High-Level Task Force for the ICPD

Are We Really Leaving Nobody Behind?

Equality & Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for All

Side event on the occasion of the Beijing +20 Commemoration

Commission on the Status of Women

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Check against delivery

Let me tell you the story of Wasilat, a girl from northern Nigeria. At 14 she was married against her will, and experienced sexual violence within her marriage. As a result of trauma, she fed her husband rat poison, which he ate and died. She is currently on trial for murder. During her confession, Wasilat said she never wanted to kill him, she just wanted to make him sick so he would stop doing what he was doing to her.

Wasilat's story is not an isolated case, about 37,000 girls are at risk every day of being married before their 18th birthday. Girls like Wasilat who are married in childhood are robbed of their education thereby minimizing their economic opportunities. They are at risk of unintended pregnancies, pregnancy-related complications, pre-term delivery, delivery of low birth weight babies, newborn mortality, and violence within marriage, and even death.

All over the world in varying degrees of magnitude, young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights are threatened. They are denied access to sexual and reproductive health information and services such as contraception. Over 13 million births occur to girls between 15 and 19 years annually, 1 young person acquires HIV every 30 seconds, and 150 million adolescent girls are raped or sexually assaulted every year. Investing in young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights is crucial for any country's development and prosperity. Young people under 25 years today amount to 1.8 billion people. In some countries this demographic makes up more than half the population. Never in our history has there been such a large number, and proportion of young people in the world, and our needs cannot be ignored.
The Millennium Development Goals was a missed opportunity to make significant investments in young people’s sexual reproductive health and rights. Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights improves the human condition because it is inextricably linked to education, gender equality, health, environment and economic development.

Delaying adolescent pregnancy in Kenya, Brazil and India would have added $3.4 billion, $3.5 billion, and $7.7 billion to their respective economies. In addition, many governments have been talking about the demographic dividend. The benefits of the demographic dividend cannot be realized without investment in young people, especially the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young women to delay marriage and child bearing, and complete their education. The window of opportunity for economic growth and poverty reduction offered through the demographic window can only be efficiently captured and harnessed by this joint investment in SRHR and in education and job creation for youth. As we transition into the SDGs there are several things we need to keep in mind, in order to truly leave no young person behind.

First of all, we need better investments in data to ensure we’re counted across the new framework, especially for 10-14 year old adolescent girls who are especially at risk ; . Beyond the currently proposed gender disaggregated data, data should be disaggregated by five-year age cohorts. And also ‘count us in’ on your negotiations and decisions.

Our rights must be recognized and respected, including the right to participate in decisions affecting our lives, and our SRHR. Child, early and forced marriage must end. There needs to be an urgent response to the high levels of gender-based and sexual violence and harassment that adolescent girls and young women experience at home, in marriage, in schools, etc. Most policies and programs that address this focus on adult women only. We need youth-friendly SRH services that treat us with respect and do not pass judgment. We need access to contraception and services regardless of marital status, and without spousal or parental consent requirements. We cannot continue to deny education to girls and young people just because they are pregnant or have HIV.

Young people need to have comprehensive sexuality education, which is often misunderstood as a tool that corrupts. Comprehensive sexuality education teaches young people about human rights, human sexuality, gender equality, relationships and sexual and reproductive health and rights through the provision of scientifically-accurate and non-
judgmental information. It has been shown to protect young people from unwanted pregnancy, HIV and sexually transmitted infections and also promotes values of tolerance, mutual respect and non-violence in relationships. This is the foundation for the realization of any young person’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, however even this basic need is still being questioned today.

We need to pay attention to young people in conflict areas. In some conflict-affected countries, over two-thirds of the population is under 25. Many young people in conflict areas are recruited as fighters, subjected to sexual abuse and gender violence, forced into sexual slavery and forced marriage. Some are sexually exploited in refugee camps. Just take a look at what is happening to children and young people with ISIS in the Middle East, or Boko Haram in Nigeria where we are witnessing a rise in the number of girls being used as suicide bombers. Yet, young people are not positioned as a centerpiece of national peacebuilding and reconstruction plans and budgets; even though they are an essential force for lasting peace and stabilization.

Last, but not least, our generation accepts, embraces and celebrates diversity. Young people are not a homogenous group. We face discrimination, in multiple forms. We are of different races; we are migrants, indigenous, living with HIV or disabilities, sex workers, married adolescent girls ... And we also belong to sexual minorities, who should have equal treatment, equal rights. Too many people of all ages experience violence and discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity – within their own families, in education, in work, from bullying to assault and corrective rape, and this is unacceptable. Our generation will be the one to change that. And we hope decision-makers will join us...

On this note, I invite you to watch the following video clip ...Thank you