



Launch of State of World Population report in Namibia

WINDHOEK – The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on 17 October 2018 launched its flagship State of World Population report titled, “The Power of Choice: Reproductive Rights and the Demographic Transition.”

The report highlights the fact that reproductive rights, one of the most fundamental rights inherent to all persons and one of the most intimate choices a person can make, are still not available to all. Evidence remains that the right to make choices remains limited for far too many women.

The extent to which couples and individuals have the power to make their own decisions about whether and when to have children, and how many children to have, directly impacts fertility levels. Fertility levels vary greatly between developed countries and least developed countries. They provide a general indication of the state of reproductive rights.

The State of World Population report calls on countries to confront their demographic challenges not through fewer choices, but rather by enhancing rights and choices.

Speaking at the launch of the publication, UNFPA Country Representative Dennia Gayle said there are 214 million women in the developing world who are at risk of unintended pregnancy because their reproductive choices are limited by a lack of access to modern contraception and other compounding factors such as poverty, socio-cultural and gender norms. “As a result, in much of the developing world, women are having more children than they want,” she said.

“The high cost of child care or the high opportunity cost of leaving a career to start or expand a family, are just some of the main reasons why women are unable to exercise their right to freely and responsibly make decisions about the timing and frequency of pregnancies,” said Gayle.

In an effort to address high or low fertility over the years, some countries have taken actions that restrict choices and violate women's rights, sometimes by cutting off family planning, sometimes through coerced sterilizations," she noted.

"Making sure that childcare is affordable is one action that a low fertility country can take that enhances rights and expands choices," said commended, further highlighting that this enables women to start or expand families without giving up their careers.

"Making sure that, for example, a 10- or 15-year-old girl has access to the information and services that will empower her to prevent an early pregnancy or an HIV infection, will enable that young girl to remain in school, attain her education, join the labour force of her country and contribute to the development of her family, community and country," said Gayle.

In speaking about family planning, Gayle noted that it is not only good for the individual, but also good for any nation's economic development.

"Imagine what that would mean for a country like Namibia in the next 12-15 years. Our 10-year-old will be 25 and our 15-year-old would be 30. Therefore, strategic policy investments in their education, employment and empowerment will be crucial to shaping this nation's prosperity when we, along with the rest of the world, will be hailing the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," she said.

Although Namibia has made tremendous progress in reproductive health efforts over the past 27 years, there are still barriers impeding the use of modern contraceptives. Unmet need for contraception remains high (12%) among women in Namibia, while 19% of adolescent girls (15-19 years old) have begun childbearing, with some regions reporting proportions of more than 36%, indicating that more vigorous efforts are needed to understand and to meet the needs of adolescents and young people.

It is with this in mind that the UNFPA/GRN newly approved Country Programme Document will focus on strengthening sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRH&R) services within the health system to enhance its ability or capacity to adequately target eligible vulnerable groups, such a young people and women, underserved locations and deliver targeted interventions. UNFPA's role will ensure that marginalized population and geographic locations are not left behind.