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Committed to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Advocacy



# POSITION PAPER

## ON TEENAGE PREGNANCY IN HOMA BAY COUNTY

### WHO ARE WE?

WE, young people from the Network for Adolescent and Youth of Africa (NAYA KENYA) would like to issue this statement as regards the high rates of teenage pregnancies in Homa Bay County and call upon opinion leaders, civil society organizations, national and county government to reverse this situation and to recognize, respect and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people.

NAYA is a youth led advocacy network committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights advocacy. It was founded in October 2001 during the Second Adolescent International Conference convened by the African Regional Office of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA).

### CURRENT SITUATION IN HOMA BAY COUNTY

Media and scientific reports are replete with stories of teenage mothers amongst us that there's every danger in ignoring these phenomenon as normal at the very best and hopeless at the very least.

According to the 2014 World Health Statistics, the average global birth rate among 15 to 19 year olds is 49 per 1000 girls with the highest rates found in sub-Saharan Africa, where our country lies.

The 2014 Kenya Demographic Health Survey revealed that, about 2 out of 10 girls in Kenya (18.1%) have begun child bearing with Nyanza province, where Homa Bay County lies, having 22%, more than the national average.

These has been majorly attributed to the low age of sexual debut and limited access to sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services.

The 2013 Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey reported that 3 out of 10 girls in Homa Bay had started having sex before 15 and that almost two thirds of 15-19 had had sex. The study also found that about 6 out of 10 girls were married before reaching age 18. Of these married girls, over seven out of ten were not using any method of family planning.

It doesn't help that according to Kenya Service Availability and Readiness Assessment Report 2014, only a quarter of primary health facilities provide comprehensive youth friendly services where young people can get friendly reproductive health services such as family planning and information on sexuality.

Whereas teenage pregnancies has significantly reduced over the last decade, more still need to be done to ensure teenagers do not get pregnant, and if they do then they have access to services and support they need and to be repatriated into society.

### POLICY AND LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

Kenya has a favorable policy and legal environment to address adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights concerns including teenage pregnancies.

The constitution of Kenya guarantees every individual the right to the highest standard of health, which includes the right to health care services, including reproductive health care. Further, the supreme law protects every child from abuse, neglect, harmful cultural practices and all forms of violence.

This environment is further anchored by the Children's Act 2001, the Sexual Offences Act 2006, Gender Policy in Education, the Education Sector Policy, The Marriage Act 2014, the Population Policy 2012, The Adolescent and Youth Friendly Services Guidelines and the National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy among others.

These Acts, Policies and Guidelines recognizes adolescents as a positive force in the society who require special attention due to challenges associated with the physical, psychological and transformation from childhood to adulthood.

## EFFECTS

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), “Pregnancies among girls less than 18 years of age have irreparable consequences. It violates the rights of girls, with life-threatening consequences in terms of sexual and reproductive health, and poses high development costs for communities, particularly in perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Since teenage girls are not physically ready for the demands of child bearing, they are more at risk of birth complications and conditions such as genital prolapse, sepsis, eclampsia, and obstetric fistulas due to prolonged labour.

World Health Organization lists Pregnancy and childbirth complications as the second highest causes of death among 15 to

19 year olds globally with the situation direr in sub Saharan Africa. In Kenya, according to a national study by Ministry of Health and APHRC, teenage pregnancies have greatly contributed to high incidences of unsafe abortion further exposing them to different levels of abortion complications including mortality.

But teenage pregnancies do not only have medical effects, they also have psychological, social and economic effects.

Not only are they at risk of school drop outs further limiting attainment of their full potentials including career opportunities, majority of teenage mothers also succumb to depression as they stare at a bleak future only made worse by exclusion and stigma from society.

## CALL TO ACTION

For Homa Bay to realize its mission of building and preserving optimal conditions for accelerated, inclusive and sustainable development that guarantees safe livelihoods, dignified living and progressive pathways for all citizens of the county to thrive , young people must be at the center of this dreams.

This will also contribute to realization of Kenya vision 2030 and the ambitious global Sustainable Development Goals.

Tackling Teenage pregnancy, however, shouldn't just be the focus of the Ministry of Health, multi-sectoral co-ordination is key in ensuring that teenage pregnancies are drastically reduced, and if possible, eliminated.

### WE THEREFORE CALL UPON:

#### THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT TO:

- Domesticate and fully implement international, national and county policies on adolescent reproductive health
- Allocate resources in health budget for youth reproductive health
- Increase the percentage of health care facilities offering comprehensive youth friendly services including family planning
- Deliberately factor in marginalized and vulnerable young people in programming for adolescents
- Support provision of comprehensive sexuality education in schools.

#### RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND CULTURAL LEADERS TO:

- Support programs that provide young people with culturally and religious appropriated information on human sexuality.
- Support the elimination of all traditional practices that undermine the physical integrity and dignity of young people and contribute to teenage pregnancy such as early and forced marriage while recognizing and supporting traditional practices that empower young people and the community
- Support reenrollment of young mothers to school and create enabling environment devoid of stigma.