



Post 2015

Lessons from the 48th session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development (CPD48)

(Published on Rural Reporters on May 2015)

So a fortnight ago nations of the world trooped to the United Nations Headquarters in New York for the forty eight session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development. Since the landmark 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, the globe has been implementing its twenty year Program of Action that was to end last year.

This process realized major strides in poverty reduction, literacy levels, fertility and maternal mortality reduction, human rights among others. However, as is synonymous with many visions and development plans, there were a lot of targets that were not achieved. This formed the rationale behind extending the Program of Action and the ICPD process indefinitely.

I was honored to be among the delegates from different nations attending this conference this year. It was a particular a huge honor for me to be part of the official government of Kenya delegation as a youth representative. This was only made possible by the progressive nature of the National Council for population and Development and her Director General. Benin too had a youth representative and so did Netherlands and a few other countries.

The Netherlands is one country that has always entrenched meaningful youth participation by enlisting youths in their official delegation. Their youth ambassador, Lotte Djikstra had the opportunity of making a statement on behalf of the country. The involvement of young people in policy making process was one of the best moments of the conference. It was an admission that the world is beginning to trust their young people with key decisions. It was also a moment that reemphasized the need for more meaningful adult-youth partnerships.

Meeting youths from other backgrounds and cultures, realities and expectations, history and dreams was particularly a learning moment and provided an immense opportunity to

understand where we are all coming from. However, it was disappointing not to have an outcome document from the session after over one week of hard negotiations and bargains. Whereas nations have different realities, we cannot afford to behave as if carbon gas emissions from China doesn't affect Alaska or that high HIV prevalence in Kenya does not affect America or that Ebola in Sierra Leone doesn't affect New Zealand.

The reality of our world as a global village demands that we have common positions against common threats and take advantage of global opportunities to boost peace and security, technology, trade among other shared interests. Whereas we must acknowledge our different cultural and religious backgrounds we must never behave like the proverbial ostrich who continued to hide the head in the sand and hoped the danger will go away. More important though, we need to ensure we don't repeat the same ills that impeded realization of previous goals as we prepare to embark on the proposed Sustainable Development Goals.

As such we need we need stronger accountability and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to keep on telling us where we are and what we need to do to measure progress and achieve the plethora of targets. But this international declarations and processes including the POST 2015 Agenda will not yield any fruits unless their impact can be felt by the 'mama mboga' in Migori Town or a cane cutter in Muhoroni. That's why it is important that the commitments made at the international and regions levels be domesticated and integrated into national planning and local development programs. Despite the heart ache of failing to agree on our population and development priorities at CPD48, the young people of the world have a reason to keep dreaming.

15 years on, 15 years away: taking stock of MDGs and focusing on the SDGs

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(The Star 22/01/2015, The Standard 23/01/2015)

At the turn of the New Year, the world geared towards the final phase of the MDG period as it prepares for the Sustainable Development Goals as the next global development blueprint for the next one and a half decades. The last fifteen years have seen Kenya record impressive progress in terms of technological advancement; establishment of public institutions; improved life expectancy and the sudden bulge of the middle class. And lo! Don't forget we are now a lower middle income economy thanks to the rebasing last year that placed the country's economy at number four in Sub-Saharan Africa and the ninth largest in the continent.

And what leaps have we made so far since the Millennium Declaration fourteen years ago? The Millennium Development Goals adopted then have served to accelerate progress in various spheres of development, albeit marginally. Positive progress has been noted in the country's endeavour towards achieving universal primary education, environmental sustainability, gender equality and empowerment of women. Free primary education launched in 2003 and the 2010 constitution that have widened women's participation in public affairs are some of the contributing factors to this trend.

Minimal gains have also been recorded on eradication of poverty as well as combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. It is however uninspiring to note that the achievement of MDGs four and five on Reduction of Child Mortality and Improving Maternal Health respectively is far from sight. Maternal deaths still average 400 per 100,000 live births, only down by 90 from 490 per 100,000 in 1990, the year that is used as the baseline. It is even gloomier that largely because of lack of economic opportunities, the effects of the HIV/AIDS scourge are felt more by young people and vulnerable populations in urban slums and rural settings. Also, recent reports that a third of all new HIV infections occur among young people don't help matters. Still, communities grapple with the rampant cases of defilements, rape and child prostitution-

mostly targeting girls and women.

That most problems and crises that have occurred this far are not mere accidents of nature is not lost on us. Indeed, many a time they result from human action and omissions of successive governments, various stakeholders and the general populace. As the deadline for the MDGs come to a close this December, the UN has recognized that the world must have a sustainable development agenda beyond 2015. That we must "meet the needs of the present without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", that is, our development goals must be sustainable.

The 17 goals with 169 specific targets cover issues affecting the world and more specifically Kenya in a more comprehensive scale never seen before. The MDGs for instance emphasizes universal access to primary education. One of the SDGs target is to ensure not just access to education for either gender but also good learning outcomes that open doors for economic opportunities in order to bridge the gap between the richest and the poorest. SDGs also recognise the need for full access to technology especially by the youth and women. They also aim to stop, by 2025, men's violence against women in all its forms.

Universal access to reproductive health and overall health care as well as improved social protection are among the issues covered in the goals. Furthermore, the new goals raise concerns for sustainable cities and human settlements as well viable consumption and production including good governance and capable institutions. Kenya too has its Vision 2030 blueprint to spearhead all spheres of development and propel it to a middle income economy by the year 2030. It only needs to align this plan with the SDGs and all will be set to go at the expiry of the MDGs later this year. The overall goal, as set out in the UN framework, should be to end poverty in all its forms. With this, every other target will be met in the fifteen years after this year.

New Zeal required in realizing the New Sustainable Development Goals

(The Standard 12th Sep 2015)

Even as we prepare to lay the eight millennium development goals to rest and start deliberations on the sustainable development goals, it is important to reflect on where we are as a nation, what we have achieved and what remains as major obstacles towards realization of world development at the national level. By 2015, the government committed to a lot of things. They said, they will halve extreme poverty rates, halt spread of HIV, reduce maternal mortality, child mortality among several others goals.

However, despite several achievements notably the domestication of the International Conference on Population and Development Plan of Action (1994) into national policies, guidelines and Acts of parliament, the reality is that we are not where we should be. We realized progress in reduction of Total fertility rate from 8.1 in 1979 to 4.6 births per women in 2009, infant mortality rate dropped from 88/1000 to 52/1000 and contraceptive prevalence rose from 17% to 46% during that period. Other indicators such as poverty levels however increased from 40% in 1994 to 46% in 2006.

For us to close in on the millennium development goals by 2015 and achieve our Vision 2030, we need to have a paradigm shift; not just in terms of policy development but implementation. Sessional Paper No.3 of 2012 on Population Policy for Nation Development which even got international recognition remains at danger of not being actualized because of weak monitoring and evaluation and lack of sufficient will by implementers to see the ideas through. We are at danger of being a nation of theories and no walk.

According to the national council for population and development, the semi-autonomous agency in charge of population and development, the daunting task of ensuring that Kenya's population is properly managed as a resource isn't just the work of one party. Indeed The NCPD has opened its doors for structured conversations with civil society organizations on the ICPD Beyond 2014 and the post 2015 development agenda. The Swahili have a saying that kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa. The challenges bedeviling us cannot

be solved if NGO'S and governments are reading from different scripts on key issues such as youth and reproductive health rights. Ultimately all a genuine government should want is a healthy and empowered people and that should be the ultimate goal of all civil society organizations.

Working together however should not mean keeping quite when a county with one of the highest rates of maternal deaths spends 87 Million shillings on tea and flowers yet that amount would purchase about nine fully equipped Beyond Zero Campaign ambulances. Working together does not mean keeping quite when Nyeri County MCAs spend over 2M shillings to learn how to use Facebook. Working together does not mean watching by as MCAs go for a foreign visit to see how spaghetti is grown yet we all know there's no crop called spaghetti.

We need to move away from the old hackneyed cliché that we are a poor nation and that there's no money for our development priorities. Are we putting the 'little' money that we have for good use? It's morally wrong for government agencies to fully absorb recurrent expenditure while developmental expenditure in most cases is returned to the exchequer or donors.

For Kenya to realize her development agenda and tackle recurring themes in the global discussion such as human rights as a development issue, sexual and reproductive health and rights, strengthen health systems and fully manage the youthful population, all agencies must play their role with selflessness and passion; with a burning desire and eyes fixed on the prize.

As Kenya heads to New York in the next fortnight for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) to reaffirm its commitment to the post 2015 development agenda, our hope is that we pursue the Sustainable Development goals with a gusto that was lacking in implementing Millennium Development Goals.

The new Sustainable Development GOALS provides the Globe an Oportunity to make it Right

(Published on NAYA Blog)

As the clock ticks down towards the United Nations Summit where the ambitious seventeen sustainable Development Goals will be agreed by the member states of the United Nations, our world has never been at a more defining moment. The world realized major gains in previous attempts at accelerating global development including the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and the International Conference on Population and Development Program of Action. Maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS, child mortality, poverty rate, illiteracy among others have been severely reduced in most countries.

However, the truth remains that as we come to the close of one agenda, a lot still has to be done. Gender equality and women empowerment for example still remains a mirage in many countries in the world. Women in certain parts of the world are still exposed to retrogressive cultural practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation while others are still discriminated upon based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Many young girls and boys are still unable to access education or youth friendly health facilities or decent pay for decent work.

That's why as world leaders plan to launch goals to guide global development for the next fifteen years, we must take stock of previous attempts, what worked and what didn't and what we must do differently to realize accelerated global

growth. Even before implementation starts, the inclusive nature of developing the goals must be applauded.

Member Countries gave out their views and what they wanted in the next phase of development as opposed to the top down approach of the Millennium Development Goals. The deliberate plans by governments to open participation to civil society organizations and young people in a meaningful manner in developing goals, targets and indicators was also a welcome break from a past of mutual suspicion between government and civil society organizations.

But the job is not done. The first step is creating awareness of these new set of goals and what it means to child soldier in Congo, carbon emitting companies in China and the young person in Kenya. However, this should not just be about elite young people. Young people from children headed households, those in slums, those without formal education, and those living below the poverty line must be involved in the domestication and implementation of this goals. It is unfortunate that fifteen years after the start of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals many people remain unaware of such.

We must get it right this time, if we are to bequeath the world to the next generation. As Barrack Obama did remind us during his visit to Nairobi, We did not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrowed it from our Children.

Realizing New Development Goals Require Paradigm Shift

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(The Standard 20th Nov 2015)

As a young person living in Kenya today am confident of the potential in me. While am alive to the current challenges facing the young people of my generation, am optimistic about the future. Am excited because of the numerous opportunities that have been presented to me to be part of the next phase of global development agenda. I'm prayerful that my needs and the needs of other youth throughout the world are taken into consideration. But interests and development sometimes are not about democracy. Even though the young people comprise of over thirty six percent of the Kenyan population and an equally huge percentage globally, sometimes their interests are the least served. Talk about high unemployment rates, talk about high burden of lifestyle and communicable diseases, talk about occupational hazards, it's the young people who contribute heavily to the agonizing figures.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Young people can be more than statistics. Young people can be more than just numbers undergoing Female Genital Mutilation, Early Marriages, getting new HIV/AIDS infections in yet another new study. Young people have a potential to be more. To do more. But there has to be deliberate effort. There has to be access to information. There has to be appropriate services. And this two must be supported by an enabling environment as is envisaged in the theory of change.

The global discussions on the POST 2015 Development agenda provides an opportunity to bridge that gap between the blissful dreams of the future and the depressing challenges of our current times. They provide an opportunity to go the Singapore and the Asian Tigers way or to continue the path that has brought us to where we are. It provides us with an opportunity to sow the seeds that will yield the fruits of demographic dividends or an avenue to do what we have been doing the same way we have been doing it while expecting different results. It's yet another opportunity to remember the letter and the spirit of the progressive International Conference on Population and Development that's hailed as a landmark in human rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights and ask ourselves what went wrong with the script. That the proposed sustainable development goals were arrived at after negotiations and input among United Nations member states as opposed to the top down nature of the soon concluding Millennium Development Goals is just but the surest sign that's it's not going to be business as usual.

However, as we step into the era of the POST 2015 Development Agenda, there's every need to take care of the global youthful population to reduce death and disease now, to reduce burden of disease later in life, as an investment, to protect human capital and to promote human rights. That the seventeen proposed sustainable development goals lack a standalone youth goal may be saddening, but the discussion on indicators provide an opportunity for the world to do right

by its youth.

It's time nation said no to ignorance. It's a high time the world reiterated that nobody should be sick or die due to lack of information. It's time countries implemented and fully funded quality, evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) programs that provide accurate information on human sexuality, gender equality, human rights, relationships, and sexual and reproductive health for both in and out-of-school youth that is relevant to each specific age group. Such programs in schools should be intra-curricular and examinable wherever possible. The Education Sector Policy on HIV/AIDS is an excellent policy document that if followed will go a long way in equipping the young people of Kenya with information they need.

However such policies cannot be realized if the implementers are reading from a different script. Such policies ran the risk of gathering dusts in shelves if implementers such as Head teachers aren't aware of what's of them, are overwhelmed or cannot muster sufficient goodwill.

It's time the nations of the world embraced technological advancements to answer the double burden of old challenges and the emerging reproductive challenges facing the young people. Whereas the world has registered major leaps in reproductive technology, governments' response on issues such as assisted reproductive technology and surrogacy remains shrouded in uncertainty, not backed up by appropriate legal and policy environment and at times antagonistic.

It's time we removed all barriers to uptake of reproductive health services by the youth, and ensure access to youth friendly reproductive health services. The services must be in the right place, at the right time, at the right price (free where necessary) and delivered in the right style to be acceptable to young people.

It's time we said no to doing things randomly and Invested in data revolution, information management, research and further disaggregation of data by age, sex and other categories as the basis of empirically founded programming and planning

It's time we invested in young people's health by increasing budgetary allocation to health to a minimum of 15% of national budgets as per the Abuja Declaration. In line with program based budgeting, there should also be deliberate efforts to allocate 15% of the health budget to family planning and address all demand and supply oriented barriers of access to, and use of family planning as per the Maputo Plan of Action.

We have an opportunity to get closest to the Biblical Canaan but the foundation must be skillfully and intentionally laid block by block. We must not behave like the proverbial Kimani who continued fetching water in a leaking basket and expected to go home happy.

Let's ensure new UN goals are achieved

(Posted on Business Daily Thursday, September 17)

As the countdown to the United Nations Summit where the ambitious 17 Sustainable Development Goals will be launched by member states continues, our world has never been at a more defining moment.

The world realized major gains during previous attempts at accelerating global development including the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action. Maternal mortality, HIV/Aids, child mortality, poverty rate, illiteracy among others have been reduced in most countries.

However, a lot still has to be done. Gender equality and women empowerment for example still remains a mirage in many countries in the world. Women in certain parts of the world are still exposed to retrogressive cultural practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation while others are still discriminated upon based on their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Many young girls and boys are still unable to access education, youth friendly health facilities or decent pay for decent work.

Implementation

That's why as world leaders prepare to launch goals to guide global development for the next 15 years, we must take stock of previous attempts, what worked and what didn't and what

we must do differently to realise accelerated global growth. Even before implementation starts, the inclusive nature of developing the goals must be applauded. Member countries gave their views and what they wanted in the next phase of development as opposed to the top down approach of the Millennium Development Goals.

The deliberate plans by governments to open participation to civil society organisations and young people in a meaningful manner in developing goals, targets and indicators was also a welcome break from a past of mutual suspicion between government and civil society organisations.

But the job is not done. The first step is creating awareness of these new set of goals and what it means to child soldier in Congo, carbon emitting companies in China and the young person in Kenya.

However, this should not just be about elite young people. Young people from children-headed households, those in slums, those without formal education, and those living below the poverty line must be involved in the domestication and implementation of this goals.

It is unfortunate that 15 years after the start of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals many people remain unaware of such. We must get it right this time, if we are to bequeath the world to the next generation.

Ensuring Access to Youth Friendly Services Is Investing for Now and for the Future

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(The Star 26th July 2015)

According to the United Nations Population Fund's 'The power of 1.8 Billion; Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future', our world is home to 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24!

This youth population is growing fastest in the poorest nations. In our country Kenya, the situation is not any different as young people occupy over 36% of the total population.

This is a significant percentage who if well taken care of puts our nation at the dawn of reaping demographic dividends from an empowered population driving key sectors of the economy. The converse is also true. A disempowered and disenfranchised youth population will not only be an economic burden to the nation's coffers, but also a major risk in the very existence of civility and progress. However, young people face significant challenges while growing up, even more than previous generations of adolescents did.

They are not only at risk of communicable diseases but they also face hitherto older people's challenges in lifestyle and non-communicable diseases. These double burden of diseases has been ensured by lack of reproductive health knowledge and information, malnutrition, general health problems, menstrual problems, female genital cutting, early and unprotected sex, early forced marriages, sexually transmitted infections, abortions, drugs and substance abuse, accidents and violence, sexual abuse among others.

But these adolescents and young people are not a homogenous group, there are still various sections and classes. For example without formal education, those from children headed households, those displaced, those living with disabilities, those married, those abusing drugs, those in conflict prone areas, those in child labour among others are more vulnerable than others.

According to the World Health Organization, there is evidence that many young people regard health services as irrelevant to their needs and distrust them. They avoid such services altogether, or seek help from them only when they are desperate. They require services that are in the right place, at the right time, at the right price (free where necessary) and delivered in the right style to be acceptable by them. These services need to meet the minimum standards set.

Kenya has a favourable policy and legal environment on youth friendly services including the new National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy and the ongoing revision of the

National Guidelines for Provision of Youth Friendly Services. However, nationally, only one out of ten of public health facilities provide youth friendly services, over a decade after the guidelines and the original policy were first developed.

In the context of Kenya's devolved system of governance, county governments have a huge role to play in accelerating realization of better health outcomes and bridging the enormous gaps in health indicators between different regions. Counties need to invest in youth friendly services not just to reduce death and diseases now, to reduce burden of disease later in life and to protect capital but also as a fundamental human right.

The government must Domesticate and fully implement international, national and county policies on adolescent and reproductive health including the revised National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy and the National Guidelines on provision of Youth Friendly Services.

These can be achieved through allocating sufficient resources in health budget for youth friendly services, Increasing the percentage of primary care facilities offering comprehensive youth friendly services, Partnering with government and non-state actors on advocacy and provision of youth friendly services, Deliberately factoring in marginalized and vulnerable young people in programming for youth friendly services, Provide linkages and referrals between the school model, health center model and youth based model among others.

The recently released Kenya Youth Survey Report 2016 which covered various thematic concerns including aspirations, values, challenges affecting youths in Kenya provide but yet another timely reminder of the dire situation of young people in the country and serves as an important wake up call for meaningful youth participation in policy processes, access to universal education opportunities, health services and rethinking our values as a nation.

For Kenya to realize her vision of being a middle-income country providing a high quality life to all its citizens by the year 2030 and contribute to regional aspirations like Agenda 2063 and the global sustainable development goals, young people must be at the center of it all.

We may be well into 2016, but the best New Year's gift the government can give to her young people is to listen to them and prioritize them; not just for votes, but as partners in this journey.

Let's Prioritize the Life of Adolescence in Kenya

(Daily Nation 18th /6/2015)

Scholars, researchers, policy makers, activists, young and old people and even adolescents from Kenya and beyond descended into Nairobi early last week for the first National Adolescent Health Symposium to deliberate on the deteriorating health standards of the Kenyan adolescent and what must be done to ensure that this vital age group are kept away from the jaws of diseases and death.

The World Health Organization reports that adolescents are often thought as a healthy group but many die prematurely due to accidents, suicide, violence, pregnancy related complications and other illnesses that are either preventable or treatable. That statement couldn't have been truer anywhere else than in Kenya, a nation where one out of four persons is an adolescent. Despite their numerical superiority, it is baffling that adolescents are still not visible, even when they are right in the face of the society.

Our media is replete of stories of adolescent truancy. No day passes by without some report that a group of school going children were either found drunk or participating in some sexual orgy. Yet, instead of treating this as a wakeup call, we have descended into bashing and comparing the current generation to the 'pious' old days of our ancestors. We do not for a second stop and ask ourselves the role the society has played in all this manifestation of 'spoiled' adolescents.

The truth is adolescence is a stage that comes with its unique challenges that if not properly handled can cause disease, injury, disability, death and even reduce the quality of life in adulthood. Recent studies reveal glaring indicators in adolescence. Adolescents do not only start having sex early, they have it with multiple sexual partners, sometimes older

people. Underage drinking and smoking is yet another cause of concern, as in physical inactivity and diet. This has been manifested in the double burden of the HIV/AIDS of the world and the increasing threat from non-communicable diseases such as cancers, diabetes and obesity.

But is all this the adolescent fault? Should they bare the cross for the own sins?

Absolutely Not.

The truth is as a nation we have let our adolescents down. We have failed to deliberately plan for this fragile group. We have, either by design or oversight, assumed that nature will take care of its course, the way it has always done. Today's adolescent is increasingly at major threats due to technological advancements that expose them to potential health hazards only reinforced with limited parental guidance. A recent study revealed that the average Nairobi parent spends negligible hours per day with their children. Where would they get information on menstruation or on boy and girl relationships, or on diet, or on managing stress etc.?

Most of these concerns are however policy issues. For example provision of age appropriate comprehensive sexuality education, or access to youth friendly services, or access to family planning for the sexually active adolescent. It is time to translate research into action for policy makers.

This however cannot be done when rhetoric, personal beliefs, innuendos and jingoism come in the way of evidence based interventions. After all nobody is happy when the future of our nation is not guaranteed.

Appreciate and invest in maternal health to achieve other MDGs

(29th August 2015)

First Lady Margaret Kenyatta's concession that Kenya is off-track to achieving two health-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is a step in the right direction in appreciating that many women and newborns are dying unnecessarily from avoidable and preventable conditions. Goals number four and five on Reduction of Child Mortality and Improving Maternal Health respectively still remain a mirage for our country.

Sadly, the country loses over 5,500 women translating to 18 to 20 maternal deaths daily, a figure that the First Lady equates to "an 18-seater minibus with pregnant women crashing and killing all the passengers every day."

The recently launched Millennium Development Goals Report 2014 indicates that Kenya is among the Sub-Saharan countries that might fail to meet the MDG targets by the 2015 deadline. There is good news however that there is positive progress on the country's commitment to achieving universal primary education, environmental sustainability, gender equality and empowerment of women. These are attributed to the free primary education launched in 2003 and the enactment of the new Constitution in 2010 that opened space for women to participate in public affairs. Minimal gains have also been recorded on eradication of poverty and hunger; and combating HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases.

The latest report also indicates that maternal mortality has not reduced much since 1990, the year that is used as the baseline. It still stood at 400 per 100, 000 live births in 2013

down from 490 in 1990. This figure goes as high as 1000 in urban slums and rural areas. The UN, in MDG number five envisions a reduction of maternal deaths by three quarters by next year. Maternal deaths are normally attributed to lack of access to skilled health personnel by expectant women. Also, few women go for antenatal care during pregnancy thereby putting themselves at risk of complications that might arise in the course of the pregnancy. Still, there are those who prefer the services of traditional birth attendants during delivery claiming that birth attendants at government facilities are normally negligent, unconcerned and rude to them despite the agony they undergo during labour. Whereas the traditional birth attendants are normally skilled, most of them lack the necessary training and medicine to administer interventions that might prevent complications such as heavy bleeding. They may also not be able to refer a patient to a higher level health care facility.

It is therefore encouraging to see such initiatives as the "Beyond Zero Campaign" kicked off by Mrs. Kenyatta to improve access to healthcare to children and mothers. If well rolled out and with support from the counties, it will help reduce preventable maternal deaths through proper healthcare solutions for the prevention and handling of complications. It will also ensure every baby is delivered with the support of a skilled health attendant. Information and testing of HIV/AIDs will greatly reduce mother-to-child transmissions thereby reducing a cause for child mortality.

Lessons from ICPD Review in New York

(The Star June 2015)

Since the inaugural of the International Conference on Population Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, the process remains an integral international framework for ensuring that the youth agenda is an important part of world development.

However after twenty years of implementing ICPD Program of Action (PoA), there is need to take a closer look at the process, the gains made so far, the obstacles and shortcomings and what needs to be done to ensure that the youth issues are brought to the forefront not only as social issues but also development.

One major issue that has plagued the process is civil society organizations who represent the voice of the youth and the governments of the world have been at crossroads and have failed to speak with one voice in the wake of critical issues facing the young people.

Whereas the government has a sovereign duty to uphold the political, religious and cultural beliefs of its people, there is need to take cognisance of new challenges facing young people globally brought firmly closer by technology and development.

We must desist from behaving like the proverbial ostrich that hides its head in the sand and hopes that the danger will go away. As a nation we cannot afford to close our eyes to the magnanimous health challenges that face our young people. Issues like teenage pregnancies, drug and substance abuse, female genital cutting, new HIV/AIDS infections and unsafe abortion will not solve themselves. Neither will we wake up and find that sexual orientation nor gender identity (SOGI) issues are no more.

The 47th session of the ICPD in New York this year was a landmark. The review provided an opportunity for the

international community to reflect on the progress made since Cairo meeting in 1994 and set new commitments for the ICPD Beyond 2014. In the process, there were gains and losses. In the original draft, paragraph 13b which touched on the need to recognize different types of families and their entitlement to comprehensive protection and marriage must be entered into with free consent was deleted. Notable gains included reaffirming that sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are central to social justice and sustainable development, and recognizing the need to address persistent inequalities and discrimination on any grounds in order to enhance development. Further the international community was unanimous on the negative impact of pervasive gender based violence on the ability of women and girls to benefit from development and urged Member States to ensure respect, protection, promotion and fulfilling of all human rights, including gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls

Going forward, there's therefore the need to speak with one voice to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights in the post-2015 development agenda. Universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights includes comprehensive sexuality education, integration of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the health system, provision of youth friendly services, ensuring access to comprehensive abortion care and ensuring access to contraceptives.

As the government integrates the outcomes from the ICPD review meeting, there's need for her to make a choice. A choice between firmly engaging civil society, meaningful youth engagement devoid of tokenism and decoration and including the emerging youth issues in the post 2015 development agenda or a choice to ignore current threats facing the youth and watch them get bigger. As the youth, we are watching.

