

YOUNG WOMEN'S STATEMENT- 7TH AFRICAN CONFERENCE ON SEXUAL HEALTH AND RIGHTS

10TH-12TH ACCRA, GHANA

PREAMBLE/ BACKGROUND

We young women and girls from across Africa attending the 7th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights on 10th-12th February 2016 in Accra

We acknowledge that much has been done and efforts put forward towards the realization and harnessing of the demographic dividend in Africa. . Policies, practice and programmatic actions towards the realization of the demographic dividend in the sustainable development goals era must be cognizant of the fact that inclusion and empowerment of young women and girls has been unacceptably slow.

We, African young women and girls, have over time proven that we have valuable contribution to make towards advancing Africa's agenda for development. In this regard, governments, organizations, multi-lateral agencies and other institutions must provide the Spaces, opportunities and resources to enable us make this contribution. Engaging young women and girls should be done meaningfully, recognizing our diversity, unique insights and capabilities.

Africa is home of 15 out of 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriage, according to WHO 1 out of every 6 deaths is due to HIV, 70% of these is amongst adolescent girls. Despite their disproportionate contribution to injury, burden of disease and mortality from adolescent maternal mortality, unsafe abortions, HIV, STDs, child marriage and female genital mutilation adolescent girls continue to be marginalized from the development agenda.

We make reference to the following issues in calling on governments, civil society organizations represented and allies to advance the African young women and girls agenda taking into account ;-

- We envision an Africa where governments enable access to factors of production to young women and girls as we intensify efforts to realize demographic dividend, this is by recognizing the gendered barriers to accessing land, technology, capital and labour hence locking young women and girls out of the regional trade agenda. This should be done by formulating and implementing policies that that enable and facilitate young women and girls' access to the regional trade sphere is critical.
- We advocate for access to quality education for young women and 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.

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- Adolescent girls and young women should be granted access to accurate and evidence based comprehensive sexuality education that enables them to make informed choices about their bodies, health and life.
 - We call for the implementation of re-entry policies for teenage mothers in countries where the policies exist and call for legislation that support their economic, social and full integration after teenage pregnancies to ensure intensified efforts in keeping girls in school.
 - We envision an Africa where adolescent girls and young women can access Quality, Affordable, and acceptable adolescent girls' friendly comprehensive sexual and reproductive rights information and services including modern contraception. We call for the elimination of barriers towards access such as legal, parental consent, service provider attitudes and user fees should be a priority in programming, policy and practice.
 - We call for an integrated approach towards the provision of SRHR services and information recognizing the diverse health needs of adolescent and young women
 - We call for the provision, facilitation and promotion of platforms that nurture and provide mentorship for young women and girls to enable them access support as they seek to engage in social, political and economic development and learn from women professionals.
 - We welcome the creation of more and acknowledge the importance of existing intergenerational spaces in sustaining the dialogue on women's rights in Africa and in particular amplifying the young women and girls' agenda.
 - We call for the inclusion of young women and girls in political, social and economic development in all our diversity regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, migration status, age and socio economic backgrounds.
 - We call for intensified actions in civil registration of girl children to ensure accurate budgeting and planning and consolidated data right from birth.
 - We advocate for the implementation of policies that protect young women and girls from violence, exploitation and discrimination. During the implementation of these policies and in efforts to create violence free societies, we call governments to be accountable to all citizens' especially young women and girls.
 - We call on governments to end discriminatory social norms and harmful traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation, early and forced marriages that undermine the rights and ability of young girls and women to control and exercise their bodily autonomy; this should be done through the development of enabling legal and policy environments to combat these practices

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- Governments, multi-lateral institutions aside from engaging young women must invest in skills building for young women and girls to develop their expertise and enable continuous learning.
 - We are looking to ensure addressing marginalization of young women and girls across sectors: Health, Quality Education, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Gainful Employment. We invite all policy makers, politicians, faith-based organizations, CSOs and fellow youth networks to join forces and champion the actualization of this agenda for young women and adolescent girls in Africa.
 - We aim for a better understanding of our needs as young women and girls, this should be facilitated by increased funding to young women's organization including support with capacity and other areas that advance organizational growth and partnerships with existing donor organizations.
 - In advancing the SRHR agenda in Africa, we call for more focus on research to ensure accurate data to guide planning and implementation of programs for adolescent girls and young women of Africa.
 - In articulating African young women and girls' agenda and challenging the deeply entrenched gender relations, we welcome the Media to partner with us to advance advocacy, support with sensitization, dissemination of information and provide space that enables us amplify our voices, facilitate our choices and promotes our agency.
 - We envision an Africa where outcomes of evidence based research guide policy formation and programming for adolescent girls and young women's sexual health and rights.
 - In calling attention to the digital divide, that is increasingly adopting a feminine face, we also call for deliberate efforts from African governments to 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.