Thematic discussion on achievements, challenges, gaps, and emerging issues in the implementation of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development, as well as the PoA of the ICPD

Round table title: **Health, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights**

**Moderator:** Ms. Fingani A. Mphande-Nyasulu, Associate Professor, Faculty of Medicine, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Thailand

**Panellists:**
- Ms. Shireen Jejeebhoy, Visiting Distinguished Faculty, International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), India
- Dr. Asela Gunawardena, Director General of Health Services, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka
- Mr. Paul Ong, Chief Strategy Officer, Tsao Foundation, Singapore
- Ms. Sivananthi Thanenthiran, Executive Director, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Malaysia

Open discussion with member States and other participants

**Statement by – Ms Poonam Muttreja, Executive Director – Population Foundation of India**

- The Population Foundation of India, established 53 years ago, is dedicated to advancing gender-sensitive policies and programs, particularly focusing on the health and well-being of young women and girls in India. Our mission involves empowering women, girls, and young people, with a primary focus on enhancing sexual and reproductive health outcomes. We pursue this mission through strategic engagement, Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC), capacity building, knowledge generation, and grant-making. Our key areas of work include Adolescent Health and Well-being, Women's Empowerment, Sexual and Reproductive Health, and Family Planning.

- Earlier this year, in April 2023, UN projections suggested that India surpassed China to become the world's most populous country. It is commendable that India attained replacement-level fertility without resorting to coercive practices, investing strategically to tap its demographic advantage and position itself as the provider of manpower for countries across the world, where aging and the non-availability of workers are posing serious challenges.

- PFI has increasingly emerged as a leading voice and thought leader in shaping the global discourse on population dynamics, particularly following India's surpassing of China as the world's most populous nation in April 2023. PFI has been reached by over 200 domestic and international electronic, print, and television media organizations.

- In addressing the challenges posed by a decreasing working population and the aging demographics in numerous countries, it is imperative to dismantle the archaic notion that perceives women solely as baby-producing machines subject to external control over their fertility. Recognising women's autonomy in deciding when to have children and when not to is fundamental in fostering a society that values equality and individual agency.
• Investing in the empowerment of women goes beyond being a response to demographic challenges; it is a fundamental and enduring commitment aligned with the principles set forth in the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). This commitment emphasizes that empowering women is not a temporary measure triggered by a need for more children. Instead, it is a continuous and unwavering dedication that should persist irrespective of changes in demographic trends.

• In contemplating solutions, we must broaden our perspective to consider options such as human capital flow. If financial investments can traverse borders, so too can the movement of human capital.

• The world has been benefitting from India’s investment in its young people. Skilled Indians are in great demand –many of them are moving to developed countries that are recording negative population growth or facing a shortage of skilled manpower. For instance, the Government of India and the Government of Japan signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) in January 2021 on a basic framework for partnership for proper operation of the system pertaining to “Specified Skilled Worker. Under this MoC, skilled Indian workers from 14 sectors have been identified for enhanced job opportunities for skilled Indian workers in Japan. The era of ‘brain drain’ is over. It is about time the world recognizes the potential of investing in and drawing on Indians.

• Population Foundation of India, in partnership with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), India, organized a National CSO Consultation on Population and Development on 31st of October, 2023 in New Delhi. The event saw 36 national-level Civil Society Organisations, working across the eleven thematic priorities, convene to deliberate the status of the indicators across policies and programmes in India. The CSOs were represented by highly respected and experienced development professionals. Dr. Shireen Jejeebhoy, the esteemed panalist in this session also participated in the consultation.

Key Recommendations that emerged on Sexual Reproductive Health and Adolescent Health are as follows:

Leveraging technology to enhance the reach and efficiency of SRH and AH programmes, particularly in remote and underserved areas.
Mainstreaming SRH in the media to reduce stigma and raise awareness.
Decentralising SRH and AH programmes by empowering state and district-level authorities.
Promoting citizen engagement, accountability, and capacity building of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), women Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) leaders, and young people.
Integrating Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) for in-school and out-of school adolescents. CSE terminology should be culturally sensitive and inclusive.
Strategic engagement with policymakers on SRH and AH initiatives.
Adequate budget allocation for SRH and AH programs
A life-cycle approach to SRH, which a focus on interlinkages with empowerment, education, and gender equality.
Strengthening the capacity of CSRs and donors to invest in SRH