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# MID-TERM REVIEW OF ASIA PACIFIC DECLARATION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT 2018

**STATEMENT FROM THE PREPARATORY  
YOUTH FORUM, HELD ON 23-24  
NOVEMBER 2018 IN BANGKOK**

## INTRODUCTION

International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action (1994) emphasises social inclusion, human rights and the importance of addressing the needs and developing the capacities of the young and adolescent populations. Young people's diverse issues remain at the heart of the Asia Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development (2013), and it calls for affirmative actions to address the specific needs and challenges faced by young people in the region.

On the occasion of mid-term review of the Asia Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development,

more than 40 youth-led and youth serving organisations came together to discuss the diverse and intersecting issues faced by young people during the preparatory Youth Forum, co-organised by the Asian Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Youth LEAD and Y-PEER on 23-24 November 2018 in Bangkok, Thailand. .

This call-to-action brings to the fore gaps, challenges and recommendations for policy makers, duty-bearers, UN agencies and CSOs to effectively respect, protect and fulfil the ICPD PoA and Asia Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development.

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# YOUNG PEOPLE AND INEQUALITIES

Many issues of vulnerability of young people still remain unaddressed and neglected. Recognition and meaningful participation of youth at all decision-making processes remains a challenge within the Asia-Pacific region. The key to youth empowerment is through the adoption of capacity-building and leadership initiatives that targets specific marginalised groups within youth populations.

There are limited opportunities for young people to secure decent long-lasting employment due to lack of educational opportunities from an early age. Issues of stigmatisation and discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnicity, caste, nationality and age are factors that limit employment opportunities. The rapid growth of cities and urban sprawls; the migration of young people to attractive cities further intensifies such inequalities, especially in accessing education, health services and securing employment.

While young people are more prone to vulnerability and inequality, overcoming youth marginalisation remains difficult for sexual minorities, young migrants, ethnic and religious minorities and young people living with HIV.

Implementation gaps within the existing laws have also given rise to inequality with regards to provision of health information and services which consequently exacerbate issues of early child marriage, unsafe abortion, limited access of contraceptives and inefficient HIV and antiretroviral therapy (ART) services by which minors, people from sexual minorities and young people living with HIV (YPLHIV) and other key populations are affected.

Inequalities in education are perpetrated due to existing stigma and discrimination in the education systems based on the indigenous status, refugee status, SOGIE and disability.

Additionally, ensuring that youth, especially adolescent girls complete their secondary studies is important for the advancement of equal opportunities; combating societal stereotypes and prescribed gender roles. Similarly, reducing health inequalities involve seeing changes to health services with the sensitisation of service providers; ensuring that services are youth-friendly, mental health services are included and SRHR programmes are implemented.

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# YOUNG PEOPLE AND INEQUALITIES

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Generate disaggregated data on a periodic basis for diverse young populations by addressing indicators of social inequalities for stronger planning and advocacy and ensuring its transparency with comprehensive monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

Provide technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to young people to address the skills gap in the labour market.

Governments should make policies and programmes based on updated empirical evidence that address geographical inequalities for the financial and social alleviation of young people, especially young migrant workers and young sexual minorities. Strengthen and support youth coalitions to increase meaningful youth participation in policy-making processes.

School-based comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) to help adolescents and young people achieve their full potential and realize their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Peer education and sensitised teacher training on CSE to foster inclusive rights based approach to SRHR and provide meaningful youth engagement.

- Educate the general population, particularly stakeholders, religious leaders, teachers, and service providers about Sexual and Reproductive Health and ensure accessible, affordable, stigma free youth-friendly health-care facilities are aimed at delivering better SRH outcomes for young people.
- Mobilise young diverse populations and identify youth champions in local communities to advocate for social change; educate, empower and address key issues of young people through the use of digital initiatives with data and accurate information on social media platforms
- Utilise International Human Rights mechanisms to ensure the safety and rights of all young disadvantaged and marginalised groups from discrimination and injustice, especially on SOGIE.
- Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

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# GENDER EQUALITY AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Some progress has been made in reducing gender inequality in the past few decades, particularly in relation to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), but many gaps still remain despite the progress.

SRHR is essential for the empowerment of girls and women and to all quality-of-life issues concerning social, economic, and political participation by women. Lack of access to SRHR not only impedes the rights to health of women and girls, it also makes them more vulnerable to gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality, teenage pregnancy and unsafe abortions, and are a contributing cause towards rising level of mortality within the young population.

The inequality and violation of their sexual and reproductive rights (SRR) faced by women and girls must be observed through an intersectional lens. Oppression and discrimination based on race, religion, caste, ethnicity, disability, education level, economic and employment status, nationality, and other socio-political factors, are aggravated based on gender. This is further compounded by religious and cultural moral codes of society which are often deep rooted in patriarchy.

Lack of awareness and information of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) among young girls also has adverse effects on their health and wellbeing. In addition, many young women continue to face barriers in obtaining contraceptives and safe and legal abortion services. Obstacles usually include conditions like parental consent, stigmatisation of adolescent sexuality, lack of providers willing to perform abortions, gender stereotyping around women's reproductive role, substandard conditions in health facilities and lack of awareness of the available services. Where contraceptives and abortion services are legal and available, they tend to be provided mainly within the framework of marriage.

Adolescent pregnancy remains a major contributor to maternal and child mortality and to the cycle of ill-health and poverty. Different forms of violence, including physical, sexual, verbal, psychological, and economic, as well as trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation, continue to affect millions of girls and women worldwide. Harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, chhaupadi, early, child and forced marriages still remain prevalent. Over half of Asian women report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime.

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# GENDER EQUALITY AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Promote gender equality to encourage rights-based, stigma free, unbiased attitude and behaviour starting from primary schools and reaching out to communities using age-appropriate CSE and rigorous public campaigning using media.

Urge governments to allocate adequate resources to capacitate service providers such as teachers, religious leaders and collaborate with civil society to collectively work with parents and community leaders in implementing the age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), and train health professionals and/or health service providers in provision of SRH services.

We call the government and policy-makers to gather credible, disaggregated data on Gender-based Violence, harmful practices, availability of SRHR information and services, discriminatory 'preventive' policies, gender and mortality, then use that data to base the formulation of laws.

Fully implement existing laws and policies preventing gender-based violence and harmful practices so that it fully protects, fulfils and promotes the rights of individuals to enable them to live free from stigma, discrimination and violence, especially by legally protecting marginalised groups such as persons belonging to non-binary identity.

- Efficient and effective monitoring framework should be introduced that has authority and capacity to penalise if the laws are not been practiced and give incentives to encourage the implementation.
- State to uphold its commitment to international human rights obligations and ensure the elimination of discriminatory laws and policies to build a more equal and inclusive society and in doing so, address gaps, loopholes and overlaps in laws and policies to bring an end to existing harmful practices especially those against women, girls and sexual and gender minorities.
- Urge government to allocate adequate resources for the provision of accessible, quality and stigma-free youth friendly health services, including maternal health services and safe abortion services and post abortion care services for all women; safe and free spaces, and medicine for PLHIV so they can live with dignity.

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# MAKING COMMUNITIES RESILIENT AND ADAPTABLE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURAL DISASTERS AND CONFLICT

Climate change is considered one of the greatest threats to human life and development. Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, and are now more than 50% higher than the levels recorded in 1990. Global warming is causing long-term changes to the world's climate system, with irreversible global consequence. The considerable impacts of climate change include rising temperatures, changing weather patterns, extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and desertification.

According to the United Nations, approximately 60% of all countries affected by extreme weather events in the past two decades are in the Asia-Pacific, accounting for huge human and economic costs. In addition, Asia Pacific is also one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world.

The impact of climate change and natural disasters is experienced by everyone. However, it is most damaging for people who are least able to adapt – the poor, the young, the aged, and the disabled as they do not have the resources and capacities to effectively prepare for or respond to the threats and consequences of climate change induced extreme weather conditions and natural disasters.

The region is also host a huge proportion of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees who underwent forced migration due to climate change induced extreme weather conditions, natural disasters, and conflict and wars.

Young people constitute a huge percentage of IDPS and refugee populations.

Climate change has severely impacted cropping patterns in the countries where major source of income and livelihoods depends on agriculture. In many cases, it has reduced the yield from crops and has also led to food security issues.

Poorly regulated and excessive construction of infrastructures such as dams has adversely affected the irrigation flow for agricultural land and the ecosystem of the rivers. Indigenous communities who live around these rivers and people living in coastal areas are being affected the most by the strains induced to these natural resources as their livelihoods depend on them.

Accountability and regulation of the private sector remains is still absent from the national, regional and global development discourse and policies. While many cities around the world are introducing bans on single-use plastic products (such as straws and disposable cups), regulations around large scale consumption of plastic products and unsustainable practices of waste management by big corporations remain missing from policies at all levels. In addition, developing countries in Asia Pacific region bear the brunt of poor waste management which has led to irreparable loss to region's natural resources and ecosystems.

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# MAKING COMMUNITIES RESILIENT AND ADAPTABLE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURAL DISASTERS AND CONFLICT

Many countries in the region lack comprehensive rehabilitation policies and programmes for IDPs and refugees. With no effective resilience and rehabilitation programmes in place, it is even more difficult to lift people out of poverty.

Women and young girls have to bear the double burden of discrimination due to their gender and age. Rehabilitation programmes, when they exist, are often gender-neutral and fail to protect and fulfil the specific needs of young girls and women. Instances of sexual violence and mortalities and morbidities occurring due to lack of sexual and reproductive health services in rehabilitation camps remain prevalent.

Young people living with HIV and LGBTIQ persons face stigmatisation and ostracisation in rehabilitation camps and programmes due to prevalent bigotry, social taboos and discriminatory behaviour.

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# MAKING COMMUNITIES RESILIENT AND ADAPTABLE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, NATURAL DISASTERS AND CONFLICT

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- Disaster risk reduction (DRR) policy and programmes should be taken into consideration at the multi-level to ensure the impact of urbanisation is minimised and incorporate holistic planning tools to mitigate climate change.
- Governments should also regulate real estate projects and engage planning agencies, consultants, and public in the monitoring & accountability processes.
- Integrate CC and SRHR into governmental practice and coming together to create synergies for Climate Action to create effective mitigation, resilience, and adaptation.
- Ensure credible and thorough Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) and intersectional study of people, livelihoods, biodiversity and climate is carried out to ensure impact on the environment and ecosystem is minimised.
- Ensure the National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) focus on youth, by strengthening the crisis management skills and knowledge on getting additional support or external aid.
- States should invest in comprehensive rehabilitation plans guided by international human rights standards that cater refugee and internally displaced persons by being gender- and age-sensitive.
- Improve the structure of evacuation centres to ensure they are safe for young people and ensure the availability and accessibility of quality SRHR facilities and services to everyone including young people, especially women and girls.
- Governance structures should prioritise on risk mapping and risk assessment technologies (and developed countries should take the onus of providing such technology/methodology) in order to enhance disaster preparedness in local communities.
- Governments need to introduce thorough regulation and accountability mechanisms for private sector and corporations in National Action Plans (NAP).

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