Accelerating progress for Universal Access to Sexual, Reproductive Health and Rights of the Young People to end Teenage Pregnancies

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Background: Who Are Young People

- Adolescence – 10 to 19 year period of life
- Youth – 15 – 24 years
- One in every five people in the world is an adolescent
- Developing countries are a home to 85% of world adolescents
Adolescence and Youth: Transition Period to Adulthood

• The transition is never easy
• Nearly 70% of premature deaths in adults are a result of risk exposure during adolescence
• About 35% of the total disease burden in adults are also associated with risk exposure in adolescence
• Examples of risk exposures that begin in adolescence:
  - tobacco use
  - unprotected sex
  - lack of physical activity
  - exposure to violence.
Why We Must Act to End Adolescent Pregnancies

• 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 years and 2.5 million girls under 15 years give birth each year in developing countries

• Complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for 15 to 19 year-old girls globally

But Africa has a way of normalizing tragedy

“--Every pregnant woman has one foot in the grave--”

_African Proverb_
Why We Must Act to End Adolescent Pregnancies

• Every year, 3.9 million girls aged 15 to 19 years undergo unsafe abortions.

• Unsafe abortions lead to severe morbidity and mortality.

![Bar chart showing estimated annual number of deaths from unsafe abortion and estimated annual percentage of all maternal deaths due to unsafe abortion by region (Africa, Asia, Latin America).]
Why We Must Act to End Adolescent Pregnancies

• Number of adolescent pregnancies bound to increase globally by 2030 with the greatest increases in Sub-Saharan Africa if we do not act
Adolescent Pregnancies: What We Must Do Now

• Decriminalize adolescence – adolescents are labeled as bad people, trouble makers ab initio
• If they get pregnant we blame them
• They think out of the box so they are labeled trouble makers right from their families
• Most legal systems and country policies perpetuate this, poor political will
• Urgent need to free young people from this bondage, legislators can do it!
Adolescent Pregnancies: What We Must Do Now

• Favorable policy exist at global and regional and national level to end pregnancies in young people e.g.:
  • SDGs
  • AU roadmap for achieving demographic dividend
  • ESA commitments – Comprehensive Sexuality Education
  • Maputo Plan of Action

• Monitor implementation – accountability for results
• Create legislative and policy frameworks to implement regional and global commitments
• Ensure sustainable financing for adolescent health programs
Adolescent Pregnancies: What We Must Do Now

- Girls face social pressure to marry and to have children early in life
- Each year 15 million children are married off before the age of 18 years
- In fact 90% of births to adolescents occur among married adolescents
- Implement laws to abolish child marriage
- Resist tendency to lower age of marriage to below 18 years
Adolescent Pregnancies: What We Must Do Now

• Adolescent pregnancies are driven by poverty, unemployment and lack of education opportunities
• It is a developmental issue
• Ensure affirmative action to retain girls in school and to transition them to post-secondary education
• Gender equity in employment
Adolescent Pregnancies: What We Must Do Now

- Many adolescents face sexual violence.
- It is estimated that 20% of girls globally have experienced sexual abuse as children or as adolescents.
- Enforce laws that prohibit SGBV.
- Abolish cultural tendencies to pay ransom and marry off rape survivors.
- Outlaw socially sanctioned SGBV such as FGM.

200 million women and girls living with FGM; 3 million girls at risk annually.
Adolescent Pregnancies: What We Must Do Now

• Adolescents face legal/policy barriers to accessing contraceptive services
• Restrictions may be based on age or marital status
• Health workers may be biased
• Adolescents lack knowledge, transportation, and financial means to access FP and healthcare

• Have/enforce policies and laws that allow sexually active adolescents to access FP
Adolescent Pregnancies: What We Must Do Now

• Re-write UHC core principles to incorporate young people’s access to SRH
  • Leaving no one behind: including young people
  • Transparency and accountability for results including for young people’s SRH
  • Evidence based national health strategies and leadership including youth SRH friendly services
  • Making health systems everybody’s business with young people in mind: communities, CSO and private sector
  • International cooperation, mutual learning across countries including to improve young people’s SRH

• You can be the ambassadors for UHC that includes young people’s SRH!
Adolescent Pregnancies: What We Must Do Now

Finance SRH services for young people using UHC health financing goals

• No young person should be asked to pay money out of pocket for SRH services
• Mobilize resources through taxation, prioritize health financing through macroeconomic framework
• Expand pooling to improve financial protection
• Strategic purchasing to increase efficiency of health spending with a focus on public goods and public health – pay for FP commodities
Adolescent Pregnancies: What We Must Do Now

Apply UHC governance goals to adolescent SRH services

- Foster engagement platforms and citizen’s voices – listen to adolescents!
- Freedom of information and use of data - CSE
- Favorable legal frameworks for access to quality health services – youth SRH
- Policy dialogue platforms, multi-sectoral action
- Promoting regional and global mechanisms
- Research, development, technology transfer
THANK YOU FOR LISTENING