

# DFID's Golden Moment initiative on family planning

## A Gender and Development Network response

The Gender and Development Network (GADN) welcomes the Department for International Development's (DFID) stated commitment to the promotion of women's rights and, within this, to the proposed focus on family planning with a 'Golden Moment' in July 2012.<sup>i</sup> We see reproductive health and rights as important components in achieving gender equality and women's rights. Leveraging additional support and funds to meet women's unmet demand for contraception is a valuable first step. However this can be a difficult agenda to navigate and it is vital that women's rights are at the heart of any initiative.

Below are suggestions as to how women's rights should be further embedded in the plans for July and beyond:

1. The underlying purpose of this initiative must be to allow women to choose when and whether to have children. This will, in turn, provide women with more opportunities for economic and political empowerment.
  2. A challenge will be to develop indicators that reflect this focus on women's rights and can assess whether women's choices are increasing. Such indicators will need to go beyond measures of contraceptive prevalence and total fertility rates. We feel DFID could add substantial value by supporting the development of indicators around, for example, choice of method of contraception.
  3. If meeting the unmet need for family planning is to be a target then it will be important to refine the definition of 'unmet need'<sup>ii</sup> so as not to exclude women and adolescent girls who are neither married nor in a union, but who are sexually active. Without this change some of the women most in need of access to family planning will continue to be excluded.
  4. There is always a risk with global goals that the incentive is to make quick wins, rather than target the people who are hardest to reach. We hope this will not be the case with this initiative.
  5. To further ensure that the initiative is rooted in the promotion of rights, women should be offered a choice of safe, affordable and effective methods of contraception as part of an integrated and broader health systems strengthening approach that recognises the importance of qualified service delivery (including information and counselling) and the removal of financial
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barriers. This concept of choice needs therefore to be included in the wording of the goal, and underlined in the key principles.

6. Family planning is about more than contraception. The physical provision of contraception removes only one barrier to reproductive choice. Other social factors, particularly gender based violence, hinder women's ability to control their fertility. It is important for them to be recognised within the initiative. Moreover reproductive health is about more than just family planning.<sup>iii</sup> DFID's work on, for example, gender, child health, water and sanitation, agriculture and food security, fragility, and nutrition also have a bearing on reproductive health and it would be good to see the initiative addressing these interrelationships.
7. In framing the debate to appeal to wider audiences, care should be taken not to undermine an emphasis on women's choice and rights. Stressing the benefits of family planning provision for economic growth or climate change may appear to provide short term wins, by increasing support for the initiative. But failing to educate a wider audience on the importance of choice, whether this leads to smaller or larger family sizes, will cause problems in the future. The recent Finding Frames paper (supported by DFID) clearly identified the pitfalls of using instrumentalist arguments to engage public support. The history of coercion in this field remains a salutary reminder of what can happen when decision makers forget choice, and use family planning as a means to achieve economic growth or other goals.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> See: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/News/Latest-news/2012/Family-planning-UK-to-host-summit-with-Gates-Foundation/>

<sup>ii</sup> “The percent with an unmet need for family planning is the number of women with unmet need for family planning expressed as a percentage of women of reproductive age who are married or in a union. Women with unmet need are those who are fecund and sexually active but are not using any method of contraception, and report not wanting any more children or wanting to delay the birth of their next child.”

[http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/family\\_planning/unmet\\_need\\_fp/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/family_planning/unmet_need_fp/en/index.html)

<sup>iii</sup> The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing expanded the right to family planning to include the right to better sexual and reproductive health.

<http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/women/womrepro.htm>

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The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women’s rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

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### Working Groups

GADN brings together development practitioners, experts and academics working on thematic issues through Working Groups. The Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Working Group is currently focused on ensuring women’s rights are central to DFID’s Family Planning initiative for 2012 and beyond.

### Disclaimer

GADN produces a series of background briefings for use by our members and others. These are produced by the Secretariat in consultation with our Advisory Group and relevant Working Groups. They do not necessarily represent the views of all our members.