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Global Partners in Action – Championing Meaningful Youth Participation

By Katie Chau, Youth Coalition Member (UK/Canada)

Fifteen years ago, 179 countries signed the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) – a ground-breaking document that recognized young people's right to sexual and reproductive health for the first time. One of the most important objectives in the PoA was to increase youth participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development programmes and policies that directly affect our daily lives.

Today, fifteen years after the signing of the PoA, over 400 people, representing a multitude of NGOs from around the world have gathered in Berlin for the Global Partners in Action NGO Forum. Over the coming days, we will take stock of what has been accomplished since 1994 and will strategize for the five remaining years of the ICPD's PoA.

While I have high hopes for outcomes of this Forum, for me, the Global Partners in Action NGO Forum is already a success in terms of youth participation. From the onset of planning for the Forum, youth participation and youth perspectives were made a top priority. One of the first objectives set by the Steering Group was to have at least 25% of

all participants be under the age of 30 yrs. And in fact, we even surpassed this goal!

Recognizing the importance for this diverse group of youth participants to collaborate and strategize, Global Partners in Action supported a one-day Youth Sexual and Reproductive Rights Symposium, which took place one day before the official start of the Forum. This symposium was instrumental for youth participants to develop key messages that we will promote throughout the rest of the Forum (see youth statement from the symposium also included in this issue of the Watchdog).

The steering group also committed to include at least one young person in all plenary panels as active presenters or moderators. This is a significant improvement from some previous international conferences, where young people are merely invited to stand up on stage without being able to participate meaningfully in discussions. The Global Partners in Action programme also includes several breakout sessions that focus on young people's issues and takes even further steps towards meaningful youth participation by including

young speakers in a variety of panels to integrate youth perspectives into broader discussions of SRHR and development issues.

Of equal significance is the high commitment to meaningful youth participation throughout the Forum's planning process and decision-making structures. As one of the youth representatives on the Steering Group, I was not only fully involved in discussions and decision-making, but was also invited to be one of the group's co-chairs. The other members of the steering group made special efforts to adapt to some of my specific needs as a young person, like respecting my study commitments and taking time to provide me with background information on issues that were new to me. From day one, I felt fully supported and was impressed by the level of trust and confidence that the Steering Group had in my work and the work of my fellow young steering group member, Vincent Abrigo.

Personally, I feel that the Global Partners in Action NGO Forum is a strong example of effective and meaningful youth participation. I hope it will set a standard for future

Youth Symposium Statement

Young people from 66 countries convened for *Youth Symposium* at the *Global Partners in Action: NGO forum on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Development*, and call for policy makers and decision makers from government, donors, private sectors, as well as civil society to:

€ **Strengthen** their commitment to implement the ICPD PoA on adolescents and youth at the country level, regardless of the political environment, donors and country donors' agendas, and to contextualize it so that it addresses country needs and local realities, by educating people and generating demand, and allocating local resources for self-sustaining programmes.

Recognize that young people are entitled to all human rights and that we are a very diverse group with different backgrounds. We are young people; women, men, lesbians, gays, heterosexuals, transgender; in school, out of school, sex workers, married, divorced, single or in a relationship; we live with HIV and AIDS; we are disabled; we are migrants, refugees, displaced, trafficked; we are working, jobless or seeking employment; we speak different languages; we have different spiritual beliefs and practices; we have different perceptions of the world around us; we use different media and social networks to communicate globally. Therefore, programs targeting us should acknowledge and respect our diversity by conducting research, collecting disaggregated data by age, sex/ gender and eliminate the existing policies that discriminate against us.

Promote accurate, timely and evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education for young people, both in school and out of school which recognizes the rights of young people to enjoy their sexuality in a safe and pleasurable way, free from coercion, discrimination, and violence in intimate partner relationships. States should ensure that the different sectors of society involved in sexuality education are fully informed, sensitized on youth issues and empowered to act in the best interests of young people.

Provide sustainable sexual and reproductive health services, including counseling, by trained providers which offer non-judgmental care and respect diversity. This includes eliminating legal barriers which restrict young people's access to essential services, such as parental and spousal consent, age of consent and issues of confidentiality. Young people should have access to a wide range of reproductive health supplies and treatment which allows them to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress.

Involve young people at all programmatic, policy and decision-making and budget planning and distribution at the national, regional and international level. In order to achieve this, States, decisions makers, international agencies, donors, and NGO's must invest in young people through mentoring programmes and capacity-building initiatives and equal youth-adult partnerships. **Support** youth-led organizations and groups through providing institutional capacity building and long-term funding both at program and operational level.

Think beyond Cairo and acknowledge the limitations of the ICPD Programme of Action, by pushing for a more inclusive and progressive agenda; specifically the recognition of sexual rights; sexual diversity and the different forms of family composition; eliminating of gender bias that leads to inequality and discrimination; liberalizing laws which will make abortion services more accessible and safer for women; promoting drug-related harm reduction strategies; eliminating the legal barriers that prevent adolescents from accessing sexual and reproductive health services and fully enjoying their sexuality; and facilitating access to the benefits of scientific progress. We recognize the value of cultural differences and do not perceive it as a barrier for fully realizing young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights and cultural practices should not compromise young people's rights.

This doesn't end in Berlin, think beyond Cairo

Berlin, September 2nd

Including Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Rights in the Budget

By Victor Bernhardt, Youth Coalition Member (Sweden)



"In theory, PRSPs have a strong potential to coordinate and strengthen development and growth. In reality, the process rarely gives enough attention to young people's needs."

In international development the use of so-called Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) has become standard practice. PRSPs are essentially national blueprints for growth, usually spanning over 3-5 years. They describe macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs, as well as analyzing needs for external investments. As PRSPs are standard practice, exercising high influence over the work of governments and their partners, it is relevant to ask oneself to what extent young people's Sexual and Reproductive Rights (SRR) are reflected in them.

PRSPs are written by developing country governments, ideally through a participatory process involving civil society and development partners, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In theory, PRSPs have a strong potential to coordinate and strengthen development and growth. In reality, the process rarely gives enough attention to young people's needs. Neglecting young people's needs in development planning and national budgets will make the goals set out in the ICPD Programme of Action and the MDGs difficult to achieve.

In light of the disparities between political ambitions to strengthen young people's SRR and the common exclusion of SRR in PRSPs, the Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive

Rights (YC) decided in 2007 to engage in PRSP advocacy initiatives. Following an internal training in February 2008, the YC initiated research on countries in which the current PRSP would soon reach the end of its term, and a new PRSP was being written. The YC sought to link up with youth SRR activists for a pilot project intended to strengthen young people in PRSP advocacy, with the goal to include young people's SRR in the PRSP currently being written.

In January 2009, the YC organized a pilot training for young people in Accra, Ghana, partnering with a local youth organization, Young & Wise. The purpose of the training was twofold. Firstly, the training aimed at increasing the capacity among the participants to engage in the ongoing Ghanaian PRSP process. Secondly, the training provided an opportunity to distinguish what kind of training components would be useful in future youth advocacy PRSP and SRR trainings. In other words, the pilot training aimed at strengthening both the participants' and the organizers' capacities.

In the training, the existence of budget lines for Reproductive Health Supplies (such as contraceptives and materials needed for safe motherhood) was used as indicator for the level of actual commitment to young people's SRR in PRSPs. It proved to be an efficient method, and could

probably be used in tracking SRR components within the implementation process of PRSPs. A follow-up evaluation conducted five months after the training confirmed that the training had indeed been useful for the participants, and that the follow-up process, the engagement in the national process, was proceeding well.

It is important to note that the work on PRSPs by the YC is by far not the only initiative concerning young people and PRSPs. International organizations such as UNFPA and youth organizations such as the National Youth Council of Sweden have been breaking ground in this important field for several years. It is therefore key that all actors in the PRSP process, be it governments, youth organizations, donors or international agencies, learn from the work that has already been carried out and collaborate as much as possible with organizations that have experiences to share. The YC is currently designing a standardized curriculum for future trainings, with the recommendations from the pilot training as base.

¿Dónde quedó la Diversidad Sexual en la agenda de ICPD?

By Ricardo Baruch, Youth Coalition Member (Mexico)

A pesar de que la Conferencia del Cairo en 1994 sentó las bases para los conceptos de la salud sexual y los derechos reproductivos, hoy en día es difícil ver dónde quedaron los asuntos relacionados con las orientaciones sexuales e identidades sexo-genéricas diversas en relación al Programa de Acción. Muchos de las organizaciones y grupos trabajando en temáticas LGBTQ trabajan totalmente separadas de organizaciones en pro de los derechos de las mujeres, redes trabajando en VIH o grupos a favor de la despenalización del aborto.



A pesar de esfuerzos conjuntos como los que se han hecho en la Comisión de Derechos Humanos de la ONU para unir esfuerzos entre las pocas organizaciones presentes trabajando en asuntos de sexualidad en general, los lazos siguen siendo débiles a 15 años de la Conferencia Internacional sobre Población y Desarrollo

(ICPD por sus siglas en inglés) y es momento de cambiar el rumbo.

Los Principios de Yogyakarta (1) creados en el 2006 retomaron muchos asuntos de los derechos humanos de las personas LGBTQ tomando como referencia diversas declaraciones y documentos internacionales enfocados en la salud sexual y los derechos reproductivos, aunque desafortunadamente ninguna de éstas realmente menciona hace referencia específica a orientación sexual o diversidad sexual específicamente. A nivel internacional muchos esfuerzos se están dando para que los Principios sean reconocidos por las diferentes agencias e instancias de las Naciones Unidas pero por el momento el panorama se avizora complicado.

En Julio del 2009 se llevó a cabo la 1ra Conferencia para Jóvenes Activistas LGBTQ en Amsterdam organizada por IGLYO (International Gay,

Lesbian, Transgender and Queer Youth and Students Organization) y Youth Coalition para crear un catálogo de mejores prácticas usando precisamente los Principios de Yogyakarta. Alrededor de 100 participantes de todas las regiones del mundo tuvieron la oportunidad de intercambiar experiencias y hacer alianzas para el trabajo regional y seguir avanzando en la conquista del reconocimiento de nuestros derechos.

Es momento de que hagamos la conexión entre el trabajo internacional de derechos sexuales y reproductivos y la diversidad sexual; si seguimos dejando pasar el tiempo ni unos ni otros daremos pasos significativos en el plano internacional y particularmente en la ONU. El Foro de ONGs es una de las pocas oportunidades en las que activistas de diferentes movimientos, experiencias y países se reúnen así que hay que aprovechar cada coffee break para crear