

PS 3.5

**GENERATION NOW: YOUTH LEADERSHIP AT THE NEXUS OF HEALTH,
GENDER, AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

| BACKGROUND

Today's world is home to the largest generation of young people, presenting an unprecedented opportunity to harness a demographic dividend for sustainable development. Yet, realising this potential demands urgent investment in health, education, and rights, especially for girls, young women, and vulnerable communities. Gender equality is critical not only for individual empowerment but also for unlocking broader social and economic progress.

Children and youth are disproportionately vulnerable to the escalating impacts of planetary health challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. These crises undermine their rights to health, education, and well-being, and disproportionately affect girls and young women through compounded risks. However, young people are not merely passive victims: they are active agents of change, advocating for transformative action at the intersections of gender, health, and environmental justice.

This youth-led session will explore the interconnectedness between demographic transitions, gender dynamics, youth empowerment, and planetary health. It will elevate youth voices, spotlight innovative youth-led solutions, and call for policy actions that centre equity, rights, and intergenerational justice.

| OBJECTIVES

- To explore how structural and environmental determinants, including climate change, disproportionately impact the health and well-being of youth and children.
- To showcase innovative youth-led and youth-centred approaches that promote planetary health and health equity.
- To discuss how investing in youth today, through education, health, and governance, can unlock the demographic dividend for a more just and sustainable future.
- To promote youth leadership by highlighting youth-led initiatives and solutions that address the intersections of health, rights, and environmental justice.
- To foster intergenerational dialogue to bridge young people's and policymakers' perspectives and commitments for more inclusive and equitable policy responses.



Speaker

Daniela Urquijo Defex

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Daniela Urquijo, or as she prefers to be called, Ela, is a youth activist from the Colombian Caribbean who has been advocating for sexual and reproductive rights since the age of 12. Growing up in a region marked by inequalities, she turned her personal commitment into collective action for sexual and reproductive health and rights, founding her own activist school during the COVID-19 pandemic to train adolescents in Colombia on issues of bodily autonomy, gender justice, and civic participation.

Her work bridges grassroots organizing and regional advocacy: she has led initiatives that amplify the voices of young people, particularly girls and adolescents, ensuring they are recognized as key actors in shaping public policies. Currently, Ela serves as a Youth Networker at IPPF Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office (ACRO), where she connects youth-led movements, builds leadership opportunities, and strengthens advocacy for comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive justice across the region.

Driven by her belief that youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow but the protagonists of today, Ela continues to champion autonomy, equality, and resilience at the intersection of health, gender, and the environment.