

The Right to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development



Mr. Chairperson, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I on behalf of World Population Foundation welcome the theme "Fertility, Reproductive Health and Development" of the 44th session on the UN Commission on Population and Development. The theme is extremely important and has its significance with human and sustainable development.

I would like to share with you experiences and lessons learnt from the implementation of comprehensive Sexuality and Reproductive Health (SRH) Education program in Indonesia, Pakistan and Vietnam.

In contrast to the popular view, fertility and sexual and reproductive health do not only relate to married couples, they also affect the lives of young people. Youth in the world is increasingly affected with sexual and reproductive health problems such as teenage - mostly forced- marriages, teenage pregnancies, early motherhood, unsafe abortions, boy preference affecting sex ratio, STIs including HIV and sexual abuse.

The present situation with the largest generation of young people ever necessitates to invest in especially designed programs and policies with meaningful participation of youth. This will lead to greater well-being and development of youth, particularly adolescent's, regardless of their marital status and sex, to ensure policies that address their concerns and prove beneficial for sustainable development.

It is a fact that adolescents and young people, especially girls, suffer from gender inequality, discrimination and exclusion and still do not have the basic human rights in many parts of the world. It is a matter of fact that complications associated with pregnancy, and childbirth are the leading causes of death and disability among women of reproductive age affecting women's and girls' rights to life, health, equality and non-discrimination. Thus, it is inevitable to place the national and international responses of women's rights, equality, and well-being at the front and the center. This calls for more focus on MDG3 to reduce gender equality and MDG 5 to both reduce maternal mortality and to ensure universal access to reproductive health.

The picture of SRHR in many developing countries is a gloomy one. About 25% of the total marriages are underage marriages, involving young women aged <16 years. As a result, 2.9 million unsafe abortions occur every year in Indonesia and about 1 million in Pakistan. Unfortunately, the reproductive health program in these countries is mainly aimed at married couples and does not yet reach younger, unmarried people. Family planning programs only target married couples whereas comprehensive sexuality education is still a dream. It is vital to adopt an integrated approach towards Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development for youth while ensuring age specific and culturally appropriate comprehensive sexuality education, easy access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, contraception, family planning, safe abortion and post abortion care. We do not promote that young people become sexually active, but we provide them with the necessary information and skills to enable them to make healthy choices.

I hope that the enriched discussions and dialogue of the Commission will substantively contribute in the upcoming 2011 Annual Ministerial Review conducted by the Economic and Social Council, with the theme of *"Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education"*.

I also welcome the Commission's decision¹ (2010/101) to choose 'Adolescents and Youth' for its forty fifth sessions in 2012 which will definitely foster the collaborative efforts of the International Community for the realization and extension of the ICPD Programme of Action beyond 2014 with the rights-based approach to sexuality and reproductive health.

¹ Economic and Social Council-Report on the Meetings of the Bureau of the Commission on Population and Development: E/CN.9/2011/2.



It is the joint responsibility of all of us, to make sexual and reproductive health and rights a reality, including for adolescents and young people. This in turn will pave the way for developing countries to benefit from the window of opportunity brought by the demographic dividend.

Thank you.

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