

Let's Step up and Deliver!

A Ministerial Call to Action for accelerating the delivery of comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services to adolescents and young people in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA)

1. Preamble

We, the Ministers¹ of Education, Health, Gender, and Youth and senior government officials, gathered in Durban, South Africa, on 18 July 2016 for the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) Ministerial Commitment Progress Meeting two years after the affirmation and endorsement of the ESA Commitment in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2013. Working towards a vision of young Africans, global citizens of the future, who are educated, healthy, resilient, socially responsible, informed decision-makers and have the capacity to contribute to their community, country and region, we:

1.1 Reaffirm our commitment to prepare and support adolescents and young people in Eastern and Southern Africa with the right information and skills to make safe and healthy decisions about their life and future. We will ensure that they access good quality, comprehensive, life skills-based HIV and sexuality education and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, in line with each country's socio-cultural context. This will reinforce efforts towards eliminating all new HIV infections among adolescents and young people; increase to 95% the number of adolescents and young people who demonstrate comprehensive HIV prevention knowledge; reduce early and unintended pregnancies among young people by 75%; and eliminate gender-based violence (GBV) and child marriage by 2020.

1.2 Confirm our determination to align our efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)², particularly SDG 3, which aims to "*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*", and SDG 4, which aims to "*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*", while also contributing to SDGs 1, 2, 5, 8 and 16. Implementation of the SDGs, as well as the African Union Agenda 2063³, along with other commitments, will transform the Africa that today's generation of young people will inherit.

¹ Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe

² <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

³ <http://agenda2063.au.int/>

1.3 Reiterate our conviction that the education and health sectors, working in collaboration with other key line ministries such as gender, youth, labour, and social welfare, have enormous potential to promote the good health and well-being of all adolescents and young people and prevent early and unintended pregnancies, transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), GBV, and child marriages.

1.4 Realize that in demographic terms, the ESA region is experiencing major growth in the youth population and will soon be home to the largest generation of young people in history. This calls on us to invest urgently in the health, education, employment, livelihood, skills, and leadership of young people; investments which will not only benefit them, but also propel our region to achieve Agenda 2063 and harness the health and social benefits of the demographic dividend.

1.5 Recognize and welcome the adoption of the SADC Parliamentary Forum's Model Law for Eradicating Child Marriage and Protecting Children Already Married, and its strong emphasis on the importance of SRH, especially the recognition of the importance of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) for young people.

1.6 Acknowledge the leadership and transformative role of young people in Eastern and Southern Africa as champions of their own health and well-being, as well as critical partners in scaling up CSE and SRH in the region.

2. Whereas

2.1 The affirmation of the ESA Commitment in 2013 has prompted significant progress by member states to address the needs of adolescents and young people with respect to ensuring access to life skills-based HIV and sexuality education and youth-friendly SRH services, there are still significant challenges:

2.1.1 HIV remains an urgent threat, with significant numbers of adolescents and young people, predominantly females, still getting newly infected – adding to the millions already living with HIV. Furthermore, many young people have limited access to good quality CSE and SRH programmes that offer them the skills and knowledge they need to protect themselves from HIV, resulting in only 45% of young men and 42% of young women (aged 15-24) possessing accurate and comprehensive knowledge of HIV.

2.1.2 Early and unintended pregnancy rates among adolescent girls remain unacceptably high across the region, ranging from 39% to 59% among 15-19-year-olds, largely as a result of

low educational attainment and poor knowledge levels about HIV prevention; laws, policies and attitudes that exclude adolescents and young people from accessing SRH care and HIV-related services; and other factors such as poor quality of available services, cultural and religious opposition, and gender-related barriers.

2.1.3 The high rates of GBV continues to be cause for concern. For example, one in every three girls in Southern Africa has been forced to have sex by the age of 18 years. GBV has serious consequences for the health and well-being of young people; it negatively impacts on their educational outcomes, can cause psychological distress, and can lead to serious negative health outcomes, not least of which are unintended pregnancies and transmission of HIV and other STIs.

2.1.4 Throughout the region, more than one third of women aged 20-24 years (6.5 million) have been married or in union before the age of 18. Child marriage is also associated with higher rates of teenage pregnancy, resulting in girls having to care for children while they themselves are still children and curbing their education and economic opportunities. This contributes to high maternal mortality rates and has an impact on the capacity of countries to reap the possible benefits of a demographic dividend.

3. Based on the above considerations

We, the Ministers of Education, Health, Gender, and Youth and senior government officials, commit ourselves to step up efforts to ensure adolescents' and young people's access to good quality CSE and youth-friendly SRH services in the ESA region, and to work in partnership with young people, parents, civil society, and community and religious leaders to achieve the goals set out in the 2013 ESA Commitment. Specifically, we commit to:

3.1 Invest in young people's development, including strategic investment in health, education, and social protection programmes for adolescents and young people, while creating an enabling environment for CSE and SRH by harmonizing legal and policy frameworks.

3.2 Prioritize increased coverage and access to age-appropriate, scientifically accurate,, inclusive CSE and SRH services for all girls and boys, both in and out of school, to address the disturbingly low HIV and AIDS knowledge levels and the challenges adolescents and young people still face in accessing SRH services.

3.3 Promote and invest in programmes that keep children in school, particularly girls in rural and poor communities, and ensure that schools are safe and equitable places for learning.

3.4 Enforce legislation to eradicate child marriage; strengthen child protection systems (with an emphasis on legal reform); and promote the development of programmes that strengthen norms and standards that eliminate discrimination based on gender, age, socio-economic status, or disabilities.

3.5 Ensure that interventions and resources are well targeted and strengthen data collection mechanisms at all levels while ensuring that data is disaggregated by sex, age, economic status, and geographical location.

3.6 Step up our efforts to accelerate action for young people's access to CSE and SRH services to guarantee that young people attain and enjoy full and healthy lives by 2030.

4. We call on all Ministers from Eastern and Southern Africa hereto not present at this meeting to join us in renewing commitment to Step Up and Deliver for adolescents and young people.