



Statement by the Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW), a non-governmental organisation in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council at the 50th Session of the Commission on Population and Development

Beyond Numbers: Rights, Equality, and Justice at the Centre of Sustainable Development

ARROW and the undersigned 52 organisations welcome the 50th session's theme. Changing population age structures impacts development opportunities, and need to be considered to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Asia is a home to sixty percent of the world's population¹ making what happens very important in determining the world's present and future. The region's demographic picture is complex: it simultaneously has the world's largest number of people over 60, at 489 million, and the largest number of young people, at 670 million;³ Its population growth is slowing down,⁴ and is facing dramatic shifts in its population's age distribution. In most of its countries, working age people will be or are already the majority of its population,³ even as the overall proportion of working-age population is already declining in some sub-regions.³ At the same time, the region is ageing rapidly,³ and the proportion of women in the aging population brackets is increasing. These trends pose significant challenges and potential opportunities that need to be anticipated and managed from a rights-based perspective.

The region faces deep inequalities across and within countries, with social exclusions and marginalisations marring human development and economic benefits enjoyed by a limited few. 772 million people still live on less than USD1.25 daily and a further 933 million more live on USD2 daily.⁵ The effects of increased migration, conflicts, food insecurity and malnutrition, climate change-induced disasters, and religious extremism cannot be ignored either.

Progress on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) has been mixed.⁷ Most population strategies in the Asia-Pacific region are still aimed at controlling fertility rather than having rights at its centre and focusing on the lifecycle. While the region's average total fertility rate has gone down, a closer look reveals that in some countries, unmet need in contraception is still high, and women continue to carry the contraceptive burden. The largest number of maternal deaths outside of sub-Saharan Africa is in South Asia; unsafe abortion continues to be a major factor in maternal deaths. Gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, and sexual violence and violence against people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity remains entrenched. Young people lack access to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and youth-friendly services, resulting in unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual violence, and are exposed to harmful traditional practices such as child and early marriage and female genital mutilation. SRHR of older women are ignored. Mental health is woefully neglected including that of aging population.

The International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (ICPD POA) remains the most comprehensive negotiated action document that considers many of these issues. At its 20-year-review, all governments agreed that the agenda should be continued until it is fully achieved. ICPD's full implementation is more critical than ever to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

We call on Member States, international agencies, and UN entities to:

- Fully implement the ICPD agenda⁸ and the SRHR targets of the 2030 Agenda, and put in place strong, inclusive accountability mechanisms. Ensure strong synergy between the CPD, the High Level Political Forum, the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, and human rights mechanisms.
- Ensure that gender equality, development justice, and human rights are pillars of sustainable development and the basis for development planning.
- Affirm that sexual and reproductive rights are prerequisites for women's, young people and LGBTIQ people's empowerment, enabling their full participation in all domains of society.
- Strengthen data collection, analysis, monitoring, and review on targets related to health, gender, and SRHR. Support qualitative research, especially those documenting the lived realities of those most left behind. Go beyond numbers, examine who are being left behind and why, and demonstrate the political will to change systems, policies, and programmes. For no one to be truly left behind, address systems of marginalisation and social exclusion, whether based on gender, age, location, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, caste, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, health status, marital status, literacy level, occupation, or citizenship status.
- Recognise that people of all generations are right-holders and equally valuable members of society who have potential given the right opportunities Challenge and change negative perceptions around ageing and older people, as well as negative stereotypes of young people; provide equal opportunities; tailor policies and programmes to age-specific needs; and institute platforms for inter-generational dialogues.
- Put in place rights-based, gender responsive, evidence-based, and inclusive policies and programmes that proactively respond to and anticipate changing population age structures.
 - Ensure that all people, throughout their life cycle, regardless of any grounds for discrimination and exclusion, have universal access to quality health care, education, decent work, housing, land, water, and other resources, food, and nutrition, amongst others.
 - Ensure equality of women and girls, including in areas of education, employment, political participation, land and property ownership, and eradication of gender-based violence.
 - Scale up public investment, both domestic and ODA, to guarantee SRHR, including universal access to quality, comprehensive SRH services and information. Provide rights-based, gender-responsive, non-discriminatory, evidence-based, CSE in formal and non-formal educational systems, and in out-of-school and workplace settings.
 - Ensure funding and an enabling environment for civil society as equal partners in development at all levels, especially those working for the rights of women, young people, and marginalised groups from the Global South.
- Repeal laws and policies that violate sexual and reproductive rights, and adopt and implement measures to counter discriminatory practices and ensure access to justice.
- Lastly, adopt concrete measures to mitigate the impacts of economic, food, fuel, and political crises; climate change; disasters; conflict; harmful traditional and cultural practices; religious extremists; migration; rapid urbanisation; and trade agreements to women, young people, and marginalised groups.

We are committed to work with you towards a just, equal, and equitable world.

Signatories

1. Aahung- Pakistan
2. AIDS Accountability International- South Africa
3. Aliansi Remaja Independen (ARI)
4. Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi- India

5. APCASO – Thailand
6. Asia Catalyst- Thailand
7. Association for promotion sustainable development - Hisar, India
8. Association of Youth Organisations Nepal (AYON)
9. Aware Girls - Pakistan
10. Bandhu- Bangladesh
11. Bargad – Pakistan
12. Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC) – Nepal
13. Blue Diamond Society (BDS) - Nepal
14. Blue Veins – Pakistan
15. Boys of Bangladesh (BoB)
16. Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA)- India
17. CHOICE for youth & Sexuality
18. CommonHealth- India
19. Community Development Services (CDS)- Sri Lanka
20. Community Initiatives for Development in Pakistan
21. Danish Family Planning Association (DFPA) – Denmark
22. Dance4life
23. EMPOWER INDIA
24. Empower Shankar
25. Elige Red de Jóvenes por los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos
26. FDI – Pakistan
27. Family Planning Association – Bangladesh
28. Family Planning Association – Pakistan
29. Fokus Muda – Indonesia
30. Gramin Punarnriman Sansthan – India
31. Haus of Khameleon (HK)- Fiji
32. Huvadhoo Aid – Maldives
33. IT for Change

34. LOOM Nepal
35. MONFEMNET National Network – Mongolia
36. Naripokkho – Bangladesh
37. Pakistan NGOs Forum
38. Pravah- India
39. Rutgers WPF Indonesia
40. Rural Women's Network Nepal (RUWON Nepal)
41. Sahaj- India
42. SAHAYOG – India
43. SERAC-Bangladesh
44. Transaction KPK- Pakistan
45. The Center for Creative Initiatives in Health and Population (CCIHP)
46. University of health Sciences (UHS)
47. Visible Impact, Nepal
48. Yayasan Kesehatan Perempuan (YKP)
49. YP Foundation – India
50. Youth Advocacy Network (YAN)- Pakistan
51. Youth Forum Papua – PNG
52. YUWA – Nepal

References

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- 2 UNDESA. *World Population Prospects: Key Findings and Advance Tables: 2015 Revision*.
- 3 UNDP. *Asia-Pacific Human Development Report; Shaping the Future: How Changing Demographics Can Power Human Development*. New York, 2016. <http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/hdr.html>
- 4 UNESCAP. 2016 ESCAP Population datasheet. <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SPPS%20PS%20data%20sheet%202016%20v15-2.pdf>
- 5 UNESCAP. *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2014*. <http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/ESCAP-SYB2014.pdf>
- 6 Sumner, Andy. 2011. *Poverty in Middle Income Countries*. http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Bellagio_Sumner1.pdf
- 7 ARROW. *Reclaiming and Redefining Rights: ICPD+20: Status of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Asia Pacific*. 2013. <http://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ICPD-20-Asia-Pacific-Monitoring-Report-2013.pdf>

8 This includes the ICPD POA, the outcomes of review conferences, the Framework of Actions for the Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the ICPD beyond 2014, the Index Report, and the CPD session reports.