



Translating Concern into Effective Action A Global Challenge from a Youth Perspective

On Wednesday 25th January, The Alliance for Health Promotion, The International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation (IPSF) and The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) ran a consultation on how to engage youth in global health, from decision making to action, at the World Health Organisation building. The panel was held in conjunction with the 140th WHO Executive Board Meeting, and was composed of Ms Marie Hauerslev from IFMSA, Mr Yacoob Moustafa from IPSF; Mr Charles Senessie from the Afro-European Medical Research Network (AEMRN) and moderated by Ms Joanna Koch, Vice President of the Alliance and Ms Sabine Chengane - IPSF Chairperson of Public Health.

There have been many times youth have catalysed social remodelling through their activism and dedication – creating and building projects to build themselves up and encourage the development of those around them. This has been seen in countries such as Yemen where youth were the driving force behind the cessation of a political deadlock; and in Peru where the youth have created their own processes and initiatives to promote peace in a country that has not experienced such a thing in 60 years. The UN has long recognised youth as major resources for development, agents for change, economic growth, and technological innovation. Eugenio Villar, WHO Coordinator for the Social Determinants of Health Unit noted that “Youth are a vital presence in reshaping Health Promotion and WHO”

Despite this, 1.8 million youth continue to face many problems. 10-20% of youth experience mental disorders impacting their quality of life. 75 million youth suffer unemployment whilst another 156 million live on the poverty line, facing major exploitation in their desperation. There are an estimated 200,000 homicides committed against youth - fourth leading cause of death. However, many establishments are seeking to battle these issues.

IPSF is a student organisation that aims to advocate for pharmaceutical students and recent graduates. IPSF initiatives focus mainly on the areas of public health and pharmacy education and professional development. Initiatives include public health campaigns, research on issues in pharmacy education and workforce development, the Student Exchange Programme, organising international and regional congresses and symposia. IFMSA, the world's leading organisation for medical students continues to uplift students, ensuring their voices are heard. Their programmes revolve around 3 overarching concepts: health in all policies; a sustainable workforce; and meaningful youth participation. Their motivation for including youth in #SDGsforher twitter campaign which resulted in expressions regarding female empowerment remaining in SDG resolutions and their pre-WHA training event that aims to prepare youth for the World Health Assembly.

The Afro-European Medical Research Network continues to run a mobile network across Africa meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, with the help of youth. They also aim to strengthen and augment local health delivery systems to provide sustainable health programs that focus especially on youth. An example of AEMRN's impact was their health camp that reviewed 5000 patients over 4 days.

The consultation also received presentations from other NGOs contributing to the wellbeing of youth around the world. Dr Elizabeth CHERIAN from Bangalore whose team has contributed to the construction of 40 schools in India focusing on: education, health and sustainable development. Mr Patrick Mwesigye's organisation, Uganda Youth and Adolescents Health Forum (UYAHF), creates programs focusing on women's health, gender equality and developing entrepreneurship skills.





The discussion revealed aspects of youth work and health issues including - mental health issues; the neglect of reproductive health education among young people; the impact of poverty on the health of the young; lack of education and basic health services; tobacco addiction among the young; the stigma and silence of menstruation; how Alzheimer's affects the young; training the young to help with the elderly; and youth's interest and concern for the environment. It also emphasized the engagement and importance of youth in health promotion going forward.

The youth have a powerful voice but are being stifled by the challenges they face. More effort should be made into educating youth about their mental health and raising awareness of the influences around them. Youth should be empowered economically; and encouraged to build their own structures and businesses.

There should be further employment laws to reduce the risk of exploitation. To foster their independence, further mentoring and training should be given to ensure that there is sustainable handover from the older generations to the younger ones. Youth should be reminded of their political power and their capability to have a phenomenal effect.

The Alliance for Health Promotion hopes that the results of this Consultation at WHO will bring about a better understanding of the needs and challenges of today's youth; that it will lead to a greater recognition of their values and achievements and will give them a voice in policy making and health promotion implementation at all levels, international, national and regional.

“No one is an island – together we can make it happen” - Charles Senessie, AEMRN

