



The World Bank

January 30, 2007

PAUL WOLFOWITZ
President

Elizabeth Stuart
Senior Policy Advisor
and Head of IFI Relations
Oxfam International
1100 15th Street NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Stuart,

Please convey my thanks to the 60 NGOs, including Oxfam, which wrote to me recently expressing concern over the direction of the World Bank's new Health, Nutrition, and Population (HNP) strategy. The letter raised a number of carefully-considered issues about our direction in this key area of health, to which I have asked the Acting Vice-President for Human Development, Nick Krafft, to reply separately with a more detailed response.

Let me say that the World Bank shares the vision stated in your letter: to ensure well-managed and well-staffed health systems which provide access to quality health services for all citizens, based on need rather than on ability to pay.

I would like to assure you that the strategy will include a strong dedication to gender issues. We agree that women are particularly exposed to informal labor conditions, facing barriers to obtain effective health insurance coverage, which expose them to lack of access to health services and to higher risks of impoverishment due to illness. One of the strategy's priorities is to support efforts to extend effective insurance coverage and enhance access to health services to the informal sector, and within it, to women and children.

On the issue of user fees, which you have flagged as a key concern, I agree that user fees may pose a barrier to poor people seeking essential health services. However, given the primacy of country ownership and national fiscal constraints, any decision to eliminate user fees is up to countries themselves. For its part, the World Bank stands ready to help find alternative, sustainable financing for health services to make up for the shortfall in revenue from abolishing user fees for the poor.

My colleagues will provide you with a more detailed discussion of your concerns over the public versus the private provision of health services. While it is ultimately up to individual countries and their communities to decide how they wish to provide these essential services, the Bank's view is that both the private and public sectors can be key partners in delivering sustainable and affordable health care. As such, the Bank supports country-level efforts to make

effective use of both public and private providers in improving the health of the people and in preventing them from being impoverished due to illness.

Please be assured that we will be taking careful consideration of the issues raised in your letter. The next version of the HNP strategy will clearly demonstrate that the Bank is following a country-driven development plan to further our shared goal of improving the health and well-being of poor people in its partner countries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Wolfowitz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul Wolfowitz