

8th International Dialogue on Population and Sustainable Development

“Making Sexual and Reproductive Rights a Reality: What does it take?”

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, please let me thank the Minister and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and all of the organisations that organised this conference. My thanks goes to all of you for making these past two days so rich, challenging and interesting, and for sharing with us your many ideas and recommendations to follow up in a variety of ways. Some of us have already indicated what a follow up could look like from their perspective.

“What does it take to make access to sexual and reproductive health information, services and supplies a reality to all women, men and young people in developing countries?”

This was the question that we started with when we first met last December to plan this conference and this also turned out to be the guiding question for us here in this room during the past two days.

Now what does it take? It certainly takes: Advocating, Claiming, Measuring, Targeting, Championing, Strengthening and last, but not least Linking; these were the headlines of the world café tables as well as the working groups this morning. And we have just heard the various recommendations that were the result of our collective thinking.

Let me take this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts over the past two days and put them into the context of the challenging, but at the same time to some extent encouraging environment we are all

working in at the moment as advocates for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

This year has seen the issue of Maternal and Child Health lifted right to the top of the political agenda, the G8 committed themselves to this issue at the G8 summit in Muskoka and at the recent MDG summit in New York the Secretary General's Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health confirmed this commitment and widened the scope to a global partnership of stakeholders.

At this point I would like to welcome the New Initiative on Voluntary Family Planning that Germany is developing right now where resources pledged in Muskoka for the area of Mother and Child Health will be made available for family planning and reproductive health and rights.

In my opinion this is a positive sign that all of us together, civil society, private sector, development partners (not donors!, Inge Baumgarten did not like this term) and partner country governments will collectively succeed to put Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights including Family Planning right at the heart of development.

This is what we will have to do in the next 5 years in the run up to 2015 and beyond. These years will not only be crucial for our goal to make access to Sexual and Reproductive Health a reality for all as set out at the ICPD, International Conference on Population and Development, in Cairo in 1994, but we will have to make sure that we will be part of the process and discussion that will shape whatever comes after the Millennium Development Goals.

The post 2015 agenda has to hold a firm place for Sexual and Reproductive Health and rights - and Population for that matter - as a cross cutting issue for all development sectors.

A Human Rights based approach is central as it means that we can hold governments accountable to their obligations, it can react to the needs of most vulnerable groups and thus ensure an equal access to services. But we have to make sure that we also provide these services at a high quality, and not only raise expectations that later on cannot be met. Therefore it is important that investments are made in this area: health systems are strengthened, health providers are trained and adequately paid, supplies are provided.

But for these investments we need convincing, target group specific arguments, and I would like to come back to the Ministers of Finance again: I can only support those of you that think that you can talk about population as a factor in poverty reduction and sustainable economic development and at the same time pursue a human rights based approach to Sexual and Reproductive health. And make sure that they understands the benefits for investing in women.

It is equally important that we reach out to other sectors that will help us to make Sexual and Reproductive Health for all a reality, be it education, gender, employment, environment and – why not – climate change. If we listen to the needs of the beneficiaries in our projects, and in our case these are mostly young people, we end up with a multi-sectoral approach. Young people need access to sexual and reproductive health, but at the same time they need training in order to get enhance their chances on the employment market, and they want to – as Gill Greer reminded us yesterday – engage in environmental protection, as they would like to make this planet a better place for them to live in.

This brings me to my last point: What does my organisation DSW take away from this meeting? What does it mean for our work in the future?

Well, we are just in the process of designing our strategic plan for the next five years and I am very happy (and a bit proud) to see that many of the recommendations listed just now meet our thinking so far in a perfect way. We already work with a Rights Based Approach, and Peter Munene presented our project “Fit for the Future” in Tanzania as a good practice example yesterday. But our goal is now to firmly anchor this approach in all our interventions. At the same time we have taken the decision to include linkages to other sectors into our work, for example environment and employment and of course global health in general ;).

I would like to encourage all of us to rethink our work and consider the recommendations that we take away from this meeting. Because change starts at home. And as change agents our advocacy should be firmly rooted in our conviction that we are all accountable for what we do: “so that we are not only doing what is right or what we think is the right thing, but what is right for the people” (if I may elaborate on a quote from Karen Newman yesterday), only then can our arguments be strong and convincing, because they are evidenced-based.

I thank you all again for coming here and sharing your expertise, experiences and enthusiasm with us. We, as the organisers of this meeting are looking forward to you sharing your follow up activities with us, because this is what we had hoped for: a conference that not only talks about change, but guides us all to action.