

SPECIAL PROGRAMME OF RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT  
AND RESEARCH TRAINING IN HUMAN REPRODUCTION

Co-sponsored by UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, and the World Bank

**Reproductive health:  
a key to a brighter future**

**Biennial Report 1990–1991**

**Special 20th anniversary issue**

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## Foreword

**W**HO defines reproductive health as a condition in which reproduction is accomplished in a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely as the absence of disease or disorders of the reproductive process. The ability, particularly of women, to regulate and control fertility is an integral component of the reproductive health care package.

Fertility regulation is important for reducing the population growth rate which is vital for achieving sustainable development; population growth adds to pressures on resources and the carrying capacity of local ecosystems and the biosphere.

The picture of reproductive health in the world today appears to be gloomy. But being an optimist by nature, I am a strong believer in the energy, resilience and adaptability of human beings. Moreover, there is much ground for optimism about health development. For example, the monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the WHO Global Strategy for Health for All show that, even at low income levels, impressive advances in human development can be achieved. An even more important cause for optimism is the growing respect for human values and for human rights, coupled with the realization that improvement in the health of individuals, particularly of women, is an investment in overall human and socioeconomic development. Another source of encouragement is the increasing number of governments awakening to the urgency of devising new health development strategies to expedite the attainment of health for all. But our capacity for action depends not only on political commitment and financial resources, but also on technical knowledge and trained manpower.

Moreover, without international cooperation, global health targets will not be achieved. WHO initiated the Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction in 1972 to strengthen international technical cooperation in reproductive health research, but in particular to address the expanding need for fertility regulation in developing countries. Today, after twenty years of success, the Programme is co-sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, and the World Bank, and has become the main instrument of reproductive health research in the United Nations system. Not only does it conduct, support, coordinate, and evaluate research, it has helped

(and continues to help) many developing countries to acquire the material and human resources needed for research in this area.

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Programme, WHO is pleased to issue this special report. As the report shows, with concern, commitment and international cooperation, we can look forward to a brighter future with regard to reproductive health.

Dr Hiroshi Nakajima  
Director-General  
World Health Organization

## Preface

**A** *special programme* is established in WHO when a *special need* is identified, necessitating a *special effort* beyond the regular WHO activities and for which the Member States are willing to make a *special financial contribution*, separate from their assessed dues to the Organization. The Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction was the first special programme to be established in WHO.

The major and rapid expansion of fertility regulation, particularly in developing countries, emerged as a special need that required special efforts in terms of political commitment, mobilization of resources, and generation of the necessary knowledge and technology. The Programme was established in 1972 with the objective of mobilizing the scientific health community, in both developed and developing countries, in a global partnership to help developing countries meet the health needs of their populations, particularly in the field of fertility regulation. Several Member States in the developed and developing world made (and continue to make) special financial contributions to the Programme. Moreover, in 1988 the Programme was co-sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Bank, and WHO, to become the research arm of the United Nations system in the field of human reproduction.

Over the past two decades, the Programme has evolved to respond to changing needs and scientific opportunities, capitalizing on its comparative advantages. Tremendous progress has been made but major challenges still lie ahead.

This issue of the Programme's Biennial Report is also *special* as it marks the 20th anniversary of the Programme. Part I reviews the status of reproductive health in the world over the last two decades. The progress made, particularly in fertility regulation, cannot be overestimated. Science, including the Programme's effort, is entitled to some of the credit. The unmet needs, however, are still great and a sense of urgency is now dictated by new environmental concerns related to population growth, together with continuing concerns for maternal and child health, the status of women, and human development.

Part II of the Report deals specifically with the Programme's twenty years and includes invited contributions. The two former directors of the Programme provide an historical perspective of the Programme's estab-

lishment and development. Another chapter gives an account of the findings of a major external evaluation of the impact of the Programme. Viewpoints are presented from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Part III of the Report highlights, in relatively non-technical language, the progress made by the Programme over the past biennium. For more detailed information on technical aspects, the reader is referred to the Programme's Annual Technical Reports.

Part IV contains the annexes which acknowledge the contributions made to the Programme by its donors, the collaborating centres, world scientists, and the current and former staff of the Programme.

The objective of this Report is not to relate the achievements or to boast about the progress made by the Programme. Rather, it aims to demonstrate that not only is it possible to mobilize scientists from developed and developing countries in a global partnership, but through it, it is also possible to work successfully on health problems relevant to the needs of developing countries. This approach still has a lot more to offer in this decade of major challenges.

M.F. Fathalla  
Director



## Message from the Executive Director of UNFPA for the Programme's 20th anniversary Report

**T**wenty years ago, setting up the Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP) was welcomed as a far-sighted move on the part of WHO. In the light of 20 years' experience, and a vastly increased demand for theoretical and practical knowledge about contraception, its wisdom is clearer than ever.

The Programme has, from the start, been a leader in contraceptive technology research, and a number of new products it has developed are now ready for introduction in countries. The Programme has also supported many developing countries in strengthening their research capability in biomedical and social sciences. Wherever feasible, HRP activities have been coordinated with UNFPA supported country programmes. UNFPA applauds the Programme's efforts to involve women in all aspects of its work, and to ensure that contraceptive research and development is particularly sensitive to gender concerns.

The Fund has been supporting the Programme since 1974, and since 1988 has been a co-sponsor with UNDP, WHO, and the World Bank. UNFPA welcomes the conclusion of the 1988-1989 external impact evaluation of the Programme:

“...that the Programme has had a major impact...(and it was)...firmly recommended that HRP be retained as a Special Programme within the UN system and that the co-sponsoring agencies and donors increase their financial contributions to the Programme”.

We are delighted to welcome the Programme into its third decade, and look forward to the availability in the near future of a number of new products which are currently in the final stages of development. We are confident that the fruitful co-operation which has been built up in the past will continue for many years to come and lead to a wider choice of safe and effective contraceptive methods for women and men throughout the world.

Nafis Sadik  
Executive Director

## Message from the Administrator of UNDP for the Programme's 20th anniversary Report

**H**uman development is about access to income and employment opportunities, education and health, and a clean and safe physical environment. Each individual should also have the opportunity to participate fully in community decisions and to enjoy human, economic, and political freedom. It also includes the ability to control fertility. For this, people need to have access to a wide range of methods of fertility regulation.

The Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction has as a primary goal the expansion of the range of safe, effective, and affordable fertility regulation methods available to women and men, particularly in developing countries. Over the last 20 years the Programme has made tremendous progress through its research and research capability strengthening activities.

In 1988 UNDP joined UNFPA, WHO, and the World Bank as a co-sponsor of the Programme. As an agency involved in human development, UNDP was pleased to be associated with a Programme that is engaged in research and training in this important aspect of human development. UNDP is committed to support this Programme and it is hoped that it will continue to benefit from the support of other collaborators in the years to come.

William H. Draper III  
Administrator

## Message from the President of the World Bank for the Programme's 20th anniversary Report

**T**he Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction has accomplished much in two decades. The Programme has provided an indispensable service for the hundreds of millions of people who choose to plan their families. It has sponsored research, collaborated with and trained thousands of scientists, and helped develop scientific consensus about the safety and efficacy of contraceptive methods, especially those suitable to conditions in the developing world. The Programme has gradually broadened its focus, and now also sponsors work in such important areas as sexual behavior, infertility, and AIDS.

The service the Programme provides is an important part of the World Bank's approach to human resources development and poverty alleviation, which depend on increasing income-earning opportunities for women and men, providing education, improving health and nutrition, and providing family planning services.

The Bank helped the Programme in an advisory capacity almost from the start and in 1988 joined with UNFPA, UNDP, and WHO as a co-sponsor. This collaboration has deepened our appreciation of the Programme's technical strength, its managerial soundness, and the commitment of its staff.

Substantial obstacles continue to stand in the way of reproductive choice for women and men in developing countries. Thus, the work of the Programme remains extremely valuable. We look forward to continuing to work together with others in this important endeavor.

Lewis T. Preston  
President

