

Combined CSO Statement

Civil society organisation representatives from Asia and the Pacific convened a forum on “Advances, Challenges and Ways Forward on ICPD Beyond 2014” in Bangkok from September 12-13, 2013 prior to the Sixth Asian and Pacific Population Conference. In appreciation of the continued commitment of Governments towards the ICPD Programme of Action, we would like to acknowledge that there has been considerable progress in recognition of rights at the international, regional and national levels in response, and changing contexts within countries and regions and globally.

However we reassert that this diverse region is home to the largest population of the world including the largest percentage of young people and a growing aging population thus presenting unique challenges in implementation of ICPD PoA, as has been evidenced through the Global Survey. In many countries there is still a significant unmet need for family planning services and supplies, many have low rates of contraceptive prevalence and many still have unacceptably high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity. Tragically, these maternal deaths and disabilities are entirely preventable. Globally, there are affordable, simple, high-quality technologies available that serve to save women and adolescents’ lives, particularly in low-resource settings. As such, we urge uniform integration of these safe technologies in health systems across the region. It is also important to acknowledge that some areas of the region are experiencing rapid economic development and that inequalities are increasing both within and between member states.

In light of the unique needs of this region, progresses achieved and continuing challenges we urge member states to consider the following evidence-based views of civil society.

Preamble

Universal access to comprehensive, integrated quality sexual and reproductive health services is a human right. We recognise the need to adopt rights-based approaches to adolescent health, reproductive health and child health. We also strongly support the implementation of national policies on comprehensive sexuality education.

A nuanced analysis of comprehensive and disaggregated population data drawing on a rights based framework must be accessible to all.

We support strengthening the commitment to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all women, including sexual and reproductive rights, without compromise.

We recognise that violence against women throughout the life cycle derives from patriarchy and harmful culture patterns. This includes the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices and all acts of extremism linked to race, sex, language or religion that perpetuate the lower status accorded to women in the family, the workplace, the community and the society.

We reaffirm that gender equality can never be fully achieved without an inter-sectional approach to reproductive and sexual rights which includes the right to sexual orientation and gender identity. Sexual and reproductive rights are indivisible, inalienable, inter-related human rights which are fundamental to achieving gender equality and human development.

We reaffirm the need to prevent vulnerability, discrimination, violence and marginalisation based on gender, age, race, caste, class, migrant status, marital status, livelihoods, disability, HIV status, sexual orientation and gender identity, including through the removal of discriminatory laws and policies and by addressing social and economic barriers.

We strongly endorse the promotion of policies that enable persons 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, sexual orientation and gender identity, without coercion, discrimination or violence, and that guarantee the right to information and the means necessary for their sexual health and reproductive health.

We recall Human Rights Council resolution 17/19 on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity. CSOs express grave concerns at acts of violence and discrimination committed against individuals because of their sexual orientation and identity.

We recall commitments made in the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing to uphold the rights of older people to access services without age discrimination and adequate protection through policies that enable them to live with dignity.

We call on member states, multilateral organisations and donors to fully implement the PoA and subsequent ICPD commitments.

Poverty Eradication

We appreciate the emphasis on eradicating poverty as the highest priority by the ESCAP member states. However, we underscore the absence of a gender perspective when aiming for poverty eradication. Gender equality, equity and sexual and reproductive rights must be recognised as central and integral to poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Women bear the brunt of poverty and food insecurity. They eat least and last which makes them food and nutritionally insecure. Women have the least access to land ownership and this is reinforced by discriminatory policies and laws in relation to inheritance and property which require to be eliminated. Also not addressed are the needs of marginalised persons who are differentially impacted by poverty such as LGBTI, migrants, fisher folk, older persons, and others. Women's roles in the agricultural sector, specially the subsistence sub-sector for food production must be recognised, valued and supported with adequate productive resources.

We commend the articulation of strategies to eradicate poverty. However, strategies need to ensure that people have control and access to resources and land in order lead healthy, productive and fulfilling lives. We urge the member states to consider food sovereignty over food security. Food sovereignty, in particular the protection of traditional knowledge and indigenous biological resources as well as the right to safe and nutritious food must be guaranteed. Global and regional trade and financial policies that perpetuate food insecurity and malnutrition must be abolished.

We affirm the focus on agriculture as a major sector that can address poverty. However, to ensure sustainability, we urge the member states to develop policies which will sustain the

agricultural sector. Farmers, including young farmers, should be provided incentives to develop and enhance their skills including technical, professional as well as vocational courses.

Health

We support the right to health for all. We commend and support the link between health policies and practices, a comprehensive approach and inclusion of universal healthcare including coverage as a priority for governments in this region. We emphasize the inclusion of vulnerable populations and recognition of their unmet needs. Vulnerable groups in this region include: young people particularly those out of school, adolescents, older persons, people living with HIV, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, migrants regardless of status, sex workers, refugees and displaced persons, and all populations irrespective of sexual orientation and gender identity.

We urge that health systems strengthening should include capacity-building of the health care providers to deliver comprehensive, high-quality health care services including mental health, and recommend that adequate pre and in-service training must enable providers to provide respectful, non-judgmental services for all, free from discrimination, personal bias or prejudice. Health systems should be strengthened by enhancing community participation and inclusion in accountability processes.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

We support a comprehensive multi-pronged approach to the provision of an essential package of integrated sexual and reproductive health services, information and care. Services should be delivered in a non-discriminatory manner and include access to a full range of safe, affordable, effective and voluntary forms of modern contraception; adequate counselling, information and education, youth and adolescent friendly services; comprehensive maternity care including pre and post natal care and safe delivery services; safe, high-quality comprehensive abortion care in line with WHO-recommended protocols; prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV and reproductive cancers; and prevention of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV).

We urge the member states to implement the following to promote and achieve universal access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights:

- Develop skills of service providers through a rights-based and a client-centred approach;
- Recognise and enhance the vital role of mid-level service providers;
- Develop accountability mechanisms to ensure fulfilment of everyone's right to sexual and reproductive health and rights and ensure implementation
- Guarantee protection of the right to health, nutrition, and social security of all women irrespective of parity and all children irrespective of their birth order.

We commend the recognition of unsafe abortion as a priority public health and human rights challenge, yet we strongly urge the decriminalisation of abortion and removal of barriers that prevent access to safe abortion services across the region. Laws on conscientious objection,

parental and spousal consent must not restrict women and adolescents' access to reproductive health information, education and services, particularly safe abortion services.

Education

We support the right to education for all, and emphasise that education should be oriented towards the full development of the individual and their dignity. It should strengthen, respect and fulfill all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Children and young people including those living in rural communities, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV), young people with disabilities, out of school and key population have access to formal and non-formal education. Schools and educational establishments should ensure a violence free, child friendly and non-discriminatory environment.

We urge inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education in the school curricula of all member states. It should recognise the evolving capacities of the child, and instructors should receive training to ensure high quality comprehensive sexuality education.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

We appreciate the continuing efforts of governments to encourage women's leadership and participation at every level including from household to community levels and political processes, and the commitments made to improve collection, analysis and dissemination and use of sex and age-disaggregated data.

We urge that efforts undertaken by member states to frame and implement policies on gender equality should be measured in terms of equal access, opportunities, enjoyments and results, where temporary special measures should be adopted to promote and accelerate the achievement of gender equality.

Structures, institutions and ideologies such as patriarchy, class, caste, hetero- normativity, ageism, religion, and culture must be addressed in order to remove gender stereotyping and all forms of discrimination and violence. Inequalities based on race, ethnicity, culture and nationalism, livelihood, physical and mental abilities perpetuate gender inequality. We recommend member states eliminate discriminatory policies and legislation in line with regional and international commitments on women's rights.

We recommend that efforts undertaken to address gender discrimination should also include sexual orientations and gender identities which places persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in a vulnerable position, preventing their equal access to human rights and to the full exercise of citizenship.

We recommend that comprehensive measures to address gender equality should include strengthening institutional responses on access to justice in the form of compensations and incorporation of measures to prevent double victimisation; strengthening of existing institutional structures to effectively implement the laws and policies; ensuring full involvement of community and civil society committed to gender equality.

Comprehensive responses to gender based violence need to be based on recognition of family violence amongst other forms with specific efforts at prevention of violence and creation of safe environments at workplaces, private and public spaces for women, girls and boys. We recommend building capacities of the media in enhancing gender equality, including sensitization on reporting on gender issues and violence.

We urge governments to consider that discrimination against women which includes son preference and daughter unwantedness, are the root causes of distorted sex ratios in countries in the Asia Pacific region that are achieving demographic transition. Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women is essential to achieve gender equality and a balanced sex ratio in these countries.

Ageing

We urge member states to address ageing as a priority issue which should be recognized in national, regional laws, policies and plans of action. The draft outcome document addresses a majority of the key issues of poverty reduction, food and income security, health including sexual and reproductive health and rights, care of older people and protection issues. This reflects a strong will to collectively address the challenges posed as well as to take advantage of the opportunities created by an increasing ageing population.

However we highlight that the window of opportunity available to countries to benefit from the demographic dividend is very small. We therefore urge member states to ensure that policies are reflected to enable people to benefit from demographic dividend that will allow them to live with dignity and free from discrimination at all stages of their lives. Civil society should be recognised as an equal partner in addressing issues related to ageing, States must and work in partnership with them so as to create the environment that is good for all, particularly the older and vulnerable populations.

We strongly recommend member states to address the specific needs of older persons in disaster situations, humanitarian responses and resilience building activities. Adequate resources should be allocated to address their needs and to create space for their active participation in Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation.

We recommend that issues specific to the sexual and reproductive health and rights of older persons such as HIV infection and AIDS, including their sexuality, diverse gender identities and sexual orientation should be addressed. Member states should make training on geriatric care mandatory for health professionals.

We recommend that age-friendly environments to support active participation of older persons in community and development activities should be created and promoted. Civil society organisations and older people should be part of the monitoring and review processes on policies and the implementation of action plans.

Adolescents and Young People

We strongly recommend member states to ensure consistent referencing to both youth and adolescents across all areas of population, development and sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is essential to acknowledge and accept the diversity of young people, as defined in the Bali Global Youth Forum outcome document.

We recommend that comprehensive sexuality education with its list of issues pertaining to adolescent and youth's sexual and reproductive health and rights, with emphasis on human rights and a holistic approach, should be retained.

It is crucial to ensure that access to youth-friendly, non-discriminatory, non-judgmental health and social services is maintained and that confidentiality and informed consent are respected and fulfilled at all times. In doing so, it is important to support the removal of legal, regulatory, and social barriers which prohibit young people from accessing services. The elimination of cultural and religious barriers to accessing health information and services and upholding rights, particularly sexual and reproductive health and rights needs to be further strengthened so that it covers, but is not limited to, the eradication of child, early and forced marriage and sexual exploitation. The rights of young people to education, services and information should be fulfilled without restrictions based on age, marital status or parental / spousal consent.

We urge member states to acknowledge that respecting and enabling the political participation of adolescents and youth is critical. Member states must recognise access to quality employment for youth as key and ensure decent job creation and its sustainability.

International Migration

We commend the member states in calling for the promotion and protection of the rights and fundamental freedoms of all migrants regardless of their status. We also request the inclusion of specific actions to address the needs and concerns of refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons, as stated in ICPD Programme of Action (Chapter 9 Section C and Chapter 10 Section D). We recommend the inclusion of families and spouses of migrants who stay behind, especially with regards to policies and programmes ensuring their health, including SRHR, social protection, access to justice and others.

We laud the incorporation of a gender perspective in all the policies and programmes addressing international migration and the specific focus on addressing the vulnerabilities of women and girls. We however request the member states to remove discriminatory laws and policies that impinge on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of migrant workers, including mandatory screenings for HIV/STIs and pregnancy, and the prohibition to marry and form a family, among others.

We also enjoin the member states to implement education and life-skills programmes that enable all migrants to make informed choices and decisions particularly with regards to their sexual and reproductive health and rights, at all stages of the migration cycle.

We appreciate the recognition of the respective roles of the countries of origin, transit and destination in the promotion and protection of the human rights of migrants, as well as the

inclusion of civil society in the promotion of cooperation and dialogue. However, we request member states to establish and strengthen accountability mechanisms to ensure that the rights and health of all migrants are protected.

We note the need to improve national data collection and regional cooperation to harmonize collection and analysis of migration data for policy formulation and programme development. However, we wish to request member states to ensure the rights and protection of migrants in the process of data collection and analysis.

We urge member states to put in place rights-based and gender-responsive pre-departure, post-arrival and reintegration programmes, in order to address the economic, psycho-social and cultural needs of all migrants, including their access to health services and information.

Urbanisation and internal migration

We commend the member states for addressing challenges on urbanisation and internal migration. We commend the commitment of member states in ensuring that the rights of urban dwellers and internal migrants are promoted and protected. However, there is a need to underscore the realities behind why people migrate beyond improving their economic livelihood which includes conflict, disasters as well as climate change. All people should have access to services, which includes education and health including sexual and reproductive health and comprehensive sexuality education. Measures to prevent and mitigate the effects of natural disasters and other adverse situations should address the needs of all vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, migrants, LGBTI, older persons, women and young people.

Population and Sustainable Development

We strongly endorse the inclusion of progressive language on the issue of population and sustainable development. If implemented effectively and in a timely manner, with full participation of communities and particularly indigenous people, this region has an opportunity to be the global leader in promoting models of sustainable development. The main challenge for most governments in the region will be to ensure fairness in wealth distribution for the growth of an equitable society. Poverty eradication is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. This is a matter of basic justice and human rights. To achieve this, the stated policies and the plans of action, will have to be implemented with full participation of societies to ensure ownership of the processes for sustainable development.

We recommend the member states formulate multi-sectoral and integrated development strategies and ensure development of green infrastructure. These will ensure food and nutrition security, safe drinking water and the responsible use of natural resources for livelihood. It is important for member states to note that despite attempts to address the shortage of food, unequal distribution of food continues to be an acute problem exacerbating situations of hunger. We therefore urge member states to ensure fair and equitable distribution of food. We also recommend that population policies based on incentives or disincentives, should be replaced with rights-based policies.

Data and Statistics

We urge member states to ensure a fully transparent and inclusive monitoring process for implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda that makes information freely available to all stakeholders at all operational levels including local, national, regional, and global; to include process indicators to improve qualitative evaluations; and to guarantee the consideration of reports from beneficiaries, in particular from the most socially marginalised and vulnerable populations, on how development programmes impact their lives.

Modalities for implementation at the national, regional and global levels

We commend the call for strengthening accountability mechanism by member states and we recommend that member states formulate clear strategies for establishing and strengthening such mechanisms.

We believe that accountability must be rooted in the principles of human rights, empowerment, participation and transparency and that the same principles are applied in monitoring and regulating the role of private sector in health care and service delivery . In the same spirit we urge member states to ensure that health care systems are based on principles of universal access and free from privatisation.

We urge the international community to fulfill the target of .7% GNI for overall official development assistance, and urge that attention be given to promoting south-south cooperation and triangular cooperation, for the full implementation of the ICPD PoA.

We request the member states to ensure the inclusion of civil society in national coordination mechanisms and recommend costed action plans to be developed at the country level to implement the ICPD Programme of Action.

We encourage member states to include ICPD agreements along with Asian and Pacific Population Conference outcomes in their governments' official position on the post 2015 development framework.

In conclusion, we urge the continued involvement of civil society in all future processes within the region in support of population and development.
