

Women's Plans Foundation is a charitable trust which raises funds to enable a family planning component in overseas aid and development programs.

We appreciate this chance to recommend the positive aspects of family planning as a vital part of reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development.

We encourage your support for AusAID to fund reproductive health programs. Deductions from the recent White Paper suggest that implementation of family planning areas will be:

- diminished by refocus of the reproductive health allocation separately to other health issues, recently to HIV/AIDS and now to epidemics and pandemic viruses;
- delayed for further 'development' and side-lined until last in the budget;
- vulnerable while the Government wonders how to respond to those lobbies who confuse contraception with death, factions strategically challenged on how best to reduce mortality and ensure viability.

Many well-designed programs increase their effectiveness when there is a family planning component included:

1. Access and understanding of modern contraceptives enables women to participate in micro-credit loans, developing small enterprises and thus contributing to their communities' welfare and adult economic structure.
2. Women and girls can increasingly participate in education, and children's well-being, and social integration can improve.
3. Agricultural and water/sanitation programs benefit from steadying population numbers rather than increases leading to recurrence of soil depletion, deforestation and water pollution.
4. Nutrition, maternal and infant health are natural partners with child spacing to maximise survival rates for a healthy society.
5. Relationship and gender equity sensitivity training greatly improve the sharing of reproductive responsibility and decision-making;
6. With sex education the incidence of sexually transmitted disease decreases, and reduction of wives' fear of pregnancy reduces husbands' resorting to prostitutes, decreasing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

7. Women, particularly, welcome the ability to care for a viable number of children rather than to mourn for many, and cultural attitudes then permeate to the ruling gender.

Because Women's Plans Foundation funds are directed to NGOs accredited by AusAID to deliver reproductive health, we would like more information on the future indicated in the recent White Paper:

- What proportion of the reproductive health allocation will actually be spent on family planning, defined as education and access to contraceptive methods?
- What proportion will be spent on HIV/AIDS but not be linked with contraception, e.g. condoms?
- Is the proposed time frame slower than for non-health issues?
- Whether the Government plans to initiate its own activities which will draw upon the skills of Australian specialists in the field?
- Whether funding for reproductive health programs through Australian family planning organisations will be conditional upon their capacity to raise funds within Australia (e.g. Women's Plans Foundation donations, which can never be enough)?
- Whether programs initiated by the Government will be subject to tender by Australian NGOs, costing their limited resources in the tendering process?
- Whether funding to the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the UN Population Fund will have increased funding to carry out their vital work in the region?
- Whether the allocation of 'aid for trade' disbursed by various Government departments is diminishing aid ventures directed towards health and education?

We appreciate the work of the Parliamentary Population Group and wish you well in your examination of issues and supporting research.

Sincerely yours,

Alice Arnott Oppen, Chair
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