

From Commitment to Action

A Factsheet on Implementing the 2013 Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development for **WOMEN AND GIRLS**

Introduction

The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) is heralded for putting people at the centre of population and sustainable development efforts, and in particular the fundamental rights and freedoms of women and girls to have control over their sexual and reproductive lives. As part of the ICPD Beyond 2014 review process, governments joined by civil society representatives met for the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference (6APPC) in Bangkok. The 2013 Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development - a progressive and visionary agenda for the region - was adopted at the 6APPC. It reaffirms gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as indispensable to sustainable development, which was also underscored in the subsequent global Framework of Actions for the follow up to the ICPD Beyond 2014.

Policy Directions and Priority Actions

The Declaration contains recommendations to ensure the effective implementation of ICPD Beyond 2014. It is critical that the policy directions and priority actions set forward are realized through awareness raising, accountability and civil society participation, and leaders are held accountable for the rights of women and girls in the Asia and the Pacific. Below, recommendations from the Declaration are set out based on the civil society statements for the 6APPC. The Declaration paragraph numbers are referenced in parentheses. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment is identified as a priority area, as well as a cross-cutting issue in the Declaration - including the action areas of Sexual and Reproductive Health, Services, and Rights; Adolescents and Youth; and Migration.

Women's Human Rights

Governments explicitly call for a human rights based approach and to uphold women's human rights in the field of population and development. It reaffirms the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Vienna Declaration and Programme for Action, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and their reviews (2, 3, 7). The need to address **multiple and intersecting forms of inequality**, disempowerment and discrimination that continue to

marginalise and impact the lives of women and girls in the region underpins the recommendations (82).

Enabling Environment

The creation of an enabling environment is critical for the enjoyment of human rights, including SRHR (26); which includes **strengthening legal frameworks** and multisectoral national strategies (133) raising public awareness of women's and girls' rights and of the existing penalties for violating those rights (80, 81). **It calls for national laws and policies that respect and protect reproductive rights**, and the **review and repeal of laws** relating to the punishment of women and girls who have undergone illegal abortions, as well as any other discriminatory laws, regulations, policies, practices, and customs (130, 131, 132). Legal and institutional frameworks, enforcement mechanisms, and capacity building of doctors, midwives, law enforcement agencies and judges needs to underpin efforts to eliminate discrimination against the girl child (138).

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Without sexual and reproductive rights, all other rights of women and girls are constrained (80). Governments committed to **prohibit practices that violate the reproductive health and rights of women and adolescent girls**, such as spousal or parental consent requirements to receive health services including: a) sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services; b) denial of access to SRH services; c) violence in health-care settings, including sexual harassment, humiliation and forced medical procedures or those conducted without informed consent, and which may be irreversible, such as forced hysterectomy, forced Caesarean section, forced sterilization and forced abortion and forced use of contraceptives, as well as mandatory HIV testing; d) early and forced marriage; e) female genital mutilation other harmful traditional practices; or f) discrimination in education and employment due to pregnancy and motherhood (112). Eliminating preventable maternal mortality through training and equipping health service providers, and ensuring access to safe abortion was among the priority actions necessary to safeguard the lives of women and girls (118).



Universal Access to Quality Services

The Declaration prioritises policies and programmes to achieve **universal access to comprehensive and integrated quality SRH services for all** (109), which is significant for women and girls, and underserved groups such as adolescents, migrants, aging, and sexual minorities. A comprehensive quality package of SRH information and services is clearly articulated as ‘adequate counselling, information and education, access to a full range of acceptable, affordable, safe, effective, and high-quality modern contraceptives of choice, comprehensive maternity care, including pre-and postnatal care, access to abortion under the criteria permitted by law, post-abortion care, safe delivery services, prevention and treatment of infertility, prevention and treatment of

sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and reproductive cancers and other communicable and non-communicable diseases’ (110). Scaling up efforts to integrate HIV /AIDS interventions should be included (119).

Gender Based Violence

GBV responses must be integrated as part of **broader, multi-sectoral, coordinated responses** (124). It calls to ensure that all victims and survivors of all forms of GBV, rape and incest have immediate access to critical services, including 24 hour hotlines; psychosocial and mental health support; post-rape care including emergency contraceptives, post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV prevention and access to safe abortion services; police protection; safe housing and shelter; documentation of cases, forensic services and legal aid, referrals and longer-term support (134).

Best Practice

After advocates lobbied for over a decade in the face of strong opposition tactics, the Supreme Court of the Philippines unanimously upheld the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act, making it law (RH Law) in April 2014. The RH law expands access to family planning and reproductive health services; requiring government health centres to provide contraceptives, and mandating sexuality education in schools. It begins to address the high maternal mortality, low family planning rates, significant unsafe abortion rates, and high teenage pregnancies in the country, all of which significantly affect poor and marginalised communities. Lawmakers and health officials have expressed hope and confidence that the confirmation of the RH Law would reach the most vulnerable populations, and lead to progress on Millennium Development Goals. It signals a positive step for the future, including the proposed Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 frameworks.

Critical Note



Recognition of SRHR within the Declaration is an achievement, along with a dedicated priority area on Sexual and Reproductive Health, Services and Rights. The emphasis on anti-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is a positive step. However, the continued imposition of caveats on access to safe abortion should be dismantled. Unsafe abortion rates in this region are high, and linked to the criminalization of abortion; abortion laws must be reviewed, and spousal or parental consent requirements removed. To fulfil the human rights of women, they must be able to exercise their sexual rights, which embrace the right to a safe and full sex life, as well as the right to take free, informed, voluntary and responsible decisions on their sexuality.

Further advocacy resources

1. Reclaiming and Redefining Rights- ICPD+20: Status of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Asia and the Pacific. Available at: http://www.arrow.org.my/publications/ICPD+20/ICPD+20_ARROW_AP.pdf
2. The Kuala Lumpur Call of Action, Available at: http://www.arrow.org.my/APNGOs/KL_Call_to_Action.pdf
3. SRHR for All NOW Call. Available at: <http://www.arrow.org.my/?p=activists-and-advocates-from-15-countries-in-asia-pacific-call-for-srhr4all>