Submission to the independent Expert Review Group Call for Evidence
May 2013

Reproductive Health Matters appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the work of the independent Expert Review Group (iERG) by responding to this call for submission of documentation on good practices and obstacles. We respond to the specific issue areas requested, by submitting information on the following themes: (1) adolescents; (2) accountability mechanisms; (3) human rights; and (4) transparency.

1. Adolescents

“Adolescents are also vulnerable, and we must make sure they’re given control over their life choices, including their fertility” (UN Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health, p5)

Papers published in Reproductive Health Matters shed light on a range of problems that adolescents face in accessing sexual and reproductive health care and in exercising their rights. In fact RHM’s next journal issue focuses on Young People, Sex and Relationships (Reproductive Health Matters Volume 21, Number 41, May 2013 – forthcoming). Papers published in this issue and previous journals highlight obstacles of great relevance to the implementation of the Global Strategy, and also identify and make recommendations for good practice. Given the functions of the iERG in this regard, we take this opportunity to highlight a set of key issues that must be addressed in order to uphold adolescents’ sexual and reproductive health and rights.


• Where adolescent health strategies are undermined by inadequate sexuality education, in particular where those charged with delivering it avoid “sensitive” topics. Pokharel, S et al. *School-Based Sex Education in Western Nepal: Uncomfortable for Both Teachers and Students*. Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 14, Issue 28, Pages 156-161.


2. **National accountability mechanisms in priority countries**

   The Commission on Information and Accountability’s recommendation no. 7 calls for all countries to establish national accountability mechanisms that are transparent, inclusive of all stakeholders and that recommend remedial action as required. The following topics, among many others, are covered RHM’s extensive literature on national and international accountability for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

• How accountability mechanisms in health care mediate between service providers and communities between different kinds of health personnel at the primary health care level, and the importance of information, dialogue and negotiation to supporting change and engagement, as well as addressing power relations and improving the representation of marginalised groups. George, A. *Using Accountability to Improve Reproductive Health Care*. Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 11, Issue 21, Pages 161-170.

• How donors should support a stronger civil society role in the design, implementation and evaluation of SRHR funding, in light of the overall reduction in quantity and quality of support. Seims, S. *Improving the impact of sexual and reproductive health development assistance from the like-minded European donors*. Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 19, Issue 38, Pages 129-140

• The importance of international human rights bodies as sources of accountability for sexual and reproductive rights violations where national accountability is absent or ineffective, as illustrated by two cases decided by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – relating to a maternal death in Brazil and the denial of therapeutic abortion in Peru. Kismödi, E et al. *Human rights accountability for maternal death and failure to provide safe, legal abortion: the significance of two ground-breaking CEDAW decisions*. Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 20, Issue 39, Pages 31-39.

• How litigation can and is being used effectively as a tool for building case law, informing communities about their rights, and holding governments accountable at local, state and central level. Kaur, J. *The role of litigation in ensuring women’s reproductive rights: an analysis of the Shanti Devi judgement in India*. Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 20, Issue 39, Pages 21-30.
3. **Human rights**

“Governments and policymakers at local, national, regional and global levels must... Introduce or amend legislation and policies in line with the principles of human rights, linking women’s and children’s health to other areas” (UN Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health, p.16)

The Global Strategy recognises the centrality of human rights to achieving improvements in improving the health of women and children, and the need to build on existing commitments made by states, including at the International Conference on Population and Development, and through human rights treaties. Reproductive Health Matters promotes rights-based approaches throughout its publications, and explores the many human rights issues involved in improving sexual and reproductive health. The following papers may be useful to the iERG in ensuring human rights are at the heart of its recommendations in its second report:

- How a new measure supposed to address maternal and morbidity and mortality in Brazil through compulsory pregnancy registration jeopardised women’s reproductive rights, and failed to address the two main problems with maternal health in the country: the over-medicalisation of childbirth and the need for safe, legal abortion. *Diniz S. Materno-infantilism, feminism and maternal health policy in Brazil. Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 20, Issue 39, pages 125-132.*

- This commentary by women with HIV from around the world argues for a human rights-based approach of what pregnancy, motherhood and HIV mean for women and children alike. The twin principles of testing being voluntary and confidential must be a cornerstone of the global response to HIV. The exclusion of these principles from the Global Plan Towards the Elimination of New HIV Infections Among Children by 2015 and Keeping Their Mothers Alive reverses important public health and human rights progress – and threatens to undermine efforts to reduce maternal mortality rates. *Chitembo A et al. Towards an HIV-free generation: getting to zero or getting to rights? Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 20, Issue 39(Suppl), Pages 5-13.*

- Partnerships between civil society groups campaigning for reproductive and human rights, health professionals and others could contribute more to the strengthening of health systems needed to bring about declines in maternal deaths in Africa. *Ray S, Madzimbamuto F, Fonn S. Activism: working to reduce maternal mortality through civil society and health professional alliances in sub-Saharan Africa. Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 20, Issue 39, Pages 40-49.*

4. **Transparency and information**

The Commission on Information and Accountability’s report recognised the role of information in raising awareness of health, scrutinising health interventions, and of transparency in fostering learning, continuous improvement and informed decision-making (p19). Its recommendation no. 8 on transparency is crucial to achieving effective accountability. The following papers focus on specific issues relating to transparency and the role of data in monitoring and measurement:

- The challenges faced by civil society organizations in Latin America in assessing budget transparency on government spending on specific aspects of maternity care, in order to hold them accountable for reducing maternal deaths, and how better budgeting modalities are needed to track local and national progress. *Malajovich, L et al. Budget transparency on*


- How the use of different statistical methods in estimating levels of maternal mortality can be made more relevant to the needs of country-level decision-makers. There is a need for the global community to invest seriously in working with countries to generate primary data on maternal mortality using measurement methods that reduce uncertainty and generate data on a continuing basis. AbouZahr, C. New estimates of maternal mortality and how to interpret them: choice or confusion? Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 19, Issue 37, Pages 117-128

- How improvements to financial transparency are needed as part of a range of measures to improve the impact and effectiveness of cash transfer or voucher schemes in Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Jehan, K et al. Improving access to maternity services: an overview of cash transfer and voucher schemes in South Asia. Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 20, Issue 39, Pages 142-154.

- A proposal for practical performance measures to be included in health sector support agreements, with a view to tracking progress in 1) reducing mortality and morbidity from unsafe abortion, 2) preventing and treating gender-based violence, 3) reducing unwanted pregnancies among the poorest women, and 4) reducing unwanted pregnancies among adolescents. These will require political commitment from donors and governments and investment in baseline data. Seims, S and Khadduri, R. Measuring improvements in sexual and reproductive health and rights in sub-Saharan Africa. Reproductive Health Matters Vol. 20, Issue 40, Pages 177-187.