Women Drive Progress on Family Planning—Let’s Join Their Fight

At largest family planning conference, spotlight on unprecedented opportunities for women leaders to create lasting change for female health and empowerment

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, 13 November 2013—Distinguished female leaders addressed the more than 3,000 attendees of the 2013 International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP 2013) today, emphasizing women’s extraordinary impact on advancing health and gender equity worldwide. In particular, female leadership is driving expanded access to family planning and contraception for women in the poorest countries, empowering them to plan their lives and realize their full potential.

ICFP 2013 is the largest-ever meeting focused on improving health and promoting women’s well-being by ensuring that all women who want to use family planning have access to accurate information and a range of options. The conference, organized around the theme “Full Access, Full Choice,” is highlighting progress since the July 2012 London Summit on Family Planning, when the global community pledged to provide 120 million more women around the world with voluntary access to contraceptives by 2020.

“Women leaders have indispensable roles to play in ensuring access to family planning,” said Her Excellency Roman Tesfaye, First Lady of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. “Women parliamentarians at the national level should spearhead new policies, provide adequate resources and advocate for full access to family planning.”

Speakers at ICFP today stressed that as more women take on positions of leadership at all levels, they are becoming powerful change-agents. For example, front-line health workers deliver contraceptive information and services in remote areas. Community leaders combat myths and misinformation about family planning. Young women educate their peers about the value of family planning and help overcome taboos and barriers to accessing it.

Family planning saves and improves women’s lives, and benefits their families and nations. “Women fight for themselves and their families because they know it is a matter of life versus death,” said Melinda Gates, Co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. “Let’s make sure that their courage counts, and let’s fight with them—as hard as we can and for as long as it takes.”

Worldwide, more than 220 million women want to plan their families but do not have access to modern contraceptive methods that meet their needs. Addressing these needs for contraception would result in fewer women and girls dying in pregnancy and childbirth, fewer unintended pregnancies and fewer infant deaths.

However, speakers at ICFP today argued that increased access to family planning by itself is not adequate to make a lasting difference in women’s lives. “Family planning isn’t enough on its own; it needs to be a part of something bigger,” said Theo Sowa, Chief Executive Officer of the African Women Development Fund. “It’s no good for a woman to have a choice of contraceptive methods if there is a strong threat of violence against her.”
Attendees of ICFP 2013 are discussing and debating actions that need to be taken alongside family planning to fully empower women. These include reducing violence against women and girls, preventing child marriages, and making new investments in girls’ education and women’s employment. Developing compelling ways of engaging men to become advocates for family planning is also important.

ICFP 2013 continues through the end of the week, with each day focusing on a theme central to expanding family planning access and options:

- **The Young and the Restless: Effective Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Programs – 14 November:** Dynamic youth speakers will address the importance of ensuring that young people have access to family planning information and programs that meet their unique needs.
- **Moving Forward: Progress and New Commitments – 15 November:** The final day of the conference will focus on progress and new family planning commitments. The winners of the first Excellence in Leadership for Family Planning (EXCELL) Awards will be announced at the closing ceremony.

ICFP 2013 is jointly organized by the Ministry of Health of Ethiopia and the Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

###

**MEDIA RESOURCES:** Online media resources, including the press program and press releases, are available [here](#). The ICFP 2013 plenary program is available online [here](#), and the full conference program can be found [here](#).

**SOCIAL MEDIA:** For more information, please follow us on the #ICFPLive Blog, Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr.

**MEDIA CONTACT:**
Leah Sandals, Global Health Strategies
lsandals@globalhealthstrategies.com
+251 929-005-467