

YOU ARE WELCOME TO THE
7th AFRICA CONFERENCE ON SEXUAL HEALTH & RIGHTS



THEME: Realizing Demographic Dividend in Africa:
*the critical importance of adolescents and youth
sexual and reproductive health and rights.*

Patron: The First Lady of The Republic of Ghana, H.E. Dr. Nana Lordina Mahama

10-12 FEB 2016

#ACS HR2016

NEWSLETTER

HOSTS:

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NATIONAL ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

Conference Newsletter

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7th ACSHR Opened by President of Ghana in presence of First Ladies and UNFPA Executive Director



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Africa's Youth is its Future: Protect and Empower them to harness the Demographic Dividend

The 7th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights (ACS HR) was formally opened by Ghanaian President, His Excellency John Dramani Mahama at a colourful ceremony in Accra. The Opening ceremony was attended by Ministers of State including Social Protection Minister, Nana Oye Lithur. The First lady, Dr. Lordina Mahama of Ghana accompanied by several First Ladies from Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Kenya and Swaziland graced the occasion to lend their support to the empowerment of young people by ensuring the respect of their Sexual Health and Reproductive Rights. His Excellency the President of the Republic of Ghana commended the First Ladies for coming together to support their husbands and governments in the fight against HIV/AIDS and other causes like the empowerment of women, the fight against the cancer and the promotion of social protection.

He pledged the government's commitment to the girl child's attainment of her full potential and strongly condemned violence against women especially the girl child and urged all not only to kick against forced marriage of girls but also need to be proactive in its prevention. Her Excellency Dr. Lordina Mahama who is the Patron of the Conference asked all to increase their activities in providing young people with what they need and ensure that their support systems work well. H.E. Dr. Lordina Mahama insisted that when young people excel when given the opportunity. She pointed to the hard work and achievement of the youth in Curious Minds that served as local host organization for the Conference. The programme of the opening segment was characterized by a traditional display by the National Dance Ensemble. School



Children from the Accra Metropolitan Schools and Queen Mothers from all over the country and some Chiefs were also in attendance to highlight their commitment to ensure young people survive and thrive.

Delivering the keynote address, Professor Babatunde Osotimehin, the United Nations Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund explained that education goes beyond literacy training. Africa should give its young people right information, skills and opportunities to fulfill their full potential. With community action and adherence to national laws we can collectively prevent men from impregnating or infecting young girls and

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Editorial

“As a group, adolescent girls can be a formidable force to create a better world with the right investments, support and interventions; adolescent girls have the power and potential to transform families, communities, nations and the world” UN Under-Secretary General and UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin

WHAT: 7th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights

Under the distinguished patronage of the First Lady of the Republic of Ghana and President of the African First Ladies Against HIV & AIDS (OAFILA), Her Excellency Dr. Lordina Mahama, and the UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Ghana is hosting the 7th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights (ACSHR) from 8th – 12th February.

With the support of UNFPA, UNAIDS and other partners, Curious Minds, a youth led organization is coordinating this crucial conference under the theme **'Realizing Demographic Dividend in Africa: the Critical Importance of Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights'**.

In line with the human development aspirations contained in the ICPD Beyond 2014, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and African Union's Agenda 2063, this conference aims at exploring and agreeing the amplification of best practices for adolescents and youth Sexual Health and Rights with a focus on:

- effective responses to youth vulnerabilities;
- facilitating knowledge sharing and programming to enhance adolescents and youth agency;
- enhancing adolescent and youth policies and programmes in regional and global development agendas;

- proposing actions to promote adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights

ACSHR 2016 is open to all including policy makers, researchers, young people, community leaders and activists working of young people's SRH issues. About a 1000 participants from across Africa and other parts of the world are attending.

WHY: Of the 1.8 billion young people living today, the majority of them are from developing countries like those in Africa. This unprecedented high number of youth calls for urgent attention, planning and action to ensure the emergence of a new generation of empowered, knowledgeable, healthy and motivated individuals.

There is an important link therefore between discourse around the demographic dividend and the rights, particularly the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people.

INVEST IN YOUNG PEOPLE TO REAP DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND



Ensure access to health
Education
Employment
Empowerment
Equality / Equity

Keynote speakers at the opening session of the Youth Pre-Conference / Youth Sexuality Institute of the on-going 7th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights were unanimous in their call for Africa to invest heavily in its youth since about 65% of the total population is below the age of 35 years.

To this end, they emphasized the need for governments to respect the rights of young people, empower them with education, provide them with an adequate and quality health care system, and create more job opportunities for them as well as basic entrepreneurship skills in order for the continent to derive the desired demographic dividend.

The speakers raised the fact that Africa was confronted with a myriad of developmental challenges including endemic poverty.

African countries therefore needed to invest more in their young people, if they want to get the maximum benefit from the Demographic Dividend and transform the continent. An investment that, according to the UNFPA Representative in Ghana, Babatunde Ahoisi, will be spent in areas such as health, education, employment, and rights.

The president of the organizing committee of the conference, Dr. Uwemedimo Uko Esiet, recognized the need to deal with youth issues as a priority.

The UNAIDS representative in Ghana, Mr Girmay Haile advocated a change of mentality among young people to enable them to truly play their role by joining forces and acting with solidarity to put pressure on the authorities.

The Director of the National Youth Authority, Mr. Ras Muburak, recalled the benefits the

Demographic Dividend can provide to a country. In his opinion, for consistent action in favour of young people, we should also think about working to keep young people, especially girls, in school, to provide young entrepreneurs with micro-credit, among other facilities.

Other Speakers included, Mrs. Cecilia Senoo, Chief Executive of the Hope for Future Generation and Mr. Kingsley Obeng-Kyereh, Executive Coordinator of Curious Minds, a youth led advocacy NGO and local host of the 7th African Conference on Sexual Health and Rights.

The Youth Sexuality Institute is part of the 7th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights organized the Youth Pre-conference which saw hundreds of youth advocates and stakeholders from different part of the world coming together to discuss and share ideas on different topics. The goal of the Institute is to contribute to the creation of a generation of young people who have a positive view about human sexuality and are empowered to make safe and responsible choices.

For most of the young people present, their message was simple but passionate and urgent. Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights must be at the heart of the actions taken by African leaders especially as the African Union prepares to embark on a campaign to harness the Demographic Dividend on the African continent.

Africa's Youth is its Future: Protect and Empower them to harness the Demographic Dividend

urged community action to support the existing laws. He joined the representatives of women and youth as well as the African Union Commissioner for Social Affairs Dr. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko, and Dr. Uwemedimo Esiet, convener of the Conference, in appealing to governments to increase their health and education budgetary allocations as a means of helping realize the Demographic Dividend and the transformation of Africa that all yearn for by 2063.

The three-day event is a platform to discuss the theme 'Realizing Demographic Dividend in Africa: the critical importance of Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Rights'. Some issues being explored

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include child and/or forced marriage, girls' education, teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence especially against young girls.

Speakers and Moderators billed for the conference include Professor John Anarfi of the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research of the University of Ghana, Legon, Ngwenya Nonkululeko of the African Union (AU), Chandra Mouli of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr. Nestor Azabenga from the United Nations Population Fund.

All people, especially girls, deserve to lead dignified and fulfilled lives. In the presence of several African First Ladies, the President and First Lady of Ghana hosted a dinner at the State Banquet Hall to launch its #EndChildMarriageNow campaign. 10 other African countries are also supporting this initiative from the African Union.



Interview



Ms Abu ACSHR

Ms Furdaux Abu, a participant and third year psychology student of the University of Ghana, Legon, expressed her satisfaction about the wealth of knowledge she was getting from the Conference: "It is a platform created for us as young women and men to know about issues relating to our sexuality and rights as Africa's youthful population."



Hon Juliana Lunguzi

Hon Juliana Lunguzi, a Member of Parliament from Malawi attending the Young Women's Pre-Conference, stated that women need to assert themselves, fight their own battles if they have to make a difference. She emphasized that when women are educated and equipped with knowledge no one will take it away from them. Protecting and empowering girls is all about education.

CAMPAIGN TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN AFRICA



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STOP!

CHILD MARRIAGE!

STAND UP FOR healthy and educated Children.

#EndChildMarriageNow!!!



OPENING CEREMONY.



UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador Catarina Furtado and other panel members point to the importance of protecting and investing in women and young people.



Mr. Chandra-Mouli from the World Health Organisation and other panelists highlight the synergies between the SDGs, Agenda 2063 and the conference focus on sexual health and rights of young people.JPG



ACS HR Convener Dr. Uwemedimo Esiet with the continent's future that needs to be protected and empowered.



Ghana's Queen Mothers show their support and commitment to ensuring the rights of adolescent girls are respected.



In attendance was a select group of students from some Accra Metropolitan Schools highlighting the importance of the conference theme for young people.

AT THE PRE-CONFERENCE.....



3FM journalist at the Media Pre-Conference explaining her approach to covering human interest issues. She ensures her coverage is socially relevant and impactful.



Africa's future at the Youth Pre-Conference.



Engaged panel explaining the importance of sexual health and rights for Africa's young people. Without this the Demographic Dividend will not be harnessed - Youth Pre-Conference.



Women and adolescent girls need to be protected and empowered. Only by doing this will Africa harness the Demographic Dividend.



It is important to take urgent action for girls and end all harmful practices including child marriage, gender-based violence and female genital mutilation - Women Pre-Conference.



Mr. Kingsley Obeng-Kyereh at the Media Pre-Conference speaking about the importance for journalists to dig deep and comprehensively cover issues. Such an approach will ensure the story of the Demographic Dividend is understood.



Mr. Nelson Muffuh from UNFPA WCARO at the Media Pre-Conference calling on media practitioners to effectively play their role in explaining and promoting the Demographic Dividend. Media should communicate for social impact.



Yes we are all young and want to fight for the rights of young people including sexual health - Youth Pre-Conference.

SESSIONS AT THE CONFERENCE.....



Head of National Youth Authority Mr. Ras Mubarak and other panel members focus on youth leadership and participation in harnessing the Demographic Dividend.



President John Dramani Mahama discusses the importance of the Demographic Dividend with the UNFPA Executive Director and his delegation.



On behalf of the collaborating partners, UNFPA presented the C'est la Vie sexual health and rights TV program and associated social and behaviour change campaign. This effort is part of the French Muskoka Fund initiative.