

Panel Discussion
On Wednesday 9th April, 2014
Priorities in ICPD Beyond 2014- An Unfinished Agenda

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1. Three top priorities for the further implementation of the ICPD beyond 2014

Youth, Youth, and Youth.

Human rights, gender equality, inequalities in access to contraception, resources, accountability, safe abortion

- HAVE BEEN MENTIONED HERE MANY, MANY TIMES: Nafis Sadik inaugural speech (spoke eloquently of the need for safe abortion, the SG report made an excellent overall view; Navi Pillay, the High Commissioner for Human rights, reminded us that sexual and reproductive rights are human rights; they are not optional; numerous delegations stressed that we can no longer tolerate huge inequalities in access to contraception.)
- ALL OF THESE ISSUES NEED TO HAVE A FOCUS ON YOUTH
- Focus on youth has been ONE the most neglected and the most vulnerable of falling off the post 2014 and post 2015 agenda.

What does it mean?

1. Comprehensive Sexuality Education
2. Youth friendly services
3. Meaning participation and leadership of youth

So, let us have it very clear: Cairo already had strong language on these issues

- 7.37: “ Support should be given to **integral sexual education and services** for young people,
- 7.41: **information and services** to adolescents to help them understand their sexuality and protect them from unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases.
- 7.47: education and counselling of adolescents in the areas of **gender relations and equality, violence against adolescents, responsible sexual behavior, responsible family-planning practice**, family life, reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV infection and AIDS prevention.

Adolescents must be fully involved

So, how come a delegation can come here and say they support Cairo, but do not support Comprehensive Sexuality Education?

Do we want to keep the status quo?

Are we happy with the huge number of adolescents throughout the world who become pregnant every day?

Are we insensitive to the enormous human cost to these young women who become pregnant and whose opportunities for further education and better economic opportunities are severely curtailed?

Don't we care about the unequal gender relations which keep millions and millions of women vulnerable to sexual abuse and gender violence in their daily lives? Don't we believe in the value of education for the prevention of violence?

Do we really believe adolescents should NOT have the right to information on how to avoid a pregnancy they do not feel prepared for?

Do we still believe ignorance is bliss?

Have we paused to consider the role comprehensive sexuality education and services can have in cutting the **high economic costs** brought by early motherhood? Costs that the World Bank has estimated goes much beyond the girl who becomes mother, but also to her children, her family and society as a whole because it affects GDP and hampers economic growth and perpetuates wealth inequality?

Have we also paused to consider the role comprehensive sexuality education can have in fighting the hidden gigantic economic costs and societal misery caused by violence against girls and women?

Do we want to continue forcing young girls into marriages they don't desire?

Of course, nobody in their sane mind or with a human heart would fight policies that could address such grave social and economic threats to our common future.

So, why there is still resistance to policies which empower young people to exercise their rights?

In many years of dialogue with people of different opinions I came across a deeply rooted **fear that comprehensive sexuality education would encourage young people to have sex early, or even adopt another sexual orientation or gender identity!**

In a world of internet where young people have access to an enormous variety of influences, this fear does not seem to make much sense. Still it persists.

But, if common sense has not been enough to dispel those fears, we cannot ignore the scientific evidence about comprehensive sexuality education. Research over the past two decades has shown that sexuality education does not increase rates of sexual activity among teenagers, and that it does increase knowledge about sexual behavior and its consequences. It also reduces risk-taking behaviors. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-sexuality-education.pdf>

So, if scientific evidence shows the benefits of comprehensive sexuality education, why this fear persists?

Why do some people think of sex as a threat to culture and religion?

What kind of culture and religion do we want to leave as a legacy for our children?

One that encourages SEXUALITY AS A SOURCE OF PLEASURE AND WELLBEING, of fulfillment and satisfaction?

One that supports the respect, protection and fulfilment of the human rights of everybody?

One that contributes to human happiness of each member of society?

I would hope so.

2. What concrete actions and policy interventions are required in order to address the priorities that you have identified?

Based on the experience of IPPF in more than 150 countries where we provide almost 6 million services to youth, I concluded that three actions are most needed.

A. We must allocate the resources that are needed for policies that empower young people to access SRH services and CSE.

We have achieved a major step forward in the number of countries that now have policies on youth, and on adolescent health, but often these policies remain underfunded. Only five countries in Latin America currently have budgets earmarked for CSE, even though they all have signed a Declaration promising to make CSE available to all.

PROFAMILIA Colombia practically eliminated teenage pregnancy in the schools where it could bring clinical and educational services to the adolescents, until it run out of resources. Donors are fickle and we need sustainable sources of funding that part of the core budget of each country.

B. We must establish accountability mechanisms including data about age inequalities

The second report of the independent Expert Review Group on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health, published in 2013, included as one of its six recommendations: "Take

adolescents seriously”. -Include an adolescent indicator in all monitoring mechanisms for women's and children's health. ACCOUNTABILITY CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT RELIABLE DATA.

Only four countries in LAC have conducted evaluations of CSE implementation. Civil society is trying to establish its own accountability mechanisms. Over the last three years, IPPF/WHR MA's CSE advocacy has contributed to twenty-four policy changes that expand access to comprehensive sexuality education and services in Central and South America. We are now monitoring how these policies are implemented in order to hold governments accountable.

C. We must embrace and promote meaningful youth participation and leadership

This is an integral part of the human right to participation. International documents have long recommended the meaningful involvement of young people on all policymaking bodies affecting women and children.

IPPF has shown the benefits in its own governance structure, by requiring that at least 20% of members of all its governing bodies be young people.