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Editorial Message

Advancing the ICPD Agenda Beyond 2024 – A Call for Renewed Action



As we commemorate the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), it is an opportune moment to reflect on the journey since Cairo in 1994. Over the past three decades, significant strides have been made in advancing reproductive health, gender equality, and sustainable development. However, as we assess progress, reaffirm commitments, and address emerging challenges, it is clear that much work remains, particularly in developing countries where systemic barriers persist.

SPIRHR marked this milestone by organizing an international panel discussion in November 2024. The event brought together experts, policymakers, and advocates to deliberate on the state of the ICPD agenda and the way forward. One of the key takeaways was the recognition of progress—maternal mortality has declined globally, access to contraceptive services has improved, and legal frameworks supporting reproductive rights have strengthened. Yet, the disparities remain stark, with many developing nations still grappling with inadequate healthcare infrastructure, financial constraints, and sociocultural barriers that limit access to essential reproductive health services.

Reaffirming commitments to the ICPD Programme of Action is more critical than ever. Governments, civil society, and international organizations must reinforce their pledges to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, protect women's rights, and invest in youth empowerment. The 30th anniversary is not just a reflection of past achievements but a call to action—countries must accelerate efforts to close the gaps and ensure that no one is left behind.

Emerging challenges, such as climate change, economic instability, and shifting demographic trends, further complicate the path forward. For developing countries, these issues exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and require innovative, context-specific solutions. Addressing these challenges will demand stronger partnerships, increased funding for reproductive health programs, and a renewed political commitment to uphold the ICPD principles in an evolving global landscape.

As we move beyond 2024, SPIRHR remains dedicated to advocating for policies and interventions that prioritize reproductive rights and population health. The legacy of ICPD is a

vision of dignity, choice, and equality for all. Let us seize this moment to reinvigorate our collective efforts and turn commitments into concrete actions that transform lives.

Malede Birara MD, MPH, FCOG(ECSA)

Editor in Chief of the Bulletin

SPIRHR Updates

6th Annual RH Conference Updates

The 6th Annual Reproductive Health Conference, co-hosted by the St. Paul Institute for Reproductive Health and Rights (SPIRHR), Yonsei Global Health Center (YGHC), and St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College (SPHMMC), was colorfully conducted on 14–15 November 2024 at the Ethiopian Skylight Hotel, Addis Ababa. Held under the theme “30 Years Post ICPD: Progress, Challenges, and Opportunities” the conference brought together a diverse group of participants and celebrated three decades of progress in reproductive health while addressing persistent challenges and opportunities.

Ahead of the main event, two impactful pre-conference workshops set the stage for deeper discussions. The clinical workshop, titled “Updates on 2nd Trimester Missed Abortion/IUFD Management” engaged Ob/Gyn residents and consultants from Ethiopia and abroad. It included theoretical discussions and practical sessions at the MICHU Clinic of SPHMMC, offering participants updated knowledge and hands-on experience. Simultaneously, a journalist workshop themed “Your Voice, Their Future: Advocate for Family Planning” brought together media professionals and public relations representatives to discuss Ethiopia’s national reproductive health strategy, the role of journalists in strategic communication for family planning, and insights from the SHaPE2 Project’s media campaigns. The latter was held at the Ethiopian Skylight Hotel. These

workshops were vital in enhancing the skills and awareness of participants across disciplines.

The conference welcomed over 190 participants, including panelists, speakers, and high-level delegates, with 173 attendees from Ethiopia and others representing South Korea, the United States, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Pakistan, and Kenya. Representatives from international organizations based in Ethiopia further enriched the event with their diverse perspectives.



The program featured an array of activities, including panel discussions, oral scientific presentations, poster sessions, and programmatic experience-sharing. High-level panel discussions included insights from esteemed policymakers, researchers, and global professional leaders, with a keynote address by His Excellency Dr. Ayele Teshome, Ethiopia’s State Minister of Health. The scientific sessions included 19 presentations from scholars worldwide, covering critical topics such as family planning, abortion, infertility, gender equality, and gender-based violence. Additionally, 18 poster sessions sparked engaging discussions and facilitated collaborations among participants. A

roundtable discussion highlighted innovative programmatic experiences, including community-based SRHR initiatives for youth, male involvement in family planning through non-scalpel vasectomy programs in Pakistan, and regional collaborations in Eastern, Central, and Southern Africa to strengthen Obstetrics and Gynecology training.



Feedback from a good proportion of attendees underscored the conference's success, with participants expressing high levels of satisfaction with the organization, content, and logistics. Many praised the relevance of the topics discussed and the valuable opportunities for learning and networking.

The organizers extend their deepest gratitude to the conference's financial supporters, including the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), the Center for International Reproductive Health Training (CIRHT), EngenderHealth, Ipas Ethiopia, and the Ethiopian Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ESOG). Their generous support was instrumental in the event's success. Moreover, technical support was provided by UNFPA Ethiopia, the Population Media Center, the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences, and EngenderHealth.

The 6th Annual Reproductive Health Conference facilitated the exchange of knowledge among practitioners, researchers,

and policymakers. This collaborative platform brought together diverse voices and expertise and fostered meaningful dialogue and partnerships, with the shared goal of advancing reproductive health and improving the lives of women and girls in Ethiopia and beyond.

Training Pillar

The training pillar recently organized and conducted a training workshop on "Basics of Vasectomy" from September 17-24/2024 in two rounds. The participants were family planning service providers at SPHMMC and catchment health centers of St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College. The workshop aimed to equip the participants with the skills and knowledge to provide a more comprehensive knowledge on vasectomy and skills for counseling. The training was provided by Dr Aschalew Seyoum, a seasoned expert on permanent contraceptive methods. The SPIRHR CPD center aims to provide similar training in future dates.



Advocacy Pillar

Nurses and Midwives Recognition Program

During a preconference session for the 6th Annual RH conference a program was held at St Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College to honor and thank the nurses and midwives, underlining their work and commitment to reproductive health, and to recognize exceptional nurses and midwives who have worked hard and diligently to promote reproductive health. During the program nurses and midwives presented a quality improvement project on how to improve surgical outcomes through surgical site infection prevention. This in turn will improve the overall performance of the case teams and will also create champion advocates of SRHR.



Successful Consultative Workshop Paves the Way for EMOTIVE Implementation in Ethiopia

The Ob/Gyn department of SPHMMC has held a consultative workshop focused on the implementation of the EMOTIVE intervention at St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College (SPHMMC) with multiple stakeholders. This marks a significant milestone as SPHMMC becomes the first institution in Ethiopia to adopt this innovative approach to postpartum hemorrhage (PPH) management.

PPH is a leading cause of maternal mortality and morbidity worldwide, and this initiative represents a major step forward in advancing maternal health within the country. The workshop brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from the Addis Ababa regional health bureau, partner organizations, professional associations, and healthcare providers from various facilities. The primary goal was to develop a comprehensive and collaborative strategy for the effective rollout of EMOTIVE.

Key Outcomes of the Consultative Workshop

- **Pioneering Implementation:** Ethiopia is now at the forefront of implementing the EMOTIVE intervention, setting a

precedent for other healthcare institutions in the country.

- **Improved Maternal Health Outcomes:** By effectively managing PPH, EMOTIVE has the potential to significantly reduce maternal morbidity and mortality rates, ultimately saving lives.
- **Strengthened Collaboration:** The workshop fostered stronger partnerships and collaboration among key stakeholders, ensuring the sustainability and potential for expansion of the EMOTIVE initiative.
- **Capacity Building:** Participants engaged in valuable knowledge sharing and skill-building activities, enhancing their capacity to implement and manage the EMOTIVE intervention effectively.

SPHMMC commitment to the improvement of maternal health outcomes across Ethiopia remains unparalleled. The institution is committed to working closely with partners and stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation and scale-up of EMOTIVE. The successful completion of the consultative workshop is just the first step in a long and impactful journey. We are excited to move forward with the implementation of EMOTIVE and are confident that it will have a profound and lasting impact on maternal health in Ethiopia. Together, we are creating a future where every mother receives the highest quality of care and support she deserves.



Improving **Male Engagement** in Family Planning in Ethiopia

The Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College (SPHMMC), in collaboration with the St. Paul Institute for Reproductive Health and Rights (SPIRHR), commemorated Vasectomy Day 2024 on November 22, 2024, under the theme “Vasectomy – Men’s Act of Love Towards Their Partners.” This event aimed to raise awareness and dispel misconceptions surrounding vasectomy as a form of contraception.



The celebration was attended by family planning and reproductive health focal persons

from the Federal Ministry of Health of Ethiopia and the Addis Ababa City Administration Health Bureau, as well as healthcare professionals, media personnel, community representatives, and leaders.

The observance of Vasectomy Day 2024 is part of ongoing efforts to promote reproductive health education and increase awareness about the importance of male engagement in family planning. The event emphasized the role of men in ensuring the well-being of their families and communities by taking responsibility for contraception.

Vasectomy Day 2024 highlights the importance of informed decision-making and the role of men in supporting their partners' reproductive health choices.



Articles

SRHR and **Male** Participation

Sexual and Reproductive health services are seen to include women primarily. It is common to see educational training and services focusing on women solely. This can be due to women being more specifically influenced in relation to SRH issues. Although the lack of such services for women will indeed threaten women's health, specifically via increasing the chance of unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion, increased chance of STI, and increasing maternal morbidity and mortality, it doesn't dispose of the need for men's engagement in SRHR. Consideration of male SRHR awareness and service is equally vital not only because of the need to address their neglected need for SRH awareness and service but moreover because it will augment women's. When men do not share the burdens of SRH women bear the responsibility for their own and their family's SRH and eventually the society's. Addressing the SRHR awareness needs of young men as early in life as possible can affect life-long attitudes and behavior pattern formation towards the issue achieving just that, men who share the burden of maintaining SRH of family. Engaging men and boys is thus central to building more equitable societies.

In the predominantly traditional society we live in, men tend to be primary decision-makers on social, economic, and domestic fronts. This key role can be utilized in influencing SRHR awareness and service-seeking behavior of

families/couples. Therefore, recognizing the fact that the role of head of household is important and men tend to be the decision-makers and utilizing it in influencing health-seeking behavior in families and as partners in women's SRH health is important. This comes with its challenge. One of the main challenges with exploiting the role of the decision-maker to increase SRHR awareness and service-seeking behavior is impeding women's right to make decisions for themselves. In consideration of this challenge, the WHO suggests a "Gender-transformative approach."

What is a "Gender-transformative approach"?

WHO characterizes a gender-transformative approach as 'an approach that addresses the root causes of gender-based health disparities through interventions that challenge and change harmful and unequal gender standards, roles, and unequal power relations that benefit men over women. There are six interrelated standards of the gender transformative approach. These are Human rights, Power, Norms and values, Gender and diversity, Empowering women and girls, and Engaging men and boys in SRHR. The role of GTA in SRHR is engaging men and tending to harmful masculinities to improve SRH services. The center of this approach is tending to gender imbalance and challenging gender power relations while also addressing SRHR issues. Programs and interventions involving men and boys have to be deliberate in advancing gender equality by unequivocally focusing on destructive gender norms, including harmful

standards surrounding masculinity and challenging unequal gender power relations that privilege men or subordinate women.

An example of a GTA approach-based intervention could be community conversations and training activities targeting school-aged and adolescent boys and girls. Such conversations will be thought-provoking for children and young adults and allow unlearning of harmful gender-based inequalities at a much earlier age. Age is an important factor in the transformative approach, as children and young adults are yet to form a firm attitude towards gender issues, while adults have a long-held belief that will be difficult to unlearn as compared to the younger age group.

The conversations should address disparities and inequalities starting from the household scale to the community and beyond, to learn and shift constraining gender norms at each level.

SRHR and Technology

Caught in the cycle: Is Technological Expansion Threatening or Supporting the Reproductive Health of Adolescents and Young Adults?"

By Amani Nurroodin, MD

Technology is everywhere. It's in the palms of our hands, integrated into our daily routines, and shaping the way we connect with others and the world. For adolescents and young adults, those navigating one of the most critical stages of life- it offers both opportunities and challenges, especially when it comes to reproductive health.

Let's imagine a teenager in a rural area who has no access to a clinic or proper sex education in their school living in a low and middle-income country with access to some technological advances. With one search online, they can find information on contraception, sexually transmitted infections, or even information on sexual abuse and violence. Technology can be empowering in this way. Social media platforms, mobile health apps, and websites are giving young people access to resources.

But it's not all sunshine and progress. Technology has a darker side that we can't ignore. The same platforms that educate and connect can also misinform and isolate. Algorithms don't always distinguish between credible health advice and inaccurate content. A young adult searching for answers about

birth control might stumble upon myths and fear-based narratives or can be caught in a loop of sextortion that can eventually lead to poor decisions.

And then there's the emotional toll. Social media, a huge subset of modern technology, often feeds unrealistic beauty standards and toxic comparisons. Many young people- especially girls- report feeling inadequate, which can affect how they view their bodies and relationships. Add to this the exposure to explicit content, sextortion risks, and a lack of boundaries in digital spaces, and it's clear that technology can also be a source of harm.

So, what can we do? The key lies in balance and guidance. Technology itself isn't inherently good or bad, it's a tool. It's up to us to shape its impact on young people's reproductive health. Schools and parents need to play a stronger role in guiding adolescents on navigating digital spaces safely and critically. Governments and tech companies must work together to regulate harmful content and promote accurate, youth-friendly health information.

Most importantly, we need to listen to young people. They're at the center of this debate, after all. By including their voices in policies, programs, and app designs, we can create solutions that reflect their real experiences and needs.

Technology has the potential to support adolescents and young adults in their journey toward healthier lives, but only if we use it wisely. The question isn't whether technology is good or bad, it's whether we are doing enough to help them make the most of it while minimizing the harm. The choice, and the responsibility, is ours.

THE NEW SRH BUILDING



About St. Paul Institute for Reproductive Health and Rights (SPIRHR)

SPIRHR was established and registered by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Agency for Civil Society in September 2019 as a local non-governmental organization with the vision of strengthening and facilitating effective and quality sexual and reproductive health and rights programs at St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College (SPHMMC). SPIRHR is an independent institution targeting to ensure the project's implementation in the most efficient and effective way while ensuring accountability and transparency. Since its inception, SPIRHR has continued supporting the implementation of major program activities that were jointly planned with SPHMMC Ob/GYN faculties while taking the lead in the administration and coordination of RH infrastructure development as per a collaborative framework outlined by a memorandum of understanding. Through the collaborative effort of SPHMMC and SPIRHR, SPIRHR will continue to invest in four key priority areas of intervention: training, research, advocacy, and clinical services. SPIRHR aim to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity through coordinated sexual reproductive health and rights and enable girls and women to reach their full potential.