

GHANA



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TO THE UNITED NATIONS
19 EAST 47TH STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017
TEL. 212-832-1300 • Fax 212-751-6743



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STATEMENT

BY

DR. STEPHEN O. KWANKYE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
NATIONAL POPULATION COUNCIL OF GHANA

ON THE THEME:

“ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IN GHANA”

AT THE

**45TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION
ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Mr. Chairman, the Ghana delegation wishes to express its deepest appreciation to the UN Commission for its continuous dedication to Population and Development issues the world over. The choice of theme for this session could not have been more relevant today. More than ever before, there is an urgent need to involve young people in all the processes of development. Ghana therefore commends the UN Secretary General, HE, Ban Ki-Moon, for prioritizing youth matters in his 5 Year Action Agenda. And Ghana stands ready to work in concert with the UN in the deepening of youth focus particularly in the areas of education and reproductive health, employment, entrepreneurship, and political inclusion.

Ghana recognizes adolescents and youth as crucial stakeholders in development. They are active participants in society today, in addition to representing the future global workforce. Yet, quite often, their voices go unheard and their views are overlooked as either immature or counter-productive. In Ghana, however, efforts are progressively directed towards reversing this trend.

According to the demographics of Ghana, the population of the youth 10-24 years has since 1960 increased nearly four-fold from about 1.8m to 5.7m in 2000 and is currently (2012) estimated at about 6m and constitutes about 25% of the total population of Ghana. The records further show that adolescents of 12-17 years numbered almost 2.5m in 2000 (about 13% of the population) and is currently estimated at about 3.2m.

The youth are faced with diverse challenges. For example, a third of women in the country marry by age 18. Sexual activity also commences quite early and often is unprotected: 7.8% and 4.3% of women and men respectively aged 15-24 years have had sex by age 15; about 8% women and 4% men aged 15-19 also have sex by exact age 15 (GDHS, 2008). With early sexual activity come high rates of unplanned and unintended teenage pregnancy, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV and AIDS, school drop-outs, child labour and eventual curtailment of career development for many adolescents and youth in the country.

Following the steady decline in Ghana's fertility in the last two decades from around 6 children per woman to 4 currently, the proportion of adolescents and the youth is expected to decrease in the coming years. However, their absolute numbers will continue to increase, and shall continue to constitute a huge reservoir that needs to be developed into a healthy, well-educated and skilled body of human resource as the fundamental bedrock for the socio-economic advancement of the country.

Mr. Chairman, Ghana recognizes education as an important vehicle for producing the nation's skilled human capital that is at the centre of our quest for achieving national development goals. Several policies and programmes have, therefore, been undertaken to address the challenges that confront education at all levels. These include the capitation grant that has contributed towards improvements in net enrolment and the retention of girls in school as a way of postponement of marriage and childbearing and reducing infant and maternal related deaths in the country.

Family planning is almost universally known and approved by all persons including adolescents in Ghana. There is, however, a big gap between knowledge of contraceptive methods and use (which is below 20% among all currently married women) for modern methods. This contrasts with about 15% and 30% respectively among female youth aged 15-24 years and sexually active unmarried women in the country. Adolescents are also more likely than adults to engage in

unsafe and unprotected sex. Fortunately, the National Adolescent Reproductive Health Policy provides for the right of all adolescents to reproductive health information and services including an option for abstention from sex.

Ghana is rapidly becoming urbanized, with a large army of unemployed youth migrating from the rural hinterland in search of non-existent jobs. This trend is increasing urban poverty and other related challenges including the inability to afford decent housing, livelihood and sexual and reproductive health among the youth.

Mr. Chairman, to address these challenges confronting adolescents and the youth, Ghana has implemented several programmes that directly or indirectly affect the holistic development of adolescents and youth. Adolescents are increasingly becoming more knowledgeable about sexual and reproductive health issues that affect them. Prominent among these interventions are:

- The establishment of the National Population Council (NPC) in 1992 by an Act of Parliament to co-ordinate all population related programmes in Ghana and to advise government accordingly. The NPC is currently working towards revising the National Population Policy to include emerging issues particularly those that directly affect adolescents and the youth.
- The provision of guarantees of rights and freedoms for all persons including the youth in the 1992 Constitution. There is media plurality and the youth are free to join any political grouping of their choice. The youth actively participated in the development of the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA) 2010-2013, which is the development blue-print of Ghana.
- The creation of a desk for Adolescent Health and Development (ADHD) programmes in the Ghana Health Service headed by a programme manager. Youth friendly services are also being promoted at health facilities nationwide. A Multi-sectoral National Adolescent Health Strategic Plan (2009-2015) and Standards and Tools for Monitoring Adolescent and Youth-friendly Health Services (AYFHS) have been developed to guide service delivery. We have also developed a training manual and other supporting documents used for the training of healthcare providers in programming for young people. There is therefore a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education for adolescents and youth in Ghana.
- The establishment of the National Youth Authority (NYA) to work with identifiable youth groups in addressing not only the peculiar development needs of the youth in the country but most importantly to integrate them into all aspects of the socio-economic development discourse in Ghana. The establishment of the Youth Advocacy Network (KRAPA) seeks the improvement and utilization of reproductive health services through networking and co-ordination of youth-focused and youth-serving organisations.
- The creation of multi-purpose youth centres known as “Young and Wise Centres” by the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana (PPAG), to provide recreational activities in addition to sexual and reproductive health services, using peer educators for service promotion and non-traditional condom distribution at the community level. The private sector and religious groups are also actively involved in service delivery for the youth.

Other important policies that are targeting youth related challenges include the National Reproductive Health Policy and Standards, the National Reproductive Health Strategic Plan, National Youth Policy and the HIV/AIDS and STI Policy which have provided frameworks through which young people are protected to promote their growth and development. The Domestic Violence Act and the Anti-trafficking Law which criminalizes trafficking in human beings in the country have both been passed by Parliament. There is also the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) with different components aimed at not only creating jobs for the youth but also developing their skills for greater jobs in future. However, there is a big gap between policy and implementation in terms of quality and coverage resulting in challenges at system, stakeholder and client (youth) levels.

In conclusion, Ghana recognizes that investing in the health, education and employment of young people provides the foundation for national socio-economic development. It improves productivity, ensures higher returns on investments and reduces the cost of health and the consequences of anti-social behaviour. Such investments provide a strong basis for transforming economies through the new skills and perspectives young people bring along. Ghana, therefore, pledges to continue to work towards removing all barriers that prevent the youth and adolescents from aspiring to be integrated into the political, economic and social development processes in order to enhance the quality of life of all persons in the country in stable environment.

Thank you for your kind attention.