



Honorable Minister of Health, YAG Members and other stakeholders during the National Dissemination Workshop on ASRH Response July 2009 in Abuja.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Ralia is a single 17-year old girl who lives in a semi-urban area in Nigeria. She first had sex when she was 15 years old without a clear understanding of the consequences. She believed she could not get pregnant until the day it happened. Ralia did not want to drop out of school, and she was afraid of the shame it would cause her parents and the man who got her pregnant. She was also worried about being too young to raise a child.

Ralia is just one of the millions of young girls facing these challenges in our society and there are many social and structural factors, ranging from lack of parent/child communication on sexual and reproductive health to inadequate information dissemination on preventing unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV. Enhanced political will help to have information and services readily available for youth to make informed choices that translate to healthy behaviors.

Budgetary allocation specific to youth reproductive and sexual health programming remains a critical issue that needs to be addressed to ensure effective program implementation for youth, a vulnerable population, with a diversity of needs.

### **Teen Pregnancy**

Nigeria is the most populous black nation with over 140 million people, of which 70% living below the poverty line are women.<sup>2</sup> There are multifarious and multifaceted social challenges facing the average young Nigerian woman today. Infringement of human rights, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and mourning rites; lack of access to reproductive health services and contraceptives; and sexual assault, are some of the many challenges that perpetuate the vulnerability of young women to unplanned pregnancies and STIs, including HIV.

Teen pregnancy is a problem that has impeded the development of Nigeria. Young people often initiate sexual activity without adequate knowledge or skills. Recent evidence shows that in Nigeria, most young adolescents aged 12-14 years are sexually active and by age 15, nearly 1 in 5 girls have had sex. <sup>1</sup> By age 18, between 40% and 60% of girls are sexually active.<sup>1</sup>

The risk of contracting STIs, including HIV, among young girls can never be overemphasized, particularly when many engage in unprotected sex. Consequently, many are faced with the choice of unsafe abortions which puts them at risk of infertility, reproductive health complications and even death. It is also not surprising then, that globally almost half of all new HIV infections occur among young people aged 15-24 years.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even with evidence of this reality at hand, the call to urgently provide comprehensive reproductive health information and services to this age group continues to generate controversy

Culture is very important and has been part of our development; however, it is important to discourage honesty with young people about their sexual health. Although these issues are often taboo, the reality is that sexuality is a part of young people's lives and we must ensure that they make responsible decisions

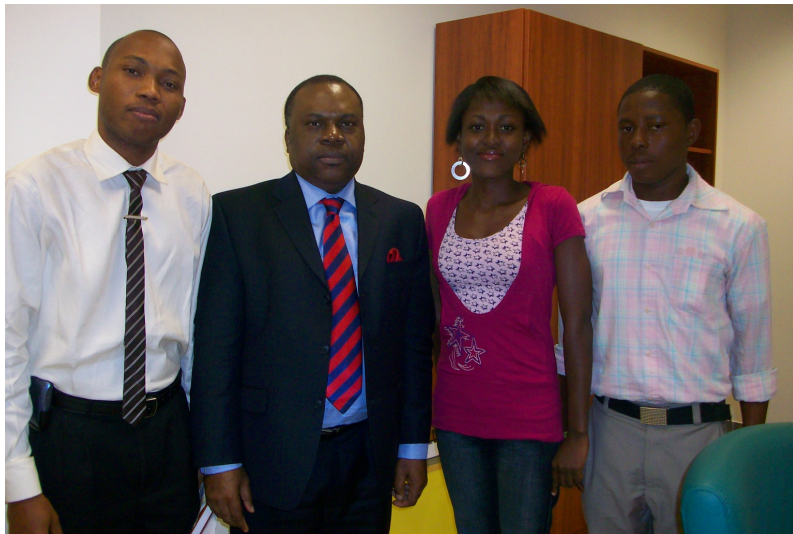
about their sexual and reproductive health. In addition, there are barriers that prevent young people from seeking information and services to help them make responsible decisions, including: fear and embarrassment, lack of knowledge on where to access information or services, unfriendly health care providers, and high costs for services and contraceptives, including condoms.

Depression, low self esteem, lower self efficacy, a tendency to resort to drug or alcohol abuse, and societal stigmas are also other barriers. It is alarming how many young girls have had an abortion (most times without parental consent), because they did not have access to information on commodities to prevent pregnancy.. Young people are not given the liberty to discuss sexual issues with adult allies either at home or schools. Thus they turn to the wrong sources as alternatives.

There is a need in Nigeria for education on reproductive health issues and access to services, There is need for governments and program implementers including faith – based and other community institutions to further support youth programs like the Family Life HIV/AIDS E through adequate budgeting and political will that provide information, such as commodities and services. To support such programs there is need to be specific budgetary allocation for adolescent reproductive and sexual health at national, state and local government levels. Policies should be created to accommodate pregnant school-age girls to return to school in order to complete their education following delivery.

### **Reference:**

1. Guttmacher institute report 2008,
2. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200906241074.html>



Youth Advocate Group Visit House Health Committee, National Assembly



YAG with the representatives of the Honorable Minister of Education

## Facts and Figures

### Did you know that?

- Young people constitute 55% of the 760,000 unsafe abortions taking place annually in Nigeria.<sup>1</sup>
- Half of women between the ages of 10-19 years have been or are sexually active.<sup>2</sup>
- A quarter of females aged 15-19 years in Nigeria had already begun child bearing as at 2003.<sup>3</sup>
- Babies born to mothers aged 15-19 are at least 30% more likely to die than babies born to mothers aged 20.<sup>4</sup>
- Between 1990-2003, the proportion of young people that know where to obtain contraceptives methods has declined from 31% to 18%.<sup>5</sup>
- Up to 100,000 maternal deaths could be avoided each year if unwanted pregnancy were prevented.<sup>6</sup>

Together we can take steps to ensure the survival of millions of young people especially girls.

Source: National Demographic Health Survey- 2003- 1, 2, 3

Gutmacher institute report on Unwanted pregnancy and

Induced abortion in Nigeria 2006- 4, 6

Gutmacher institute report on Teen pregnancy 2008 - 5

## THE INTERVIEW: TEEN PREGNANCY(transcribed from dialogue)

**JOY:** When did you get sexually active?

**FATIMA:** I experience it at the age of 14.

**JOY:** Did you know you could get pregnant?

**FATIMA:** He told me there is a way he would do it that can't lead to pregnancy and I accepted because I was ignorant and I liked him very much

**JOY:** You said ignorant?

**FATIMA:** Yes, because I thought he loved me and cared for me so I ignorantly believed him. He also insisted that we don't need a condom and that if we do it standing I could get pregnant.

**JOY:** What were your thoughts when you got to know that you were pregnant?

**FATIMA:** I wanted to die or get an abortion without my parent knowing or maybe from home or should I say I was very confused.

**JOY:** Confused?

**FATIMA:** What will my friends say? What about my parent? I thought of going to a clinic to seek advice.

**JOY:** Why go to far clinic and not telling your mum?

**FATIMA:** Because, I don't want people to know and I was really ashamed and wanted an abortion.

**JOY:** Well, Did you get any help from the clinic?

**FATIMA:** Yes but it wasn't easy; I didn't just have a choice. Initially the person who attended to me was a little bit disappointed by my situation and she was harsh because I was pregnant at the age of 15.

**JOY:** Could you please tell me the kind of help you got from the clinic?

**FATIMA:** I was advised not to terminate the pregnancy because I was 4 months pregnant at that time. She also said I should tell my parents about it before it got too late.

**JOY:** Were you able to tell your mum?

**FATIMA:** Yes I did but my mum was more than disappointed in me, but as God will, she understood, But I had to leave school which was very painful.

**JOY:** How did you overcome the challenges from your peers before and after your pregnancy acceptance?

**FATIMA:** It was really challenging, but what could I have done, because some of my peers "spoiled", some of my peers parents hated my parents for their reaction. They would prefer they (parent) push me into marriage despite the fact that my pregnancy was not by the same guy that claimed he loved me before.

**JOY:** How did you feel during that period as a pregnant teenager?

**FATIMA:** Hmm..., it was not easy at all; those days were my worst moments even though I was young....

**JOY:** After delivery, how has it been taking care of your baby?

**FATIMA:** In every thing in life, I have to give thanks to God, although I lost my baby during delivery.

**JOY:** What happened?

**FATIMA:** According to my doctor, I was not given proper medical care and I was not mature enough to give birth because I was not mature enough.

**JOY:** What will be your advice to young people out there?

**FATIMA:** My advice to young person's especially girls like me is that, abstinence is the best and if they must do it at all, they should please insist on using condoms. I strongly believe that a teenager loving or dating a teenager is nothing but a child's mistake. Parent need to be their children's friend so they might guide them from making such mistakes. Government can also help us to have places we can get the right information on these things (sexual issues).

The discussion transpired between two teenagers in a community in Nigeria. Note that for confidentiality sake their real names were not used

## Update of YAG Advocacy activities:

### Meetings with Stakeholder and Legislature

Since the commemoration rally on World AIDS Day 2008, the council has paid advocacy visits to relevant stakeholders like

- National Coordinator Adolescent reproductive health, Ministry of health
- Deputy Director, HIV/AIDS unit, Ministry of education
- Deputy Director Education and Youth development, Ministry of Youth development, and,
- Chair, committee on health, House of representative, National Assembly.
- Secretary of Education, Federal capital territory

Issues concerning youth participation in policy implementation and funding for ASRH intervention programs were discussed. It was agreed in each meeting that urgent effort needs to be made to ensure all the program interventions are funded in the next budget appropriation. The different units in the ministries also promised to work with council and ensure quality participation of the youths.

### National workshop on ASRH

Based on the YAG objectives, council members recently participated in a stakeholders meeting to review a report on the situation of the national response to adolescent and young peoples sexual and reproductive health in Nigeria hosted by the Federal ministry of Health and Action Health incorporated. Council members participated in the desk report review and in the review of some tools to be used for the field assessment. A member of the council was also nominated to participate in the field assessment for the FCT. The Final dissemination workshop of the assessment had the group in attendance on July 7, 2009 at Sheraton Abuja. The opportunity to witness the dissemination gave an opportunity to interact with other stakeholder and also get the minister's commitment to ensure inclusion of adequate funding of ASRH programs in the 2010 budget appropriation. We believe the young people we represent will continue to support us and see these objectives for the Nigerian youth come to a reality.

### Advocacy Publications

- First edition of this publication was published in march..
- Produced a policy brief which summarizes where Nigeria is concerning ASRH programming and we should be (see [www.amplifyyourvoice.org/nigeria](http://www.amplifyyourvoice.org/nigeria))
- The council also manages a blogspot for young people to make contributions and suggestions on the issues. (see [www.amplifyyourvoice.org/nigeria](http://www.amplifyyourvoice.org/nigeria))
- A trend analysis on public expenditure spending report on ASRH in Nigeria
- Video documentary on teenage pregnancy in Nigeria.

We would appreciate all your feedbacks on this edition. Please send your views and comment to our contact address listed below.



Education as a Vaccine Against AIDS

**TEEN PREGNANCY:** a male perspective.

**Ramat** (18 year old Electrician)

*"being a father comes with responsibilities, so if a girl get pregnant for that responsibility, what is my business, or do you want me to father a pe am been fathered myself?"*

**Kamal** (SS 2, 16 year old)

*"I am not sure I can handle that now, I mean if a girl says she is pregnant she have to go and do something about it, I am still a boy now!"*

**Tunde** (undergraduate student)

*"As a parent and a student, the kind of stigma I faced and still facing am and sibling is not what I would want any one to face, that is why it would this information on our sexual health be provided at an early stage so that would be responsible for the choice we make"*

**Mohammed** (20 year old mechanic)

*"It is really difficult; I had to drop out of school to be able to do something of my son and my girlfriend because my parent and hers' said they are m responsibility now. I also know some boys who had to leave the communit responsibility but they are not doing better because they get engaged in n behaviors'.*

**Aminu** (20 year old trader)

*As a father, I see teen pregnancy as "cikin banza" meaning "wasted pre, for two young people, it comes down to that, because in my culture, the n marriage The effects was that of disappointment in myself.*

**Abel** Makama (19 year old out of school)

*As for other guys, the only implications is that they will have to stop scho on how to train the child and take care of the mother, which means they v into early marriage, as the girl might not even be the one you desire, lea unfaithfulness or lack of commitment in the marriage. And if the guy is n will make things harder for him. It could also make a guy run away from community, just to escape the responsibilities.*

*Guys are always on the look out for girls to go to bed with them, "they n sweet words, no matter how hard the girl claims", so they are the ones p leading role in teen pregnancy. Some times the girl would want to use a c the guy would refuse and insist on "skin to skin".*

*As for me, I like skin to skin,, but since I heard about HIV/AIDS on TV, I using condom to avoid having a baby. To me, the guy is the cause of teen*

The respondent above indicates the level of information accessible to you how they have been using it. It is evident that most of the respondent lack education on sexual and reproductive health issues, some also accept the at the detriment of dropping out of school while others try to shy away fr responsibilities. It is however evident that given proper education and ac services as counseling a lot more can be done to salvage the situation.

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**Youth Advocates Group (YAG)**

A team of young Nigerians between the ages of 15-24 years residing or schooling in the Federal Capital Territory concerned and determined to address adolescent health and development issues through social mobilization and advocacy. The YAG aims to improve sexual and reproductive health of young people in Nigeria by advocating for adequate implementation of the ASRH policies with meaningful involvement of young people by 2011. To achieve this goal, the group advocates for:

- A national budgetary allocation for ASRH policy implementation by December 2009;
- Increased opportunities for young people to participate in the implementation of ASRH policies and programs; and
- The establishment of ASRH units at state and local government levels.

YAG will use communication and advocacy strategies to educate and mobilize young people, adults, and duty bearers to take action on adolescent reproductive health issues.

