

International Consortium for Medical Abortion Asia Region Network Meeting

18th - 19th March 2008

Hotel Dorsett Regency
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

A Report

Day 1 Tuesday 18th March 2008

The meeting began with **Suchitra Dalvie, Consultant ICMA**, welcoming all the participants. She thanked IPPF ESEAOR for having made the hotel arrangements and enabled ICMA to hold this meeting in Malaysia. Special thanks were expressed for Dr. Raj Karim, Toan Tran and Juliana Moses.

She then invited **Dr. Raj Karim, Regional Director, IPPF ESEAOR**, to chair the welcome session. Dr Raj Karim began by stating that they were very pleased to host the first ever ICMA Asia Region Network Meeting. Unsafe abortion continues to be a major cause of maternal mortality in Asia and therefore is a high priority area of work. Indonesia, Mongolia and Vietnam in ESEAOR have recently received funds as part of the Global Comprehensive Abortion Care Fund.

Rodica Comendant, ICMA Coordinator, then gave an overview of the work of ICMA, with a few technical highlights on the issue of Medical Methods of Abortion, and explained the evolution of the regional networks, with a special mention of CLACAI, which is the Latin American network.



This was well received and was followed by a detailed round of self introduction by all the 37 participants present, representing 13 countries. This was a very interesting session which allowed all the participants to get to know each other as well as develop an appreciation of the challenges and complexities existing within the law and policy frameworks of each country.

Toan Tran and Suchitra Dalvie then facilitated a discussion to bring about an in-depth understanding and agreement among the group about the key issues/ needs of safe abortion access in Asia with reference to

- Law, Policy, Advocacy,
- Research and Documentation,
- Capacity Building,
- Service Delivery.

This was done by group work and each group identified **five gaps** and made **five recommendations**. These were then discussed with the entire group and priorities were agreed upon.



Following the lunch break, Lester Coutinho, Country Advisor, Packard Foundation (India), facilitated an invigorating session on “**Is there a need for an Asian Network?**” He urged the group to think about whether we as a group represent the interests of our organizations alone or those of these women? He then asked the group to **defend the rationale for creating such a coalition or network.**

The group rose to the occasion and spiritedly defended this idea. They spoke of the diversity of the group working as its strength. Members said that at present there was no such group in Asia; it could create south-south capacity building, influence regional / global agenda by its credibility; it would be a useful forum for experience sharing. Individual members are already doing this but their effectiveness will be improved by being a part of such a group. The members felt that in order to succeed, we need a focused goal, an agenda which is relevant not only to the region but also to each member country/ organization and as a group we need to retain high levels of motivation and commitment so that the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts.

Day 2 Wednesday 19th March 2008

The first session was facilitated by **Yasmeen Qazi** and **Asha George**. They led the group through a brainstorming for identifying the **goal and objectives** of the proposed network. **RD Marte** had prepared a draft which the group discussed and modified. After much deliberation, the group agreed upon the following wording for the goal and objectives, **in keeping with ICPD language:**

GOAL

To promote, protect and advance women’s sexual and reproductive rights and health in Asia by reducing unsafe abortion and its complications and where it is legal, by promoting access to comprehensive safe abortion services.

OBJECTIVES

1. To serve as a forum for information and experience sharing, strategic thinking and planning for a collective vision aimed towards regional and international advocacy
2. To support members to advance the partnership goal in their country contexts through the following areas:
 - law, advocacy and policy
 - capacity building
 - research and documentation
 - service delivery
3. To promote new technologies, including manual vacuum aspiration and medical abortion.

Once this was finalized, the name was chosen and agreed upon as the **Asia Safe Abortion Partnership** or **ASAP!**

The next session was facilitated by **S P Choong** and **Nongluk Boonthai**. During this session, the members attempted to determine the structure and functioning of the ASAP. It was agreed upon that like ICMA, both organizational and individual member will be welcome.

RD Marte suggested a structure consisting of **General Members, Steering Committee, Secretariat and Task Forces**. This was accepted by the members as a good structure. It was felt that while the Secretariat may need to have an office space once the work increases and if more staff is taken on, currently that was not mandatory. There was also a concern expressed that the organization where the Secretariat is located should allow independent functioning since the Secretariat needs to liaise with and be guided by the Steering Committee and not the organization which offers the space.

The members felt that 7 was a good number for a Steering Committee, with 5 being the quorum needed for decisions taken collectively. The process of selection was by open nomination by the members around the table and then acceptance by those nominated. A 2 year term was agreed upon with 3 members rotating off voluntarily every 2 years. While a gender balance and regional representation would be encouraged, each country need not be represented in the Steering Committee.

The members of the **Steering Committee** as nominated by the group are:

- Claire Luczon, Philippines
- Khalid Qureshi, Pakistan
- Indira Basnett, Nepal
- Milind Shah, India
- Phan Bich Thuy, Vietnam
- SP Choong, Malaysia
- Suchitra Dalvie, India

There was agreement that Suchitra would take on the role of **Coordinator**. As the work grows and evolves and funding needs to be routed to ASAP, some mechanism would need to be looked into.

Following lunch break there was a suggestion that the members once again move into the working groups and outline the plan of activities for the next year. This would help in setting the agenda for the ASAP as well as be useful when approaching donors with a specific work plan. The suggestions from the groups were then discussed. It was agreed that the group on capacity building had cross-cutting issues with the others and could thus be merged with them in the work plan.



The meeting then came to a close and the Steering Committee stayed behind to have their first meeting.

*Report prepared by Suchitra Dalvie.
Thanks to Sheila and Asha for notes taken on first day.*