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Editorial. The 42nd Session of the Commission on Population and Development, having the theme “The contribution of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development to the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals” has been an important opportunity for young advocates to promote our sexual and reproductive health and rights. Some strong suggested language that addresses the needs and realities of young people has been proposed by various delegations, with the support of coalition of progressive NGO's. While there has been some resistance within the negotiation room to progressive youth language, we firmly believe that a strong resolution that protects and promotes our sexual and reproductive health and rights is critical for the fulfillment of the ICPD PoA and the achievement of the MDGs. *- Yeranuhi Hovhannisyán*

Oral statement on behalf of IPAS

Laura Villa Torres

The International Conference on Population and Development brought many very important advances. Key among these, are:

- adoption of a reproductive health and rights framework and approach to population and development; including everyone's right to decide on the number and spacing of their children;
- greater attention to young people's reproductive health and needs;
- recognition of the need of all women access to contraception and the health consequences for women of unsafe abortion and commitment by governments to address this critical public health issue, including by ensuring that where abortion is legal, it is safe.

Especially on behalf of the world's young people, today I want to remind you of those commitments and to urge you to give them more attention. Unsafe abortion remains a pervasive and neglected reproductive health problem. 19 million women experience an unsafe abortion every year. In the 15 years since your governments met in Cairo, nearly a million women have lost their lives because they lacked access to safe abortion services. Almost half were under the age of 25. Many more have survived an unsafe abortion, but with great costs to their reproductive health. The women most at risk of suffering serious complications are young, poor and living in rural and marginalized urban areas.

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Since 1994, 24 countries have liberalized their abortion laws, and another 8 countries have broadened access to safe legal abortion through other measures, such as revision of health sector regulations, development of national standards and guidelines for abortion care, and court rulings. Such reforms have occurred despite the controversy often generated by issue abortion, because leaders have recognized that access to safe abortion is not only a public health issue, but also a matter of ethics, social justice and human rights. In these cases, governments have recognized women's right to a healthy reproductive life. Moreover, an increasing number of societies are having open dialogues about respecting and defending reproductive choices.

We urge governments to actively involve young people in public dialogue about sexuality and reproductive health and in the design and delivery of related health programs. Doing so is the only way to understand and meet their needs effectively, and it has to be done consistently as this is a transitional period and each generation of young people brings with it a new way of living and experiencing their sexuality.

We want to say this openly: the only way to reduce abortion-related maternal mortality and morbidity is to break down the taboo that shrouds women's experiences with abortion in secrecy and to provide women and girls with comprehensive reproductive health services that include sexuality education and comprehensive abortion care.

Governments are responsible for responding to the needs of all their citizens, for promoting public dialogue and for generating social consensus around crucial issues such as legalizing abortion. We need public funding for research, training and services. We need political will from governments to undertake these dialogues under their political agendas. We are counting on you for your support.

Why youth?

*Marina Lacroix, CHOICE for Youth and Sexuality, The Netherlands
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At CPD this year the rights and needs of young people have been brought up in various ways. A broad coalition of youth has assembled youth specific language, delivered an oral statement and contributed to side events in and outside of panels. Young people are not 'just another' vulnerable group. We'll give you ten reasons for paying special attention to our rights and needs.

1. **There are a lot of us.** Although you might not be able to tell from the composition of a UN Commission like this week's, today's generation of youth under 25 makes up half of the world's population and, as such, is the largest young generation ever. 85% of us live in developing countries.

2. **You promised.** At the 1994 ICPD it has been agreed that young people should have access to information and services on sexual and reproductive health and that adolescents should be fully involved in planning, implementation, and evaluation of policies. The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the capacities of young people and the importance of adolescent autonomy. The General Assembly has adopted resolutions, such as A/RES/62/126, that stress the importance of youth participation.
3. **We have human rights.** Human rights are neither age nor sex bound, so young people should be able to enjoy all human rights. Not fulfilling our rights to sexual and reproductive health means not fulfilling our right to liberty, to self-determination, to consent to marriage, to health, to freedom from discrimination, to freedom from sexual violence and to education and information.
4. **We have the right to be heard.** We have the right to have a say in sexual and reproductive matters, because they affect our lives deeply and directly. Therefore, we should be involved in policies and decision-making, at all levels and in a meaningful way.
5. **We want to know.** A lot of us simply do not know how to prevent unwanted pregnancies and STIs, or how to stand up against sexual coercion. For example, in countries having conducted the necessary surveys, at most one in four of us understood how HIV is transmitted and how to prevent infection.¹ Comprehensive, evidence-informed sexuality education is the most effective way to provide us with essential knowledge and skills to make responsible decisions about our health.
6. **We want to choose.** It's our life, so we want to be able to make free and well-informed choices. Currently, even among married adolescents up to 61% of the last births are unwanted or mistimed². This shows that we currently lack very fundamental choices about how we want to live. We want to choose freely whether or not to have children, with whom we will or will not engage in sexual activity, and whom and when to marry.
7. **We are neither children nor adults.** The second decade of life is distinct in terms of physical maturity, cognitive capacity and social skills. Young people require sexual and reproductive health care that takes this into account. Not yet fully developed reproductive and immune

¹ At most 40% of men and 36% of women aged 15-24. UN ECOSOC, 'World population monitoring, focusing on the contribution of the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development to the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals', Report of the Secretary General E/CN.9/2009/3, p. 18.

² Olukoya, A.A. e.a. (2001), 'Unsafe abortion in adolescents', *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics* 75, pp. 137-147.

systems make us more vulnerable to STIs, HIV transmission and complications of pregnancy³. In sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia almost 30% of women give birth by age 18⁴. Meanwhile, pregnancy is the leading cause of death for young women ages 15 through 19⁵. Every day, more than 3000 young people become infected with HIV.⁶ This is why it's so important that services are youth-friendly, non-judgmental, affordable, effective and accessible.

8. **Our participation is effective.** Who could know more about youth-specific problems than youth themselves? Involving young people in all stages of policy making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation makes sure that programs are well-catered towards our needs, both in the issues they address and the way they address them. Peer mentoring and education are also an excellent way to reach young people, both in and out of school.
9. **Successful development needs us.** Developing countries which invest in their record numbers of young people could produce surging economic growth and sharply reduced poverty. The Millennium Development Goals, in particular the goals related to maternal and child morbidity and HIV/AIDS, cannot be reached without reaching us.
10. **No youth = no change.** We are the present and the future. Our generation will provide tomorrow's parents, teachers, workers and leaders in the global north and south. Our health and knowledge are essential for the wellbeing of generations to come. If we are to bring any structural change to the world, we cannot be forgotten. No youth means no change.



3 Bearinger, L.H. ea. (2007), 'Global perspectives on the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents: patterns, prevention, and potential', *Lancet* 369, pp. 1220-1231.

4 Population Reference Bureau. *The World's Youth 2006 Data Sheet*, <http://www.prb.org/pdf06/WorldsYouth2006DataSheet.pdf> (last accessed 11 March 2009)

5 In low and middle income countries, with complications of childbirth and unsafe abortion being the major factors. UNFPA (2004). *State of World Population*, <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2004/english/ch9/page5.htm> (last accessed 11 March 2009)

6 Bayley, O. (2003), 'Improvements of sexual and reproductive health require focusing on adolescents', *Lancet* 362, pp. 830–831.

Meaningful Youth Participation

Katie Chau, Youth Coalition (YCSRR)

Decision-makers and leaders from around the world have been here in New York to discuss how the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) can contribute to internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. One of the key promises articulated in the PoA is to increase youth participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development activities directly affect our daily lives.

So, what exactly does youth participation mean?

Broadly speaking, it means the range of processes that empower young people to take an active role in all phases of decision-making that affects our lives and to take up leadership roles to address and promote the issues that matter most to us. More specifically, meaningful youth participation is underpinned by a number of core principles, notably:

1. Youth participation means more than involving young people in existing structures and processes. It requires making structural and procedural changes to adapt to the needs and realities of young people.
2. Tokenism and Exclusivity are detrimental to meaningful youth participation
3. Youth participation does not mean that adults have to surrender their roles, rather to work in equal partnerships with young people
4. Young people need more than just opportunities to participate – a commitment to on-going training and capacity building is essential for effective youth participation
5. Capacity building for adults is just as important as capacity building for young people

Why is youth participation Important?

1. **To gain a real understanding of young people's needs and realities.** We understand best our own needs and realities. We know what issues affect us most, how they affect us. We know what our preferences are, and what kinds of messaging and programmes resonate with us. And we're also aware of our capacities and limitations, as well as our fears and desires. Programmes and policies that address young people's needs must be informed by our perspectives. And in doing so, they will be much more successful.
2. **Benefits for adults.** Adults can gain a better understanding of youth issues and youth perspectives. Moreover, meaningful youth participation lends credibility to organizations, not only among young people, but also among the growing number of decision-makers and leaders who recognize the value meaningful youth participation.
3. **Capacity Building – for today and tomorrow.** Youth participation offers capacity building opportunities for young people to become stronger leaders and champions today and in the future. It's important to stress that young people are not only important leaders of tomorrow. We're critical partners and of leaders today, especially for SRHR.

4. **Importance of youth participation for SRHR.** As the largest generation of young people that the world has ever known, many of us are entering into our sexual and reproductive lives at a time when high unmet need for family planning, a lack of adequate sexuality education, as well as insufficient access to SRH services and supplies, concerning rates of STIs, including HIV, characterize the regions where youthful populations are the largest. Clearly, in such a context, youth perspectives and youth participation warrant a central place at the table.

Moving forward

There are definitely signs that governments and civil society have made progress towards achieving greater meaningful youth participation. However, much remains to be done to mainstream meaningful youth participation and overcome tokenism and exclusivity. The aim is for youth participation to be embedded in all institutions and processes that influence our everyday lives. And in order to do so, we urge you to take up some of the following actions:

To Governments, we recommend:

- Develop, operationalize, evaluate national youth policies that work towards better addressing the needs of young people, especially our SRH needs
- Involve young people in policy and programme decision-making - especially in relations to SRH at a national and international level including UN delegations
- Ensure comprehensive sexuality education for young people in formal and non-formal learning environments. Young people can only become meaningfully involved with sufficient knowledge.
- Involve young people in planning youth-friendly SRH services and in designing sexuality education curricula to meet our needs.

To Funders, Civil Society and Governments, we recommend:

- Involve young people when developing strategies for youth participation and deciding the best ways to work with young people
- Support youth organizations, especially youth-led organizations, through funding and providing a conducive policy environment that helps develop and sustain youth organizations.
- Support research on youth issues and youth participation, using participatory research approaches that involve and empower young people;

Basically, we urge you to work in partnership with young people to build structures, systems, policies, programmes that will secure our health and rights today and for generations to come. Shaping the resolution of this current CPD session, as well as fulfilling commitments to fully implement the ICPD PoA and achieve MDGs are critical to do this.

Brian Ackerman's Blog

<http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/blog/brian-ackerman>

So we just finished day three of the UN Commission on Population and Development (UN CPD) in New York City. Debates are starting to heat up as the commission completes the introductory statements and enters the negotiation stage. And in case anyone was unsure that a new government had come to power in the United States, I think this quote from the U.S. statement, delivered on Tuesday, reflects a sweeping sense of change:

"We must do more to provide comprehensive, accurate information and education on sexuality, sexual and reproductive health for women, men, girls, and boys as they age and their needs evolve. We must, as well, foster equal partnerships and sharing of responsibilities in all areas of family life, including in sexual and reproductive life, and promote frank discourse on sexuality, including in relation to sexual health and reproduction. . . We need to prioritize comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, as defined in the Program of Action and the Key Actions for its further implementation, in our work to strengthen health systems."

Considering the MDG's focus on the reduction of global poverty, and the empowerment of individuals at social, political, and economic levels, I think their connection with the Program of Action is clear. I hope that the resolution adopted at this meeting, which will inform and guide the UN's work on population issues for the next year, makes this connection as well.

I am proud to say, after having been disappointed in my government for the past eight years, that the United States government also sees this connection and it is committed to the realization of both the PoA and the MDGs over the next six years. Hopefully we can translate this commitment into better foreign policies, better donor coordination in difficult economic times, and better outcomes for young people.

Brian Ackerman, International Policy Manager, Advocates for Youth

Impressions

CPD 2009 was completely focussed on recognizing the promises of ICPD POA 1994. I was honored to be a part of this with IPPF. Being my first time here, I was a bit confused initially, but I found my way with the help of my colleagues from IPPF and other like minded NGOs. For the first time, I had the experience to see how the UN actually works and dynamics involved in the negotiations. Not always are your expectations met. I was able to interact with delegations from different countries, sharing with them the draft language introduced by our group of NGOs and getting their views on particular language which they thought might or might not change the negotiation dynamics. I being an Indian myself, wasn't able to have a lot of interaction with the Indian delegate in the initial days of the CPD, as he was a bit closed up. But, I was able to catch up with some of the other members of the Indian delegation who came in later through the week, particularly on Wednesday.

We the youth volunteers of IPPF also gave a presentation on YOUTH FRIENDLY SERVICES at a side event organized by IPPF. We were able to make our point at that and just hope that the delegates from various countries, who attended the event, remember what we conveyed to them.

The oral statements by the NGOs were very progressive and urged the governments to review their policies and plans. I really loved it when all the youth wore T Shirts with captions NO YOUTH NO CHANGE in the CPD Conference hall. This in itself was a very strong statement.

I would love to part of this Commission in the following years as well and hope that my contribution would prove useful to everyone working for the betterment of this.

*Ankit Saxena,
International Planned Parenthood Federation*

Substantial youth involvement and participation has been evident in the ICPD process here in the UN. Being part of the team of young people from different organizations I have been able to learn a great deal on advocacy at this high level within the United Nations. Having access to the information embedded in the Cairo Program of action has been an eye opener to understand the global agreed upon language that are geared towards addressing youth participation and also issues surrounding reproductive health that are core to young people.

My participation has proved that indeed youth adult partnerships are workable since as part of the young people in this process we closely linked with adults to bring out issues that are key to us during this ICPD. I surely commend IPPF for supporting quite a number of young people participating in the ICPD and am looking forward to share with my fellow young people the wealth of knowledge that I have gained during this great week of engagement.

*Carolyn Momanyi
IPPF Africa Region,
Alternate Youth Representative*

It is good to see the youth language been implemented in the official document. This is not only by all the youth effort, but also because we count with the adults partnership and support.

Today I understood that my contribution during UN meetings goes further than trying to convince Government leaders to implement our youth language in the document, but also to learn and work directly with them, giving recommendations, correcting paragraphs, among other things.

The best it's to see our proposals approved, this in the end represents new possibilities and a life with our rights guaranteed.

*Bruno Solis
IPPF Brazil*