

## 4<sup>th</sup> APCRSH

The 4th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights (APCRSH) 2007 was held from 29 to 31 October at Hyderabad, India. The goal of the conference was to enhance and accelerate the process of realising the sexual and reproductive health and rights agenda in the countries of the Asia Pacific Region. The overarching theme was "Exploring New Frontiers in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights". The opening session included oratorical addresses by Dr Baigo Zhao, Vice Minister, National Population and Family Planning Commission of People's Republic of China, Dr Sunil Mehra, Co-Chairperson of the 4<sup>th</sup> APCRSH, Dr Purnima Mane, Deputy Executive Director of UNFPA, Ms Gillian Greer, Director General, International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), and Dr Vishwanath Koliwad, Secretary General, Family Planning Association of India.

The themes of each day were "Implementing sexual and reproductive rights: an unfinished agenda"; "Engaging young people in promoting their sexual and reproductive health and rights"; and "Forging partnerships to reinforce the centrality of sexual and reproductive health in national programmes" respectively. Diversity of human sexuality and one's right to choose it, access to health products and services, importance of women's right to reproductive health, and inclusion of youth in policy making were discussed extensively. It was emphasised that sexual health does not imply biological health alone, but emotional health as well.

Migrants and their sexual and health rights were less represented in most of these sessions. There were few oral presentations on migrant workers in China and Philippines. The primary focus was on migrants' awareness on reproductive health and HIV prevention. There was a mention on how Cambodian migrants are lured to become sex workers in massage parlours, once they get stranded in a foreign land without a job, which gave a glimpse of vulnerability of migrants in general. However, the second day's theme being "The Youth", gave a leverage to talk about migrant issues in various sessions. CARAM Asia's delegate was able to raise the question of inconsistency between national policies and practice of mandatory testing for migrants in many countries as well as the convenient silence of society towards migrants, who have become the invisible community among youth in many sessions. Suggestions were given to include a health component in pre-departure programs in the sending country.

With regard to policies and legislation related to reproductive and sexual health, it was acknowledged that most nations have excellent health legislation and policies in place at the top. Along with it, there have been various isolated, yet successful practices at the grass roots as well. Unfortunately, it does not transcend across all areas and people in order to bridge both these ends. Dr Lyn Freedman from Colombia University compared it with a "broken zipper" problem, where the zip is closed at the top and bottom, with the middle part remaining

open in the same way how elegant theories and policies meet 'messy' practices with a huge gap in between. A dangerous fallacy was also pointed out in the conference, where development professionals, complacently equate technical inputs and political will and money as the most dependent constituents to bring out functioning services in the society. The plea was to perceive health system as a core social institution built on human relationships than a mere mechanical system to deliver technical assistance. The integration of family planning, HIV and AIDS as well as SRH envisioned at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994 and Millennium Development Goals were constantly emphasised across sessions. It was also mentioned that sexuality and reproductive health needs should be seen beyond certain agreements in conferences and as a mere liability to fulfill these goals.