

GENDER ACTION LINK:



“A renewed global consensus on the need to make progress on Millennium Development Goal 5, together with greater attention to gender issues within and outside the Bank is refocusing attention on reproductive health and offering an unprecedented opportunity to redress the neglect of the previous decade. ”

—World Bank Reproductive Health Action Plan, 2010

Although International Financial Institutions (IFIs) continue to promote sexual and reproductive health (SRH) as a matter of policy, Gender Action research shows that SRH rights are rarely acknowledged or fulfilled through IFI investments:

The World Bank (WB)

The WB's "Reproductive Health Action Plan: 2010-2015" acknowledges that "women's full and equal participation in the development process is contingent on accessing essential RH services." The plan indicates that the WB will increase investments to "help expand access to contraceptives, prenatal visits, educational programs for women and girls, and training for health workers on common causes of maternal death." Judging by the WB's 2007 discussion paper, "Population Issues in the 21st Century: The Role of the World Bank," this latest commitment to increase SRH funding seems unlikely to have a significant impact. Although the paper highlighted that declining fertility rates in low-to-middle-income countries had bypassed Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the WB devoted only 1.7% of its \$11.44 billion budget for SSA in 2010 to projects that address SRH to that region, which has the highest unmet contraceptive need and maternal mortality rates in the world.



The African Development Bank (AfDB)

The AfDB also fails to implement its progressive SRH policies. The AfDB's "Policy on Population and Strategies for Implementation" highlights widespread gender inequality "in most African societies," noting that "women as a group are much more disadvantaged by poverty, ill-health, malnutrition, illiteracy and poor education, inferior legal status, landlessness and the overwhelming responsibilities for household management and family care." The AfDB, however, is only currently funding SRH projects in four SSA countries, and spent a mere .12% of its \$12.6 billion budget in 2009 on health projects overall. Although the AfDB often incorporates SRH into broader health system strengthening projects, the bank currently provides only 18 SSA countries with funding for this purpose.



The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)

Although the IDB does not have a specific policy toward SRH, its new "Operational Policy on Gender and Development" prioritizes "proactive action, which actively promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women through all the Bank's development interventions" and "preventive action, which introduces safeguards to prevent or mitigate adverse impacts on women or men due to gender resulting from the Bank's actions through its financial operations." The IDB's track record, however, is less impressive: Gender Action's 2007 report, "Mapping Multilateral Development Banks' Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS Spending," reviewed 16 active IFI SRH/HIV projects from 2003-2006. None of the IDB's four SRH/HIV projects during this period qualified as "gender sensitive." The report also found that the vast majority of IDB funding for SRH was made in the form of loans, which only add to developing countries' crippling debt.



IFI Ideological Assaults on SRH Investments

Influenced by US political trends, the WB sometimes promotes conservative SRH ideology (Gender Action, 2007). The Bank's Health, Nutrition and Population (HNP) Strategy, which is updated every 10 years, recognized family planning as a critical public health priority prior to 2007. Through the "new" HP Strategy draft, the U.S. Bush Administration's Executive Director of the WB attempted to sabotage SRH by replacing the term 'reproductive health' with 'age-appropriate reproductive health care' and eliminating references to safe abortion and family planning (Government Accountability Group (GAP), 2007). Internal documents also revealed the WB's plans to continue its ideological assault on SRH by omitting all references to family planning for Madagascar's Country Assistance Strategy paper (GAP, 2007). Thanks to advocacy on the part of civil society organizations (Gender Action, 2007) and European leadership within the WB, the Board of Directors rejected the HNP draft, partially restoring some reproductive health language (GAP, 2007).



IFIs must be held accountable for the gender impacts of their investments, which undermine their own SRH and gender policies, disproportionately hurting women and girls. See the 'What Can Civil Society Do?' box for recommended actions.

WOMEN AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AROUND THE WORLD

- Each year, an estimated 358,000 women die due to complications related to pregnancy and childbirth; 99% of these deaths occur within the most disadvantaged population groups living in the poorest countries of the world.
- It is estimated that over 200 million couples do not use contraceptives, despite wanting to space or limit their childbearing.
- A woman dies every eight minutes somewhere in a developing country due to complications arising from unsafe abortion.
- Female genital mutilation (FGM) can cause severe bleeding and problems urinating, and later, potential childbirth complications and newborn deaths. An estimated 100 to 140 million girls and women worldwide are currently living with the negative health consequences of FGM.
- The UN's multi-country report on gender-based violence found that women who were abused by their partners were significantly more likely to experience emotional distress, suicide attempts, physical health limitations, unintended pregnancy, abortion and miscarriage.
- Almost 80% of cervical cancer cases occur in low-income countries, where cervical cancer is the most common cancer in women. Cervical cancer causes about 250,000 deaths worldwide each year.

—United Nations, 2011

"[R]eproductive rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. It includes the right of all to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence as expressed in human rights documents."

—United Nations International Conference on Population and Development, 1994

"The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behavior and its consequences."

—United Nations Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995

WHAT CAN CIVIL SOCIETY DO?

- Sign on to Gender Action's letters to governments, IFIs, and the public to advocate for women's equality and SRH rights
- [Join Gender Action's campaign](#) to pressure IFIs to increase and improve their spending on SRH and HIV/AIDS, as well as remove their loan conditionalities that impede progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- Continue to pressure all IFIs to strengthen gender policies, SRH investments and accountability mechanisms.
- Help build the capacity of those who are directly and indirectly harmed by IFI SRH projects- particularly women and girls - to bring gender discrimination cases to IFI accountability mechanisms and help them gather information on IFI policies and procedures.
- Bring media and international attention to gender discrimination claims, which may pressure IFIs to accept responsibility for the negative impacts of SRH projects and consider gender rights in future SRH projects.
- Pressure IFIs for increased transparency, demanding increased access to and appropriate translations of key investment documents for local communities.

SRH RESOURCES

- Center for Development and Population Activities: www.cedpa.org
- Gender Action: www.genderaction.org
- Health Gap: www.healthgap.org
- International AIDS Alliance: www.aidsalliance.org
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) www.unfpa.org
- World Health Organization (WHO) Department of Reproductive Health and Research: www.who.int/reproductivehealth/en/

GENDER ACTION RESOURCES:

- ["Mapping Multilateral Development Banks' Reproductive Health and HIV Spending"](#): An examination of the quality and quantity of MDB spending on SRH and HIV projects, including an overview of each institution's commitments to promoting SRH rights.
- ["Speaking Up for Gender: A Step-by-Step Guide to IFI Accountability Mechanisms"](#): A user-friendly, comprehensive guide for taking gender discrimination complaints to IFI accountability mechanisms. Includes specific information about the complaint process and the requirements of each IFI as well as case studies. Available in Spanish.

RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL DECLARATIONS:

- [Cairo Declaration on Population and Development](#)
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)
- [UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

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