

Dhaka Youth Call to Action on Health for All and Gender Equality



April 12, 2017

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE BELIEVE IN

We, youth representatives from all over Bangladesh came together in Dhaka on April 12, 2017 at the Bangladesh Youth Consultation on SDGs to call for sustainable solutions to ensure health for all and gender equality in the country through an intersectional analysis and participatory approach.

It is evident that a huge percentage of people of the country still have least access to health services which reduce the country's productivity in the long run. Universal health coverage is a must for sustainable development of a country. On the other hand the term "Gender Equality" is connected with every development tools in broader sense. Patriarchy is a concept by which gender inequality is happen with a systematic way where we see the women are always deprived. Women are almost half of total population in Bangladesh and they are the victim of gender inequality in every sector of life. It's not possible to ensure universal development of a country without ensuring gender equality. Youth, who are the generation with the most to gain or lose depending on the extent to which these goals are achieved, were involved in helping to shape the Sustainable Development Goals and have the opportunity to take on key leadership roles in understanding, promoting and supporting efforts to help the world achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

Young people are at the center of sustainable development. As equal partners in turning the 2030 Agenda into reality, we reiterate that this ambitious agenda can only be achieved with young people's leadership, meaningful participation and support, and empowering youth-adult partnerships.

The Dhaka Youth Call to Action on Health for all and Gender Equality was adopted at the Bangladesh Youth Consultation on SDGs hosted by SERAC-Bangladesh, with the support from The International Planned Parenthood Federation on April 12, 2017 in Dhaka.

This call to action is for ensuring health for all and gender equality where we believe young people of the country can come in front to achieve these two SDGs for a better development. They can recommend and can raise their voice in country policy for sustainable solutions on these statements.

WHY THIS CALL

About 47.6 million or 30 percent of the total 158.5 million people in Bangladesh are youth. The largest number of young people in Bangladesh can work as influential change maker in various sector where a positive change is needed.

Access to social services, such as education, information, health services (including for sexual and reproductive health and rights), is not universally enjoyed by all, particularly the most marginalized. Bangladesh still reserves a poor record on gender equality, rooted in structural inequalities, unequal power relations, and control of sexuality.

We face intersecting challenges, including economic, food, aggressive trade policies that hinder livelihood and access to affordable and quality medicines, health services, nutrition, and healthy food systems; high prevalence of HIV and AIDS, unsafe abortions, early/unintended pregnancies, child marriages, and other harmful traditional practices, gender-based and sexual violence and exploitation; lack of understanding and acceptance of persons with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities and expressions; and shrinking spaces for civil society and human rights.

OUR CALLS

We, young people aged 30 and below, commit to fulfill our roles and responsibilities to ensure a just and equitable nation for all. In turn, we urge governments, national and international organizations, including United Nations agencies, development partners, funding agencies, and other duty bearers to address the following priority issues and take the following actions related to the sustainable development goals which should be strongly recommended here by this national call for action on SDGs 3 and 5. We also call the stakeholders to acknowledge the potential of youths to contribute into the sustainable development goals implementation at local, national, regional, and global levels, urging them to ensure meaningful youth participation at all levels by including youths in policy delegations with necessary resource allocation.



SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Health must be understood not only from a biomedical perspective but from a holistic, rights-based approach in due cognizance of external factors affecting health and well-being, particularly for young people. These include but are not limited to food security and nutrition, climate change, environment, housing, sanitation, insufficient service providers and access to potable and drinking water, lack of proper monitoring system, corporate negative influence and so on.

There is a need to emphasize and strengthen actions taken to address adolescent pregnancies, proper sex education, maternal mortalities and morbidities, abortion, and other issues related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); communicable and non-communicable diseases; universal health-care coverage and health policies for all age and access to medicines specially for rural and marginalized people; and environmental pollutants from Bangladesh context.

Health systems of Bangladesh that alleviate stigma and discrimination need to be strengthened; institutional mechanisms and proper monitoring should be in place to end stigma and discrimination in accessing health services and information for all. Disaggregated data needs to be made available to create evidence around health issues faced by diverse communities, including but not limited to, youth groups, such as marginalized women, LGBTIQ people, people with disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, people living with and affected by HIV, young sex workers, and marginalized castes. Context-sensitive and equitable technological innovations should be promoted to advance health and well-being of all.

Recommendations:

- Empower young people by giving them youth friendly information on sexual and reproductive health services and made them available at community level health facilities
- Set guidelines and organize trainings for health service providers to make them better understand young people's needs and choices as well as make counseling more effective.
- Make menstrual care products available and equitably affordable for all girls and

young women to avoid health problems and distribute free of cost at schools to prevent dropouts.

- Provide and improve access to youth-friendly health services, including for sexual and reproductive health, that are confidential, non-judgmental, non-discriminatory, and are affordable. Sexual and reproductive health must also include access to contraception, safe menstrual regulation, and reproductive cancer prevention. Programs need to be based on a human rights framework, including the right to be free from discrimination, coercion, and violence, as well as on principles of bodily integrity, dignity, equality, respect for diversity, and affirmative sexuality.
- Address myths and misconceptions around contraceptives due to social norms and cultural barriers clarifying the perception that access to contraceptives is not encouraging sex.
- Acknowledge that young people are best placed to identify barriers and solutions and roll out country-level work to increase access to supplies among their age group and therefore they should be engaged and participate at all levels (policy, planning and implementation). They can support in collecting the data, delivering the supplies, advocacy, social monitoring, developing the products and tracking the stock outs.
- Prevent access to alcohol, tobacco, and narcotics among youths by imposing high taxes, and introducing comprehensive programs on behavior change, and counseling at educational institutions.
- Allocate a minimum of 10% of the national budgets for health, with an adequate proportion for young people based on demography, following *The Maputo Call of Action*.
- Ensure contingency planning for health services in emergency settings (such as the minimum initial service package or MISP).
- Introduce special health care service facility for migrant worker youths at all Bangladeshi embassies, consulates, and high commissions abroad.
- Introduce health insurance, and implement the strategic plan for social health safety scheme to achieve universal health coverage.
- Provide special attention to introduce equitably affordable health care services and social transformation scheme to reduce discrimination against disadvantaged communities including persons with disabilities, minorities, and indigenous youths.
- Introduce centralized health service database including records of services accessed, details of physicians, and prescriptions provided to the patients.



SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

In today's context, achieving gender equality at all levels, realizing the full potential of all individuals, regardless of their gender, sexuality, or socio-economic context is very challenging in Bangladesh as a third world country struggling with male dominated pre-determined roles of people. With just 13 years left to implement the ambitious 2030 Agenda, issues such as climate change and ecological damage magnify the urgency of action needed to reach every woman and every girl of every age, place, ability and status.

In a review of the context of Bangladesh- government has identified economic empowerment, social and political empowerment, violence against women and children, equal pay for equal work, equal participation women in every sector of social and political life, recognition of women's domestic work as ongoing challenges to ensure gender equality. Although there has been progress in achieving gender equality in the country but still huge gaps still remain. Having patriarchal and religiously biased societal structure Bangladesh is still working to improve cohesive communities and ensure safe spaces for women and girls in social, political and national life.

Bangladesh as a front line country in adopting SDGs, and it has achieved targets on maternal and child health improvement throughout the Millennium Development Goals. Being a country led by Prime Minister, Speaker in Parliament, several ministers as females, it is on a progressive status on the move beyond the binary understanding of gender and acknowledges the freedom of self-identification of gender for all. For instance the government recognized transgender persons in 2013. But they still face lack of social acceptance as person. Whereas the government can help with strong legal procedures to ensure their rights.

Women still face difficulties, oppression, and deprivation in daily life by the stereotypical understanding of Women's role to stay at home and cook, raising children, while men are expected to go for mainstream economic sectors. However this scenario is gradually changing as a result of country's economic growth and free education for girls.

Despite a number of initiatives by the government to tackle gender based violence, women and girls still face limited access to mobility considering sexual harassment and violence as well as enjoy unequal decision making authority even on their own body. This situation is completely different than men. There is strong polarity between men and women in the existing societal roles in the country. Women exercise a very limited economic freedom which is a vital cause for gender discrimination. Women are still fighting for equal pay and equal opportunity in the job sector, and those who are already

in the mainstream employment sector lack freedom to have control on their own income in many cases.

In the education sector, we see that a large number of girls drop out of educational institutions every year, despite their sign of merits at schools. The major causes identified are child marriage, religious superstition that women are not acceptable for higher education, discriminatory treatment of boys and girls at families, social security of girls and risk of sexual abuse, and violence.

Recommendations:

- Provide comprehensive sexuality education for all young people through formal and informal channels, and in workplace settings, that will challenge gender norms, as well as harmful cultural norms and barriers such as child marriage, ostracization, and misconception around puberty and menstruation.
- Strengthen digital literacy for all young people, especially young women and girls and transgender youth, and enable access to ICT.
- Strengthen the redressal mechanism that guards against gender-based violence on women and girls including—physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, and virtual.
- Promote and ensure more representation of people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities and expressions in social, political, and economic spheres.
- Ensure women’s economic empowerment, including their right to control, own, pass on, and inherit property, and equal opportunities at formal, semi-formal and informal employment spaces.
- Acknowledge and ensure equal value for women’s contribution in household economy, and agricultural production sectors.
- Introduce a gender auditing mechanism at all government, non-government and private sector organizations to identify and address gender inequality, and empower women and girls at all levels.
- Social norms and stereotypical values are mainly responsible for discriminatory gender practice and government, civil society organizations, and educational institutions must address to redefine and practice it in the light of The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- Strengthen legal framework to mainstream the transgender population into formal, semi-formal, and informal employment sectors.

References:

1. <http://arrow.org.my/pre-apfsd-youth-forum-2017-asia-pacific-youth-call-action-sustainable-solutions-eradicate-poverty-promote-prosperity/>
2. <http://www.ippf.org/resource/maputo-plan-action-call-african-leaders-deliver-their-commitments>
3. *The State of World Population Report 2014-UNFPA.* (<http://www.unfpa.org/swop-2014>)