



SOUTH-SOUTH YOUTH PLATFORM STRATEGIES AND VISIONS



Partners in Population and Development (PPD)
An Inter-Governmental Organization
Promoting South-South Cooperation



December 2022

SOUTH-SOUTH YOUTH PLATFORM STRATEGIES AND VISIONS

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Foreword

The Partners in Population and Development (PPD) is an intergovernmental initiative, established for the purpose of expanding and institutionalizing South-South cooperation in the fields of reproductive health, population, and development. Launched at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), PPD began its journey with ten developing countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America, who formed an alliance to facilitate the implementation of the Cairo Program of Action (POA). Over the decades, PPD has extended its membership, with a total of 27 developing countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, who have united under its organizational umbrella.

In 2024, the 30th anniversary of the ICPD and PPD will be observed, which compelled us to reflect back on our journey and identify areas where more cooperation is urgently required. With 60% of the global population residing in PPD member states, including a massive share of the youth population, we decided it was time that we had taken measures to form an intergenerational alliance with young people who are more connected, politically aware, and action-oriented than even before. One of the key areas on which PPD's current strategic plan (2020-2024) is centered is the demographic dividend, which will elude our grasp if we fail to mainstream the youth into our global population and development agendas.

As a result, in 2022, the PPD in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) unveiled a youth-oriented platform called the South-South Youth Platform (SSYP), which is set to facilitate youth engagement and mobilization in the fields of reproductive health, population, and development through South-South and Triangular Cooperation. The PPD family is proud to publish this report, which marks our utmost commitment to this platform and the countless promising youth of the Global South.

The report shines a spotlight on the journey of the South-South Youth Platform (SSYP) thus far, delineates its objectives and action plans, reflects on the milestones already achieved and the lessons learned, includes valuable insights of youth leaders from the developing world, and develops practical strategies for the future.

We express our sincerest gratitude to those who will read the report and share their valuable feedback toward promoting youth engagement in the fields of reproductive health, population, and development.



H.E. Ms. Lindiwe Zulu, MP

Chair of PPD Board & Honourable
Minister for Social Development,
Government of the Republic
of South Africa.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

The Partners in Population and Development (PPD), a global Intergovernmental Organization (IGO) comprising 27 developing countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, represents 60% of the world population, including a large share of the youth population¹. In collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the PPD seeks to promote population and reproductive health agenda for sustainable development through youth-led South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). With the aim of accelerating the achievement of the ICPD goals and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the PPD and UNFPA have thus jointly launched a unique platform for young people to engage in SSTC, called “South-South Youth Platform” (SSYP).

Currently, there are 1.8 billion adolescents and youth between the ages of 10 and 24, marking the largest youth generation in history. In fact, half of the world population is comprised of people aged 30 or under, which is likely to reach 57% by 2030². Yet the age balance in politics, employment, health and justice have been decidedly unfavorable towards young people, who face numerous barriers. Without the active involvement of the youth, the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and ICPD²⁵ Commitments remains wanting.

Moreover, due to barriers to reliable reproductive health information and adequate health care, the youth face a higher risk of unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted infections and diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and sexual coercion in the post-COVID era. The pandemic has also exacerbated the trends around domestic abuse and child marriage, increased the burden of unpaid household work, and disrupted the educational and health systems worldwide – all of which are adversely affecting today’s young people. There is thus a felt need for a youth-oriented platform undertaking programmatic interventions such as advocacy on the policymaking level, capacity building, production and exchange of technology and in-depth knowledge about barriers to youth empowerment, raising awareness among young people about their rights and obligations, and others. To this end, as developing countries recover from the external shocks induced by the pandemic and other global challenges, the South-South Youth Platform (SSYP) has been launched to facilitate youth engagement and mobilization.

1. Partners in Population and Development. “Annual Report 2020.” (2020).

2. United Nations Population Fund. “The power of 1.8 billion: adolescents, youth and the transformation of the future.” UNFPA State of the World Population 2014 (2014).

2. OBJECTIVES:

- a. Establish a dynamic and interactive platform that will foster, promote and utilize youth engagement in a bid to bolster population and reproductive health agenda in the post-COVID era.
- b. Institutionalize South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) and promote its utility in facilitating youth mobilization and delivering on the promises of ICPD25 and the SDGs.
- c. Utilize social media platforms to connect, educate and empower young people of the developing countries.
- d. Establish an inclusive, sustainable and youth-led forum for exchange of knowledge and technical support.
- e. Build the capacity of young minds so that a new generation of change makers can rise to the occasion and help achieve the 2030 Agenda and the ICPD25 Commitments.

a. Youth Engagement and Mobilization

Forming engaging and meaningful partnership with the youth, with a view to positively impacting the population and reproductive health dynamics across the developing world, has been an indispensable objective of the PPD since its inception. Representing more than a quarter of the global population, today's adolescents and youth stand on the precipice of a brave new world, which must be steered ahead with their active and informed participation.

Adolescence is when young people make life-changing choices regarding their reproductive health and rights, which go on to shape the overall trajectory of their lives. It is a period of transformation and incredible growth; and young people must thus be made aware of their rights and given a seat at the table. It is unfortunate that, while being both the beneficiaries of the global development agendas and crucial partners in their implementation, the youth are rarely consulted or have been integrated in the processes of policy development. Mainstreaming youth, on the other hand, would ensure the inclusion of young people and result in balanced and timely policy outcomes.

Covid-19 has shown us how, despite being one of the most affected cohorts of the population, young people have admirably played an active and diverse role in mitigating the adverse consequences of the pandemic through their activism, resilience, collective action and technological expertise³. Moreover, developing countries in the South, with large shares of adolescents and youth, currently have a rare and short-lived opportunity to reap the full benefits of the demographic dividend, which could greatly accelerate the process of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the ICPD25 Commitments.

b. Leveraging South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC)

South-South Cooperation (SSC) has been defined as a process “whereby two or more developing countries pursue their individual and/or shared national capacity development objectives through exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how, and through regional and interregional collective action, including partnerships involving governments, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector, for their individual and/or mutual benefit within and across regions.”⁴ It does not seek to replace North-South cooperation, rather serves to complement it.

3. United Nations. “Protecting and mobilizing youth in COVID-19 responses| Department of Economic and Social Affairs.” (2020).

4. Geraldine Dolan. “ILO South-South and triangular cooperation and decent work: Recent developments and future steps.” (2018).

Triangular Cooperation, on the other hand, refers to the process through which South–South Cooperation is supported and facilitated by a northern partner, which could be a traditional donor country, a rising economy and/or a multilateral organization.

SSTC has been acknowledged as an important vehicle to advance multilateral cooperation by a number of international frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), the Paris Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda among others.

c. Utilizing Social Media

As of April 2022, the number of active internet users has reached 5 billion globally, who spend around 2.45 hours every day roaming the digital space.⁵ The advent of the internet, particularly the social media platforms, has catapulted the communications sector into a new age.

In an unprecedented development that has transcended borders, races, religions and ethnicities, adolescents and youth are currently more connected to each other than any other generation in history. Around 70% of the youth from around the world are now online,⁶ and have effectively used the social media platforms both as a deeply personal space as well as a site for collection action and political organization.

With its prevalence and wide acceptance, social media continues to have the rather untapped potential to be the most powerful tool to promote youth-led advocacy and disseminate development solutions.

d. Production and Exchange of Knowledge

While the integration of youth into formal decision making processes has become a much repeated commitment on the part of national governments and multilateral organizations, there remains nonetheless a significant dearth of relevant data to inform policy formulations that could result in inclusive and just outcomes. The digital gap among young people, which keeps a significant portion of the global youth population switched off to digital connectivity, also requires attention and immediate interventions.

A strong youth policy, whether sub-nation, national or international in scope and impact, must be evidence-based, supported by the most updated and accurate data that reflects the heterogeneous character of the developing world's diverse youth population. In this vein, the origins, operation, trajectory and impact of youth platforms from around the world must be vigorously researched and reviewed.

In addition, youth leaders and activists must be consulted and brought together to share their first-hand experiences, insights and challenges in an effort to inform and guide the present and future youth-oriented strategies and programs of PPD and UNFPA.

5. Statista Research Department. "Worldwide digital population July 2022." (2022)

6 United Nations Population Fund. "My Body, My Life, My World Rights and choices for all adolescents and youth: a UNFPA global strategy." (2019).

e. Capacity Building

Today, 12 million adolescents, aged 12-17, are out of secondary school, and only 23% of the refugee adolescents attend schools.⁷ Globally, 24 million children will never enter a classroom.⁸ Moreover, around 3 in 4 youth from 92 countries lack digital, secondary-level and job-specific skills to obtain employment.⁹ As a result, countries of the Global South are undergoing a skills crisis with the increasing drop-out rates and falling secondary skill levels among the youth. With this pace, the demographic dividend will remain unrealized and the much-needed economic growth out of reach for many developing countries.

It is thus not enough to engage and mobilize youth if they lack the capacity to meet new challenges and formulate effective solutions. State and non-state actors, both, should join hands at this critical juncture and invest in the capacity development of youth.

7. United Nations Population Fund. “My Body, My Life, My World Rights and choices for all adolescents and youth: a UNFPA global strategy.” (2019).

8. UNESCO, UIS. “A growing number of children and adolescents are out of school as aid fails to meet the mark.” (2015).

9. UNICEF and the Education Commission. “Recovering learning: are children and youth on track in skills development?.” (2022)

3. ON REFLECTION: MILESTONES AND LESSONS

The South-South Youth Platform, as a joint PPD-UNFPA initiative, was set in motion in the latter part of 2021, and has sought to host a series of youth-oriented activities since September 2022. Owing to the pandemic, the activities were mostly held online, and as a result, attained a large share of reach and engagement among young people over the span of four months.

Under the umbrella of this platform, advocacy and communications materials including social media content, audio visual/pictorial/video, edutainment content, data visualizations, presentations and press releases have been regularly published. Webinars, focusing on adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), youth-led SSTC, and the first-hand experiences of youth representatives, have been released. Social media platforms were extensively used to reach a diverse mix of young people and disseminate critical messages about gender equality, bodily autonomy, reproductive rights and justice, and other salient issues.

In addition, a month-long digital campaign was launched which sought to facilitate the production and exchange of knowledge, and finally, build the capacity of young people from different corners of the Global South. A call for concept notes, an essay competition and a photography competition and exhibition were organized, utilizing social media platforms in the post-pandemic world, to engage, educate and mobilize the youth for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and the ICPD Agenda. Finally, measures to cultivate a productive relationship with the media and organize the scattered networks of local youth-led organizations in various member states into a single youth network were prioritized.

a. Harnessing Youth Engagement to Address SRHR through SSTC in Post-Covid Era

A webinar, titled, “Harnessing Youth Engagement to Address SRHR through SSTC in Post-COVID Era,” was held on September 22, 2022. The webinar sought to address effective ways to create a new generation of human resources, who would commit to the responsibility of promoting and protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) around the world in the post-COVID era.

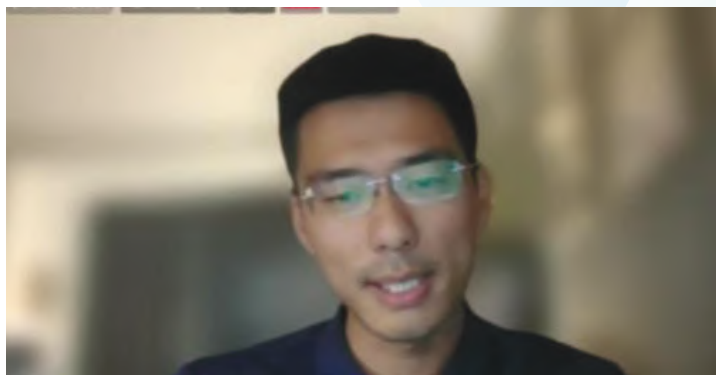
The webinar began with welcome remarks from **Mr. Linton Mchunu**, Acting Director General for Social Development, South Africa. “Looking back at the recent pandemic-ravaged years, we can see that the youth around the world have faced and overcome unique challenges. While they have been some of the most adversely affected age groups, young people have also emerged as the most active, innovative and responsible global players in their response to the pandemic. This webinar is one instance of a series of activities that we have and will continue to undertake in an effort to facilitate intergenerational solidarity,” he said.



Mr. Bobby M. Olarte, Senior Adviser, Inter-Country Cooperation, Policy and Strategy, Division, United Nations Population Fund New York, elaborated on youth mobilization through South-South and Triangular Cooperation during his brief speech, stating, “South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) is a development modality whereby developing countries share knowledge and resources across borders, guided by the principles of equality and mutual benefits. As we know, young people are natural networkers; today they have the

largest online presence. They have the energy and capacity to learn from each other, which is what SSTC is all about. The newly created “South-South Youth Platform (SSYP)” aims to enhance the means by which the youth can share knowledge and form partnerships.”

Mr. Junjian Gaoshan, Youth Leader from China, said “I am glad to see that the UNFPA and PPD are continuing to take action to engage young people, and that these intergovernmental bodies see value in what the youth have to say. COVID is of course a very personal topic to me, as I believe it is to everyone else here. I was home-quarantined for months; I developed severe anxiety and personally suffered from the unprecedented disruption in the education system. COVID also had adverse ripple effects on SRHR. I am hopeful that we can put SRH services and education back on track, restore our faith and build back our communities.”



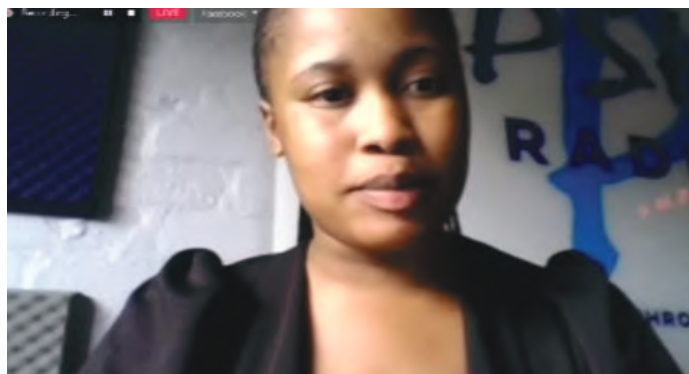
Ms. Triza Chirwa, Youth Advocate of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights from Malawi, highlighted a number of socio-economic challenges faced by the youth from her country in the post-COVID era, which limited their access to sexual and reproductive health services.

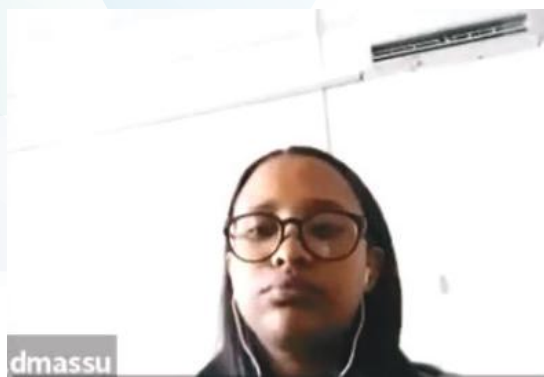
“While most SRHR interventions are undertaken by youth organizations in Malawi, they operate at the local

district level and cannot satisfactorily deliver the SRHR package due to gaps in knowledge, lack of funding and policy constraints. On the other hand, numerous advocacy initiatives have indeed been launched with a view to determining the most useful ways to address the needs of adolescents and youth. Yet the voices of young people continue to be neglected at all levels,” she said.

“Moreover, the additional challenge that we face in Malawi is being unable to openly advocate for the sexual and reproductive rights of minority groups like LGBTQ due to various cultural and religious constraints.”

Ms. Nthabiseng Mogashoa, Youth Leader from South Africa emphasized the need for an integrated approach towards promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence in the post-COVID era. “While major investments to improve access to and reduce inequalities in the health-care services have been made, there remain several systemic challenges. Through increased youth engagement, this can be remedied,” she expressed hope.





Ms. Loza Admassu, Youth leader from Ethiopia discussed her local youth-led podcast, named “Tankua,” which holds weekly talks on sexual and reproductive health and rights. “Tankua is a pandemic baby, born of our despair at having been separated from our target groups. Tankua refers to a small boat in Amharic, the Ethiopian Semitic language. Through this podcast, we try to empower youth leaders, raise awareness about SRHR, spread evidence-based and scientific information, and empower women and girls,” she stated.

In order to integrate the youth into global development agendas, she recommended that access to the internet should be improved to bridge the digital skills gap and more advocacy initiatives ought to be launched to promote awareness of SRHR.

Mr. Mohammad Mamun Mia, Youth Leader from Bangladesh put forward suggestions regarding youth friendly health services, such as mobile health booths, and the integration of male family members in development activities. He also noted the importance of adopting an intersectional approach in addressing SRHR in the context of the COVID-19 recovery plan. Without considering issues related to gender, race and class across societies and nations, we cannot adequately meet, or even comprehend the challenges facing us today, he argued.



Ms. Tahrima Khan, Senior Programme Officer at PPD Secretariat, noted, “Despite our efforts, it is true that a digital divide exists among the young people, which demands an intersectional approach and creative solutions. Today, we are actively encouraging the governments of developing countries to bridge the technological divide among the youth. Meanwhile, we are determined to accelerate our efforts to reach the most vulnerable youth populations, young migrants, homeless youth, adolescents and children facing the growing threat of domestic violence. While COVID-19 pandemic has indeed set us back, there is

hope for recovery, that much we are certain. And, much of that optimism comes from listening to our youth leaders speak.”

The webinar ended with an interactive Q/A session, remarks and recommendations from audience members.

The youth panelists advanced the following recommendations:

1. Government and non-government bodies ought to accelerate efforts to bridge the digital divide among the young people and help bring about an equitable age of information.
2. The sexual and reproductive health and rights of LGBTQ community ought to be given due importance in all conversations on SRHR.
3. Young people do not constitute a monolith. As a result, an intersectional approach, which takes into account matters of race, class, religion, gender, age and disability among others, requires to be adopted to identify and reach the most vulnerable youth populations across the world.
4. Considering the enormous influence of male family members, especially in the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal systems, they should be treated as a primary target group of all awareness-raising initiatives, and integrated in development activities.
5. Alongside digital platforms, the traditional media, including radio, TV, newspapers and billboards, should be simultaneously utilized to promote SRHR.
6. While youth engagement is imperative to address SRHR in the post-COVID era, forming substantive partnerships with the youth and helping build their capacity will further facilitate their integration in the formal decision-making processes.
7. During natural disasters caused by deteriorating climate change, it must be ensured that young girls can afford and access menstrual products.
8. All necessary measures should be taken to tackle period poverty adversely affecting low-income girls.
9. Governments around the world need to implement comprehensive sexuality education, both in schools and outside schools through community-based training and outreach, so that young people can make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, and the stigma associated with SRHR can be eliminated.

b. Social Media Campaign

A digital campaign, utilizing social media platforms, was launched in September 2022, with the aim of primarily targeting young people and youth-led organizations from the PPD member states, and secondarily targeting young activists, human rights educators, youth researchers, gender activists, governmental institutions and non-governmental youth organizations in developing countries.

Facebook and Twitter were primarily used to reach the target audiences. One of the most influential social media platforms, Facebook is ranked third in the world's most visited websites as of the third quarter of 2022. Its number of users has been on a steady rise, with 2.96 billion monthly active users today.¹⁰ Twitter, on the other hand, is a microblogging platform which has over 237.8 million daily active users as well as a diverse range of audience in terms of age groups.¹¹

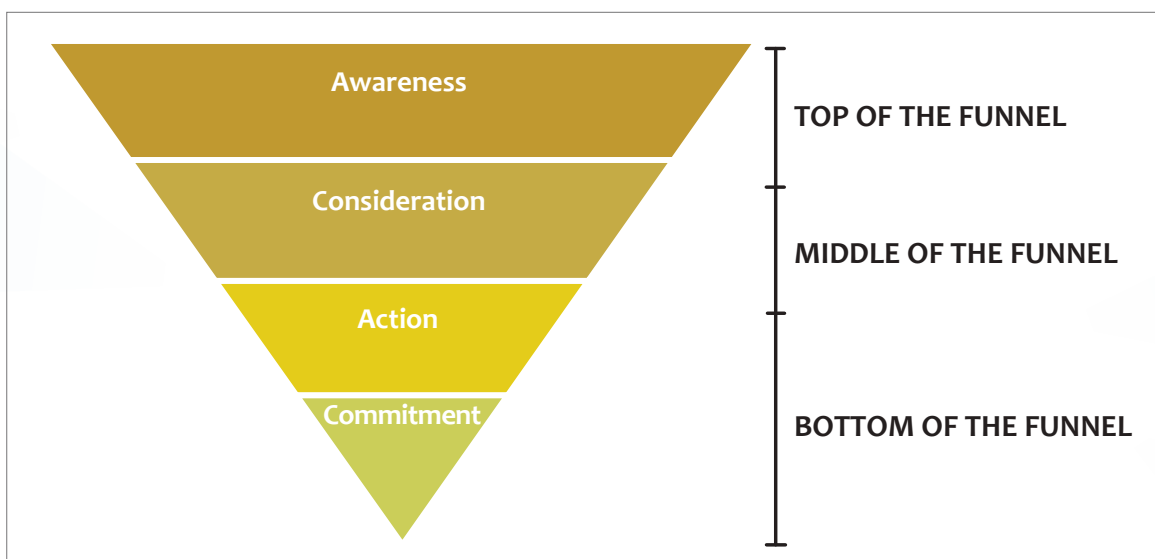


Figure 1: The Marketing Funnel

The Marketing Funnel, which is one of the most effective social media tools to adopt for non-profit campaigns, was employed to engage the target audiences of SSYP.

- a. Awareness: Becoming aware of the objectives of SSYP and the focal issues that the platform should pursue.
- b. Consideration: Evaluating whether the target audiences would indeed support the goals of SSYP.
- c. Action: Impactful actions taken to support and advance SSYP's advocacy.
- d. Commitment: Remaining determined to advance SSYP's advocacy goals and implementing sustainable action plans.

Over the span of four months (September-December), around 55,000 young people actively responded to SSYP's digital campaign; however, there remains a gender gap in reach and engagement, which must be mitigated onwards.

10. S. Dixon. "Facebook: quarterly number of MAU (monthly active users) worldwide 2008-2022." (2022).

11. S. Dixon. "Twitter: number of monetizable daily active users worldwide 2017-2022." (2022)

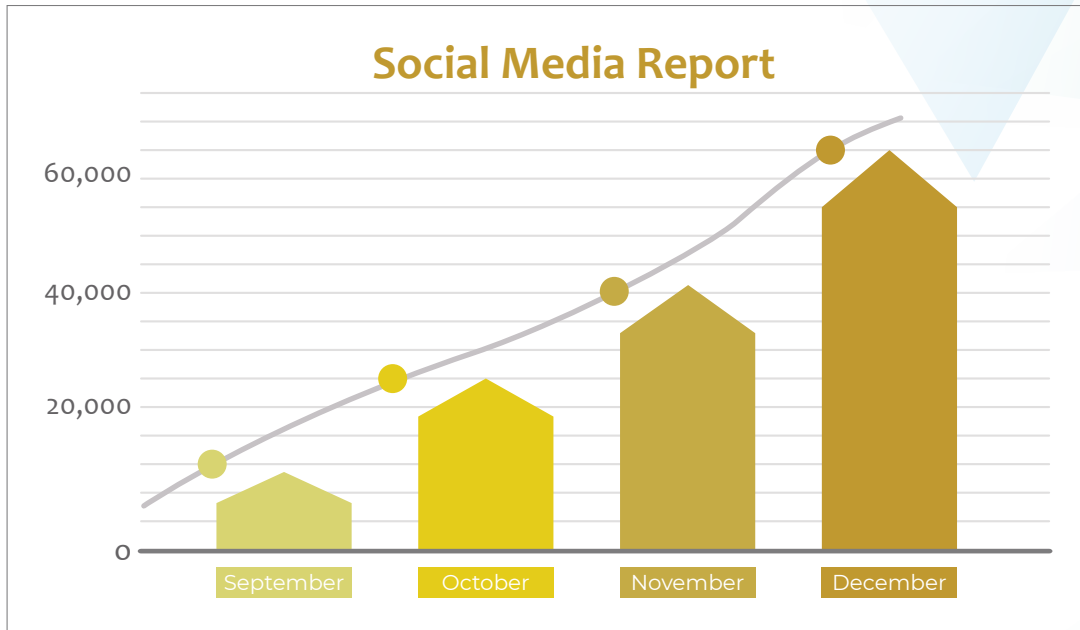


Figure 2: Social media reach and engagement of SSYP

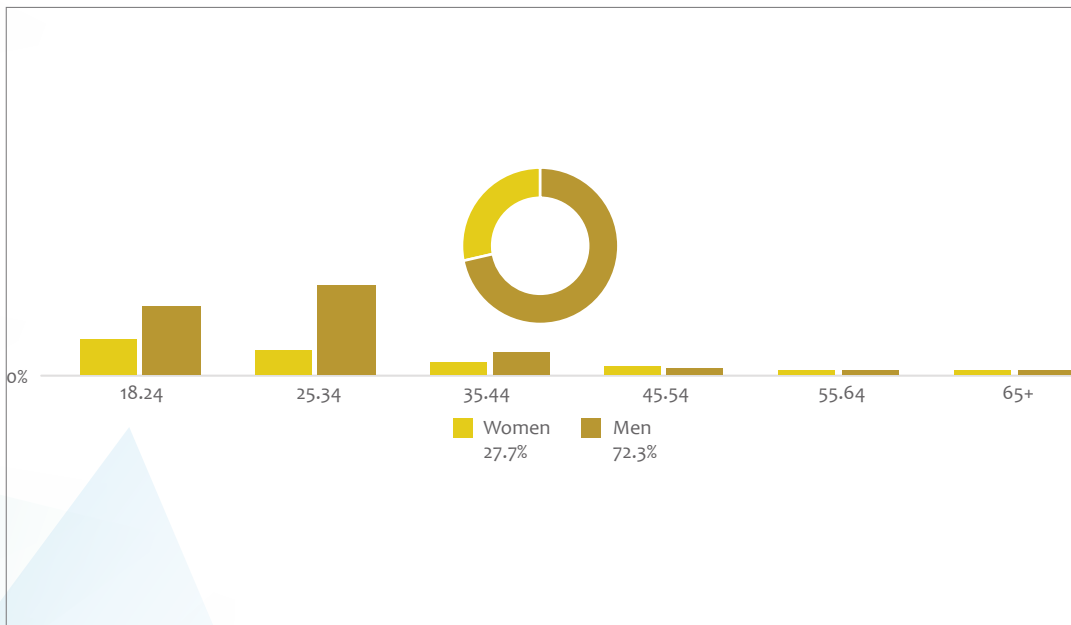


Figure 3: Age and gender of the engaged audience members

As part of the digital campaign, a call for concept notes, an essay competition and a photography competition and exhibition have been held from November 5, 2022, to November 30, 2022.

i. Essay Competition:

An essay competition was held to gain a deeper understanding into the perceptions of young people across the developing world and help build their capacity. It aimed to encourage youth to reflect on the development issues, identify extant problems, and recommend creative solutions.

The 1000-word essays were limited to the following topics:

1. How can South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) as a development modality help mobilize youth and achieve the 2030 Agenda and the ICPD25 Commitments?
2. Explore the challenges to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the ICPD Agenda, facing the countries of the Global South, in light of the current global crises.

ii. Call for Concept Notes:

A month-long call for concept notes was held for the young minds of the Global South to encourage innovative thinking, form new partnerships and highlight the lessons learned and best practices on leveraging youth involvement to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ICPD agenda. More importantly, the objective was to inspire young people to proactively think about problems facing their own communities and provide a comprehensive project plan to resolve them through a bottom-up approach.

The applicants were encouraged to consider local contexts, integrate the vulnerable and marginalized groups as well as solutions to bridge the digital divide among young people across the Global South. This competition segment also sought to reform the prevailing notion of ageism that reduces opportunities for the youth and integrate them into the formal decision-making processes, political mechanisms, and global development agendas.

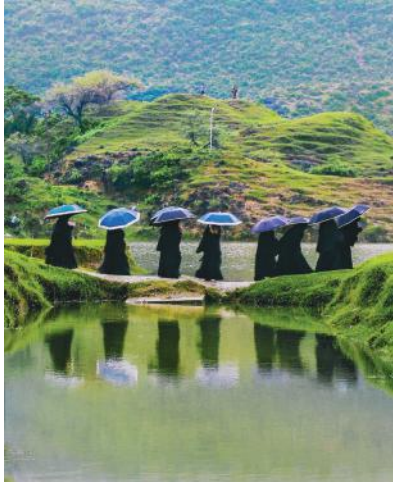
The concept note was held on the following topic: “Mainstreaming Youth to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ICPD agenda in the post-COVID context.”

iii. Photography Competition & Exhibition:

Photos tell compelling stories about humanity, the tides of time, and the triumphs and losses of mankind. They keep us grounded in the present moment, while building a bridge with our past and igniting hope for a better future. Often, photos put a human face on matters that are either too complex or elusive, at times both. More importantly, they transcend borders and effortlessly communicate what words fail to capture.

A photography competition was held throughout November for young people, aged 15-29, on the following themes: 1. Faces of the Global South, 2. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

A two-day virtual exhibition took place on December 21-22, 2022, featuring the following selected photographs curated from the competition.



AHMED SHAFAYET MOSTAFA



TOMAL DAS



MITHUN BISWAS



SHAH MD. SHAHIDUL ISLAM SHAHI



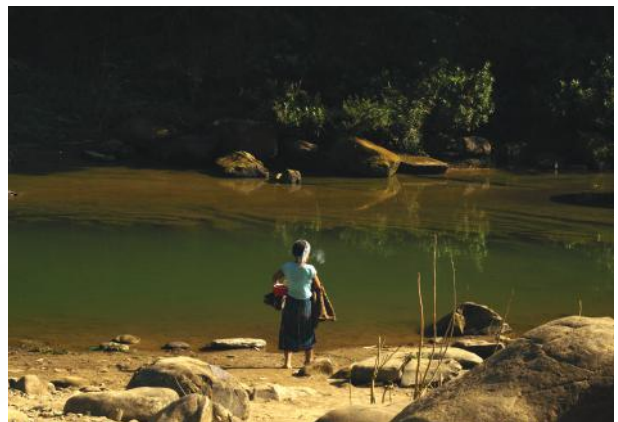
SHAKIB HOSSAIN



ASIF AHMED



OUEDRAOGO S.R ABDLOU AZIZ



ZARIF TASHDEED



MD. TANVIR AHMED



MD. TANVIR AHMED



SHAKIB HOSSAIN



SHAKIB HOSSAIN



ASIF AHMED



ASIF AHMED



MD. ASADULLAH



MD. ASADULLAH



HASAN MEHEDI AMIN



RAHI ABDULLAH



BIPUL AHMED



LAM-YA TASNIM



NTHABISENG MOGASHOA



DR. JANNATUL MEHJABIN



ANICK BHUIYAN



SABIDUL ISLAM



FARID AHMED RAFI

c. Engaging Youth: Curating Innovative Solutions to Push Forward the ICPD Agenda and the SDGs

A webinar, titled, “Engaging Youth: Curating Innovative Solutions to Push Forward the ICPD Agenda and the SDGs,” was held on December 21, 2022, featuring the youth champions from around the developing world, who participated in a number of competitions on concept notes, essays and photography, held by PPD and UNFPA throughout November 2022.



Ms. Tahrifa Khan, Senior Programme Officer at the PPD Secretariat, moderated the webinar, which she began with a few introductory remarks. She thanked the panelists, colleagues and guests for attending the discussion session and the virtual exhibition.

“Broadly speaking, today’s webinar, held by the PPD in collaboration with the UNFPA, has three objectives. First, engaging the youth; second, curating and listening to creative

solutions provided by young people from the developing countries, and third, advocating for the ICPD mandate and the SDG 2030 agenda,” she continued. “This webinar also marks the conclusion of our one-month digital campaign which included a call for concept notes, essay competition and photography competition. Our campaign was met with enormous support and enthusiastic submissions from all over the world, including Gambia, South Africa, China, India, Malawi, Bhutan, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Nepal, Kenya, Myanmar, Tanzania and others.”

“We have reviewed all the submissions, and were astonished at the incredible capacity of our young people to critically discuss the global issues that plague us all. We have short selected some of those submissions from each category, which will be presented by the young participants today,” she added.

Mr. Oliver Zambuko, Deputy Director for Population Policy & Strategy Monitoring & Evaluation, Ministry of Social Development South Africa welcomed all the participants and conveyed his thanks to the PPD staff for successfully organizing the event. “The Partners in Population and Development (PPD) is committed to promoting and strengthening the population and reproductive health agenda for sustainable development within the frameworks of the global development agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ICPD Programme of Action. Therefore, PPD’s strategic focus includes an emphasis on encouraging and investing in the meaningful mobilization of youth as an important cohort of the population for our collective, sustainable future,” he said.



“Today, a great opportunity beckons us, while uncertainty takes over many parts of the world. With more than 60% of the global youth population residing in developing countries, which is by far the largest youth generation in history, we hold the key to a brief window of opportunity to realize the potential of the demographic dividend, given that we invest our time and collective resources to engage and empower our young people. It is time that we extend our hands and build a new sustainable alliance. And, this webinar and exhibition are instances of many activities and programmatic interventions that we have and will continue to undertake in an effort to facilitate intergenerational solidarity,” he added.

Mr. Oliver Zambuko ended his remarks by congratulating the youth champions on excelling at disseminating evidence-based and scientific information regarding the population and reproductive health agendas through creative means.



From China, **Ms. Iris (Jingyun) Pi**, who is the Co-Founder of Stories to Action and a member of the Global Young People’s Action Team (YPAT) at Generation Unlimited, presented her concept note on “Mainstreaming Youth to Achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ICPD Agenda in the Post-Covid Context.” She began by interacting with the audience members, asking them to reflect on who the youth are to them, what images they associate with the youth, and why it is important to work with the youth of the Global South. Later, she delved deep into a

range of activities to facilitate youth mainstreaming in her presentation, including recurrent youth consultations, social media campaigns, youth oriented podcasts, consultation reports and evidence briefs, and monitoring and evaluation.

“Young people today are more connected, creative, knowledgeable, and driven to take action than ever before. Youth is itself a very diverse and inclusive group that comes from different racial, gender, socioeconomic, ethnic, and ability backgrounds. My concept note revolves around how the South-South Youth Platform (SSYP) can effectively create a strong youth support network to empower the young people of the Global South, and build intergenerational partnerships in reproductive health, population and development,” she said.

Mr. Ishmael Shalid, who is the Executive Director of Malawi-based Development Network for Youth Empowerment (DENEYE) and a vocal advocate for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), presented his concept note on “DANEYE’s Human Rights, Education and Health Awareness Campaign.” He succinctly outlined the objectives of the campaign his concept note was based on, such as “envisioning a Malawian society where young people are economically independent, participate in ridding the society of HIV and AIDS, and uphold human rights, good governance and environmental conservation.” He also referred to the lack of funds adversely affecting implementation of life changing interventions and projects in response to achieving SDGs 2030 Agenda and ICPD 25.



“For the past two years, DENEYE has been implementing projects through meaningful partnerships, advocacy, and knowledge exchange. We believe our next project will help empower the youth, equip them with life-saving skills, integrate them in Malawi’s formal political processes and increase their access to sexual and reproductive health services. It gives me great pleasure to see that our local initiatives are gaining traction in international events like these,” he said.

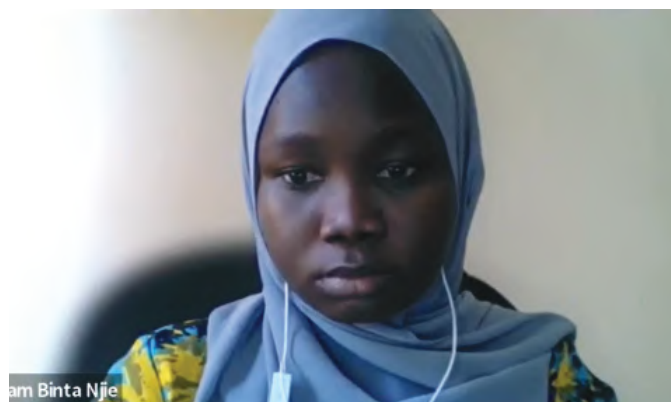


Ms. Tshering Yangden, who is a 20-year old law student from Bhutan, presented her essay on “Translating Why the SDGs and ICPD are Practicable in the Global South.” She said, “The expression ‘Global South’ serves as more than just a metaphor for underdevelopment. It makes reference to a lengthy period of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and diverse economic and social transformation, all of which contributed to significant disparities in living standards, life expectancy, and other aspects. Although the SDG and ICPD Agenda

could improve the current situation and bring the required changes, it is necessary to consider the challenges in implementing the sustainable development goals and ICPD agenda.”

She argued that the SDGs and ICPD agenda have immense potential to improve the living standards of many and save the lives of many men, women, and children from the existing social and economic issues. It is necessary to improve the implementation of these through the development of adequate infrastructure, coordination with multi-stakeholders and government sectors, and the practical translation of these goals into society with policies that do not overpromise but protect the vulnerable population.

Ms. Mam Bintu Njie, who is a highly skilled IT Support Technician and entrepreneur, currently employed at the Gambia Press Union (GPU) secretariat, presented her essay on “Exploring the challenges to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the ICPD Agenda, facing the countries of the Global South, in light of the current global crises.” She shone a light on five major challenges to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the ICPD Agenda in the Southern countries, namely, the lack of resources and funding, lack of political will and commitment, impact of climate change, lack of access to education and healthcare, and gender inequality and discrimination.



Addressing and overcoming these challenges will require significant efforts and multi-sectoral collaboration between governments, international organizations, and civil society, she said.

Mr. Bipul Ahmed, a photographer from Bangladesh, extended his thanks to the UNFPA and PPD for organizing the photography exhibition and several youth-oriented competitions on globally relevant subject matters. He expressed hope that the two organizations will continue to jointly arrange such events in the future.



He began his presentation by explaining the themes of his selected photo, “My photograph is symbolic. What I meant to thematically convey is that young people are vulnerable to a range of threats emanating from all around them if they don’t receive adequate knowledge about sex and reproduction. Adolescents have a fundamental right to know and make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health. They need to be aware of physical changes during puberty so that they can develop and prepare themselves for the future. Or they might remain extremely vulnerable to various physical and psychological risks, especially in the post-COVID era. Overall, it is a shame that many people in our society still do not take reproductive health seriously,” he said.

“Today, I am glad to see that governments around the Global South are recognizing the importance of investing in adolescent health as a vehicle for the future development of their societies,” he added.



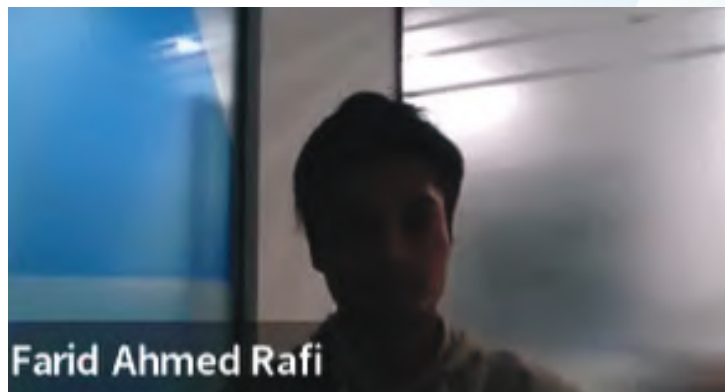
Ms. Nthabiseng Mogashoa, who is a 21-year old outspoken youth leader and radio personality from South Africa, began her photo presentation by quoting Alfred Stieglitz, who once said, “In photography there is a reality so subtle that it becomes more real than reality.”

She stated that photography as a medium can be used to document, move, and inspire action; it can be wielded as a strategic tool to reflect on and address the world from one’s innate sense of authenticity and truth. She

further explained the theme of her photograph, where a mother is showing healthy and respectful expressions of love to her adolescent son as per a native cultural ritual.

“Photography is a useful medium to get to know and be known; more importantly it is a tool to eradicate false realities and dismantle stereotypical forms of representation. Visual advocacy is the key to constructing ethical, creative and effective cultural usage of images, especially when we are talking about the most vulnerable adolescents and youth around the developing world,” she said.

Mr. Farid Ahmed Rafi, is a 20-year old young photographer, whose area of specialty is urban photography. During his presentation, he recollected an otherwise eventless day, hours of which he spent waiting for a unique moment to capture. When all on a sudden he saw a mother entering a mosque with two of her sons, and proceeding to teach them how to pray Salah, he found the moment he was looking for.



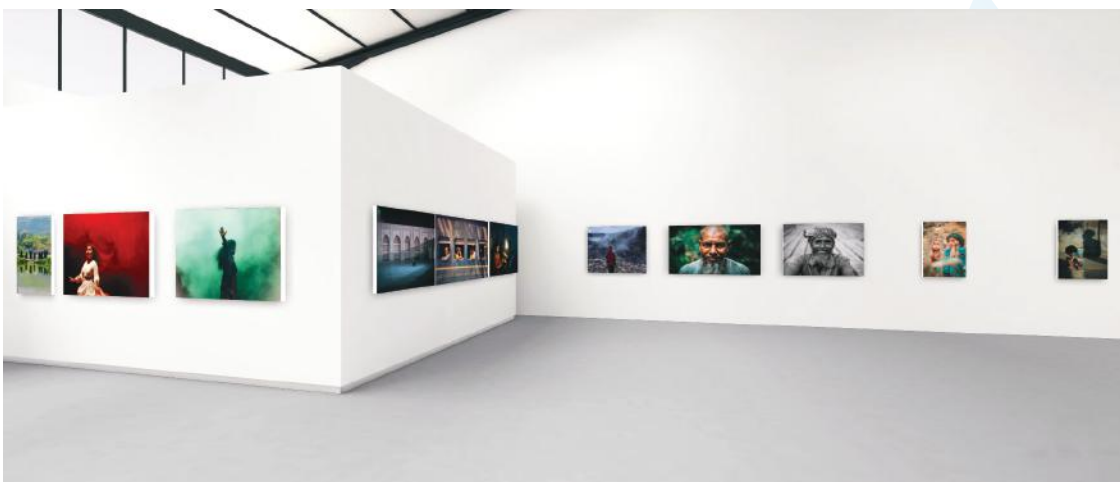
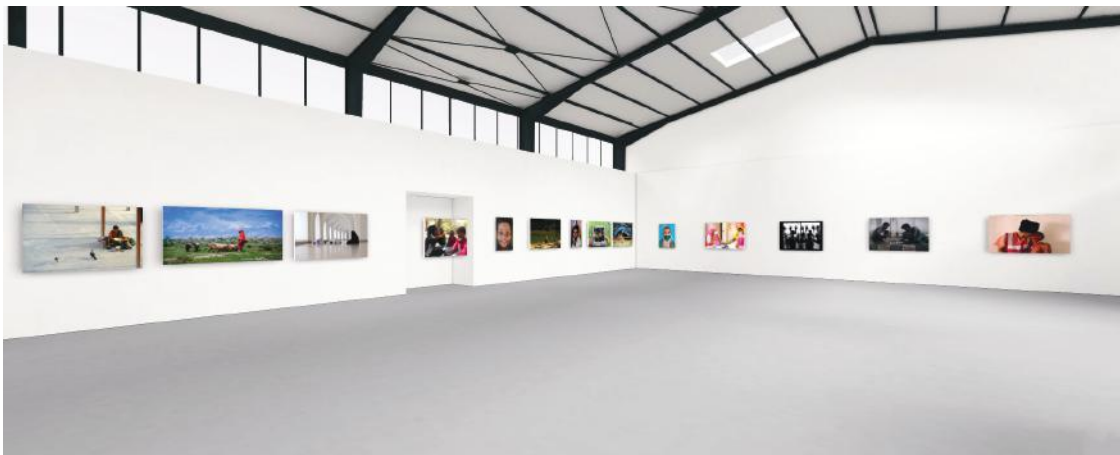
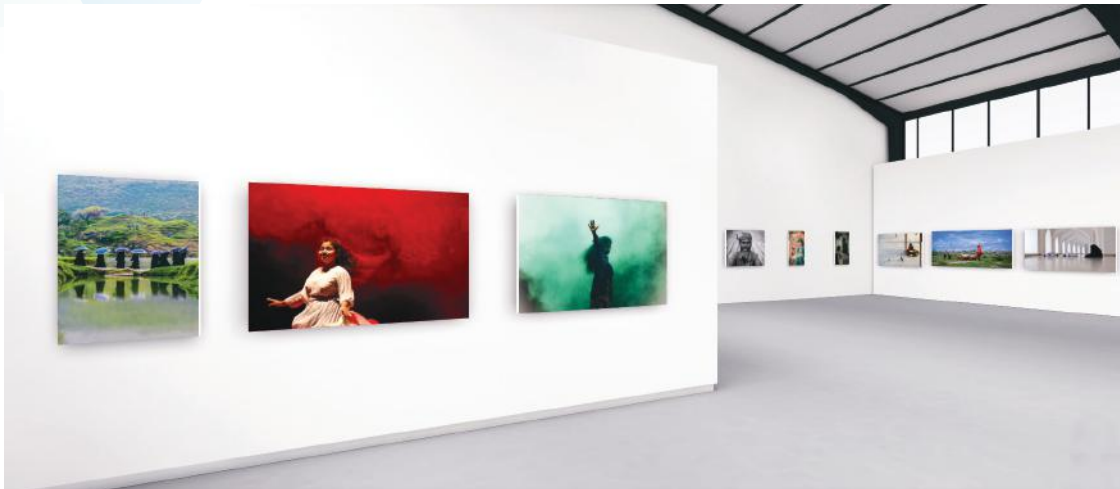
“One of the themes of this photography competition was ‘Faces of the Global South,’ which my photo sought to capture and explore. When we talk about the developing world or the global south, images of a long series of problems come to mind. But the global south is so much more than that. We are strong together in our values, our respect for the common humanity in all of us, our family unity, our devotion and local cultures. In every corner of my country, there is a story of love and sacrifice unfolding every day. So, when we go around trying to find the face of the global south, I want to make sure through my visual storytelling that the stories like the one in my photo do not get lost,” he added.



Mr. Khandaker Humayun Kabir (Shishir), Acting Officer-in-Charge, PPD, provided the vote of thanks at the end of the webinar. “It has been such an honor to be part of this wonderful event. On behalf of PPD, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Oliver Zambuko, Deputy Director for Population Policy & Strategy Monitoring & Evaluation, Ministry of Social Development South Africa, for his encouraging remarks. We have all been very inspired by the presentations delivered by the youth

champions today. Finally, I would like to thank all the guests present here today for taking time from your busy schedules and attending this event,” he said.

Later, he took all the guests on a virtual tour of the exhibition, featuring 25 selected photographs from the developing countries, and discussed with the attending guests about the details and themes of the curated photographs. Finally, the webinar ended with a Q/A session, remarks and recommendations from audience members.



The youth champions advanced the following recommendations:

1. Mainstreaming youth and gender to achieve the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the ICPD agenda in the post-COVID context.
2. Strengthening engagement with local communities on the prevention and abolition of harmful cultural practices that prohibit adolescents and youth access to sexual and reproductive health rights and services (SRHRS).
3. Facilitating establishment of groups of youth living with HIV/AIDS as rights advocacy groups, promoting positive living and hassle-free access to health and social services.
4. Organizing more youth-friendly programmes in line with the creative interests of today's youth with a view to engaging them and building their capacity.
5. Developing and implementing long-term advocacy and communications strategies for youth as one of the primary target groups.
6. Enhancing the social media presence of the South-South Youth Platform and actively developing user following, productive interactions and engagement.
7. Ensuring youth representation, especially of low-income women, migrants and refugees, persons with disabilities, and indigenous groups in all programmes of UNFPA and PPD.
8. Highlighting the inadequate coordination, disproportionate division of responsibility and lack of accountability in member states seeking to fulfil the SDGs and the ICPD mandate.
9. Building the capacity of SSTC focal persons in member states to effectively leverage youth engagement for attaining global development agendas.
10. Localization of the sustainable development goals by breaking down macro-level goals into achievable and practical goals.
11. Ensuring adequate financing and resource allocation in member states to meet the SDGs and ICPD promise.

4. VISION 2023: PATHWAYS TO EXPANSION

The South-South Youth Platform (SSYP) began its journey in September, 2022. The activities, held under the auspices of SSYP, initially aimed at solidifying the platform among young people in the digital sphere. However, as we approach the new year, the activities require scaling up in terms of scope, frequency and impact. New doors of participation and opportunities must be opened for a diverse number of young people to meaningfully and spontaneously engage with the platform. Aside from advocacy and communications campaigns, there needs to be an emphasis on policy advocacy and inclusive policy development that caters to and integrates the youth. Furthermore, the capacity development of SSTC focal persons in PPD member states is another area that requires urgent interventions.

a. Communications Guideline and Recommendations

The communications guideline for year 2023 includes measures to continue, expand and strengthen programmes in the following areas:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted the traditional communications sector, leading to a few surprising boons. One of which is the rising salience of digital communication, which has greatly facilitated knowledge generation and exchange among diverse actors.¹² SSYP should take advantage of this digital revolution and organize monthly **webinars** on topics related to population dynamics, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, demographic dividend, Sustainable Development Goals and the ICPD agenda. It would help bridge the gap between experts and young people, highlight diverse youth perspectives on development, and amplify voices of the young people. Additionally, a **policy dialogue** with stakeholders of the ministries and international agencies including UNFPA should be held to gain a deeper understanding into the existing national policies on youth development, and identify areas where more work ought to be done.
2. A 2019 survey conducted by PPD in 17 developing countries found that the management of the SSTC activities was facing a series of challenges because of a lack of comprehensive professional training and transfer of learning in developing countries. Less than 47% of the officials who were assigned in the respective ministries as focal persons were aware about triangular cooperation among developing countries or were adequately trained.¹³ Additionally, countries of the Global South are undergoing a skills crisis with the increasing drop-out rates and falling secondary skill levels among the youth. As a result, there needs to be an emphasis on organizing impactful **training programmes** for the focal persons to foster youth engagement through SSTC, well-defined intensive **workshops and peer learning sessions** to train youth professionals and a **mentorship programme** to nurture and build the capacity of vulnerable and disadvantaged youth groups in the developing countries. Moreover, PPD's **scholarship program**, which provides an excellent opportunity for young professionals to acquire new skills, accommodate new challenges, and build capacity for translating global commitments into national needs, ought to be strengthened and aligned with SSYP's objectives. As an extension of the scholarship programme, short **online courses and e-learning modules** could be made available for young people.

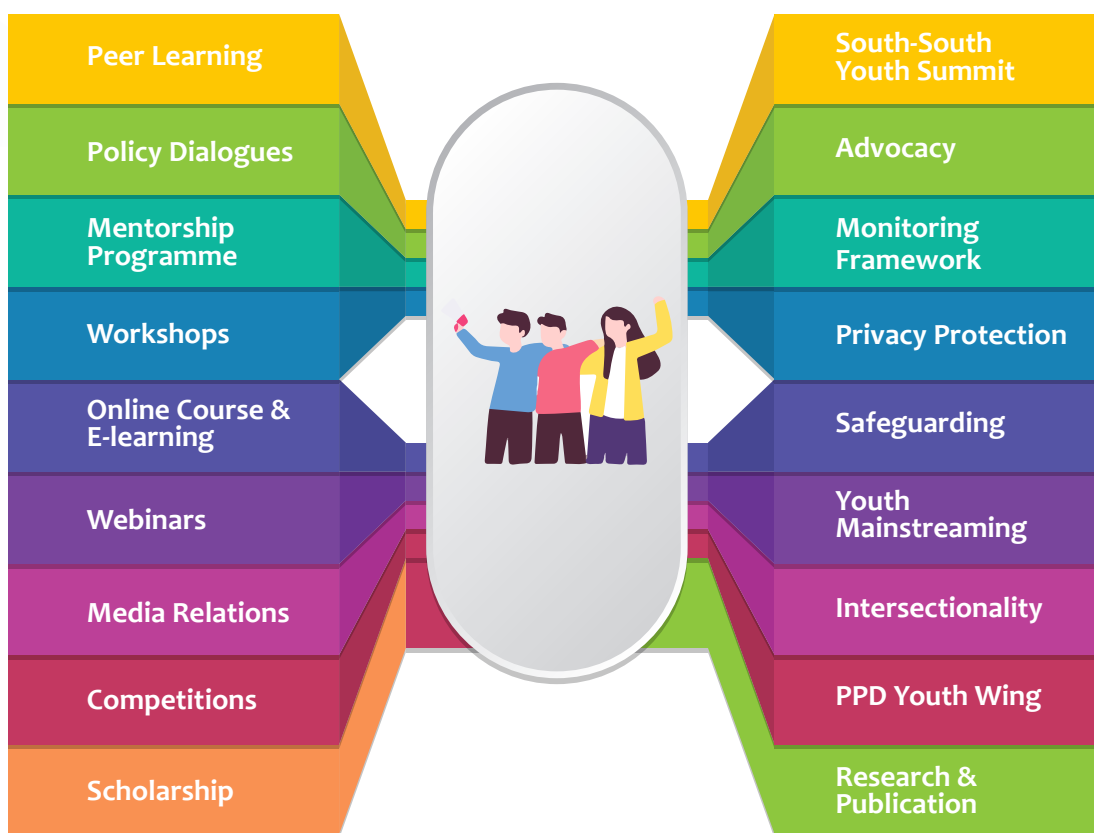
¹² Linda Hantrais, Paul Allin, Mihalis Kritikos, Melita Sogomonjan, Prathivadi B. Anand, Sonia Livingstone, Mark Williams & Martin Innes. "Covid-19 and the digital revolution." *Contemporary Social Science* 16, no. 2 (2021): 256-270.

¹³ Partners in Population and Development. "South-South Cooperation in Catalyzing Achievement of ICPD and SDGs 2030 Agenda." (2019).

3. Policy **research** and accumulation of robust **evidence** on best practices in population and development sectors involving the youth are indispensable to shape the future trajectory of SSYP. The platform should facilitate the publication of updated data reports, surveys, expert interviews, guidelines and standards, research articles and case studies to understand the current state and needs of young people from PPD member countries. In this vein, a **monitoring framework** needs to be developed to track and report on indicators across various targets in order to evaluate the efforts of member states for youth development and the outcome of their policies.
4. This year, the South-South Youth Platform (SSYP) organized three **competitions** for young people aged between 15 to 24 years, which resulted in healthy rivalry of ideas and increased youth engagement. In continuation of this tradition, the platform should expand the scope of these competitions to help build the capacity of its target group and explore new creative arenas of competition, such as creative writing, research, filmmaking, debate and others. Additionally, a **project pitching session** should be held, where the PPD will call for project ideas from the youth, seeking to deliver innovative solutions to issues plaguing the organization's areas of interest. Expert mentors will conduct a training session on a well-defined curriculum for the selected applicants, who will be subsequently assigned field work, and finally given grants for project implementation.
5. A **South-South Youth Summit**, serving as the culmination of the year-long programmes and competitions held under the auspices of SSYP, will tentatively take place during the latter part of 2023. Youth leaders from the member states will engage with each other, share first-hand insights and detail specific actions they have taken in their communities. Advancing inter-country youth coordination, the summit will host student delegates, young development professionals, youth activists and social innovators, government officials, media personnel, academia, civil society and development experts.
6. With the prevalence of social media, **privacy protection** has become an integral part of all digital communications plans. As a result, caution should be applied while posting on these platforms. Using the names, photos and personal social media handles of young people can pose serious risks of identity theft and blackmail among other cybercrimes. Before using personal data, young people must be made aware of the risks involved and provide clear privacy statements with their informed consent. Many social media platforms have safety guidelines and sophisticated reporting systems which must be utilized to protect young people. Facebook, for example, has Youth Portal, which provides safety tips and advice to navigate the virtual world.

Social media provides users a sense of anonymity along with impunity, which unfortunately often leads to the flourishing of abuse on these platforms. Strict safeguarding policies for SSYP must be formulated and exercised so that young people can interact with each other in a safe environment.
7. **In-country and inter-country media coordination** needs to be prioritized to enhance media-IGO interactions, disseminate information about the programmes held under the umbrella of SSYP, promote youth-led initiatives and raise mass awareness about the importance of integrating youth in formal political processes and development agendas.

8. Transforming **strategy into action** is contingent upon the cooperation and willingness of the respective ministries of PPD member states who are responsible to implement youth-friendly policies in the national work plans, ensure policy coherence, allocate funds for youth development, mainstream youth in the design and evaluation of in-country programmes, and build the capacity of young people from the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. To track and report on the progress achieved in the policy realm, a dedicated **youth wing of the PPD Secretariat** can be formed.
9. Young people do not constitute a monolith. As a result, an **intersectional approach**, which takes into account matters of race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, age and disability among others, needs to be adopted to identify and reach the most vulnerable youth populations across the world. For instance, in all conversations on sexual and reproductive health and rights by SSYP, especial attention must be paid to LGBTQ+ youth, homeless youth, migrant and refugee youth, low-income young women and other marginalized groups.



5. CONCLUSION

Research shows that young men and women help forge alliances across generations, perform tasks as “mobilizers,” positively influence the mindsets and perceptions of their family, community and local government, envision and design new methods of finishing the unfinished business of the global development agendas, and serve as “provocateurs” in an attempt to address the systemic injustices and biases.¹⁴ In other words, they play a multitude of diverse roles in varying local and international contexts, and add substantial value to the process of achieving the SDG and ICPD agendas. Nevertheless, the risk of overly instrumentalizing youth as a means to attain the demographic dividend is all too real. It is thus imperative that the policymakers and development experts recognize and appreciate the innate value of young people and support their aspirations to define themselves and their future in ways they see fit. In a similar vein, the South-South Youth Platform (SSYP) seeks to transform the visions and strategies for 2023 into action by the youth, for the youth and with the young, leaving no one behind.

¹⁴ Plan International UK and ADB. “What’s the Evidence? Youth Engagement and the Sustainable Development Goals.” (2018).

