

Youth Talk on Family Planning on the Launch of the State of World Population Report 2012

December 2012

Phnom Penh, Cambodia: *“By choice, not by chance”* is chosen as theme for the UNFPA State of World Population Report 2012, which was launched worldwide on the 14 November. The report was launched in Cambodia by the UNFPA Representative, Dr. Derveeuw Marc and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs Director-General, Her Excellency Dr. Khieu Serei Vuthea in the presence of young people representing civil society, students and religious groups.



UNFPA Cambodia Representative, Dr. Derveeuw Marc (right) and Her Excellency Dr. Khieu Serei Vuthea (left) are releasing the State of World Population Report 2012 on 14 November 2012 in Phnom Penh.

Photo: UNFPA Cambodia

Mr. May Tum, UNFPA Assistant Representative pointed out that research has shown that family planning helps Cambodia in cutting down huge resources in the healthcare systems through a reduction in maternal and infant morbidity and mortality and a reduction in the numbers of unsafe abortions. *“The women, who are using a family planning method, will have more chance to expose themselves to social development. The women will be able to engage themselves in the business. For instance, she is less busy with housework and taking care of children, thereby, she is likely to work outside and do other business to earn income for the family”*, said Mr. May. Likewise, young people who are accessible to reproductive health information and services tend to finish their schooling, added as saying at the report launched.

The core of this event was a panel discussion between representatives from the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Planning and Non-Governmental Organizations such as Population Services International (PSI), Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia (RHAC), and Family Health International (FHI 360) and nearly 200 young people coming from different backgrounds and having different life experiences as peer educators, students, volunteers and the youth senate representatives (a fellowship from 21 different universities in Phnom Penh that links to the network of youth from every province and university in Cambodia, created by the Khmer Youth and Social Development in 2003). Some of the participants were entertainment workers, religious

representatives including Buddhist monks, communities and NGO networks working to address human rights and development in Cambodia.

Emphasising during the panel discussion, H.E Dr. Khieu Serei Vuthea, Director-General for Social Development of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs stressed that family planning is not the sole responsibility of women. The government has used different approaches to engage men and boy in reproductive health resulting in preventing domestic violence and gender-based violence in the last decade. Women and youth of today are more open to discuss about reproductive health issues and they are empowered to make a decision in family planning based on their individual choice. *“The population policy allows the couple to decide on the number of children they want and when to have them”*, said HE Dr. Khieu.

The forum was an inspiring moment for the audience. Participants heard interventions being implemented by the government and NGOs, received accurate information and interacted with experts on family planning. The forum did not only allow youth to raise their voice and concern but it was the place where young people were informed on misconceptions on the use of contraception and change unsafe practices on sexual reproductive health and rights. The questions from the audience were challenging the panel experts in many ways.



Youth audience attending panel discussion debating on how young people be empowered accessing re productive health information and services without discrimination, in particular vulnerable group, entertainment workers.

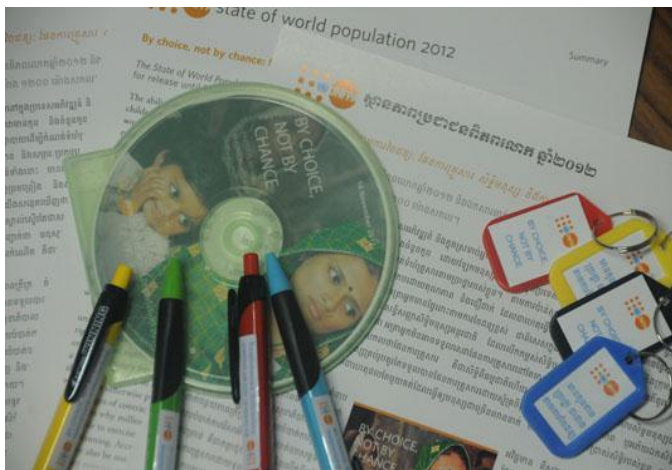
Photo: UNFPA Cambodia

“Regardless of social status, entertainment workers should not be discriminated but they are empowered to seek social services, including contraception and blood testing”, said Ms. Thou Kagnabelle, technical program officer for entertainment workers and male client for Family Health International 360.

The questions raised by young audience included:

- *When is the good time for young people to think about family planning? Should they wait until they get married or before their marriage?*
- *While there has been a discussion about family planning and an increasing the use of family planning methods, the population growth remains high.*
- *How can we prevent unwanted pregnancy when young people become sexual active.*
- *How effective is the integration of adolescent sexual reproductive health into the school curriculum? Some parents may think that their children are being taught to have sexual intercourse so early?*

- *Entertainment workers have a low social and economic status and are at risk to be discriminated. How can the entertainment workers be empowered to seek services?*
- *While, many entertainment workers work for their daily survival, it is impossible for them to act safe and prioritize their sexual reproductive health and rights. They are vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy, STIs and HIV/AIDS infection, gender-based violence... and they have less power to negotiate with their clients for safer sexual relationship. How are these issues being addressed in the policy and programmes implemented by the government and NGOs.*
- *How effective is involving boys and men in the family planning programme by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Ministry of Health.*



SWoP Report 2012 and promotional materials released during the launch in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 14 Nov 2012.

Photo: UNFPA Cambodia

While some people still believe that talking about sexual reproductive health in public is not a good practice for Cambodians, especially for women and girls, experts and young people attending the forum think that discussion about this subject benefits teenagers and community. *“Providing information and ensuring services availability to young people can prevent them from unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion, STIs and HIV/AIDS infection,”* said Dr. Lam Phirun, Deputy Director of the National Reproductive Health Programme, Ministry of Health.

“When young people know when to plan for life and family - before or after marriage and how, they are exercising their rights. This will also allow them to have more time engaging in social business or development”, said Som Sothea, youth senator from Panhasastra University and peer educator of People Health Development Association attending the panel discussion.

The panel discussion was a learning session for young people and allowed policy makers, programme implementers and advocates to reformulate strategies and approaches in addressing adolescent sexual reproductive health issues and development in an effective way.

The SWOP release event provided an opportunity for young people to understand the importance of family planning, expand their social network and strengthen their capacity beyond family planning – its relationship with human rights, poverty and development.

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