



# Joint Civil Society Position Paper on adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights during covid 19 pandemic

**WE**, the undersigned feminists, young women and young people in all our diversity representing feminist youth-led, women-led and human rights civil society organizations and initiatives;

**UNDERSCORING** that youth below 35 years constitute more than three-quarters of Kenya's population and thus a significant proportion whose well-being is critical to the development of the country;

**INVOKING** the constitution of Kenya which, in Articles 35, 43 (1), 53 and 55 guarantees all Kenyans the right to information, the highest attainable standard of healthcare including reproductive health and access to education;

**NOTING WITH CONCERN** that adolescents and young people are disproportionately affected by sexual and reproductive health and rights challenges including

teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, maternal mortalities and morbidities from procuring unsafe abortions among others;

**EXPRESSING DEEP CONCERN** over the additional vulnerability of girls and young women to sexual and gender-based violence and inadequate access to services especially sexual reproductive and health (SRH) due to the COVID 19 pandemic;

**ALARMED** by the recent reports of escalating incidences of teenage pregnancies, sexual and gender-based violence, female genital mutilation, child, early and forced marriages since the closure of schools and stay at home orders were issued;

**DISTURBED** that girls and young women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more vulnerable to

abuse and marginalization including sexual exploitation for necessities such as pads, clothing, shelter and food leading to transactional sex and sex trafficking;

**CONCERNED** that the additional cancellation of the school year and the closure of schools up to at least January 2021 due to COVID 19 pandemic will exacerbate the already existing challenges that young women and girls face at home where they are supposed to be protected;

**EMPHASIZING** that young people and adolescents are not homogenous and have different needs and experiences; and that there are more vulnerable subpopulations within this group including sexual and gender minorities; young women and girls in all their diversity; young people living with disabilities, young refugees, young persons living with HIV, young people from economically challenged backgrounds among others;

**CONSCIOUS** that meaningful and inclusive youth participation is a precondition to sustainable, holistic and relevant solutions to youth challenges;

**CONVINCED** that access to comprehensive sexuality education leads to improved knowledge, informed decision making

and better outcomes including increased condom use, decrease in multiple partners, increase in self-efficacy for HIV protection, favourable attitudes to safer sex and delays in initiation of first sexual intercourse;

**CONCERNED** by the increased politicization, sensationalization, opposition, misinformation, disinformation and threats by communities, religious leaders and political leaders on young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights including access to comprehensive youth-friendly services and comprehensive sexuality education;

**CONVENING** virtually on 1st July 2020 through the convention of Zamara Foundation to discuss the implications of COVID 19 on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in Kenya;

**CALL** for an intersectional and multisectoral approach in COVID 19 response to integrate young people's, especially adolescents girls and young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights and address the intersecting forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls;

**WE PARTICULARLY CALL ON** the Ministries of Education and Health, the Judiciary and Parliament to:

1. Strengthen the implementation of existing instruments on adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights including the National School Health Policy 2019, the National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy 2015, the National Guidelines for Provision of Adolescent and Youth Friendly services in Kenya 2016, the Education Sector Policy on HIV and Aids 2013, the School Reentry Policy among others.
2. Integrate comprehensive sexuality education that provides accurate information on human sexuality, gender equality, human rights, relationships, and sexual and reproductive health and rights in the school curriculum and make it intra-curricular and examinable and strengthen the capacity of teachers on delivering CSE.
3. Strengthen multisectoral partnerships including with communities, teachers, religious leaders, parents and guardians and capacitate them to provide youth-friendly services and sexuality education through clinic-based, community-based, school-based and virtual based models in line with the National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy 2015 and the National Guidelines for Provision of Adolescent and Youth Friendly services in Kenya, 2016.
4. Invest in research and information management on young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights including child marriage, teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortion to strengthen the evidence base for informed programming and policy interventions.
5. Enact a Reproductive Health Law to provide a human rights-based legal framework for the protection, fulfilment, respect and promotion of young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights services and comprehensive sexuality education.
6. Adopt a survivor-centred approach to ensure access to timely justice by investigating and prosecuting sexual offences and operationalizing Section 39 (13) of the Sexual Offences Act that provides for a register for convicted sexual offenders.

This joint statement and call to action has been developed and endorsed by the following organizations and platforms:

