Young Leaders Call for More Youth-Led and Youth-Friendly Family Planning Services

Global gathering on family planning spotlights efforts to expand lifesaving information and services for young people

Nusa Dua, Indonesia (27 January 2016) – Today, hundreds of young leaders gathered alongside policymakers, advocates and scientists at the fourth International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP) to discuss the critical role of youth and adolescents in the family planning movement. Organized around the theme “Global Commitments, Local Actions,” the ICFP brings together global leaders and family planning advocates from around the world to ensure that everyone, including youth, has the tools to plan their families and futures. A complete archive of conference live coverage can be found here and youth participation at the conference can be followed on social media using #ICFPYouth.

Today’s plenary presentations, including those by young leaders, highlighted emerging evidence of effective strategies for reaching young people with contraceptive information and services. Speakers discussed specific ways to improve the sexual and reproductive health of young people, including youth-friendly health services, laws and policies focused on adolescent health, and conditional cash transfer programs. Young leaders at the conference emphasized the need to meaningfully engage youth and adolescents as key partners and decision-makers on family planning.

“The issue of adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights is not just one about information; it is fundamentally interlaced with intersectional issues of social justice, finance and poverty alleviation,” said Nomtika Mjwana, young leader and ZAZI Women Empowerment Ambassador from South Africa. “When we talk about family planning, we are challenging the cultural beliefs about young women and the methods used... about education and the right to access information... it is essential to look at strategies that can inform and educate young girls and empower them not to see themselves as objects waiting for men, but as women with pride and the agency to decide what they need to do with their own bodies.”

The world’s population of young people is at a historic high, with 1.8 billion people entering their reproductive years. Adolescent girls are at a dramatically heightened risk for pregnancy- and childbirth-related health complications, which is a leading cause of death among young women ages 15 to 19 in low- and middle-income countries.

“Our youth leaders have told us loud and clear: know our interests and work with us, co-design and co-create with us to drive successful programs; invest in our empowerment education, health and employment; recognize that we are our nations’ precious human resources, and investments in us will produce wealth and well-being for all nations; leverage our collective power for the collective transformation we can bring to the 2030 Agenda,” said Dr. Benoit Kalasa, Director of the Technical Division, UNFPA. “Our journey to 2030 starts and ends with prioritizing adolescents and youth.”

Conference presentations noted that many youth pregnancies and pregnancy-related deaths are preventable through access to family planning information and contraceptives, yet contraceptive use among girls lags behind that of older women. Currently, only 22% of women ages 15 to 24 are using contraception, as compared to 60% of women over the age of 30. In parts of Asia and Africa, over half of youth who want to avoid pregnancy don’t have access to contraception.
“It is the opportunities, the needs and the choices of young people today, who account for half the world’s population, that will define the world not only as we know it, but as we want it,” said Katja Iversen, CEO of Women Deliver at the official ICFP press conference. “Giving them the opportunities and the access so they can make those choices and really reach their full potential is key for all of us.”

Speakers highlighted the importance of tailoring family planning programs to meet the unique needs of young people. Emphasis was placed on the value of programs that enlist youth and adolescents to educate their peers on family planning and create a safe space for conversations about sexual and reproductive health.

“There are two things to take into account [to increase access to youth-friendly services]...Number one: youth engagement is not the problem, youth engagement is the solution. We need to stop this symbolic engagement, we need to be deciding campaigns and programs [together]... from the beginning,” said Juan Ramón Díaz, Youth Coordinator for Children International in the Dominican Republic. “Number two: education is the key. Having access to education over time can make a huge difference... each school – it doesn’t matter how far it is – in every country should have a sexual education program... Including youth from the beginning works.”

Expanding family planning for youth and adolescents has long-term benefits for society as a whole. Young people who utilize family planning services and information are more likely to complete their education, pursue the career of their choice, raise healthy children and live healthier and more prosperous lives. When countries reduce unplanned births, they save money on other development priorities such as immunization, sanitation and education.

The conference will close on Thursday, 28 January, with the final sessions focusing on:
- **Accelerating Progress: 2016-2020 (morning plenary):** Organized by FP2020, the final plenary of the conference will discuss global partnerships and actors, human rights and acceleration of progress toward 2020.
- **Celebrating and Mobilizing for the Future (afternoon ceremony):** The winners of the Excellence in Leadership for Family Planning (EXCELL) Awards will be announced.

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**ABOUT THE ICFP:** Held biennially since 2009, the ICFP serves as a strategic inflection point for the family planning community worldwide. It provides an opportunity for scientists, researchers, policymakers and advocates to disseminate knowledge, celebrate successes and identify next steps toward reaching the goal of enabling an additional 120 million women to access voluntary, quality contraception by 2020.

The 2016 ICFP is co-hosted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the National Population and Family Planning Board of Indonesia (BKKBN). The conference is made possible through the ICFP Core Group—the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, UNFPA, USAID, FP2020, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Marie Stopes International (MSI) and the UN Foundation—as well as the International Steering Committee and National Steering Committee of the ICFP.

**MEDIA RESOURCES:** Online media resources, including the press program and press releases, are available

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here. The conference plenary program is available online here and the full program here.

LIVE STREAM: All of the main plenaries at the ICFP can be watched live here and can be played back on demand here.

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