Leaving No One Behind: Healthy Adolescents: Smart, Connected, Sustainable Practices

The Permanent Missions of Italy, Mozambique, Uganda, Canada, as well as WHO, UN Women, Doctors with Africa CUAMM, Children’s Investment Fund Foundation, Together for girls, Elton John AIDS Foundation, Global Financing Facility-World Bank Group, BD and ViiV Healthcare, co-sponsored a side event entitled Leaving No One Behind: Healthy Adolescents: Smart, Connected, Sustainable Practices at the 61st Commission on the Status of Women that took place on March 23. The session was moderated by Katy Hayward, Global Medical Lead Paediatrics ViiV Healthcare, and speakers shared strategies to advance the adolescent health agenda and explored smart, connected, and sustainable practices to improve the health and wellbeing of adolescents across the globe.

Dr. Nata Menabde, Executive Director of WHO UN office spoke about the need to support adolescents to thrive, transform, and survive in their future lives. She emphasized the benefits of empowering adolescents and the role they can play in the health workforce to strengthen society as a whole. She also shed light on the need to invest in adolescents because they are the people who will drive towards achieving the SDG agenda.

Other speakers included H.E. Zainan Hawa Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, who underlined the importance of national leadership, ownership and responsibility to ensure sustainable practices; H.E. Inigo Lambertini, Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the UN, advocated that healthy adolescents are key to society and we must protect their sexual and reproductive health rights; H.E. Antonio Gumende, Permanent Representative of Mozambique to the UN, advised that multisectoral policies must be implemented to promote the health of adolescents and that we should empower adolescents to continue to enjoy their rights and livelihoods; and H.E. Michael Grant, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN, highlighted the attention generated by WHO’s Global AAHA! Strategy and reinforced the need to translate momentum into action, he also shared the need to include adolescents at the table and underscored the importance of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

Additionally, Gustavo Gonzalez-Canali, Senior Advisor at UN Coordination Division – UN Women, spoke about investing in women and girls with education programs to prevent violence, which is necessary to achieve the SDGs; John Santelli and Terry McGovern, Professors at Columbia University, shared information from a recent report in the Lancet that stated that investments in adolescent health brings a triple dividend of benefits and we must empower young people as partners rather than subjects; and Mariam Claeeson, Director of Global Financing Facility Every Woman Ever CHild/World Bank, advocated for investments that ensure that human, technical and financial resources are mobilized in country-driven approaches to promote adolescent health.

Finally, Miles Kemplay, Director of Adolescent Sexual Health at Children Investment Fund Foundation, reiterated the intergenerational benefits of investing in adolescents and the need to empower them through self-care, include them during program design and empower youth advocates to influence decisions; Michele Moloney-Kitts, Former Executive Director of Together for Girls, underscored the need to end violence against children, particularly sexual violence among girls, through government leadership and multisector action plans in education; Helen McDowell, Director – Government Affairs, Access & Patient Advocacy – ViiV Healthcare, shed light on the increased rates of mortality among adolescents living with HIV and recommended enabling, catalyzing, and connecting them in order to
make sustainable change, specifically through partnerships and funding; and Giovanni Putoto, Director of Planning – Doctors with Africa Cuumm, emphasized the challenge of working with local authorities and communities in fragile states and reiterated the need to engrave programs in their contexts that consider multifaceted factors, and to engage with adolescents to build trusting relationships that encourage their participation.

To conclude the session, Andrea Atzori, Head of International Relations at Doctors with Africa Cuumm and Mariam Claeson, Director of Global Financing Facility Every Woman Every Child/World Bank, provided closing remarks and encouraged all attendees to become change agents within their communities and continue to advocate for inclusive, multisectoral and sustainable policies that promote adolescent health worldwide.