Adolescents and youth (from SEAR) Statement On Provisional Agenda Item (9.5)

Ending preventable maternal, newborn, and child mortality in the South-East Asia Region in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and Global Strategy on Women’s, Children’s, and Adolescent Health (SEA/RC69/R3)

75th Session of the World Health Organization RCM for the SEARO Region

Meaningful Involvement of Adolescents in National Health Programs for ensuring Effective and Inclusive programming

Building a healthy future – Meaningful involvement of adolescents in the policy planning, designing, implementation, and monitoring to help achieve the 2030 agenda for sustainable development!

South-East Asia Region (SEAR) is home to nearly 350 million adolescents. At the intersection of childhood and adulthood, adolescents are confronted with many changes and uncertainties in life. In this transient phase, adolescents are targeted by industrial marketing practices and indulge in a wide range of risky behaviors which result in self-harm, road traffic and other injuries, violence, teen pregnancy, nutritional deficiencies, obesity, poor mental health, and substance abuse like alcohol and tobacco. According to WHO, in 2015, an estimated 6.3 million adolescents died of disease, self-harm, and injury in SEAR.

Today’s youth and adolescents are surely tomorrow’s leaders but will also bear the burden of health risks due to current policies and programmes in different sectors and circumstances like pandemics, humanitarian crises, and climate change. Adolescents and Youth are innovative solution finders and have the potential to take charge of their health and bring about a positive change in the world. Young People should be involved as equal partners, and stakeholders in the ecosystem directed at building human capital. They need to have the space to mobilize, learn, and influence actions to co-create solutions for the health challenges that impact them. Meaningful youth engagement is central to the success of planned policies and programs. For young people to lead decision-making, their vision needs to be integrated into policy action and program implementation as well as its monitoring. It is, therefore, essential to meaningfully engage and empower adolescents to effectively address health-related issues, challenges, and multi-pronged determinants.

The Global Strategy and Action plan adopted by World Health Assembly in 2016 on women, children, & adolescents’ health and Sustainable Development Goals Agenda with emphasis on “no one left behind” for 2030 serves as a framework for promoting and prioritizing meaningful youth engagement for health initiatives. We acknowledge the WHO-SEARO and partners’ initiatives on adolescent participation like a Regional Town Hall meeting in Jakarta in 2019 led by the Regional Director and the subsequent establishment of the SEAR Youth Health Action Network (SYAN).

Through this statement, we the adolescents and youth call on the SEAR Member States to build on this momentum and, seek their input in designing, implementing, and monitoring National Programmes, with a focus on the three specific actions which can help prioritize meaningful involvement of adolescents and youth.

- Prioritize capacity building of adolescents and youth for their meaningful involvement at all levels from the planning of the health and development policies to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Understand their perspectives and accordingly create opportunities for adolescents and youth to lead health and development agenda through innovative ways including peer interaction, dissemination of relevant information, and adolescent-led campaigns to foster a healthy environment for advancing adolescent health and well-being.
- Support civil society engagement to facilitate the meaningful participation of adolescents and youth from hard-to-reach, far-away communities in the national and regional health program planning and response.

We thank you for your attention and remain dedicated to supporting these vital endeavors so that together we can strengthen the public health interventions to foster a healthy environment for advancing adolescent health and well-being.