

## **KFHA Statement at UPR pre-session meeting – Geneva, 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> Dec, 2019**

The Kiribati Family Health Association (KFHA), established in 1985, is a registered non-government leading NGO, and committed, and service provider working to promote (sexual and reproductive health and rights) SRHR for all people in Kiribati. KFHA works in close collaboration with local, national and international partners to ensure good health for families, men, women, youths, disabilities, people with special needs and underserved communities, through the provision of high standards sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information, services and programmes including family planning issues.

Sexual reproductive health and rights are not only important to improve health and well-being outcomes, but because they also play a significant role and impact on other key aspects of national development. Beyond health gains, there is a bounty of other social and economic returns yielded by meeting women's sexual and reproductive health needs. These benefits are felt from the micro to the macro level, by women, their families and their communities. When their needs are met, women and children are more likely to be able to stay in school and gain an education, which in turn will have a positive impact on their future labor force participation and earnings. Women experience an increase in social status, self-esteem and gender equity. Families face fewer orphaned children, and households can boost their savings and assets. Societies undergo improved living conditions, reduced poverty and fewer strains on environmental resources. All of these rippling benefits directly affect other global development goals.

Currently, Kiribati has some of the worst SRHR indicators in the Pacific, which are particularly alarming for the population in terms of adolescent fertility, total fertility, unplanned pregnancy, unmet need for contraception, maternal and infant morbidity/mortality, STI/HIV rates, and rates of gender based violence including sexual violence. Under SDG 3.7, SDG 5.6 and CEDAW Article 12, as well as the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and their regional conferences, the state of Kiribati has the duties and obligations to ensure the provision of a high standard of sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR), services, information and awareness programmes, and to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages in the country.

Despite the need for more SRHR information and services, in Kiribati's cultural context, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is perceived as a taboo subject that is not normally discussed or shared between parents and their children or taught at schools. This results in young people possessing conflicting information about relationships and sex. CSE empowers young people to make informed decisions in a world where gender-based violence, gender inequality, early and unintended pregnancies, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) pose serious risks to their health and well-being. Equally, a lack of high-quality, age- and developmentally-appropriate sexuality and relationship education may leave children and young people vulnerable to harmful sexual behaviours and sexual exploitation.

In KFHA's work we regularly are regularly exposed to the damaging effects that young people are forced to endure due to the absence of CSE. Young women who become pregnant and are forced to leave school and enter into marriages they are not prepared for. In many of these unions, both young parents are unemployed and are dependent on their own parents. We would like to share these testimonials.

In light of the above, KFHA strongly recommend the following recommendations;

### **1. SRHR integration into the next National Development Plan**

It critically important that the next National Development Plan for the period 2021 – 2025, should include and integrate SRHR programs and services as one major key strategic development concern to address, and accordingly allocate sufficient annual budgets to ensure effective and sustainable delivery. This national commitment is important to compliment on-going support from development partners and thereby would enable acceleration of national efforts in reaching global set targets. If women participated in the economy at the same level as men, \$28 trillion — or 26 percent — could be added to the global annual GDP by 2025. But to realize this full participation, women need to be healthy and empowered — and that starts with the basic right and ability to plan a family and protect sexual and reproductive health.

### **2. CSE integration into School curriculum**

At national level, the Government should ensure the development of an appropriate CSE curriculum in accordance with UNESCO technical guidelines and to ensure its integration into all school curriculums for both Junior and Senior high schools. This recommendations aims to ensure that young people are well informed of their sexual reproductive health and rights enabling them to make right choices in life. The evidence is clear that CSE leads to improved sexual and reproductive health, safer sexual behaviours and promotes gender equality and equitable social norms. It also leads to a reduction of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV, and unintended pregnancies.