

8th International Dialogue on Population and sustainable Development – Making sexual and reproductive rights a reality: what does it take? Berlin 5-6, 2010

Issue Note for Session 1 Prepared By: Jon O'Brien, President, Catholics for Choice

Advocating—initiating a rights-based approach/campaign for sexual and reproductive health, raising awareness, using evidence, engaging stakeholders, proposing policy change, countering opposing forces.

- How to bring sexual and reproductive health into the (inter)national human rights discourse?
- Engaging rights and values: How to deal with certain controversial issues/counterarguments?
- What are good practice examples to show how policies can be influenced via evidence-based data?
- Identifying areas needing strengthening and next steps

Recommendations

Identify New Partners

- i) We need to move away from the existing model where we spend far too much energy talking with the people who already agree with us. They are already our champions – we need to develop a new cohort of new ones also. This is for two reasons. Sometimes our existing champions take us for granted and let us down. Other times, our existing champions aren't numerous enough and we need to find more to expand our influence.
- ii) We need to remember that ICPD was a long time ago. Few of those who attended or supported its passage are still in power. We need to carry out a new political education to explain why it is still relevant.

Raise Awareness Using the Evidence We Have and New Evidence as it Becomes Available

- i) We need to be constantly on the look out for new ways to advocate the importance and success of family planning and its role in saving lives. For example, the recent figures showing a 30 percent decline in maternal mortality should be embraced and heralded and their link to better provision of family planning investigated and promoted.
- ii) We all need to know why ICPD was such a turning point and is still relevant today. Keep practicing the facts and figures. Have an elevator speech. Make it compelling and adaptable, depending on your audience.

- iii) Having all the facts at our fingertips make our jobs easier. Know the basics, at the very least, and continually seek to expand your knowledge, and that of your staff and partners. Practice asking and answering basic factual questions and the difficult ones that may come your way. Have good answers.

Engage Stakeholders: Use the Media More Imaginatively

- i) There are a lot of different forms of media out there. Not everybody can master them all. Figure out which are your strongest shots and make the most of them. Then build your repertoire.
- ii) We need to find new ways of improving the world's understanding of why our issues are important. Support for family planning and development aid are the right thing to do in and of themselves, but for those who need more convincing the benefits they give in the fields of poverty alleviation, education and other areas about which policymakers are concerned make them a useful means to an end. Figure those out, and push them in meetings and communications with their offices.

Counter Opposing Forces: See the Opposition for What It Is

- i) In most cases, our opposition is marginal. Having access to the key facts about their influence means that we can remind policymakers and stakeholders of this fact at every moment.
 - a. Keep a perspective: How many countries issued reservations to the original ICPD document? Out of a total number of 179 countries present in Cairo, only 13 (Afghanistan, Brunei Darussalam, El Salvador, Honduras, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Nicaragua, Paraguay, the Philippines, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen) made statements expressing reservations or comments on specific chapters, paragraphs or phrases in the Programme which they requested to be recorded in the final report of the Conference. Ten states (Argentina, Djibouti, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, the Holy See, Iran, Malta and Peru) submitted written statements for inclusion in the report. **In expressing dissent from the majority of countries who supported ICPD without reservation, the majority of these countries did not represent the wishes or best interests of the people that they represented.**
- ii) Remind policymakers that they should not pander to the extremes. Just because some people are screaming the loudest does not mean that theirs is the most compelling case. In fact, it is likely they are screaming because there is no substance to what they have to say.

Propose Policy Changes: Work to Overcome Stigma

- i) The most compelling arguments around family planning are often the simplest: because it's the right thing to do. Why do people see family planning as controversial? Because we let them drive the conversation. We are in the majority; most people see family planning as a nonissue or support it. Only the fringes oppose it. Let's keep that perspective, remind our colleagues to do the same. But rather than shrugging our shoulders, let's keep reminding the world about this as well. Only then will the marginal be marginalized.