



ACSHR

ACCRA, GHANA. **8-12 FEBRUARY, 2016**



**7th AFRICA CONFERENCE ON
SEXUAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS**

OUTCOME DOCUMENT



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1. We, the participants of the 7th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights, Government Ministers, Parliamentarians, the African Union Commission, United Nations Agencies, population and development experts, sexual health and rights experts, civil society particularly women, including young women and youth organizations, researchers and academia, private sector and other stakeholders, having met in Accra from 10 to 12 February, 2016, on the theme “*Realizing the demographic dividend in Africa: The Critical Importance of Adolescents and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights*”;

2. Reaffirming the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and its Programme of Action, as well as other international instruments relating to all human rights, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ rights and the Maputo Protocol, and emphasizing the responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter, to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status;

3. Reaffirming the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population

and Development beyond 2014 which emphasized the importance of the demographic dividend to the sustainable development of Africa, noting the urgency of actions needed in the areas of education, employment and sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and young people;

4. Reaffirming our support for the African Union Agenda 2063 and its first ten-year implementation plan which sets out a holistic vision of the “Africa we want” and boldly aspires for an Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of its women, adolescents and young people;

5. Bearing in mind that the implementation of the AU Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will occur amidst significant demographic changes which call for deliberate investments to ensure the health, well-being, education, employment and empowerment of young people, and recalling the interlinkages between the ICPD Beyond 2014 Outcomes, Beijing Plus 20 Review, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the priorities of the African Continent as reflected in Agenda 2063;

6. Noting with appreciation the recognition by African Heads of State and Government, and Ministers, in championing the importance of the demographic dividend for Africa’s sustainable develop-

ment efforts including the decision by African Heads of State and Government to devote the theme of their 2017 Summit to “Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth”;

7. Acknowledging the relevance of the Continental Framework on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights to improving the lives of all people in Africa and welcoming the review and extension of its Maputo Plan of Action;

8. Recalling the unfinished business of the MDGs particularly MDG 5 on universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights;

9. Reaffirming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and stressing its commitment to fully realize the rights and capabilities of adolescents and young people, in order to support countries in the realization of the demographic dividend;

10. Being cognizant of the challenges faced by African leaders to either invest in the capabilities of the large youthful population of their countries, with a view towards fulfilling adolescents and young people’s rights and potential, and reaping a dividend, or risk serious impediments to the sustainable development of their countries as well as the peace and security of the African continent as a whole;

11. Noting with grave concern

the need to strengthen the health systems on the continent, to ensure universal access to quality right-based health services, with a specific focus on adolescent and youth friendly quality integrated sexual and reproductive health information and services;

12. Acknowledging the worrying status of adolescents' and young peoples' sexual and reproductive health which includes high rates of sexually transmitted infections and HIV, high rate of adolescent pregnancy, unsafe abortion and its link with the persistent and unacceptably high levels of preventable maternal deaths which continue to pose a significant threat to the health and wellbeing of the African people;

13. Concerned that, gender based violence (GBV) and harmful traditional practices like, inter alia, early, child and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM) continue to occur, stripping women, girls and boys of their dignity, violating their human rights and risking their basic health and wellbeing;

14. Noting that while the demographic dividend narrative highlights the important need to focus on the investments in young people as a necessary first step, it is imperative to expand the demographic dividend narrative to ensure a rights-based perspective and approach, with specific attention to the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people, in all their diversity, are empowered and protected and provided with quality, human rights based services and information that enable them to fulfill their potential, thus making the fulfilment of rights the ul-

timate end, and the achievement of the demographic dividend a significant by-product;

We call upon Governments of Africa to:

Ensure Dignity for all;

15. Recognize that at the core of sustainable development is the achievement of a world in which the human rights, dignity and capabilities of all people are protected, respected and fulfilled, ensure that all young people have the chance to define their lives and elaborate their own path to adulthood, with security and confidence in a sustainable future;

16. Promulgate, where absent, and enforce laws to prevent and punish any kind of hate crimes without distinction of any kind, and take active steps to protect all persons from discrimination, stigmatization and violence; in accordance with national laws and policies;

Invest in the rights and capabilities of adolescents and youth;

17. In advancing Africa's agenda on sexual health and rights and intensifying efforts towards the realization of the demographic dividend, we call for recognition of the continent's diversity characterized by language, regions (North, South, East and West) and political context which has a bearing on the presentation and trends on sexual and reproductive health and rights within the continent and hence requiring context specific interventions towards realization of the demographic dividend in Africa;

18. Governments must recognize that achievement of a demographic dividend is not an end-goal unto itself, but a possible

by-product that can result from investing in the empowerment, health, education and creating gainful employment opportunities for all people. The dividend will only arrive if governments invest strategically in policies that preserve the freedom of young people from harmful traditional and social practices that diminish their integrity and autonomy, ensure that all young people can enter into marriage and family life if and when they choose, ensure their good health, ensure that they have access to quality education, at the highest level they wish to pursue, including comprehensive sexuality education, and create equitable structures for entrepreneurship and business within and across countries that will advance the decent employment of all people;

19. Governments must recognize and respond to the serious threats facing young girls, and protect them from HIV, female genital mutilation (FGM), from early, child or forced marriage, unplanned pregnancy and unsafe abortions. Because to achieve sustainable development requires the full creative participation of all persons, the role of girls and women in society can no longer be subject to a patriarchy that diminishes their value. The empowerment of women and girls must be evident in full and effective social, economic and political participation to ensure that they are not unduly burdened in life simply because of their sex;

20. Operationalize the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual and reproductive health by adopting equity and rights based planning

and resource-allocation, facilitating community participation in health decision-making and programming, educating health care providers and communities on what the right to health means in service provision and ensuring the delivery of health care that is free from stigma, coercion, discrimination, violence and respects human rights, including the rights to confidentiality, privacy, and informed consent; Issues on stigma, discrimination and marginalization should be at the center of every discourse on sexuality, sexual health and rights and youth leadership with specific emphasis on key populations, including youth living with disability. There must also be clear policies on stigma and discrimination. Stigma and discrimination undermine the participation of young of people and limits their wellbeing and capacity to lead. This is especially true for young LGBTI people;

21. Governments who have ratified such continental documents as, inter alia, the Maputo Declaration and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, should align their national legislation so as not to propagate comprehensive sexuality education in a context that criminalizes certain sexual orientation and gender identities;

22. Governments must reinforce legislation, where it is already aligned to international and/or continental instruments, or make legislative changes to guarantee women and girls equal access to schooling, labour force, fair and equal pay for equal work in the workplace, and equal opportunity to rise to positions of leadership,

while ensuring their personal dignity, ensuring their ability to contribute fully to their communities and realizing the demographic dividend and achieving sustainable development.

23. African Governments are urged to harmonize their laws and policies that affect the health and rights of adolescents and young people, as well as enact and enforce laws that raise the age of marriage to 18 for both males and females without any exception;

24. African Union Member states are urged to scale up HIV and STI prevention, treatment and care programmes for adolescents and young people and the general population with special focus on addressing the disproportionate burden of new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women;

25. The role of education is especially critical to the demographic dividend and to sustainable development, and all governments are called upon to build on the impressive gains in primary school attendance to ensure quality comprehensive secondary education for all persons, and expanding the range and types of post-secondary education that are available to all, especially girls. Quality education must include comprehensive sexuality education that provides young people with accurate information about their bodies in line with their evolving capacities, and enables them make informed and healthy life decisions;

26. Given the growing diversity of the global economy, including in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, all African governments must cultivate the

elaboration of the full gamut of educational opportunities, trade schools, community colleges, research universities, and online learning opportunities. Free public education must be guaranteed, to assure universal access, and stem the trends to educational inequality in the continent;

27. Schools at every level should be recognized as not only the place for the acquisition of skills and concrete knowledge, but as a complement to the family in its diversity, and broader community in forming the values and character of young people. In-school programs should therefore endeavor to address mediated learning opportunities that build values of universal human rights, gender equality, non-discrimination, cross-cultural competency and citizen education, the peaceful resolution of conflict, and include role-play and skill-building in the same;

28. Governments are called upon to ensure access to quality education for young women and adolescent girls providing safe school and learning environment and providing opportunities for continuous learning. Resources should be allocated to facilitate girls' education including those in and from conflict zones within their countries and within the African region;

29. African Governments are called upon to engage education leaders and the private sector to assure that the curricula of secondary and post-secondary education is well-matched to the skills needed by the growing economic sectors of the country and the region. Equally important is the assurance

that schooling includes the development of entrepreneurial skills, as well as the development of successful business planning, and an understanding of how to navigate access to credit, regulations, the tax system and how to participate in local and regional trade spaces. Free enterprise and inclusive trade demands mentoring and partnerships, and governments are called upon to include attention to innovation hubs and opportunities for young people to build partnerships with peers and mentors as they enter the workforce;

30. In calling attention to the digital divide, that is increasingly adopting a feminine face, the African governments must invest in enabling girls' access to education on science, technology, engineering and mathematics. This includes recognizing the cyber space as a growing space for advancing violence against adolescent girls and young women and putting in place policies and measures that keep African girls and young women safe online as they engage within social and digital media spaces, and welcoming the Media to partner with women and girls to advance advocacy, support with sensitization, dissemination of information and provide space that enables them to amplify their voices, facilitate their choices and promote their agency;

31. Ensure that the issues and needs of key populations (LGBTIQ, sex workers, PLHIV, people who use drugs and other substances, MSMs and WSWs) are not mainstreamed in adolescent and youth issues they often get lost in the discourses that lead to policy and program formulation. Youth is

not a homogenous group therefore investments to leverage demographic dividend must be tailored to the needs of the specific disaggregated groups of adolescents and youths;

32. Governments are further called upon to strengthen the labour regulations and business partnerships to guarantee a safe workplace for all, and decent wages and benefits that provide a safety net for all workers and benefits their communities, including post-employment pensions and disability;

33. Governments should further enable access to factors of production to young people as we intensify efforts to realize the demographic dividend, this is by recognizing the gendered, age and disability barriers to accessing land, technology, capital and labour, hence locking young people out of the regional trade agenda. This should be done by formulating and implementing policies and quota systems that enable and facilitate young peoples' access to the regional trade sphere;

Strengthen National Data Systems

34. African governments are called upon to strengthen national population data systems in order to assure the achievement of the ICPD Programme of Action, the Framework for the Further Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action beyond 2014, and the 2030 Agenda, as well as Agenda 2063, each of which stress that redressing inequalities is a cornerstone of sustainable development. Only by assuring an equitable and fair society, in which all people have the chance to strengthen their

capabilities, can hopes be realized for sustainable development, and long term resilience, including economic dividends;

35. The transformative demand of the 2030 Agenda is the expectation that all governments will have the population data systems to be able to locate and respond to the most vulnerable in society. That requires not only a geo-referenced census every decade; but a strong national civil registration system that records all births, deaths, and marriages; strong national registries in all sectors necessary for development, including health and education, and periodic household surveys on issues of emerging concern. National data systems that collect and archive data on the national and sub-national level must be complemented by national capacity to use these data for the common good, assuring capacity for analysis by government, academia, and civil society. Only such capacities can guarantee true accountability to advance the rights of people, and to assure that no one is left behind;

36. Governments are also called upon to develop new strategies to assure data on key populations, including those living with disability and adolescents between 10-14, who have been routinely neglected from households surveys, young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), persons displaced by conflict or environmental crises, including the homeless, those living in informal and slum conditions, persons in transit, nomadic communities and those living in remote and hard to reach areas of the country. The extent and pace

of urbanization should be tracked, especially given the large number of young people moving to cities for a better life, to ensure that public services and opportunities are effectively located where they can reach those in need.

37. Further call on African governments to set up a professional youth development cadre and infrastructure in each country to effectively plan, implement, evaluate and sustain youth development programmes aimed at achieving the demographic dividend.

We call on the African Union, United Nations and Development partners to:

38. Engage young people and their organizations in shaping development assistance and implementing, and in ensuring that investing in the prospects and capabilities of young people, including to realize the demographic dividend is a priority and prerequisite for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

39. Use the importance of investing in the human rights and capabilities of young people as a means of providing joint support for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063, key youth and health-related continental policy instruments in particular the African Youth Charter (2006) and the African Decade on Youth Development (2009 – 2018), through Delivering as One, linking empowerment, health, education, and employment approaches in high risk and humanitarian settings, and climate change resilience;

40. Support countries in learning about relevant experi-

ences, best practices and lessons learned in other contexts, regionally, nationally and sub-nationally, through stronger south-south and triangular exchanges and support for collaboration within and across regions;

41. We recognize that though the demographic dividend will be realized at the national level, continental level cooperation amongst Member States will reinforce country level action and ensure delivery of results. Therefore we call on the African Union Commission, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), African Development Bank (AfDB), the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), UNFPA, other UN Agencies and development partners to actively support a continental initiative on Demographic Dividend for Africa;

We call on Research and Academia to:

42. Build on existing research and evidence-based policy guidance to examine inter alia the prospects for maximizing the capabilities of young people and realizing the demographic dividend in African countries, including links to gender dynamics and roles, health including sexual and reproductive health, the realization of human rights, support for women's labour force participation including work-life balance;

43. Continue and strengthen research, and knowledge sharing on the demographic, social, economic and other conditions of diverse African countries, and how they differ from or are similar to the experiences of the demographic dividend in Asian and Latin American countries to ensure that demographic dividend policies

and strategies are context specific and relevant;

44. Further investigate the impacts of trauma and destabilization driven by insecurity, conflict, displacement, migration and other shocks on the prospects and capabilities of young people;

45. Continue to support and strengthen the training of a new generation of researchers with the skills and expertise to conduct integrated research linking demography, human rights, gender, health, disability, education, empowerment, economics, environment and other aspects of sustainable development;

We call on Communities, Traditional, Religious and Faith-based leaders:

46. In line with the Dakar Declaration of Faith-Based leaders on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend in West Africa, and other relevant commitments, we urge all our religious and faith-based leaders to engage with various actors within our communities to secure a better future for adolescents and young people and build an innovative partnership to ensure their empowerment through adequate access to education and health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights as a key pillar for achieving the Demographic Dividend;

47. We urge communities and traditional leaders to examine and remove all harmful traditional and cultural practices particularly those associated with initiation ceremonies and/or rites of passage including child marriage and FGM;

We call on the private sector:

48. To work closely with

government and civil society to strengthen the national educational system at all levels, including post-secondary training and technicians, in order to align education systems with the skills needed to support growing sectors of economy, and to enhance the likelihood of formal employment for local graduates;

49. The private sector is called upon to expand opportunities for young people to enter formal employment through paid internships and skill-based apprenticeships, with strong mentoring and support structures to facilitate the eventual transition to secure, decent, and formal employment;

50. The private sector is called upon to invest in the on-going skills development of their employees through on-the-job training and new learning platforms that assure life-long opportunities for promotion, and professional advancement, and that these are accessible to all persons, regardless of gender, age, or disability;

51. The private sector is called upon to assure a safe and healthy workplace for all employees, aligning with international labour standards for secure working environments, guaranteeing the right to employment without undue risk of bodily injury, and including the protection of all persons from sexual harassment, threats, abuse, or violence;

52. To assure the social protection of their employees, including the provision of health insurance and disability protections, maternity and paternity leave, and the provision of sexual and reproductive health care;

All employer-based insurance sys-

tems should explicitly include provisions that guarantee women and men access to the necessary sexual and reproductive health care services to choose the timing and number of their children, including family planning services, and coverage for safe abortion in accordance with national law and post-abortion care. Access to free condoms in the workplace should be guaranteed to assure the protection of all people from sexually transmitted infections, including HIV;

We call on Civil Society Organizations including youth groups and Media:

53. Recognizing the important role of civil society organizations, particularly youth groups, across Africa, who through their work at the grassroots, community, national and regional levels, have clearly contributed in making visible the issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as diversity in Africa.

54. To work in partnership and solidarity to ensure that no one is left behind as we work towards making our objectives of guaranteeing adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights to achieve the demographic dividend and ultimately sustainable development, a reality for all;

55. To continue to work in unity through their diversity, demonstrating transparency, accountability, and responsibility in their initiatives at local, national, regional and international levels;

56. To continue to hold governments and duty bearers accountable to delivering on all commitments linked to the demographic dividend; with a focus on fulfilling the sexual and reproduc-

tive health and rights of all, particularly of adolescents and young people as a starting point to ensure all young people are able to reach their fullest potential, live healthy and fulfilling lives and contribute towards the achievement of the demographic dividend and the sustainable development of their countries and of the region;

THANK YOU