

Asia- Pacific Youth and Adolescent Regional Call to Action

International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action was initiated in 1994 in Cairo, where 179 countries agreed that everyone is entitled to a healthy and productive life without discrimination, including the elimination of gender disparities, and achieving the widest and earliest possible access by girls and women to secondary education. Now, after 20 years of the momentous agreement the agenda remain unfinished. Further, young people are disproportionately affected by the incomplete agenda.

Young people under the age of 25 comprise 43% of the total global population. About 16 million adolescents girls become mothers annually, and in any given year, at least 20% of adolescents suffer from mental illness such as depression and anxiety. 40% of the new HIV infections are among young people between 15 and 24 years old. The Asia-Pacific region is estimated to be home to approximately 750 million young people aged 15 to 24 years. These young people include girls, LGBTQI, people living with disabilities, indigenous people, migrants, language minorities, women, pregnant girls, people living in war and humanitarian contexts, sex workers, drug users, people living with HIV and AIDS, dropouts, and displaced people.

Responding to these needs of the region, 50 young leaders from Asia and the Pacific gathered in Bangkok on 14th -15th September 2013, prior to the 6th Asia Pacific Population Conference, and formed the regional platform to ensuring that the rights of young people are met, respected, and protected. The young people came up with recommendations for five thematic areas: (1) Education, (2) Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for adolescents and young people, (3) Comprehensive Sexuality Education, (4) Abortion, and (5) Young people and Migration. The recommendations for each thematic area are as follows:

1. Education:

- Ensure equality and substantive equity in universal access to education for all young people regardless of class, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, culture, socio-economic background, disability and geographic location, and free from stigma and discrimination, violence and coercion.
- Adopt school curricula that focus on personal and skill development along with academic achievement, to ensure transition from school to sustainable livelihood.
- Increase investment in non-formal education systems to address the contextual needs, such as existing unemployment and drop out young peoples, including differently-abled, marginalized, underserved population and other minorities.

- Invest in leadership and meaningful participation of young people and adolescents in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation process of national, local and community-based education programmes.
- Improve the infrastructure of schools to enhance the accessibility and utility by young people and adolescents, with special emphasis towards rural and urban poor communities, and persons living with disability.

2. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Youth and Adolescent:

- Develop and strengthen policies, laws and programs that recognize, promote, protect and fulfill young people's sexual and reproductive rights, including the right to express sexual orientation and gender identity, recognizing these rights as human rights.
- Allocate and effectively utilize national and sub-national budget dedicated to young people and adolescent's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and ensure effective governance, transparency and accountability of policies and programmes being implemented by state and non-state stakeholders..
- Invest in enhancing capacity of health service providers (nurses, skilled birth attendants, midwives, pharmacists, and community health worker, among others) to ensure provision of comprehensive young people-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and its referral system.
- Allocate financial resources exclusively for youth-led movements - within and beyond forums and organisations - to be able to effectively plan, implement and monitor programmes on young people and adolescents'.
- Eliminate all barriers, including cultural, religious, social, economic and legal practices, which have been used to impede the efforts in accessing information and services related to sexual and reproductive health by youths and adolescents.

3. Comprehensive Sexuality Education:

- Provide universal access to comprehensive sexuality education which is based on rights and evidence based, non-discriminatory, non-judgmental, gender-sensitive, and youth-friendly for all young people. Comprehensive sexuality education should be incorporated into the school curriculum at primary, secondary and tertiary levels.
- Develop capacity of the peers and teachers, among others, to deliver CSE effectively to meet the diverse needs of young people and adolescents and acknowledging their evolving capacities and needs.
- Create an enabling environment for the provision of CSE by removing all religious, social, economic and cultural barriers.
- Urge government to implement CSE fully both in formal, non-formal and informal settings to fulfill and safeguard young people and adolescents' human rights.

4. Access to Safe and Legal Abortion

- Ensure access to safe and legal abortion that promotes young women's right to choice, and is affordable, accessible and free from coercion, discrimination and stigma by:
 - Eliminating restrictive and punitive laws and policies including requirements for parental and spousal notification and/or consent or age of consent and other barriers to comprehensive safe and legal abortion.
 - Developing and implementing programs that support, promote, protect and fulfill young people's right to make decisions about their body and reproduction that are informed and independent.

5. Migration:

- Urge governments to harmonize local, national and international laws and policies to ensure legal recognition of different groups of young migrants, such as young workers including domestic workers, students, internally displaced young people, young people seeking asylum, young refugees, young sex worker and young people entering into paper marriages through migration.
- Develop, strengthen and implement programmes in countries of origin, transit and destination that provide young migrants with access to information and health services including sexual reproductive health services, and harm reduction services through social protection schemes such as public insurance and legal assistance.
- Eliminate mandatory medical checks, especially HIV, STI and pregnancy testing that is used as a basis for discrimination and, often, the deportation of young migrant workers. Ensure that every young migrant have the right to decent employment.
- Invest in development of holistic re-integration and rehabilitation systems for returnee migrants, which include social re-integration programs and sexual and reproductive health and rights services.
- Invest in strengthening national and regional data collection and analysis of periodic, reliable, quantitative and qualitative, age and gender disaggregated statistics on young migrants to support evidence-based policy making and programming.