

## **Impression of Mari Simonen's lecture on Gender and Population (17 September 2009, ISS The Hague)**

Mari Simonen of UNFPA was invited to provide the key note speech at the fourth lecture in the lecture series 'The Population Question and Development', a joint initiative of SID, WPF and ISS. In her lecture on Gender and Population, she emphasised the importance of the Programme of Action of the ICPD, that was agreed in Cairo in 1994. She briefly introduced the significance of this conference in relation to the shift from population and demographic approaches to development, to women's issues, human rights and SRHR. Since then, we can celebrate some progress in relation to SRHR, girls empowerment (in going to schools) and increase of contraception use. On the issue of maternal mortality there are still severe challenges, even though very effective and inexpensive methods have been proven to work, like voluntary family planning, skilled care during delivery and availability of emergency care. Still, the goals of Cairo are not being met. Mari Simonen emphasised the need for maximising efforts and upscaling, by increasing resources, working together, engaging civil society and young people, and implementing policies programmes and laws.

Wendy Harcourt, who recently published her book 'Body Politics in Development' reacted on Simonen's speech, acknowledging the importance of the ICPD PoA at that time. However, as she herself said, for the sake of the debate she needed to be provocative and critical at the same time. Although progressive, the PoA was not radical enough to address the issues adequately. In terms of accountability, a major obstacle is the fact that the PoA is not legally binding, and there is no budget attached to it. When the MDGs were developed in 2000, Wendy has foreseen a great challenge in the paradigm shift from human rights, to right to choice, to solely on maternal mortality which is approached as a health issue. And last not least, Wendy wonders: where are the men in the PoA? These challenges ask for a critical view on the significance of the PoA in a changing development world, particularly in approaching 2014 when the PoA ends. Wendy modestly provided some solutions for keeping SRHR and the significant aspects of the PoA on the international development agenda – she recommends to shift the discourse from an isolated SRHR agenda to one that links with other aspects of daily life, like an economic discourse (livelihoods) on sexuality.

A lively debate with the audience raised questions like what the global community needs to do until and after 2014, age limits of contraception, involving men, aging populations, and the influence of opposition.