



Letter to the editor

Translating JAH Science: Safeguarding Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health in the Current Funding Crisis



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To the Editors:

Based on the commentary published in the Journal of Adolescent Health titled “Shock Unleashed by Recent US Administrative Actions Cannot Lead to Paralysis” [1], by Chandra-Mouli et al., the African Population and Health Research Center convened a webinar series entitled, “Safeguarding Adolescent Health in the Current Financial Crisis.” This letter shares insights from the series. The series took the position that the crisis brings an opportunity that we must seize to sustain the past 20 years of progress in protecting young people’s health and well-being.

The first webinar (<https://youtu.be/Kml899wpY1k?si=VfnuemLDNRYHlxNn>) [2], with a panel of academics whose work informed the commentary, highlighted the systemic shocks from the abrupt defunding of critical adolescent health programs, which threaten decades of progress in HIV prevention, sexual and reproductive health, and gender equality. Panelists called for funding agencies to put the Global South at the center of philanthropic decision-making, necessitating a deliberate shift of power from institutions in high-income countries to those in low- and middle-income countries. This shift, panelists noted, involves redefining the roles of those in the Global South, not just as aid recipients, but as decision-makers of funding allocations. The panel argued this shift would fundamentally change investments in the global development community and noted that conditions are ripe for such change.

The second webinar (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvfhXcyTiVo>) [3] with Ministry of Health representatives from Africa, Asia, and South America reported immediate severe consequences of reduced global aid, including the elimination of prevention programs, termination of outreach workers, and erosion of community trust. However, rather than being paralyzed, countries were taking reactive measures, including resetting priorities, integrating services into broader health

platforms, and forging new partnerships, while also increasing their investments in health.

The final webinar (<https://youtu.be/jxUld525xZQ?si=hCxulQr8A915rPox>) [4], with representatives from global funding agencies and other entities supporting low- and middle-income countries, confirmed that the funding crisis is real and profound. They recommended prioritizing funding for proven, cost-effective interventions, increasing support for local capacity building, and advocating for stronger domestic health financing, consistent with recent World Health Organization guidelines [5]. A consensus emerged that the path forward requires decoupling adolescent health from the uncertainties of external funding by anchoring health initiatives in national budgets and universal health coverage schemes.

The webinar series exemplified translating academic discourse into action by collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders and supporting country capacity for local leadership. We believe this South-led orientation is crucial for safeguarding adolescent health in the current crisis and beyond.

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