

Half of the world's population is under the age of 25. Some three billion young people are, or will soon be, of reproductive age. Pakistan, with a population of 153.45 million in mid 2005 is the sixth most populated country in the world. As per Human Development Index, Pakistan is ranked 135th among 177 countries. As per Human Poverty Index, the country is ranked 65th among 94 developing countries. Universal access to reproductive health, including family planning, is the starting point for a better future for

the 1.5 billion young people (ages 10 to 24) who live in developing countries. Pakistan, with 147th position on Health Index is also facing the multi-dimensional damages of HIV/AIDS that has emerged as one of the major global health and development challenges.

By 2015 all 189 United Nations Member States have pledged to erad-

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reproductive health issues need to be tackled with urgency in countries like where a major bulk of population comprises young people and women. Recently, a health society, SAHET, organised a 4-summit in Islamabad address this and more...

icate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other major diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development. This pledge constitutes eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Pakistan like all other member states is a signatory to this very pledge. The current development indicators however are not promising but efforts from public, private, NGO and donor sectors are underway to make some progress.

RHIYA (Reproductive Health Initiative for youth in Asia) is a multi partner initiative that spans over seven South and South East Asian countries namely, Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. In Pakistan, this project is being implemented in five districts. SACHET (The Society for the Advancement of Community,



Health, Education and Training) - implements this project in Pakistan with two other partner NGOs namely, Marie Stopes Society and PAVHNA. The project is being funded jointly by EU and UNFPA.

The main model of RHIYA project at district level is based on Youth Friendly Centers (YFCs), both for girls and boys. The YFCs offer many services to empower youth by mobilisation, educating and skill development. The youth take advantage of recreational activities provided at the centers, such as folk music, debate contests, reading and declamation contests etc. Both indoor and outdoor sports activities have been made available to the youth, with sports club activities such as football and cricket, badminton etc. Volunteers who have skills in these activities have been recruited from the community to lead the sports activities for the youth. To build competitiveness, inter-union council and inter-district debate and ARH messages dissemination events are organised on regular intervals, which provide the participating youth with an opportunity to travel and meet with youth from the other places, thus providing ground for information and knowledge exchange. In Pakistan, a total number of 80 (40 for each boys and girls) youth

friendly centers (YFCs) have been established in five districts.

Recently, a four-day summit was organised by SACHET in partnership with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The Summit was part of RHIYA. Over 100 young boys and girls from Qila Saifullah, Jacobabad, Chakwal, Muzaffarabad and Kohat participated in the Summit, where they were given an opportunity to interact and share their concerns with government officials, donors, civil society organisations and the media. These young delegates have been involved in RHIYA activities in the five above-mentioned areas of Pakistan.

Coming to the summit, the main features were the presentations by the RHIYA partner organisations about their experience of the project, their success stories and learning; technical and working group sessions on important youth-related issues between the youth and concerned ministries and donor organisations.

The Summit ran for four consecutive days with various technical sessions on youth issues. A youth assembly was also held during the summit, which allowed the young participants - the real stakeholders in RHIYA - to interact and share their concerns with government officials,

donor organisations and civil society representatives. The main recommendations that were brought out for the assembly concerned the education policy, particularly the curricula. It was pointed out that the whole curricula must be altered to create a healthy environment for the youth in Pakistan. Issues of women empowerment, population control, youth welfare policies, allocation of more funds by the government for the youth and reproductive health issues were also brought forth.

During the summit, it was repeatedly urged that government and donors should make compulsory for the young people to participate at all levels of decision-making processes, including policy planning and development, program implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the current issues.

The closing ceremony was addressed by Dr. Doniya Aziz, parliamentary secretary; Mr. Shehzad-u-Sheikh, joint secretary, Ministry of Population Welfare; Dr. France Donnay, country representative UNFPA; Mr. Nadir Gul, technical advisor to RHIYA for UNFPA; and Dr. Rakhshinda Parveen, executive vice president, SACHET.

Dr. Doniya Aziz lauded the efforts of SAHET and other partner organisations for arranging a successful summit for the youth on an issue as crucial as Adolescent Reproductive Health.

"It is important that sensitive issues such as sexual health of young people should be addressed in a culturally-sensitive manner, as it will be more effective," said Mr. Shehzad-u-Sheikh. He told that the government was committed to youth welfare and that it had allocated more funds for them in the recent budget.

Dr. France Donnay expressed her satisfaction over the successful completion of the summit. She said that UNFPA was trying to expand and replicate the successful RHIYA project in many other districts of Pakistan.

