



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY NIYI OJUOLAPE,
UNFPA REPRESENTATIVE IN GHANA AT THE
OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 2019 ADOLESCENT HEALTH
AMBASSADORS CAMP AT UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON,
ON TUESDAY 6TH AUGUST 2019.**

Protocol:

- **Honourable Minister of Health**
- **Director General of Ghana Health Service**
- **Development Partners**
- **Distinguished Invited Guests**
- **Distinguished Health Ambassadors**
- **Friends from the Media**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning to deliver a keynote address at the 2019 Adolescent Health Ambassadors Camp (AHAC19); an annual camp that is being organized for the third time running. For us in UNFPA, this camp is dear to our hearts and hence our continuous involvement and support since its inception in 2017.

We identify strongly with the theme for the occasion: *Equipping Young People as Health Ambassadors for Sustainable Development.*

Sustainable development goals, especially the ones related to health, aim to improve the health standards of the general population from all walks of life



irrespective of the settings. These goals are formulated in such a way as to accomplish universal health coverage, equality, and prevent violation of basic rights, especially of the vulnerable population groups. Further, it provides an opportunity for the policy makers and the government to show their commitment towards the upliftment of the society and ensure that young people have a better future.

The population groups of women and girls has often attracted attention from the global stakeholders owing to their position in the male-dominant society in different settings, and the vulnerability they have been exposed to in different stages of their lives. It is for this reason that UNFPA focuses especially on adolescent girls and women for programme implementation with the aim of achieving three transformative goals: **Zero Preventable Maternal Deaths; Zero Unmet Need for Family Planning; and Zero Gender Based Violence and All Harmful Practices.**

Ghana today has the largest generation of young people in its history with over 9 million (32%) young people between the ages of 10 and 24 years. Many of them already are driving transformative changes, and many more are poised to do so, but lack the opportunity and means. This cohort represents a powerhouse of human potential that could transform health and sustainable development. Unfortunately, 14% of teenage girls in Ghana have either had their first pregnancy or have become pregnant. This situation does not augur well for their growth and contribution to the sustainable development of the country.



Safe, effective and meaningful engagement is also an important part of helping young people realize their full potential for health and wellbeing and their rights. This not only enables individuals to thrive, it also brings economic and social benefits for the country, because a healthy population is more likely to be productive and prosperous.

UNFPA's contribution to engaging young people seeks to:

- Ensure young people have space, voice, audience and influence, grounded in their agency and rights.
- Enable young people to shape and implement agendas that promote attainment of the SDGs
- Explicitly commit to young people's engagement and leadership by young people.

As previously stated, today's generation of young people is the largest in the country's history. It is also potentially the most influential, in part due to the rapid increase and geographical spread of internet-enabled devices and other modern communications methods.

The Adolescent Health Ambassadors' Camp is an opportunity to gather a cross section of young people and inculcate in them knowledge and discipline and provide them with vast opportunities for networking to enable them engage among themselves and influence the social media as agents of change to enhance their individual and collective contribution to achieving the SDGs especially the Health-related ones.



There is limited time available to achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda (SDGs) where we will see the fruits of our collective actions. The world is changing and so is Ghana, challenges are growing and every single action matters. With more than 32% of the population being young (10-24years), it is clear that we cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without the engagement of young people. Young people have a lot of power that needs further exploration.

To fully unleash this power, institutions at all levels are required to provide an enabling environment that provides young people with their human rights allowing them to thrive up to their potential. The power of young people is probably the most untapped resource in the global endeavors towards achievement of health for all. The first reason could be that the nature of the power of young people itself is not well understood by many. There is also insufficient understanding of how possibly this power can be put into action towards achieving the national and global goals. UNFPA in Ghana took a bold initiative last year to incorporate 16 young persons in Youth Leadership Fellowship program (YoLe Fellows) to hone their skills in leadership and programme. In addition, several young persons have undertaken various internship programmes in the office; a situation that has ensured their preparation and readiness to fit into the job market.

Secondly, there is national institutional under-investment with both intellectual and financial resources on developing robust engagement strategies that recognize young people as partners.



As beneficiaries of this Camp, I urge all participants to grab this opportunity with both hands and perhaps feet. My generation missed such opportunities and we made several mistakes. Let what you learn here be meaningful in your lives and help you to make informed decisions subsequently and do things for yourselves. Choose what matters to you and act accordingly. Learn what you are passionate about, what to change in your community and choose actions that you want to contribute and support. After all you learn at the camp, start in your own small way to impact your communities. Pick actions that are easy to do every day and move on to bigger actions. When this will become a routine, challenge yourself daily to do more.

Engage your family and friends. Tell them about what you will learn here. Raising awareness about the SDGs is something you can do every single day. Just explaining the importance of the sustainable Development Goals to all your friends and family will create vast awareness and enhanced adherence to achieving them. Inspire more people to do something about the biggest global challenge ever. This year UNFPA celebrates its 50th anniversary as an organization. Most importantly it also celebrates the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD@25). ICPD is the precursor of the MDGs and SDGs. In November this year, Nairobi will witness a review of ICPD and situate UNFPA within global efforts to ensure attainment of the SDGs.



After you are done enlightening everyone in your family and circle of friends, mobilize your communities by creating group actions or projects. The biggest (and the most impactful) actions require organizing initiatives that can influence the whole community and often need their engagement. Your neighbours, educational institutions and eventually even the whole community; after all everybody is affected by the SDGs so it is everybody's business.

I thank you very much for your attention.