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Technical Meeting Focuses on Sharing and Expanding Use of Best Practices in Family Planning, Maternal and Child Health

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According to the World Bank, the health of mothers, newborns and children is central to human development, sustained economic growth, and poverty reduction. Yet each year, 250,000 mothers and --- newborns die because of childbirth and other complications in Asia and the Near East. The Director General of the Thai Department of Health, Dr. Narongsakdi Aungkasuvapala, points out an even more disturbing fact: "Many of these deaths are preventable with the use of proven, relatively simple and inexpensive best practices."

Experts Assemble to Address Health Issues in Asia and the Near East

Nearly [450 health and development professionals](#) arrived in Bangkok, Thailand to address the challenges of bringing proven practices to those in need. The *Scaling-up High Impact Family Planning and Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Best Practices: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Near East* technical meeting, held September 3-8, 2007 at the Bangkok Millennium Hilton hotel, focused on practical and feasible approaches to expand access to best practices through existing health services.

The technical meeting was organized by United States Agency for International Development and the World Health Organization, in collaboration with USAID partners: Extending Service Delivery Project (Pathfinder International), ACCESS (JHPIEGO), ACCESS FP (JHPIEGO), MotherNewborNet (ICDDR,B), White Ribbon Alliance (Constella Futures Group), Quality Assurance Project (University Research Co.), and other partners.

A Collaborative Environment

Participants from 18 countries of the ANE region came to present their successes, lessons learned, and share approaches to improve the health of women and children of their region. Guest speakers from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund, and the Thai Ministry of Health highlighted the importance of their efforts. "The work you do saves lives. It improves lives. It transforms both people and communities," said Gary Cook, Senior Health Advisor of the ANE Bureau at USAID, Washington. "It is not just important; it is essential."

However, all speakers acknowledged that the region is facing an uphill battle. The Millennium Development Goals most recent report shows that, in ANE countries, health-related goals face the greatest challenges. The numbers are staggering: 3.5 million children under 5 die each year in Asia and the Near East. "In many countries progress is lacking and in some, the situation has worsened," said Mr. G. Giridhar of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). In addition, the World Bank reports that the financial situation for family planning projects is more constrained than ever as money is redirected to HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB programs.

A Focus on Solutions

Nearly [150 presentations](#) focused on practices in maternal, newborn, and child health that have demonstrated success. In addition, sessions on fostering change, scaling-up, management strategies and

technology addressed practical barriers to expanded health services. Speakers included international and country experts from a variety of technical fields.

Using technology to overcome logistical challenges was a key element of the meeting. The Skills Labs allowed presenters to demonstrate practical aspects of certain proven best practices. An e-learning lab also attracted many participants with its diverse modules on family planning, reproductive health, newborn and child health, scaling-up best practices, monitoring and evaluation, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and TB.

Creating Paths Forward

Fourteen countries developed and presented action steps for scaling-up best practices in their countries. The Extending Service Delivery Project and World Health Organization will follow up with the country teams and assist in implementation. In addition, three to four countries will be awarded grants to assist in expanding an MNCH/FP best practice country-wide.

[The Extending Service Delivery \(ESD\) Project](#), which managed the technical meeting, was pleased by the enthusiasm and commitment of the participants. Mr. Cook echoed their sentiments. “There is no work more important than [this] work. Shout about it and—above all—keep doing it.”

About The Extending Service Delivery (ESD) Project

Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Bureau for Global Health, ESD is designed to address unmet need for family planning (FP) and increase the use of reproductive health and family planning (RH/FP) services at the community level, especially among underserved populations, in order to improve health and socioeconomic development. To accomplish its mission, ESD strengthens global learning and application of best practices; increases access to community-level RH/FP services; and improves capacity for supporting and sustaining RH/FP services. ESD works closely with USAID missions to devise tailored strategies that meet the RH/FP service delivery needs of specific countries. A five-year Leader with Associates Cooperative Agreement, ESD is managed by Pathfinder International in partnership with IntraHealth International, Management Sciences for Health, and Meridian Group International, Inc. Additional technical assistance is provided by Adventist Development and Relief Agency International, the Georgetown University Institute for Reproductive Health, and Save the Children.