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**HOW TO IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL AND  
MENTAL WELL-BEING OF POPULATIONS  
THROUGH BETTER REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH?**

**LE DÉBAT DE WATHI**

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**Introductory note**

# HOW TO IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING OF POPULATIONS THROUGH BETTER REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH?

## 1. Why this theme?

- **Because** access to basic health services is a fundamental right guaranteed by international laws and state constitutions.
- **Because** the concept of reproductive health incorporates major determinants of the physical and mental well-being of individuals in general and girls and women in particular, such as unwanted pregnancies, complications of pregnancy, childbirth and abortion, contraception, infertility, genital infections, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS, breast and genital cancers, maternal and child morbidity and mortality, and mutilation and sexual violence.
- **Because** the concept of reproductive health incorporates major determinants of the physical and mental well-being of individuals in general and girls and women in particular, such as unwanted pregnancies, complications of pregnancy, childbirth and abortion, contraception, infertility, genital infections, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS, breast and genital cancers, maternal and child morbidity and mortality, and mutilation and sexual violence.
- **Because** ignorance and lack of information created by the taboo nature of reproductive health issues have adverse consequences on the physical and mental health of citizens, especially young women and men in the region.
- **Because** some African countries, particularly those in West and Central Africa, still have very high maternal and infant mortality rates and the cold statistics reveal avoidable suffering and tragedy. Early maternity is a cause of high maternal and infant mortality rates in the region. West and Central Africa has the highest adolescent birth rates in the world, with nearly 200 births per 1000 adolescent girls. <http://uni.cf/2hXtjFc>

- **Because** early marriages are still very present in the region and are important explanatory factors for the poor physical and mental health of many girls and women in the region. Of the 15 countries where the rate of early marriages exceeds 30%, nine are located in West and Central Africa. Niger has the highest rate in the world with 75% of girls married before their 18th birthday <http://bit.ly/1R4KvE8>. Ghana is the country with the lowest rate in the region (5.02%) <http://uni.cf/2hXtjFc>.
- **Because** access to reproductive health, especially family planning and maternal health services, helps women and girls avoid unwanted or early pregnancies, unsafe abortions and complications related to pregnancy.
- **Because** it is necessary to debate on reproductive health in the light of the (cultural and technological) evolutions of African societies and the sexuality of young people.
- **Because** in view of religious and social considerations, issues related to abortion and family planning remain sensitive in the countries of the region and are hardly present in public debates when they are crucial for the individual and collective well-being in all African societies.

## 2. What are the main topics to be explored?

- Determinants of maternal and infant mortality
- Sensitization and education of young people on sexuality
- Prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV / AIDS
- Availability and competence of medical staff
- Access of vulnerable populations to reproductive health services
- Quality and existence of infrastructures dedicated to reproductive health
- Situation of family planning and national measures
- Legislation on voluntary termination of pregnancy (abortion) in the countries of West Africa
- Early pregnancy and reproductive health
- Early marriages and consequences on reproductive health

- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and consequences on reproductive health
- Sexuality before marriage, a taboo in African societies
- Gender inequalities and reproductive health
- Access to feminine hygiene products and services
- Demographics and Reproductive Health

### 3. How to participate in the debate?

- Contributions by experts in the issues discussed are welcome. So are observations, accounts, opinions, and recommendations from all citizens.
- We particularly welcome articles that refer to one or more specific countries, are based on concrete examples and include recommendations for action and reform.
- You can submit short articles (500–1000 words) or longer ones (1500–2000 words). Although the maximum length of a contribution is 2000 words, short articles are more likely to be selected and published by WATHI. All articles must be accessible to the general public, well written and structured.
- Without having to write a structured article, you can send your comments, observations, and recommendations to [infowathi@wathi.org](mailto:infowathi@wathi.org). The most relevant contributions will be published on the website.
- You can also submit a short audio or video recording to share your experiences and concrete reform proposals.
- We invite you to send your article with a 50–word biography and preferably a good picture of yourself.

## CONTACTS

[www.wathi.org](http://www.wathi.org)

Please send your articles and contributions at: [infowathi@wathi.org](mailto:infowathi@wathi.org)

The debate is also taking place on WATHI's Facebook and Twitter accounts:

Link to Facebook : <http://on.fb.me/1L2kOSk>

Link to Twitter : [https://twitter.com/WATHI\\_Africa](https://twitter.com/WATHI_Africa)