

ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, MS. NKAKARENG RAKGOALE, AT THE EVENT OF WORLD POPULATION DAY, THOHOYANDOU TOWN HALL, THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY, VHEMBE DISTRICT.

11th July 2019

Programme Director;

The Executive Mayor of Vhembe District Municipality, Cllr. Dowelani Nenguda;

The Mayor of Thulamela Local Municipality, Cllr. Avhashoni Tshifhango;

Our esteemed traditional leadership;

The Vice Chancellor of Univen, Dr. N.D Nthambeleni;

The Statistician General, Mr. Risenga Maluleke from StatsSA;

Dr. Justine Coulson and other representatives from the UNFPA;

Dr. Leon Swartz and our other colleagues from the National Department of Social Development present here today;

The HOD for Social Development, Ms. Daphne Ramokgopa and management of the Department;

Members of faith-based organisations and NPO's;

Ladies and gentlemen, in particular, the Youth gathered here;

Good morning!

This gathering reminds me of the words of American civil rights activist, Maya Angelou who once said, and I quote:

“Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with deeper meaning.”

Close quotes.

Programme Director;

We seem to be planning and discussing ideas at length, but in order for us to succeed, we need to live those words and breathe meaning into them. As we look down the path of 25 years of democracy and forward towards the 6th Administration of a free and fairly elected government, we need to realise that the time for talking, planning and writing down ideas and not taking action to fulfil them, has now run out.

Today’s deliberations also marks the 25th anniversary of the ICPD Programme of Action whereby 179 countries, South Africa (SA) included, deviated from other demographic dynamics and directly focused on women’s reproductive health and rights to take centre stage in national and global development efforts. Specifically, as we know, the programme of action called for all people to have access to comprehensive reproductive health care; voluntary family planning; safe pregnancy and childbirth services, as well as the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections. Beyond the 1994 ICDP conference, there were ICDP10, ICDP beyond 2014 and several other reviews of the Programme of Action.

Flowing from the Plan of Action, South Africa also recognises that reproductive health and women’s empowerment are intertwined, and that both are necessary for the advancement of society.

Incidentally, 25 years ago the newly elected government embarked on a similar programme amidst other programmes and projects to ensure the restoration of our people's dignity – especially the vulnerable members of society.

We too, believe in the rights of women to make their own and correct decisions with regards to their reproductive health and their health in general. We have advanced the rights of women to such an extent that we have equal representation in management spheres of both government and the business fraternity.

Therefore, when we say “**25 Years of the ICPD - accelerating the Promise**” we are adhering to the global consensus that women's reproductive health and rights are a precondition for women's empowerment, and that women's equality and empowerment are preconditions for securing the well-being and prosperity of all people.

Our continued deliberations should therefore revolve around these rights and the advancement and popularising thereof, among all the women in South Africa and especially in Limpopo.

Programme Director;

It seems, however, that young women and especially those in the rural areas of the country, continue to be left behind in terms of this empowerment and equality. Incidents of teenage pregnancy is rife in especially the villages of the Province and many heart breaking stories of how some of these girls fall pregnant, continue to unfold.

According to the United Nations Population Fund's website, over six hundred million teenage girls live in the world today. There are no big differences between the challenges faced by teenage girls around the globe and teenage girls here in South Africa. Culture seems to play a major role in how society treats its girls and whether they are raised merely for marriage and childbirth, even at a very young age, or if they are raised to become significant contributors to society in the form of professionals, politicians, leaders and more.

We will continue to encourage young girls to take charge of their own lives and their own reproductive health. We believe that when teenage girls are empowered; when they know their rights and when they are given the tools to succeed, they become agents of positive change in their communities. The goal for teenage girls should be abstinence. They need to know that a delay in becoming mothers heavily increases their chances of finishing their secondary education; accumulating skills that are relevant to the job market and starting an independent livelihood.

In order to invest wisely in teenage girls, more evidence is needed about their attitudes and behaviours, as well as the risk and protective factors that shape the opportunities available to them. At the same time, we need to teach our boy children about the rights of their female counterparts as well as their responsibilities towards sexual reproductive health. Yesterday we had a successful seminar with the youth of the Province about this and other issues affecting them as per the ICDP Programme of Action. We are therefore right **IN** this Programme of Action with this type of interaction and dialogue.

Programme Director;

According to a UNFPA report, voluntary access to modern contraception globally, has increased by 25 per cent since 1994 and the quality of family planning services has also greatly improved. Yet hundreds of millions of women are still not using modern contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Preventable maternal deaths have declined by 40 per cent, but the world is still miles from the ICPD Programme of Action's target to reduce maternal deaths to fewer than 75 per 100,000 (one hundred thousand) live births.

There has also been widespread action to end harmful practices like female genital mutilation or FGM and child marriage. In countries with high prevalence of FGM, for example, the proportion of girls subject to the practice, fell from 49 per cent to 31 per cent. Yet because of population growth, the total number of women and girls affected has actually grown.

Programme Director;

World Population Day, however, is not just about one but about all the developmental challenges faced by communities all over the world, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, malnutrition, child-headed households, water scarcity and climate change among others. All of these issues impede comprehensive population development worldwide. South Africa, with its growing economy and equally growing population, is therefore not alone in this fight against under and un-development communities.

Let us therefore not lose momentum in the implementation of the ICDP Programme of Action. Let us integrate the population issues in our planning, to successfully resolve them, towards sustainable livelihoods, zero hunger and poverty and an informed and empowered population.

Let us not just talk the talk, but walk the talk as we continue down this road of building a caring society together.

I thank you!