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Comprehensive Sexuality Education: *empowering girls and young women*

The coalition of progressive youth organizations at the 55th Commission on the Status of Women, where the focus is on education, science and technology, **are advocating for the inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education into negotiated documents.**

We are young women and men, here to advocate for our right to universal access to information about our sexual and reproductive health, access to youth-friendly services, and non-discrimination.

There are policies and programmes in place, throughout the world, that support comprehensive sexuality education. The UN has consistently recognized the importance of comprehensive education on sexual and reproductive health. **The International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education developed by the United Nations in 2009 defines key concepts of comprehensive sexuality education as: 1. Relationships; 2. Values, Attitudes and Skills; 3. Culture, Society and Human Rights; 4. Human Development; 5. Sexual Behaviour; and 6. Sexual and Reproductive Health.**

These policies and guidelines are essential tools in the protection of the rights of young people, promoting the empowerment of young women and girls and the prevention of the further marginalization of young women and girls by providing them with non-discriminatory, rights-based, gender-sensitive comprehensive sexuality education, in and out of school.

August 2010—August 2011 marks the International Year of Youth. Youth advocates are working nationally, regionally, and internationally to ensure that the voices of youth are heard. We recognize that we have strength in numbers.

More than 1.3 billion people – 1 in 5 people alive today – are adolescents aged 10 – 19.

Stand up for us. Stand up for young people internationally. Stand up for girls, stand up for our rights, stand up for a rights-based approach to comprehensive sexuality education.



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The right to Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Babu Ram Pant, Youth Action Nepal

Let's dare to accept the fact: Children are already getting information on sexuality that we don't want them to know—mostly unscientific and misconceptions—from many sources like friends, media and books. That's what we did too. But here lies the tragedy. While we are denying them of life saving comprehensive sexuality education hoping they'll never know anything on sex, they're still getting unauthorized and useless information from many informal sources. This creates further barrier to get need-based and scientific information that would help them to make informed decisions about their sexuality and life. Thus, they fall prey to ignorance, confusion and misconceptions. Poor access to sexuality education makes many adolescents and young people face one of the most difficult times in their lives. Many are bound to the fate of death, just because they don't receive appropriate information on right time.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education is not a set of information only on sex that would increase sexual activity of young people. In fact, there have been evidences that comprehensive sexuality education delay early sexual involvement and increase the use of contraceptives among already sexually active adolescents and youth. There are evidences that correct education helps to slow down new HIV infection rates and develop positive attitude towards those living with AIDS.

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Deudas pendientes: Educación Sexual Integral, el caso de la Provincia de Tucuman - Argentina

Amelia Sofia Ganem, Coordinadora Juvenil Jóvenes por la elección y el placer

En nuestra provincia no se operativiza la ley 26.150 de educación sexual integral. Tucumán es una de las tres provincias, junto a San Juan y Formosa, que no adhirió a ley de salud sexual y procreación responsable. Este escenario obstaculiza la concreción de nuestros derechos.

Observamos una tendencia a centrarse en aspectos negativos de la sexualidad, como la violencia y la mala salud y excluyendo aspectos positivos como el bienestar, la satisfacción y el erotismo.

Es interesante analizar, por otro lado, los enfoques de algunos grupos que brindan consejerías en salud sexual y reproductiva, en las que se enfatiza sobre la posibilidad de adquirir infecciones de transmisión sexual o posibles embarazos no planificados, buscando generar miedo entre los y las adolescentes. Esto tiene que ver con concepciones esencialistas de la sexualidad, que la consideran algo que necesita ser controlado. Pensamos que estos enfoques atentan contra el concepto de salud como un todo, como un estado de completo bienestar físico, social y mental y no de mera ausencia de afecciones o enfermedades. Ya que no se trata solo de no embarazarse, de no morir, de no enfermarse, sino también de disfrutar de relaciones sexuales plenas y del derecho al placer sexual, sin censuras ni cuestionamientos. Resulta atinada para finalizar la pregunta que se hicieron Alice Miller y Carol Vance: "¿Cómo hacemos para crear políticas basadas en derechos que alienten la capacidad de vivir las sexualidades elegidas sin coerción y permitan conversaciones públicas más diversas acerca de lo que es posible desear y hacer sin por ello, inadvertidamente, reforzar un único estándar normativo acerca de la sexualidad o el placer?".

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The right to Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Comprehensive sexuality education is a set of scientifically proven, fact-based, appropriate and accurate information on a wide range of issues such as human sexuality, human development, relationships, life-skills, sexual behavior, reproductive and sexual health, society, culture, interpersonal skills, communication skills, decision-making, peer-refusal skills etc. that is very crucial and too risky to be ignored to lead a healthy and happy life. Sexuality education is also one of the most pressing educational needs as society is too shy to speak about it and there is no environment where problems related to sexual and reproductive health can be shared with parents, elders, teachers or experts.

Many adolescent girls and boys in developing countries face problems that none would like to imagine, only because they did not receive proper information on their sexuality on time.

Let's relate with some not-so-discussed examples from Nepal and South Asia. Because of poor education on sexuality and reproductive process, more than 90 percent girls in a survey reported that they believed that no regular bath should be taken during menstruation. Imagine the condition of their health. Many girls reported that they missed classes and they were distracted from studies during their menstrual period because they had no idea about menstrual hygiene management. Many think it is okay to live outside house in poor and inhumane living conditions during menstruation. Many young girls and women in Nepal, because of lack of information have to deal with Uterine Prolapse (a condition in which a woman's uterus sags or slips out of its normal position). According to WHO and UNFPA, about six hundred thousand women in Nepal are suffering from it, with at least two hundred thousand in need of immediate treatment. Another study conducted among uterine prolapse patients revealed that nearly 31 percent were of the age group 20-24 and 19 percent between the ages 15-19. Imagine the condition. Think of the condition when uterus has been dislocated, you have no idea what it is, and still you are too shy to talk it to your family members. These problems are but some among many other pressing issues faced by young people today because they are being denied of information that they pressure-free, dignified, healthy and happy. In lack of correct information and counseling, many adolescents and young people take the burden of mental, emotional, psychological pressures, which in many cases has led to suicides and severe health hazards.

This list continues long and the toll increases day by day. Until we take a stand. Look back and assess what the denial of their basic rights to be informed, about their own bodily process, has caused so much damage to human development. If we now, commit and ensure that every girl and boy, whether in village or town or the big cities, in underdeveloped, developing or developed country, gets appropriate, accurate and comprehensive information on sexuality on right time, we can still make sure that many young people around the world would not have to be restless every day. We could save lives of many young women who have to die because of unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and AIDS. The right to comprehensive sexuality education is crucial because it is very important in the realization of rights to life, rights to equality and many other rights. Ensuring adolescents and young peoples' rights to comprehensive sexuality education is indispensable to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals, particularly Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. It is equally important to achieve other internationally agreed goals and commitments including ICPD, Beijing, CEDAW and UNGASS. Above all, CSE is crucial to fulfill the rights of every adolescents and young people to lead a happy, healthy and dignified life. It is a matter of justice.

El Papel De La Educación Integral En Sexualidad En La Equidad De Género

Miguel Corral,

Coalición de Jóvenes por la Educación y Salud Sexual- COJESS

La sistemática exclusión de las mujeres alrededor del mundo, su poca o nula posibilidad de participar activamente en las decisiones que conciernen a ellas mismas y sus propios intereses, han sido un padecimiento que históricamente ha afectado el desarrollo de nuestros pueblos y su transformación en sociedades más justas e igualitarias. Los sistemas patriarcales hegemónicos han perpetuado la desigualdad por razones de sexo y género, impidiendo que la mitad de la población de este planeta tenga acceso al goce de sus derechos humanos, fundamentales para la vida digna, crecimiento personal y el cambio social.

En el caso de niñas y mujeres jóvenes, la situación es sombría y en el tema particular de sus derechos sexuales y reproductivos se torna aún peor. Las niñas y mujeres jóvenes han vivido crónicamente la violencia en su cuerpo y en su identidad. Han sido forzadas, violentadas, humilladas y laceradas ante la inminente presencia de un *stablishment* totalmente ajeno a sus propias demandas, sus problemáticas, sus necesidades, teniendo este escenario un costo humano incalculable.

Afortunadamente, la Educación Integral de la Sexualidad (EIS) nos ofrece una oportunidad esperanzadora al presentarse como una herramienta para combatir críticamente el orden social establecido. En primer lugar, considerar que tanto niñas como mujeres jóvenes tienen derecho a disfrutar plenamente su vida sexualidad como cualquier persona, sin que esto implique su criminalización o muerte (real o simbólica). El enfoque de EIS, abre la puerta para pensar que las personas jóvenes tenemos derecho a ejercer libremente nuestra sexualidad, de manera informada y responsable, integrando el deseo como componente primordial de la salud, tanto en el nivel físico, psicológico y social. Además, este enfoque permite el desarrollo de aptitudes y habilidades en el plano personal y relacional. En este sentido, permite que la sexualidad sea vista sin connotaciones negativas e ideologizantes.

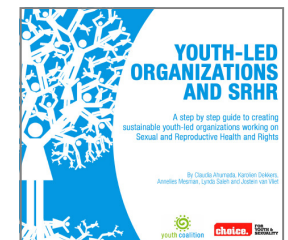
No se trata de imponer un nuevo modelo de educación sexual. Se trata de construirlo colectivamente con la voz de todas y todos, especialmente de aquellos a quienes se espera impacte positivamente: niños, niñas, jóvenes hombres y mujeres.

Hay que recordar que los derechos sexuales y reproductivos de las niñas y mujeres jóvenes son asunto de todas y todos, por lo tanto es menester que en conjunto abogemos porque sean respetados y formen parte de la agenda política de nuestras naciones.

The articles in this newsletter represent the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Youth Coalition.

Publications Available From the Youth Coalition

Learning to Speak MDGs
2nd Edition



Youth-led Organizations and SRHR:
A step by step guide to creating sustainable youth-led organizations working on SRHR




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