



Lentswe La Rona

Newsletter of the Young African Advocates for Rights
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Day 1 from an African Youth Perspective

Delegations of as many as 50 countries met in Dakar, Senegal on June 7 to review the implementation of the Dakar/Ngor Declaration and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. It was encouraging to see the number of distinguished men and women sitting next to their country placards, waiving at old and new colleagues, or sipping some water to clear throats that would for the next four days deliver long and intricate speeches that would surely have their speech in their country newspapers by the next day. However, if you were fortunate enough to have a pair of expensive binoculars (which I assume is a necessity in such large meetings), one could spot a handful of youth members among the country delegations. Why only a handful? Is it not known that the population of youth in many African countries is as high as 30-40%? Does it take a calculator to figure out that each country delegation should have at least one youth representative? I don't think that only a mathematician could figure this one, but maybe we need my old maths teacher, Mrs. Nzeba.

If you think that I will write more about the lack of youth participants at the conference, you will be disappointed. Just as deliberations began, a wave of fifteen young men and women from countries as Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Nigeria, Mozambique and Senegal wearing red t-shirts, made an entrance that caused as much attraction as seeing Miriam Makeba walking down the street of Senegal. Unlike Miriam - who is automatically given a platform wherever she goes - these youth have been working for a year to formulate strategies and action plans to give African youth a platform at all levels.

The first day of deliberations heard discussions on population, poverty, environment, sustainable development, gender equality and equity, and empowerment of women. If one were to step out of the conference room, leave the hotel venue, take a taxi and ask a driver to take them to the

neighbourhood that they live in, then you would see why these issues are worth discussing. Senegal has not been immune from the same challenges facing other African countries. In a nation of approximately ten million people, the female literacy rate is roughly 30%, under 5 years of age the mortality rate is 140/1,000 children. Maternal mortality is among the highest in the sub-region and the use of modern contraceptives is low among married women (8%) and 53.9% of households live below the poverty line. Unless Senegal can build an environment that can create jobs for the thousands of unemployed youth and improve access to education and health care, the country risks being destabilized as many of its counter parts on the continent.

The journey that started ten years ago with the ICPD was clearly ground-breaking. Delegates now need to take active steps to secure the promises made then and, above all, make sure that these strategies integrate those that are most marginalized in African women and youth. Without them, then we are left starting at each other once again in another ten years with another pair of binoculars and a fresh glass of water to clear our throats...

Neema Mgana, Tanzania

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The Emperors New Clothes

Young people are touted as the leaders of tomorrow. Present figures show that some countries in the world have more than 48 per cent of their population comprised of youth. However, youth are still not visible or actively participating in communities, national or international fora. Despite the acknowledgment at the international level for youth leadership, it is critical to reassume these commitments and put in place strategies to capacitate youth to leadership roles.

The future of the world and the world's best chance to find lasting solution to some of its most pressing problems come from the youth. Young people need the capacity, support and opportunity to lead and develop skills that will propel them to take on leadership roles that within all levels so as to realize a peaceful and prosperous future. Youth are creative, they have energy and sometimes radical ideas but radical ideas are what freed slaves and gave women the rights to vote. Wasn't it a young person who told the Emperor that he had no clothes when everyone was silent? If Africa is to be able to clothe itself in garments of fine thread and colour, then youth need to be involved in finding the thread and choosing the colour.

Youth participation is about power-sharing. Power, as we are all told, corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Why should there be a small group of people holding on to power when all of us are affected by social and economic problems? Youth participation gives young people confidence and leadership skills while also providing avenues to use them in real situations. On a continent where HIV/AIDS and poverty have set the stage for collapse of nations, those real situations are now.

Improving access to information in order to enable young people to make better use of the opportunities to participate in decision-making, while strengthening opportunities for young people to learn their rights and responsibilities, promoting their social, political, and economic participation and removing obstacles that affect their full contribution are not things that can be left for discussion. There is no more time for that. Nations now need to act. Remember, children grow up to be youth... then what?

Neema Mgana, Tanzania & Amos Mwale, Zambia

Day 2 from an African Youth Perspective

Tuesday was an important day for *Lentswe La Rona* since the topics of discussion included the Family; Adolescents and Youth; Reproductive Health; and HIV/AIDS, all of which are special areas of concern for young Africans. The following paragraphs will provide a short summary, from an African youth perspective of Tuesday's discussion.

The Family

The presentation examined how any changes in society affect the family, such changes include conflict, modernization dynamics and the economic situation. It also highlighted that the family is the basic unit of society, where it is the primary unit of reproduction, production and consumption, socialization, and education of children and youth. There is a trend to the dissolution of the family structure in Africa due to conflict, HIV/AIDS and poverty this has led to an increase in child-headed households and street children which perpetuates the devastating cycle of youth unempowerment. We were happy to hear that the Sudan delegation addressed the issue of early marriage, and that it should be incorporated in the family values. Namibia and Zambia commented on the increased number of child-headed households and that government policies need to address this. Nigeria also stated, that youth and young people are the responsibility of families and the recommendation of the African Union stated that sufficient attention was not given to the family in the report. We agree that the family is an important unit and that parents have a crucial role to play as guardians but should be sensitized to openly talk to their children about sexual and reproductive health. Moreover, rights of the parents should not suppress the rights of the child and youth.

Adolescents and Youth

We were very happy to hear in the presentation the importance placed on youth participation and how we should be recognized as a dynamic force of change and as key to reaching ICPD targets. However, youth participation is easy to say, but more difficult to implement, and all governments need to take stronger action to develop the capacity of young people in order to effectively participate at all levels. The Gambia stated that young people should not depend entirely on governments and parents, but should take the initiative themselves. This is important, however the current environment does not facilitate youth taking initiatives or voicing their concerns, thus we need to work with and get support from governments.

Guinea mentioned that sex education should be included in the school curriculum, this should be in a comprehensive and non-judgmental manner. In Niger, adolescents contribute to 30 – 40% of the fertility index, thus the promotion of youth sexual and reproductive health and rights should be a priority. We were very happy to hear from a youth on the South African delegation who strongly stated the importance of having youth presentation in making the policies that are being discussed now, and any messages concerning sexual and reproductive health should be developed by us, since only we know how the message should be said so it can be heard.



Elizabeth, the youth delegate from South African speaking about youth participation

Reproductive Health

The presentation was very informative with regards to the current situation of reproductive health. Young people are implicit and vulnerable to all of the issues related to sexual and reproductive health including early pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, maternal mortality including unsafe abortion and contraceptive use. Governments must respond to the needs of youth and provide access to non-judgmental youth-friendly services. Algeria has established a National Reproductive Health and Family Planning Committees, and we urge the Algerian government to have a youth representative on those committees. We support Cameroon's statement on the necessity of developing a proper youth policy that takes on board the needs of youth with respect to sexual and reproductive health. Ghana made a strong statement regarding unsafe abortions and how they specifically target young girls and that bold decision by governments need to be made in order to reduce this trend.

HIV/AIDS

The presentation gave devastating statistics of HIV/AIDS prevalence in subsaharan Africa and explicitly pointed out the alarming trend among young people aged 15 – 24. Governments need to look at the prevention of HIV/AIDS in a broad and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health approach. Special attention should be given to the provision of treatment including ARVs to young people living with HIV so they can live a full life and contribute effectively to society. We were not impressed with the comment made by Sudan “that people go looking for AIDS and no matter how hungry they are they should learn that there is an evil lurking in the dark”, this does address the desperation or coercion that many youth, especially young women, experience when they practice unsafe sex, especially transaction sex. Namibia made an excellent comment that HIV/AIDS should not be divorced from sexual and reproductive health and information in sexual and reproductive health delays sexual initiation.

We urge governments to remember the presentations made today, and how young people are implicit in the prevention or perpetuation of these issues facing African society. We need your commitment and action to stop this cycle!

Wala Nalungwe, Zambia & Tanya Baker, Canada

Les Jeunes et la Pauvreté au Sénégal

Au Sénégal, les jeunes représentent la couche la plus importante de la population, le potentiel de développement et de croissance de la société. Ils sont néanmoins confrontés a d'énormes problèmes liés à la pauvreté.

D'abord, il y a le chômage lié au manque de programmes et de projets leurs permettant d'exercer des activités génératrices de revenus. Il y a aussi le manque d'infrastructures sanitaire scolaire et culturelle en milieu rural. A cela s'ajoute les mauvaises saisons pluviales entraînant une agriculture déficitaire.

La conjugaison de ces éléments font que l'exode rural s'intensifie de jour en jour. Les jeunes ont de plus en plus tendance à migrer vers l'occident. C'est pourquoi le gouvernement devrait renforcer sa politique de développement sur l'emploi des jeunes, l'accès au crédit, favoriser les micro-projets et essayer de structurer le secteur informel. Il devrait également mettre en place des politiques de développement de l'agriculture pour atténuer l'intensité de l'exode rural.

Nous pensons que la meilleure façon de réduire cette pauvreté est de ne pas parler **des** jeunes, mais **avec** les jeunes. Il faut non seulement les responsabiliser, les associer aux instances de décisions, les faire participer à l'élaboration et à l'exécution des programmes et surtout investir dans leurs potentiels.

Mimi Tamba, Aicha Drame et Khadija Sall, Senegal

Femi Aina Fasinu, caught-up with a staff member of the UNFPA Africa division during a tea break and here is the excerpt of the interview

Lentswe La Rona (RLN): Can you please tell me your name and background?

Dr Diop: My name is Dr Fatou Sarr Diop and I am a medical doctor. I was working with UNFPA office in Senegal as a National Programme Officer and now in UNFPA Africa Division New York as a Programme Specialist. I am providing guidance to country offices on UNFPA programme development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in the Southern countries in Africa.

LRN: What are your expectations from young people at this conference?

Dr. Diop: This Conference on the ICPD+10 is a strategic one for young people. As you may be aware, UNFPA since 1994 in Cairo has been working with countries to provide a specific attention to adolescents and young people's need in the area of Population, Gender and Reproductive Health and Rights. Some African countries since Cairo have made significant efforts in improving access to information and services for adolescents and young people. Different strategies have been implemented at various levels (political and operational) in order to achieve their needs. In this aspect, this ICPD at ten conference gives to young people and opportunity to express their own view in their countries commitment based on the evaluation report for the African Region.

LRN: How is UNFPA going to follow through with what they say?

Dr Diop: Within the Africa Region, UNFPA Africa Division has assigned a focal point who is already working with countries on implementing regional programme for young people (African Youth Alliance project, Youth Advisory Panel and others). This focal point within UNFPA task force on adolescents will follow up key issues raised by you and provide you feed back actions.

LRN: Why is it that most parents and adults don't feel comfortable giving young people information on sexual and reproductive health?

Dr Diop: Some parents don't feel comfortable because many of them have never discussed openly with their parents. Culturally talking, we are not able as parents to discuss with our children on sexuality because it's forbidden. They need to be trained as their children in order to get the right information.

LRN: During the meeting we had with you on Sunday, you mentioned that the executive director of the UNFPA, Thoraya Ahmed Obaid has special interest in culture. Can you mention some of the cultural practises in Africa that violates Sexual and Reproductive rights?

Dr Diop: Ms Thoraya Ahmed Obaid and Ms Fama Ba have a special interest on culturally sensitive programmes in UNFPA supported activities. Some practices in the Africa Region (and in some other regions) can be an obstacle in promoting Gender, Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights: two examples can be highlighted:

-Early marriage in some communities is a cultural issue which consequence is to reduce girls' education

-Female Genital Cutting also is common cultural practices that can have impact on maternal mortality

LRN: Let me ask you a hypothetical question, if you were given the power to change one thing for young people, what would it be?

Dr. Diop: The relationship with their parents: better communication and support from their parents

LRN: Thank you for giving me some time to talk with you.

Dr Diop: The pleasure is mine



Femi Aina Fasinu, Nigeria

Dr. Fatou Diop giving *Lentswe La Rona* a briefing on the upcoming meeting – **thank-you!!**

Child-headed Households? What is the solution?

Increased poverty, HIV/AIDS and conflict induced displacement are all contributing to distorting traditional support mechanisms for the social well-being of young people. Extended family support networks have come under increased strain resulting in an alarming increase in child-headed households where children (in both urban and rural areas) are left with limited, or no resources. Young people in such conditions are deprived of their childhood and the opportunity to go to school. Economic hardships lead them to look for means of subsistence that increase their vulnerability to HIV infection, substance abuse, child labour, sex work and delinquency.

In the context of facilitating the reproductive health and rights of young people, the question is how do we provide the support that would enable these young people to realise their life potential? Due to the fact that child-headed households have not been identified as priority area, it means that there is a constituency of youth with unrecognized needs. Many interventions that do exist, are either from a uni-dimensional perspective, either providing just counseling (often only of a spiritual nature) or dealing with the immediate basic needs (food and shelter). It is important to meet the basic needs of these young people. However, more importantly, what is necessary is an integrated approach that addresses not only the basic needs, but also strategic needs of education and support (including economic empowerment). This can only be possible if these young people are part of the process and their voices are at the center of a process that identifies what their needs are, and how best to assist them in accessing what is the fundamental right of every young person.

Shamillah Wilson, South Africa

Lentswe La Rona

Young African Advocates for Rights Mission:

We are a network of young African advocates, dedicated to promoting and defending the rights of young people in Africa, by empowering and supporting them.

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The Role of Peer Educators in Senegal

Aïcha Drame is a volunteer with the CSRJ/ASBEP (Youth Reproductive Health Center/Senegalese Association for Family Planning) and works in the center of Dakar, Senegal.

Aïcha is a vibrant and strong young woman who believes in helping and empowering the youth of her country, who have many problems affecting them including issues around sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Her role as a peer educator is to propagate sexual and reproductive health for young people both in and out of schools.

It is not common practice in Senegal and many other African countries for parents, guardians and teachers to freely talk about sexual and reproductive health due to deeply entrenched cultural and traditional religious beliefs.

Young people fear to ask their parents about issues concerning their sexual and reproductive health.

Aïsha said, when she gathered the courage to ask her mother about the changes in her body, her mother brushed her off and said that such issues are for boys and not girls to know and ask. This clearly shows that some parents are not a good source of information and often provide little or no support on matters relating to their children's sexual and reproductive health.. Why is it that parents are so uncomfortable with these issues? Is it because their parents never spoke to them? When will we break the cycle? Most of the time it is us, the youth that initiate these kinds of conversations. It is not always easy for us to do this but this is information that we desperately need.

The Government of Senegal has taken an interest in young peoples reproductive health . The Ministry of health has established a reproductive health department to coordinate the provision of reproductive health services in their country.

We wish the Senegalese youth well in their quest for ensuring better reproductive health for young people.

Semantu Philip Sparks, Uganda



Emmanuel, the Nigerian youth delegate talking to Dr. Akinyele Dairo of UNFPA African Division – thanks for supporting the youth!

Sexual and Reproductive health services

The reproductive health services that currently exist are not youth friendly or realistic and do not address the needs of young people. Youth often lack the correct information they need to protect themselves against sexually transmitted infections including HIV and unwanted pregnancies. If and when young people attempt to access health care services, the information is either not available or they are faced with judgemental health care providers.

Condoms are not as accessible as they should be to young people and sex education is viewed as promoting promiscuity. Therefore, adults, such as parents and teachers, avoid the subject perpetuating the lack of knowledge that exists among young people.

We would like to see a world where young people can access youth friendly sexual and reproductive health care services. It is vital that information, sex education and contraceptives are available and accessible to all young people. Young girls should be able to finish school, even if they are pregnant. Governments should make it a priority to support them.

“Girls who give birth are far less likely to complete high school than their childless peers. And around the world, unsafe and illegal abortions are disproportionately sought by young women, sometimes at the cost of their lives.” Population Action International – Fact sheet April 2002

Worldwide, over 10 million young people, aged 15 - 24 are living with HIV and AIDS. Young people are less likely to access Antiretroviral (ARV) therapies or treatment for opportunistic infections. Some governments have not included youth at all. Other governments have not adequately provided for young people in their national ARV programs. They are less likely to be able to access medication through the private sector because they are still not financially independent.

Government should be protecting their future generations. We strongly urge governments to ensure that all young people immediately receive the treatments they desperately need.

We deserve it!

Sophie Dilmitis (Zimbabwe) and Semantu Philip Sparks (Uganda)

Early marriage in Senegal.

The population of Senegal exists of different ethnicities, with beliefs, practices and certain traditional values that are still common today. Among those strictly following traditions, girls are supposed to marry early, in order to have many children, but also in order to avoid extra-marital pregnancies. This is in contradiction with the efforts of the government to have a maximum number of girls going to school.

Consequently, girls who marry at an early age do not go to school, they do not learn a profession and they know little about their reproductive health.

The numbers of maternal mortality and infant mortality, abortions, sexually transmitted diseases and severe complications at birth are still very high, especially young girls are more vulnerable, because their bodies are not yet fully developed.

That is why the government, in collaboration with reproductive health structures, and the support of the population and NGOs, should start a campaign against early marriage. With this, young married girls will have the opportunity to enrol in school and benefit from services offered by youth health centres.

Aïcha Drame, Senegal



Lentswe La Rona group busy on Tuesday night busy preparing for the youth statement, youth press conference and launch coming up

Retraction

The editors of the newsletter would like to apologize to Kwabena Asamoah and Alexandre Muianga for the exclusion of their names replaced by Edford Mutuma as authors of the article on poverty 'Less than a dollar a day...'

Remembering Ronald Reagan

Mr Ronald Reagan the 40th President of the United States of America, died on Saturday the 5th of June 2004 at the age of 93. He was the oldest surviving president of the USA.

Although most of the current young generation in Africa did not experience Mr Reagan's rule, some of the policies and ideologies implemented still live on. They continue to affect populations and development programs world wide. One of the most unforgettable policies which people all over the world will remember him for is The Mexico City Policy otherwise known as the Global Gag Rule. This was instituted in 1984 and was one of the first policies that Clinton (when he came into office) discarded.

It was later reaffirmed by President Bush Jr on the first day he took office, following in his fathers footsteps. The Global Gag Rule is an executive order that prohibits federal funds to go to any organizations and agencies that provide information and services on abortion outside of America. Although there are some people and organizations that support the Global Gag Rule, there are many people who believe it to be a violation of human rights.

At this ICDP+10 review, after the reproductive health presentation, Namibia commented on the negative impact that the global gag rule has had on sexual and reproductive health programs in Africa and was concerned that the report failed to take note of this.

Even though the Bush administration is giving \$15 billion dollars to HIV and AIDS, the money does not come free of conditions. Approximately one third of these funds will go to HIV prevention programs but because of the expansion of the Global Gag Rule as an extreme religiously based policy, any funds allocated can only go to abstinence based programs.

Some of the implications of this policy are severe

for many organizations that were giving people comprehensive information on their sexual and reproductive health. Many of them have either lost their funding or have had to severely limit their programs and censor the information they disseminate. This not only affects the health and well being of all Africans but especially young people but is a violation of their right to information.

May he rest in peace!

Edford Mutuma, Zambia

Les mariages précoces in Sénégal.

La population Sénégalaise est composée des différentes ethnies ce qui fait que les croyances, les coutumes et certaines valeurs ancestrales demeurent toujours présentes. Chez les conservateurs ou gardiens de la tradition, les filles devraient se marier tôt, pour leur permettre d'avoir beaucoup d'enfants, mais aussi pour éviter les grossesses hors mariage. Ceci malgré les efforts fournis par le gouvernement pour scolariser le maximum de jeunes filles. Conséquence; les filles qui se marient tôt ne vont ni à l'école, n'apprennent aucun métier et elles ne savent pas beaucoup sur leur santé reproductive.

Ainsi les taux de mortalité maternelle et infantile, d'avortements, d'infections sexuellement transmissibles, de complications sévères à l'accouchement sont toujours haut, surtout les jeunes filles sont plus vulnérable, parce que leurs corps ne sont pas encore complètement développés.

C'est pourquoi, le gouvernement en collaboration avec les structures travaillant dans le domaine de la santé reproductive avec l'appui des populations et des ONGs, devraient lancer une vaste campagne de lutte contre le mariage précoce : ceci pour permettre au moins à ces jeunes filles de bénéficier d'une bonne éducation et des services offertes par les centres de santé pour jeunes.

Aïcha Drame, Senegal

Quote of the Day

“Women are highly sensitized. Are the men? No! Therefore we must formulate programs to sensitize and educate our men on gender issues and empowerment of women”

Honerbale Elizabeth A. Lavalie
Sierra Leone
Deputy speaker of Parliament