

**Launch of the WHO report  
"Women and health: today's evidence tomorrow's agenda"  
9 November 2009, Geneva, Switzerland**

**Statement by Otaviano Canuto, Vice President, Poverty Reduction  
and Economic Management (PREM) Network and Julian  
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World Bank**

The Bank welcomes this effort by WHO to put the issue of women's health on the international agenda and endorses the importance and timeliness of the messages of the report "*Women and health: today's evidence tomorrow's agenda*". The Bank is committed to promoting gender equality in client countries because we believe that under-investing in women limits economic growth and slows down progress in poverty reduction. Improving women's health, particularly reproductive health, is central to achieving gender equality. Reinvigorating our commitment to helping client countries improve their reproductive health outcomes and to ensure that women's reproductive health needs are met, the Bank is poised to launch in the coming months a Reproductive Health Action Plan.

The Bank also endorses the life-course approach taken by the report and would like to draw attention to the health issues affecting adolescent and young women. With nearly 80% of adolescent and young women residing in developing countries, the Bank is strongly committed to ensuring that their needs are met so that they can make a healthy transition to adulthood. Towards this goal, sixteen million of Bank and donor support has been allocated to date to the Adolescents Girls Initiative (AGI), launched on October 2008 as part of the World Bank Group's Gender Action Plan - *Gender Equality as Smart Economics* - aiming to increase young women's economic opportunities by improving their access to the labor market, agricultural land and technology, credit and infrastructure services. Going forward, the Bank will also be working to ensure that reproductive health needs of adolescent and young women are met.