The 5th International Conference on Family Planning (ICFP) is being held in Kigali Rwanda slated from the 12th to 15th of November. The conference which is held every two years remains the largest scientific conference on reproductive health and family planning. Its significance stems from its ability to avail opportunities for political leaders, scientists, researchers, policymakers, advocates, and young people to disseminate knowledge, celebrate successes, and identify next steps toward reaching the goal of enabling an additional 120 million women to access voluntary, quality contraception by 2020.
First Lady Jeanette Kagame said that the acceleration of economic growth and poverty reduction requires access to comprehensive family planning services.

“In Rwanda advancing family planning and reproductive health has been proven to have a direct correlation to overall empowerment of families and as a result our commitment to FP2020 has led us to work even harder,” she said.

While this progress is encouraging, the First Lady said more needs to be done as significant challenges are still present.

“We need to ensure that all relevant stakeholders from public health, economics, sociology, political science and technology work hand in hand to yield sound results.”

The opening ceremony, saw officials expound the existing barriers on family planning, the effects of this and the necessary steps that ought to be taken going forward in the journey towards FP2020 goals. Prime Minister Edouard Ngirente said that family planning is one of the most cost effective ways of encouraging the wellbeing of the people.

"A number of studies have indicated that family planning has a close impact on economic development. This is why it is not only a women issue but a development issue that affects all of us" Prime Minister said.

Right Hon. Edouard Ngirente
Prime Minister of Rwanda
CALL FOR MORE INVESTMENT IN YOUTH FRIENDLY SERVICES

There is need to encourage further investment in adolescent and youth friendly services in health facilities. This was highlighted during the bi-lateral meeting between the Executive director of UNFPA Dr Natalia Kanem and Rwanda’s health Minister Dr Diane Gashumba.

Rwanda is commended for the great leadership role in family planning, reaching the target for MDG5 on maternal mortality and ownership during the elaboration of the RMNACH (Rwanda Maternal, Newborn, Adolescent and Child Health) policy as a first ever integrated policy. However challenges still prevail.
Dr Natalia Kanem the Executive Director UNFPA noted that the right to family planning is not just a moral imperative but a path to sustainable development as well.

“Words needs to be taken into action, the demographic dividend can only be possible when fertility declines. The demographic dividend framework requires everyone and all sectors to work together.”

Health Minister, Dr Diane Gashumba commended the progress of Rwanda’s health sector saying that it is a result of the political will. She nonetheless put emphasis on the prevailing case of young people facing barriers to access family planning adding that it exposes them to a lot of risks.

“Rwanda has a lot of initiatives in place to address this, however despite the efforts in place issues such as teenage pregnancies remains a challenge therefore we need to bring our effort together to tackle this through empowered partnership with all stakeholders. We need to go beyond all the barriers that are associated to our cultures and beliefs to mitigate all these issues,” she said.
Dr Kanem said that current challenges include the issue of teenage pregnancies and expansion of youth friendly services, an issue that calls for ample attention.

“Whilst dealing with closure of the family planning gap, there is need to highlight the importance of family planning services as a critical means to help spur the demographic dividend.”

Dr Gashumba said the importance of considering issues related to sustainability in health financing especially family planning cannot be over emphasized.

“We need to foster progress to the achievement of the FP2020 goals and beyond to the achievement of the sustainable developments goals. Rwanda has done so much in the promotion of family planning services and with the effort in place, much is yet to be achieved.”
Sadia Rahman, a youth delegate, said that for the youth, family planning is not only about contraception but a matter of lifestyle, choice and privilege.

"It is a freedom of choice of reproductive health, every young person should have access to contraception. SDG’s can only be successful when we connect them to individual life. We young people are not just the future we are the present."