

## Strong commitment witnessed for making Sustainable Development Goals, a development and political priority at the APCC midterm review

**29 November 2018, Bangkok:** Midterm Review of the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Declaration on Population and Development concluded in Bangkok on November 28, 2018. The three-day event (26-28 November), which was organized by the United Nation's *Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific* (ESCAP), in cooperation with the *United Nations Population Fund* (UNFPA) Asia-Pacific Regional Office, concluded with strong recommendations to the member organisations.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Asian and Pacific Population Conference (APPC) in 2013 was an inter-governmental agreement at the regional level, and the midterm review was a follow-up to the necessity of a monitoring framework in the region. The mid-term review reaffirmed the commitment towards the implementation of the Programme of Action (PoA) of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 at the national and regional level.

Priority areas of the conference included Population dynamics and inequality in Asia and the Pacific, advancing gender equality and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and population dynamics, vulnerable groups and resilience to climate change and disasters.

Additionally some of the key advocacy issues, which were discussed during the midterm review, included increasing SRH services for the underserved population, liberalization of abortion laws and policies, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in national formal education curriculum, public funding for CSE and improving regulations, policies and protocols to reduce and respond to gender-based violence (GBV).

Several delegates highlighted their commitment to universal access to SRH services, including family planning and also to eliminate all forms of discrimination in the provision of these services, particularly for young people, people with disabilities, migrants and people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity. The discussions recognised a significant decline in maternal and infant mortality rate, attributing it to improved access to quality maternal and child health care. Some countries noted that access to safe abortion and post - abortion care had contributed to reducing maternal mortality and morbidity.

Urgent need to address GBV was expressed by several representatives. While some countries cited progress on the legal reform for prevention of GBV and domestic violence, others stressed on the need to eliminate child marriage, gender - biased sex selection, female genital mutilation and to address the sociocultural context in which these practices occurred.

The consortium highlighted the importance of investing in young women and men for better future and achievement of the objectives of the PoA and SDGs. Investment in education and skill development, including tertiary education, business incubation and support for small and medium enterprises for women and youth had reduced high levels of youth unemployment in several countries.

Negative impact of climate change and conflict was reported on a range of population and development issues, including reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health, poverty, urbanisation and country capacities. Delegations reported on efforts to increase resilience, improving disaster preparedness, applying risk prevention approaches and practices. All these efforts would be aligned with the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and the 2030 agenda, Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and the Kaila Declaration.



Significant advancements in the collection and use of data for population and development policies and programming was recognized during the discussions at the mid-term review. Civil registration and vital statistics, censuses, demographic and health surveys and specific surveys on issues such as ageing, disability and gender-based violence, geospatial data and small area estimation, birth registration highlighted the importance of investing in improving timely collection, availability and use of disaggregated data to protect dignity and human rights of all people. Several countries also acknowledged the importance of regular monitoring of progress in the region towards the Ministerial Declaration commitments, with clear indicators and targets linked to the Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals.

As a precursor to this meet, Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Forum was organised in Bangkok, on November 24 – 25, 2018, to chart the way forward and identify key priority areas to accelerate progress. Various constituencies represented at the forum included women and girls, LGBTQI people, migrants, youth and adolescents, people living and affected with HIV, people living with disabilities, rural, indigenous and tribal people. CSO steering committee members that participated in the forum include

CSO forum emphasised that, while there had been significant progress in sexual and reproductive health policies in the region, implementation continued to be a challenge, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable groups. Structural problems including limited resources and capacities as well as the lack of disaggregated data were identified as contributing to the gaps in implementation. The committee recommended that governments should ensure a legal and social environment that supports sustainable civil society engagement, free from violence, stigma, discrimination and pressure, to allow civil society organizations to contribute to society and policymaking. Governments should also enhance their national data systems to support them in recognizing those people that are not able to access services, and work in partnership with affected populations to develop specific programmes to reach out to these groups and reduce stigma and discrimination in service provision.

Prior to the mid-term review, a Youth Forum was organized on 22 – 23 November 2018 in Bangkok Thailand. The forum discussed the emerging population and development issues in relation to young people's special needs and brought young people's voices to the forefront of discourses around sustainable development.

Representatives from the Youth Forum noted that, while all young people were at greater risk of vulnerabilities and inequalities, the challenges were greater for young people from sexual, ethnic and religious minorities, as well as young migrants and young people living with HIV. They also urged member States to recognize and reaffirm human rights, gender equality, equity, social inclusion and justice, as well as youth empowerment and leadership, as central to sustainable development. They ended with a call for meaningful discourse on young people's needs and aspirations.

The recognition of the interlinkages between all aspects of sustainable development and SRHR – as reflected in the ICPD PoA, was formalized in the 2030 Agenda through specific targets under the goals on gender equality and access to health and the Midterm review witnessed strong commitment from member associations towards making SDGs and ICPD PoA a development and a political priority.

