

CONCEPT NOTE

Regional Consultation on Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV in the Caribbean

Proposed dates: April 22-24, 2013

Proposed location: Dominican Republic

Background

Young people represent a growing and increasingly important socioeconomic segment of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). In fact, the adolescent and youth population is the largest cohort in the history of the Region, representing 26% of the total population.¹

Young people in our region face significant challenges related to sexual and reproductive health. Currently, around 20% of all births in the region are to adolescent mothers (10-19 years of age)² while there are an estimated 250,000 youth (15-24 years of age) living with HIV in the region³, and 41% of new adult infections occur among youth⁴. Additionally 1 out of every 20 youth are infected with a curable sexually transmitted infection⁵.

Between 48% and 53% of sexually active young people in the region have never used contraception⁶.

In the Caribbean sub-region, the estimated HIV prevalence among young people (15-24 years) is 0.6% for women –higher than any other region apart from

• ¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. World Population Prospects, the 2010 Revision. Population database.

² Guttmacher Institute (2010). Facts on the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent women in the developing world. In brief. Washington DC: IPPF.

³ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Opportunity in Crisis: Preventing HIV from early adolescent to young adulthood. New York: UNICEF; 2011.

⁴ UNAIDS (2012). Young people living with HIV in Latin America make their voices heard. New York: UNAIDS.

⁵ World Health Organization (2006). Global strategy for the prevention and control of sexually transmitted infections: 2006-2015. Geneva; WHO. Available at: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2006/WHO_RHR_06.10_eng.pdf.

⁶ United Nations Population Fund (2012). Latin America and the Caribbean: Bulletin UNFPA LACRO (Issue 2). New York: UNFPA. Available at: <http://unfpa.org/webdav/site/lac/shared/DOCUMENTS/2012/Boletines/Octubre%202012/Ingles/3EmbarazoE.pdf>.

sub-Saharan Africa, and 0.3% for young men – third highest in the world, only higher in sub-Saharan Africa and the Eastern Europe/Central Asia regions⁷.

Although adolescent (15-19 years of age) fertility and birth rates have declined substantially over the past decades in the Caribbean (from 77.1 in 1997 to 63.8 in 2007) the figures remain high compared to the global average (52.7 per 1000 adolescent females in 2011). Indeed, the Dominican Republic (108.7), Jamaica (7.3), and Saint Lucia (61.7) all have adolescent fertility rates above the global average⁸.

Vulnerability and risk of young people

Negative sexual and reproductive health issues and outcomes amongst adolescents and youth include unintended pregnancies; unsafe abortion; maternal mortality; violence; sexually transmitted infections (STIs); HIV; exploitation, and sexual violence; and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Many multidimensional factors contribute to the vulnerability and risk of young people to these negative outcomes, including early initiation of sexual activity, intergenerational and transactional sex, sexual violence and incest, limited access of young people to sexual and reproductive health information and services, lack of a supportive legal and policy environment to facilitate the full enjoyment of sexual and reproductive rights by adolescents, and poverty.

Improving adolescent sexual and reproductive health

The health of adolescents is a priority for the PAHO Member States, as reflected in the Adolescent and Youth Regional Strategy and Plan of Action for Improving Adolescent and Youth Health 2010-2018. Meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people is vital to development, especially in improving the overall status of women and reducing poverty among families.

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⁷ UNAIDS. Global Report. UNAIDS report on the Global AIDS Epidemic – 2-12. UNAIDS, Geneva, 2012.

⁸ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. World Population Prospects, the 2010 Revision. Fertility database. Available at: <http://esa.un.org/wpp/Excel-Data/fertility.htm>. Accessed on 25 June, 2012

The aim to prevent HIV/STI and strengthen sexual and reproductive health of young people, in particular young women, also converges with the Regional Initiative for Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV and Congenital Syphilis by the year 2015, also endorsed by PAHO Member States in 2010.

In order to generate consensus on priority action to increase access of Caribbean adolescents and youth to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including HIV prevention, a Caribbean regional consultation will be held with relevant stakeholders, including youth. The organization of this meeting was also catalysed by the expressed intention on the part of the COHSOD leadership to intensify efforts to address HIV and SRH among adolescents in the Caribbean.

This concept paper seeks to outline the approach for the organization of this Caribbean regional consultation to gain consensus on the key issues affecting youth including the barriers to SRH services and core elements for an appropriate regional and country-level response. The findings and outcomes of this consultation will be utilized to inform a policy dialogue to be presented at the COHSOD in May 2013.

Meeting goal: to review the situation of adolescent sexual and reproductive health in the Caribbean with an aim to inform policy decisions and the development of appropriate interventions and services for young people in the national SRH and MCH programs.

Objectives:

- To discuss major factors influencing the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents, and lessons learned regarding the access and utilization of services including the policy and legal environment;
- To agree on key interventions for implementation at the local, national, and regional levels in order to improve sexual and reproductive health of adolescents
- To facilitate and strengthen the involvement of youth in SRH interventions for young people;

Expected outcome:

- Consensus recommendations for action to strengthen adolescent sexual and reproductive health services at the local, national and regional level in the Caribbean.
- Consultation report to contribute to a policy document on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health for submission to COHSOD

Methodology

The consultation will bring together technical experts, public health officials, STI/HIV program managers, SRH Program managers, MCNH program managers, international partners working with adolescents and youth as well as Sexual and Reproductive Health, leaders in the adolescent and youth community, faith-based organizations and the new media.

The Consultation will last the duration of three days and will focus on analysis of the situation, review of experiences, good practices and lessons learned of international and Caribbean practitioners and agencies in addressing youth SRH, and engagement in a dialogue to jointly identify strategic action. The agenda will include presentations, plenary and small group discussions.

In preparation for the consultation, a background document will be prepared that summarizes available relevant information on the different aspects of SRH of adolescents and youth in the Caribbean. The background document will be shared with meeting participants prior to the meeting, to facilitate an informed dialogue.

Following the adolescent SRH/HIV consultation, a two-day capacity building activity will be held at the same venue with some of the same and a number of additional countries on implementation of the Regional Initiative for Elimination of Mother-to-Child transmission of HIV and Congenital Syphilis.

At both events simultaneous English-Spanish translation will be provided.