



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

#ACSHR2016

NEWSLETTER



Conference Newsletter

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Safeguarding our "curious young minds" and our future



For many people including experts who have to evaluate the effectiveness of conferences, meetings and outcome documents, some are quick to say that they were good intentions expressed on paper and left just there. Others try to do something about all the positive intentions but sometimes they are bogged down by challenges and give up in the long run. There are a plethora of conferences we can cite where after a few years people ask about the use of it.

Because of failure to implement a lot of what is spoken about and captured, some sceptics and media people regularly ask about the relevance of conferences and workshops. They may be right. However there are occasions that such meetings have served as a catalyst for action. There are so many meetings to cite. Even with the 7th ACSHR, these questions have flooded in. "Is it possible to take action to safeguards young people and our future?" "Can it be done?" "Can you sustain the effort?"

The questions are myriad but they have the same flavor. Now we want to ask. How will this 7th ACSHR make a difference? We have had so much to chew on from the experts, the young people, the duty bearers and all. **It is Africa's time to scale up investments in its biggest asset - its young people – to be able to benefit from the Demographic Dividend** and there is only a short window to do so effectively. How are we going to do it? We discussed all the answers at the ACSHR. To make things possible, we need something little but big. **That is COMMITMENT, ACTION, and ACCOUNTABILITY.**

Young people especially girls must be protected and educated. They must not be married off or impregnated since they must be retained in school without any form of abuse. Only by doing so can we ensure they receive all the necessary skills to be able to **lead fulfilling and dignified lives.** We therefore **need commitment from all stakeholders** - from parents to community leaders, through teachers to government as well as the media to employers. Are we ready to take

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HIGHLIGHTS

Sessions at the Conference....



AU Child Marriage Goodwill Ambassador Ms. Gumbonzvanda, Curious Mind's Mr. Obeng-Kyereh, WHO's Dr. Chandra-Mouli and other speakers at plenary session on Ending Child Marriage in Africa.

The first plenary and other sessions on the last day of the ACSHR highlighted the fact that it's **time to deliver and move from words to action**. It's about commitment, implementation, monitoring and accountability for the **protection and empowerment of young people especial girls**. There can never be a prosperous and peaceful Africa unless it's young people are allowed to survive and thrive. Government, private sector, civil society, media and UN partners are playing helpful and mutually reinforcing roles.



The patron of the #ACSHR2016 Her Excellency Dr. Lordina Mahama was joined by the convener and her fellow First Ladies from Kenya and Sierra Leone as she presided over the closing of the 5 day discussions focused on empowering Africa's biggest asset - it's young people. She committed to sustain her robust advocacy for sexual and reproductive health and rights leading to the harnessing of the Demographic Dividend. We are ALL IN.

Views at the Exhibition

The ACSHR brought together over twenty three exhibitors. On display were sexual and reproductive health services, messages and commodities that can empower especially women and young people. Several conference participants and representatives expressed their views about the ACSHR below:

Mr. Nicolas **Fesser** a young Spanish man at the **West Africa AIDS Foundation** stand said their aim of attending this Conference is to meet people from other West African countries with a view to expanding their presence across the region. This will enable the Foundation increase its awareness creation on HIV/AIDS and its related challenges.

The **Association to Combat Violence against Women** (Association de Lutte Centre Les Violences Faites Aux Femmes) from Cameroon has as its caption "Promoting the other sex, the other speech, the other area, the other power".

Representatives at the stand explained their interventions in support of victims and survivors of early and forced marriages, training through the media and awareness raising through educational talks, mobilizing stakeholders in the response chain, and participating in the on-going drafting processes of the new Family Code.



Ms. Florence **Afful** the dynamic Sales Executive at the **DKT International (Lydia)** stand explained that because their focus is on young people, they use social media to get them on board. The "NO YAWA" project is the social media platform that enables young people ask all their sexual and reproductive health questions without disclosing their identities.



Ms. Amanda Joan **Banura** of Uganda is excited to be in Ghana. She loves Ghana and the hospitality of its friendly people. She explained that the Conference was a great success. She is especially enthused about the content and handling of the topics; 'they are African in nature', she said, 'oh I love it'.

In order to harness the so much yearned for Demographic Dividend in Africa, a youth representative, Ms. Akosua **Adjepong** called on governments to support education on Sexual Health and Rights. Policies should not only be made but they should be implemented and protected as well. There should be access to quality education for all including comprehensive adolescent health and sexual rights.

HIGHLIGHTS



SDGs Domestication Event and Celebration of President John Dramani Mahama as Co-chair of the UN SG's SDGs Eminent Advocates

The National Planning Commission with the support of the UN System in Ghana hosted a high level event to celebrate the appointment of President Mahama as Co-chair of the UNSG's SDGs Eminent Advocates. The President's appointment and expected leadership reflects confidence in **Ghana's commitment to domesticating and delivering the SDGs**. All speakers including the UNFPA Executive Director called on the President and Co-chair to work steadfastly to **ensure no one is left behind especially adolescent girls in situations of vulnerability**. Africa's **biggest asset is its "curious young minds"** and their potential needs to be fulfilled.



Views at the Exhibition



Mr. Richard **Dzikunu** from Curious Minds said that: "So far a lot of leaders have been seen at the conference who have various expertise and I have seen the commitment that each of them is making not forgetting President John Dramina Mahama and the conference Patron H.E. Dr. Lordina Mahama and their fight against child marriage and adolescent HIV."

In the various sessions I have also appreciated the passion with which people are calling for actions to be taken. I expect that as the sessions end we will go back to our countries, share best practices and put more pressure on our governments to deliver on their promises"



As young people we, are not counting ourselves out of the equation of those who should be actively playing a part. As we get the knowledge it becomes important for us to share that same knowledge. We are prepared to step up. We believe in the statement that says **NOT FOR US WITHOUT US**. We are going to help positively. Let us not talk about figures. Let us not just discuss percentages. We are talking about real lives-Individuals who matter for our society and their families.



Ms. Inaam **Abelsoud**, Women Deliver Young Leader from Egypt said: "I've been waiting for an opportunity to address perspectives in Egypt with a focus on its African Identity. The ACSHR has articulated this through and I particularly liked the theme: Realizing the Demographic Dividend in Africa! I am looking forward sharing my awesome experience back home!"



It is all about you(th)!



Safeguarding our "curious young minds" and our future

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the bull by the horns and take comprehensive sexuality education more seriously without any hypocrisy or playing the ostrich? It is commitment – walking the talk. Are we ready to **invest in health, education and the creation of opportunities** in spite of all the competing challenges? Commitment and then Action comes in. And as the President of the Republic of Ghana H.E. John Mahama said at the opening ceremony, are we going to take the issue of ending child marriage and other harmful practices so serious that we turn our resentment into resolute action? The heartwarming issue is that it is possible. We should not give up. **Let us get to work IMMEDIATELY.** We have finished the talk and ACTION is the next logical step that will **ensure we deliver on our promises.** That is where ACCOUNTABILITY comes in.

Now that the youth have spoken and their elders and our leaders have not only listened but also commitment to take action, we hope that the **aspirations and strategies reiterated in the outcome declaration from the 7th ACSHR will be effectively delivered.** When we next meet in South Africa in 2017, our "curious young minds" **expect progress in advancing their sexual and reproductive health and rights not excuses.**