



## **Submission to the 56th Commission on Population and Development, 2023**

*455 words*

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, and fellow advocates,

Swasti is a public health organisation based in India and working in the Global South, and a Member of the Asia Pacific Alliance for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (APA). We echo the sentiment of the Commission that education is a critical enabler of health and well-being in the most holistic way and are glad that population, education and development is once again the theme of this Commission - 20 years after the 28th Commission.

We're at the cusp of the Fourth Industrial Revolution powered by AI but we have to try to answer the difficult question of whether young people today are more, or less equipped to make the right life choices to better their own well-being and that of the planet. Now more than ever, we are faced with the spectre of climate change, which is raising alarm bells about food security. Population control measures in response to climate change, and especially burdening today's youth with such measures would be the last thing we would want as a society. A growing population should not become a source for further alarm in this context, and should not be held responsible for reversals in the achievement of sustainable development goals.

Honourable delegates, we would like to make three recommendations:

- We need to educate ourselves and youth about local, sustainable and resilient ways of deriving nutrition in the face of climate change. Educational systems have a role to play here -do existing pedagogies encourage this shift in food systems?
- We must ensure the fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all, including access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). It must be human-centred, and empowering and awareness-oriented rather than prescriptive and focused on population control. It must enable women, girls and gender minorities to make choices over their own bodies and claim their rights.

- We need an educational system that links the health of human beings, animals and the planet through One Health and Planetary Health curriculum so that young people are able to rethink their lifestyles.

Education cannot be limited to disseminating technical information within the confines of school buildings. We need to centre human development moving away from traditional calculations of GDP; we need to measure our progress on reducing inequality as per SDG 10 especially since climate change is widening the cracks. Education, including CSE, that equips people and communities to think inclusively and participate meaningfully in their local socio political environments and in the achievement of the global SDGs, to become more resilient to climate change and to protect the planet at the same time, is the need of the hour. Thank you.

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