

**19TH INTERNATIONAL INTER-MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON
SOUTH -SOUTH COOPERATION IN POPULATION AND
DEVELOPMENT**

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MEMBER & THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NATIONAL POPULATION COUNCIL
OF GHANA SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION AND THE ICPD @ 30:
ACCELERATING THE MOVE FORWARD
14TH NOVEMBER 2022, TBC, PATTAYA THAILAND

- 1 Mr. Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am honored and excited to be part of this historic event in the beautiful country Thailand. I thank the organizers, PPD and UNFPA for making it possible for me to be here.

- 2 In focusing on accelerating the move forward ICPD @ 30, permit me to start with a story. About 4 years ago, I visited Germany as a guest of the government and met with a group of Parliamentarians. During our engagement, one of the Parliamentarians who had 3 children said, in Germany, he is considered as a father of many. He visited Nigeria and whiles being driven to his hotel, he asked the 30 something year old driver, how many children he had, he mentioned 6 and was still counting. The paradox leaves much to be desired.

- 3 Mr. Chairman, cumulatively, Africa has a net population increase of about 33 million which is near the population of Malaysia or Ghana in 2021 despite relatively high mortality rates. Child marriage, high teen pregnancy rates, high unmet need for family planning,

negative cultural beliefs, patriarchal systems, ignorance, and misinformation put many women on the path of involuntary reproduction with many far-reaching negative consequences, high maternal mortality and morbidity, high unemployment, insecurity among others.

- 4 The covid 19 pandemic, a neutral phenomenon, widened the deep inequalities already created along fertility lines in almost all aspects of lives and livelihoods with the poorest in the developing countries being the worst affected, and unfortunately leaving many people behind.
- 5 In this fast world of automation and digitalization, which has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change, access to jobs, now more than ever, requires adequately educated individuals and once again, the poorest people in the developing countries are left further behind without quality education and relevant skills for the 21st century.
- 6 In countries where most of the population is relatively undereducated and unemployment among the educated is already high, they thrive on a skilled workforce to increase efficiency and at the same time decrease the need for workers, leaving no place for unskilled ones. This condition sadly fuels illegal migration in huge numbers and create conditions for insecurity.

- 7 The ongoing COP 27 deliberations in Egypt like the previous ones have brought home the chilling and devastating impact of climate change on lives and livelihood. Once again, the poorest in the developing countries become those worse off.
- 8 Mr. Chairman, when we consider increasing poverty, high unemployment, insecurity, climate vulnerability, illegal migration and cut through a lot of the misinformation and distractions and get to the core of the problem, the reason is simple - the empowerment of women is crucial to solving a lot of the seemingly unrelated problems that are as important to men as they are to women.
- 9 The start of women empowerment is purposefully vesting women with adequate information and services for them to have control of their bodies as well as abolishing some of the self-defeating poverty entrenching cultural practices such as child marriage, teen pregnancy, and high unmet need for family planning in line with the first law of holes which states that ***"if you find yourself in a hole stop digging."*** Unquote.
- 10 There is ample evidence that, governments and the community of men have the power and resources to solve the problem of maternal health, high population growth by intentionally and purposefully empowering women to take control of their bodies through the provision of adequate reproductive health information and services to women in reproductive age, abolition child marriage and reducing unmet need for Family Planning.

- 11 This depicts that, women will have fewer and healthier babies which makes it easier to solve many seemingly unrelated issues such as poverty reduction, hunger, reducing civil unrests, and building resilience to withstand some of the devastating impact of climate change even as we reduce our carbon footprint.
- 12 Protecting women's rights and giving them control over their bodies is protecting everyone's rights. Just as some people have postulated that it was machines not morals that ended slavery in industrial nations, we can hope that COVID-19, climate change and associated vulnerabilities, automation and the resolve by countries to curb illegal migration, it will help us remove barriers of child marriage, unmet need for family planning, lack of adequate family planning information and services to enable many people move out of poverty.
- 13 Mr. Chairman, we cannot ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages without focusing on reproductive health information and services as an integral part of the development ecosystem because inequality is always along those lines.
- 14 However, in case duty bearers want to continue to maintain the status quo or progress at a slow pace, at a minimum they owe the citizens a duty to make known the social, economic, and environmental costs of their choices and their reasons for

supporting their positions amidst a compelling body of knowledge begging for attention and use for well-being of all.

15 **In accelerating the forward match 30 years after ICPD in Ghana/Africa, we can consider the following five action points.**

- *Abolition of Child Marriage from the continent of Africa* (Religious, Traditional, governments and other relevant bodies)

Child marriage endangers the lives of children and their off springs. It sustains high population growth and puts pressure on our limited health and educational infrastructure with its attendant, low health and educational outcomes of the children; a potent combination that creates and maintains intergenerational poverty. It leaves generations unborn and born behind.

- *Production of Contraceptive Methods:*

Currently, in Ghana, donors support more than 70% of our contraceptive needs. However, local production of contraceptive methods as is done globally should attract national attention because it is central to promoting healthy mother, child and population. Local production of this essential commodity is considered exceptionally prudent now because African governments advocating for COVID-19 and other vaccines production without a focus on contraceptives warrants that many more people survive but few might thrive and exposed to climate vulnerabilities. Therefore, all stakeholders, multilateral agencies, governments, private sector, World Bank, the Gates Foundation should support with resources the production of contraceptive methods with focus on the long-acting reversible methods by

combined effort with pharmaceutical companies in Ghana and on the continent.

- *Family Planning Integration with immunization services:*

Immunization services prevent diseases of public health importance to enable citizens especially children to survive and thrive. Contraceptive methods especially in the post-partum periods prevent women from unintended and mis-timed pregnancies to enable mothers and babies survive and thrive. Immunization and family planning programs are thus considered mutually supportive of mother and child health and service delivery must be integrated.

- *Effective communication strategy*

Finally, just as we seriously discussed and found ways to counter the threat of misinformation and disinformation during covid 19 pandemic, we should strategize to address the misinformation and disinformation about the role of reproductive health information and services to our individual and collective well-being, in meeting the SGD goals and in creating the Africa we want.

- *Partnerships*

There is the need to build partnerships around the action points and coordination among the various groups just like the groups for climate mitigation and adaptation at the ongoing COP 27. These members would implement programs to achieve the goals guided by facts and informed by evidence.

I would like to submit that for us to accelerate the ICPD goals 30 years on and create the Africa we want; we need to abolish child marriage in Ghana and in Africa. Africa needs to produce family planning methods, train service providers, integrate family planning/immunization services and mount an effective campaign in a collaborative, consistent and committed fashion.

Thank you for your attention.