

III. PROMOTING PARTNERSHIPS

The participation of civil society organizations (CSOs), NGOs and the private sector is seen as essential for meeting the Millennium Development Goals and those contained in the ICPD Programme of Action. The latter states: “The involvement of non-governmental organizations should be seen as complementary to the responsibility of Governments to provide full, safe and accessible reproductive health services, including family planning and sexual health services”. [1, Chapter XV, para. 15.6, p. 78] Also, one of the objectives of the Programme of Action is to “promote the role of the private sector in service delivery and in the production and distribution, within each region of the world, of high-quality reproductive health and family-planning commodities and contraceptives, which are accessible and affordable to low-income sectors of the population”. [1, Chapter XV, para. 15.15(b), p. 79]

The enquiry conducted by ESCAP in 1998 as part of the five-year review of, *inter alia*, ICPD implementation indicated that, barring a few exceptions, NGOs have operated in most countries of the Asian and Pacific region and have played pioneering roles in highlighting issues that are culturally sensitive and that Governments are reluctant to address. In the countries which did not have NGOs at the time (e.g., the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Uzbekistan) they have since begun to support NGOs in population and related programmes. Many of the countries also indicated that “NGOs were encouraged to participate in the policy dialogue on population and reproductive health issues”. While their involvement was largely in the form of participation in workshops and seminars, in a few countries NGOs were included as members of government-organized policy committees. In that enquiry, most of the Governments also reported taking specific action to promote CSO and NGO participation by supporting them in project development and implementation, often providing RH services and addressing the needs of adolescents and youth. Only a few countries reported that they have established mechanisms to promote the participation of CSOs and NGOs.

The UNFPA field enquiry confirms the above-mentioned findings. For example, while 24 countries reported that NGOs are involved in programme development, implementation and monitoring, only 7 countries reported their involvement in policy-making and/or having developed policies for their involvement in activities related to RR/RH. Also, the involvement of the NGOs in RH/RR training and consultation workshops was cited by only a few countries. Ten countries reported that they have set up national forums for NGOs.

Nearly two thirds of the countries (22 out of the 33 responding) indicated private sector involvement in providing services, including supplying contraceptives. The private sector is involved in the provision of services, including the distribution of contraceptives, in most countries. It also sponsors social marketing and outreach programmes in many countries (16), according to the field enquiry. Many countries also reported that the private sector sponsors some IEC/advocacy activities or has supported the organization of special events.

Since the Cairo Conference in 1994, direct donor support to NGOs – in many countries with the concurrence of the Government – for population and reproductive health programmes has also increased. For example, UNFPA funding for NGOs rose from US\$ 35.8 million in 1995 to US\$ 60.1 million in 1998. [16, p. 332] Asian and Pacific donor countries, namely, New Zealand, Japan and Australia, provided 40, 37 and 18 per cent respectively of their support to NGOs in the year 2000. For the region as a whole, one third of the total expenditure for population activities (totalling US\$ 389.3 million in 2000) was channeled through NGOs. [17, pp. 348-349] The European Union has also been supporting seven countries in Asia, mainly through NGOs, to improve the access of adolescents and youth to RH information and services.

New approaches such as health sector reform, SWAPs, Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework and PRSPs provide the opportunity to identify and involve CSOs, NGOs and the private sector, as well as other development partners, in population and reproductive health programmes.