that required decision making.

### **GROUP WORK:**

The parliamentarians were divided into three groups for the group work. Each group was required to work on two common queries, put forward to parliamentarians across the globe in ICPD seminars held to revive the commitments and determination of the signatories, in their respective countries. On behalf of SRH advocates and FPAN in this particular context, CA member **Hon. Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba**, facilitator for the Group Work session, said it becomes important to identify our champions and our target audience and to identify the key people who can lobby for the cause we work for.

The queries in scrutiny for the parliamentarians to come up with a plan of action were:

- What action is the government taking to ensure that it meets the internationally agreed development goals, including the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), specifically in relation to Family Planning, Reproductive Health and in meeting the needs of Young People?
- Will the government commit to adequately fund the relevant budget lines to meet these goals?

In accordance with these two questions, each work group came up with an individual work plan.

*The work plan drawn by the **first group** of Parliamentarians:*

### **Need Identification:**

- Identification of the need to make efficient committees/ workgroups.
- Identification of the need to regularly monitor implementation by the workgroups.
- Identification of the need to lobby while designing the budget.

**Target groups:** Constituent Assembly, Finance Ministry, line agencies.

**Commitments:** Group 1 agreed to create work groups, carry out regular monitoring of the work implementation and lobby to allocate budget for SRH.

*The work plan drawn by the **second group** of Parliamentarians:*

**Need Identification:**

- The government has invested a lot in the health sector, however to reach out the services to the rural areas which lack infrastructure, the means and methods are very less. As a result everybody does not have access to proper health services.
- Most of the programs in Nepal rely on foreign aid. It is essential that the government allocate its own budget in areas crucial to health and well being of the citizens to ensure the continuity of the projects.
- There is a lack in the sector of comprehensive health education. The health services are not female oriented or centered around women's actual health emergencies or priorities. We should aim to make the health sector capable of bestowing public awareness, supplying women oriented services.

**Target groups:** The policy making bodies of government, women CA members, line ministries.

**Commitments:** Group 2 aspired to make a women caucus, to put experts in the caucus, who would not only solve women's issues but also health issues related to the youth.

*The work plan drawn by the **third group** of Parliamentarians:*

**Need Identification:**

- The Nepal government being a signatory to the MDG, ICPD should take information on what FPAN and or related organization working on SRH issues are doing on it, and vice versa.
- Make inquiries on what all places working for health and population are doing and make appropriate plans to give continuity to their programs.

**Target groups:** Male parliamentarians, government officials, the concerned committees in the parliament, line agencies working on SRH issues.

**Commitments:** Group 3 asserted to set a believable target for fund allocation (10%) from the national budget to SRH sector and to carry out the following tasks. They would properly manage the allocated budget. They would ensure that the concerned line agencies shall keep proper track of the work being done. They would conduct social audit from time to time in the lead of the communities and beneficiaries. To abide by these commitments, the group felt a need to set a timeline for all activities.

**TOWARDS THE END:**

CA member **Hon. Gagan Thapa** explained that it is very important to make a demarcation on whether the word 'youth' refers to a state of mind or to a stage of life. Without clarity in the understanding, Mr. Thapa believed, we shall be unable to cater the right sexual and reproductive health education to the right audience.

He felt that the largest strength of Nepal is its youth population. But he maintained that we have not been able to reap the bonus of this huge manpower. He said that Nepal has not been able to rightly make use of its youth. He bared the fact that Nepal is not short on capital, technology or technicians. In order for Nepal to make the most of the capacities of the young generation, Mr. Thapa said, youth should be welcomed to participate in the decisions being made for them. On behalf of the youth, he pledged to the parliamentarians to find a way to let the youth decide for themselves.

**Dr. Girdhari Sharma Poudel**, DDG of FPAN in his remarks, talked of a much needed revision of school curriculum and introduction of SRH as a subject. The urgency to mention it especially in the presence of parliamentarians, Dr. Poudel expressed, was because political commitment from lawmakers becomes absolutely necessary to take a progressive idea to a logical conclusion. He urged the parliamentarians attending the workshop to stay sensitive to the subject of SRH and make progressive laws when the time will come to take a stand.

**Ms. Shalini Verma**, representative from IPPF SARO shared her positive impressions to see an enthusiastic gathering of parliamentarians joining hands for SRH issues. She further expressed her contentment to have come such a long way since the first Cairo conference ICPD held back in 1994. She made an important observation that for women, without Sexual and Reproductive Rights, enjoying other kinds of rights is inconceivable.

Closing the ceremony **Ms. Anita Devkota**, Vice President of FPAN wisely offered, it is very important to understand the change that comes with time and also, change with times to be able to cater to the needs of new generations. She pointed out, stages of pregnancy and related complications, abortion and related complications are issues women counter on their own. So to provide them with a sense of security, it becomes important to ensure safe abortion practices, to provide SRH services and encourage youth and women to make the most of it in central as well as local levels.