



Check against Delivery

Seminar on Human Security and Health

**Remarks
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**Panel Discussion: Added Value of Human Security Approaches to Health
Challenges**

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Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset allow me to express UNFPA's great appreciation to the organizers and sponsors of this conference on human security, in particular the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of both Japan and Norway, the Japan Center for International Exchange, and the Institute of International Education.

I think this seminar is extremely timely and important and I thank you for inviting me to participate. The importance of the concept of human security was highlighted by the Asian financial and economic crisis of 1997 and 1998; and its vision clearly remains relevant today as we cope with the current global financial turmoil, which affects individuals and families around the world.

At the recent Spring meetings in Washington, D.C. of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, experts cautioned that while the most acute phase of the recent global financial and economic crisis has passed, recovery remains fragile. We hear talk in some countries of a "jobless recovery," and risks to economic health persist and include high unemployment, low growth in developed countries and scarce international financing for developing countries. And one thing is clear when economic health is threatened, so too is human health due to reduced health spending.

We are all aware that just as the global economic and financial system is interconnected, so too are we as human beings. We have a common responsibility for the most vulnerable and weakest members of our societies because in today's tightly knit world, the well being of each one of us depends on the well-being of others.

Although we now see a recovery from the economic crisis, the persistence of global imbalances, the resumption of currency speculation, and the challenge of sovereign debt, highlight the fragility of this recovery.

Furthermore, even if economic growth is sustained, it will take years for countries to cope with the consequences of the global economic meltdown.

As a result of efforts to rescue financial institutions and revive the economy, many countries are now left with a mounting burden of public debt, and at the same time many are confronted by high and rising unemployment. The combination of these two forces places a significant strain on public finances and on the capacity of countries to ensure adequate social protection.

Although official development assistance did not decline in 2009, the prospects of sustaining the levels of ODA in the coming years remain doubtful. In ongoing efforts to reduce budget deficits and public debt, many countries are likely to pursue a shift towards fiscal austerity. As a result, developed countries may decrease development assistance, and both developed and developing countries may cut public expenditures. While governments must carefully consider their fiscal policy stance, it is essential that they do not compromise on social protection.

Today, human security is challenged by a continued rise of unemployment and underemployment, as well as a renewed rise of fuel and food prices across the world. Both developments erode household incomes and push many households towards or into poverty.

It is now that many need a helping hand, and it is now that we must lend this hand. Reducing social and health budgets that benefit the poor and most vulnerable would be a wrong signal and misguided way forward. Failure to keep up spending on social and human development would threaten human security and would at the same time undermine progress towards internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the goals set forth in the Programme of Action agreed at the International Conference on Population and Development, such as universal access to reproductive health, which includes maternal healthcare and family planning.

Women and younger generations were amongst the first to suffer from the economic crisis, and the emphasis needs to be that they are not amongst the first to suffer from fiscal austerity. Fewer resources for sexual and reproductive health care, for example, would spell a major setback for women's empowerment. It would make it more difficult to combat maternal and child mortality, address the challenge of unwanted pregnancies, arrest the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and to improve women's and children's health more generally.

Another consequence of the crisis is an increased risk of gender-based violence, trafficking and abuse, which require urgent action.

In some countries, the fallout of the economic crisis, and the rise of commodity prices, was further aggravated by natural disasters. The terrible earthquake in Haiti is but one example. Through our work in the areas population and development, UNFPA supports countries to analyse and address dynamics that can ultimately threaten human security and prosperity; and through our work in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and gender, UNFPA supports countries to improve the health and wellbeing of women and children, and families more generally.

With a view to identifying possible challenges to human security and prosperity, UNFPA is analyzing population dynamics and their implications within societies. Changes in the size, age structure and location of populations, for instance, have important implications for the creation and distribution of income, and also for policies to address income inequality and poverty.

Furthermore, some of today's most pressing challenges, including climate change, environmental degradation and food insecurity, are closely interlinked with population dynamics. For example, rising urbanization, growing slums and increasing movements of people to coastal areas presents new challenges for municipal authorities and policymakers. These trends are particularly relevant given the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, such as tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes.

In response, UNFPA works to strengthen national capacities to understand and address these complex interactions and associated risks. An understanding of these dynamics provides the basis for the mapping of vulnerable populations, and for the design of policies to address their needs and protect their human rights.

The right to health is not just a right of individuals, it is also a measure of social justice and equity. Access for all people to safe, high-quality essential health-care services is vital, and is a key responsibility of governments. There is global consensus that strengthening health systems (human resources, financing, logistics, infrastructure, monitoring and evaluation) and promoting demand is critical to improving health outcomes, including those related to maternal, newborn and child health, sexual and reproductive health services and HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care.

In recognition of the challenges that funding-constrained environments pose to health systems strengthening and, convinced of the crucial importance of national ownership, leadership and capacity to development that is sustainable, UNFPA is working with partners to align our support behind national processes and to harmonize efforts to strengthen national health systems.

In the area of human resources for health, UNFPA and partners are working with countries to build national capacity to increase skilled attendance at birth through trained midwives and provide emergency obstetric care.

Also, UNFPA is addressing weaknesses in procurement systems and the logistics of management and delivery of essential drugs and medicines, utilizing reproductive health commodities as an entry point to improve capacity and coordination, including in health information systems.

However, we must remember that strengthening health systems alone does not automatically result in the utilization of health services and better health outcomes. Gender-related attitudes and socio-cultural barriers often prevent women and young people from having access to much-needed services.

Therefore promoting demand at community level is crucial. UNFPA is supporting community participation and development to ensure that the health needs of all citizens, including the poor, the young and persons in hard to reach areas are met.

From experience we know that the strengths and resilience of women are often essential for the survival of households, especially in crises. But if women are to look after the needs of others, their own safety, dignity, health and nutritional concerns must be met as well. UNFPA and our partners seek to bolster the strength of women by identifying and meeting gender-specific needs.

UNFPA works to mobilize communities to foster a culture of ‘zero tolerance’ on violence against women and girls, including working with elders and opinion leaders, and engaging men and boys as agents for change. In addition, UNFPA advocates for legislative reform and the enforcement of laws for the promotion and the protection of women's rights to reproductive health choices and informed consent.

As you know, along with other UN partners, UNFPA moves quickly when emergency strikes, be they natural disasters or situations of conflict, to protect the sexual and reproductive health of communities in crisis. We also provide assistance to affected communities as they move beyond the acute crisis and enter the phase of reconstruction.

In conclusion, within its mandate and in close collaboration with other UN agencies and development partners, UNFPA is committed to promoting both human security, especially in times of crisis, and human development, as measured by progress towards international development goals. One of our key objectives is to combine both protection and empowerment, especially of women and younger generations. To this end, UNFPA continues to promote sexual and reproductive health, gender equality and women’s empowerment, and to provide evidence-based analysis on population dynamics, which is essential for identifying risks and vulnerable populations, and for planning and delivering targeted assistance.

Thank you.