

Panel Discussion

“Realising SRHR for Young Bangladeshis: Youth-led Submissions for Bangladesh’s UPR”

9 April 2018, Geneva

Introduction:

Adolescents and young people represent nearly one-fifth of the Bangladesh’s total population of 144 million¹. Conservative attitudes and traditions, combined with social stigma, particularly in rural societies, affect the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of adolescents, especially girls. Adolescents and youth have inadequate sexuality education, and lack access to quality youth friendly SRH services. Areas such as urban slums exist in complete service gaps further depriving young people of SRH services². Gender and sexually diverse populations face discrimination, stigma, harassment and violence from family members, schoolmates, police, and at the workplace, healthcare facilities, and government offices.³

About 85% of girls in rural areas are married by the age of 16.⁴ While the overall contraceptive use rate has improved significantly, it is only 42% among adolescents aged 15-19.⁵ According to the latest, Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey (BDHS 2015), adolescents aged 15-19 contribute up to one-fourth of total fertility.⁶ Information and awareness about HIV is also severely lacking among adolescents and young people in Bangladesh, especially young women⁷.

The situation is even more bleak for people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Bangladesh gave official recognition to the third gender in 2014 but neglected to define this gender category, thereby effectively failing to protect the rights of the transgender population and other gender-diverse groups. Criminilisation of homosexuality under Section 377 of the Penal Code further results in social stigmatisation, discrimination and violence, and blocks their access to many fundamental services, such as sexual and reproductive healthcare and legal redress.

Bangladesh has ratified several international human rights conventions, including CEDAW, CRC, CRPD and ICCPR. Bangladesh also made significant stride in terms of reducing maternal mortality as part of the MDGs implementation, and indeed renewed its commitment to improve the sexual and reproductive health in the country during its Voluntary National Review at the High Level Political Forum in 2017. But despite the government’s political commitments at international fronts, the lived realities of young people with regards to their SRHR remain abysmal.

1 http://evidenceproject.popcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Bangladesh-ASRH-Report_January-2017.pdf

2 Ibid

3 https://www.wewillspeakout.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/GBV-Study-report_Final-FHI_PNG-and-Bangladesh.pdf

4 <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MarryingTooYoung.pdf>

5 http://evidenceproject.popcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Bangladesh-ASRH-Report_January-2017.pdf

6 Ibid

7 Ibid



RIGHT HERE
RIGHT NOW



Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are fundamental human rights, which are enshrined in national, regional, and international laws and agreements. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is a critical prerequisite for young people’s empowerment and rights, and for enabling their full participation in all domains of society—economic, social, political, and cultural.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is considered a significant opportunity towards the realisation of SRHR.⁸ Unfortunately, young people’s SRHR has received very little attention in the last two cycles of Bangladesh’s UPR. Right Here Right Now (RHRN) Bangladesh⁹ has submitted the first-ever youth-led CSO report, in collaboration with ARROW and the Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI), for Bangladesh’s 3rd UPR to highlight the urgent need for attention to address the severe gaps in terms of universal access to young people’s SRHR in the country. In line with RHRN Bangladesh’s concerted advocacy to advance young people’s SRHR in the country, ARROW, as the regional coordinator of RHRN Bangladesh platform, has collaborated with SRI and Dance4Life to hold a panel discussion with following specific objectives.

Objectives:

1. To share the findings from the first-ever youth-led submission for Bangladesh’s 3rd UPR on status of young people’s SRHR in the country and highlight the progress and gaps in fulfilling Bangladesh’s relevant international commitments;
2. To explore the policy and programmatic landscape with regards to institutionalisation of the provision of SRHR for young people and sexual and gender minorities;
3. To propose key recommendations for Bangladesh’s UPR to improve the situation of young people’s SRHR, in line with Bangladesh’s national and international commitments.

When and where?

9 April 2018 (Monday) b/w 11:30 am – 1:00 pm in Geneva. Venue details to be shared later with confirmed participants.

The panel discussion is being organised by The Asian Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW), in collaboration with Right Here Right Now (RHRN) Bangladesh, Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI), and Dance4Life (D4L).

⁸ http://hrbportal.org/wp-content/files/Final_UNFPA-UPR-ASSESSMENT_270814.pdf

⁹ *Right Here Right Now Bangladesh (RHRN-BD)* is a platform consisting of 11 organizations with unique expertise in the respective areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGI) issues. RHRN-BD is part of the *Right Here, Right Now* global partnership that envisions a world where young people, in all their diversity, acquire full and uninterrupted access to life skills based education and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion. The Asian Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW) is the regional coordinator and one of the members of the *Right Here Right Now* global partnership.