

Local Perspectives

A compilation of op-eds and newspaper features published in local dailies focusing on SRHR and gender justice



RIGHT HERE
RIGHT NOW



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FOREWORD

The Network for Adolescent and Youth of Africa (NAYA) is pleased to present this Local Perspectives Anthology, a compilation of op-eds, blog posts, and newspaper features by youth advocates published in local dailies in 2024 focusing on SRHR and gender justice.

Over 30 years since nations of the world gathered in Cairo and agreed on the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (PoA), adolescents and young people are disproportionately affected by multiple and intersecting sexual and reproductive health and rights challenges.

During the 30th anniversary of the ICPD Programme of Action, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) released think pieces including 'The Future of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights' that strongly indicates that human development and resilience in a world of turbulence and change hinge on realizing SRHR for everyone.

NAYA's Participatory Advocacy Model for Youth (PAMY) moves young people from helpless spectators to proactive players who have a key role in advocating for their sexual and reproductive health rights by documenting their lived realities and using their voices to hold decision-makers accountable. The Local Perspectives Anthology departs from the usual trends of discussing and presenting SRHR from medical jargon and highly technical and policy perspectives to bringing the lived realities and personal perspectives to the fore, not just as undeniable and impeachable evidence but also to encourage other young people that their voices matter and that young people should, and must utilise,

available citizen journalism platforms for public education, strengthening public support and for advocacy.

The articles cover a wide swath of topics: from making a case for comprehensive sexuality education to addressing the prevalence and impact of sexual and gender-based violence; to the SRHR challenges young people face including STIs including HIV and unintended pregnancies to the crucial importance of meaningful and inclusive youth participation. The youth journalists talk about discrimination on several basis in accessing SRHR services and information including based on sexuality, gender, age and income among others and how it's tantamount to shooting ourselves in the foot. We talk about how SRHR is not just a health sector issue and make a case for why all actors including religious leaders must play their part if we are to realise a country where we reduce disease, disability and death now and in the future while also ensuring that healthy young people actively contribute to our national and global development agenda and earns us the proverbial demographic dividend. We recall the Gen Z protests and draw on their strengths, resilience, sacrifice, and dreams for a better Kenya for all.

We hope these stories make you more informed, reflective, empathetic, energised, committed and rejuvenate your desire for a healthy world where all adolescents and young people enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Happy Reading.

From all of us at NAYA.



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Why sex education is crucial as schools reopen this year

(07th January 2024, *The Standard*, By Daniel Odeke)



In the initial five months of 2023, 110,821 recorded pregnancies involving adolescents aged 10 to 19 (Kenya Health Information Systems). Among these, 6,110 were observed in the age group of 10 to 14 years, while 104,711 were in the age range of 15 to 19. - Daniel Odeke, Youth Advocate.

It has been a long holiday and the time to return to school for our children is here. Having shared an open community with this interesting lot, going back to school presents an interesting dynamic to them.

This holiday has probably been one of the longest; with it, there has been time for the school-going lot to experience a lifestyle that won't be available soon. At the end of the current period, a concern arises on whether schools are ready to receive not just the pupils and students but also the physical, social, and emotional changes anticipated to come along with them.

It is an interesting time in our educational system, with the 8-4-4 system edging closer to a full replacement by the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). It's critical to ask ourselves what CBC has in stock for such periods, several reports have painted a concerning picture of adolescents

and youths after a long holiday break. In the initial five months of 2023, 110,821 recorded pregnancies involving adolescents aged 10 to 19 (Kenya Health Information Systems). Among these, 6,110 were observed in the age group of 10 to 14 years, while 104,711 were in the age range of 15 to 19.

This figure is nearly half of the 2022 recorded pregnancies, which amounted to 260,734. The numbers in 2021 and 2020 were 316,187 and 331,549, respectively. With such trends, it's worrying to even contemplate what is to come, especially after long holidays, begging the question, do we have programs in schools, designed to manage, counter, or mitigate this when schools open?

Biological changes linked with the sexual and reproductive maturation of school-age children are intertwined with diverse risks related to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). These risks serve as indicators for

unfavourable SRHR outcomes, including inadequate knowledge of sexually transmitted diseases and a prevalent trend of early sexual initiation among school-age children.

Promoting effective educational intervention will bolster the SRHR of children attending school by making them aware of the intricacies of their sexuality, through Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). Research indicates that achieving CSE at an early stage and addressing SRHR needs, significantly predicts positive outcomes in school children. These favourable outcomes encompass delayed sexual initiation, child marriage, and a reduction in teenage pregnancies

It is thus our responsibility to find and promote effective educational interventions for CSE, thus eliminating the worry around reports of teenage pregnancies.

'Education for all' remains an elusive dream for thousands of children across the country

(15th January-2024, *The Standard*, By Ngotiek Philip)

Education is a fundamental right for every child, and it is the responsibility of every government to ensure that every child has access to quality education. However, in Kenya, this is not the case. According to the Basic Education Act 14 of 2013, education is free and compulsory for all Kenyan children. Despite this, many children are still unable to attend school. More than 1.5 million children and teenagers aged between six to 13 do not have access to this fundamental right.

There are a variety of reasons why a good number of Kenyan children do not attend school despite the government insisting that it is free and compulsory. Extreme poverty levels are a major problem. In all schools across the country, students are always required to get uniforms and equipment that their families cannot afford, even though the school is 'open'. In some cases, parents are required by school administrations to pay for the provision of lunch to their children. For parents with very humble means, the financial demand for education of their children is beyond

their reach and they opt for their children to drop out of school.

There are also issues to do with gender-based discrimination. Male children will be educated while their female siblings will not in some parts of the country due to poverty or cultural factors. Then there is a lot of social and

cultural inequality among children with disabilities. These children are more likely than other children to miss school. One out of every three out-of-school children has a disorder, according to estimates.

In Kenya, fewer than ten per cent of children with disabilities attend primary school. Child labour is also an impediment. Many children are compelled to work rather than attend school. Children are frequently relied upon by low-income families to supplement their income. In 2017, the International Labour Organisation estimated that 152 million children in Africa, aged five to 17 were working.

The government needs to take a more proactive approach to ensure that every child has access to quality education. This can be achieved by providing free education, abolishing school fees, and providing financial assistance to families that cannot afford to send their children to school. Education is the key to a better future, and every child deserves the opportunity to learn and grow.



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Ngotiek Philip,
Youth Advocate

Give teen mothers another chance

(25th January 2024, Daily Nation, By Doris Kathia)

Bungoma Governor Kenneth Lusaka recently said that pregnant teens should be barred from resuming their studies. He said such a move would help in dealing with the crisis in the country. While acknowledging his concerns, it's crucial to assess the potential consequences of such a proposal and emphasize the importance of allowing girls to return to school after childbirth. Education is pivotal for their personal growth and well-being of their children

Lusaka's proposal overlooks the complex factors that contribute to teen pregnancies, including poverty, lack of access to education, and inadequate sexual reproductive health information. Rather than addressing the root causes,

an outright ban on pregnant teens from school may exacerbate the existing challenges. Lusaka's call to ban pregnant teens from resuming their studies is a step backwards and perpetuates bad stereotypes. Instead of ostracising these young mothers, society should adopt a compassionate and supportive approach providing resources for comprehensive sexual education, accessible reproductive health services, and socio-economic support.

Education can challenge stereotypes, foster understanding, and break down discriminatory barriers against young mothers. Education stands as a fundamental human right, and denying pregnant teens access to schooling is

wrong as it hinders personal growth, economic empowerment, personal growth, and the well-being of their children. Governor Lusaka's proposal contradicts these legal provisions and risks undermining the rights of young mothers.

Existing legal frameworks, such as the EAC SRH Bill 2021 and the Children's Act, recognize the importance of education in breaking the cycle of poverty for teen mothers. These laws provide a pathway for girls to return to school after childbirth, acknowledging that education is pivotal for their. Efforts should also target the accountability of men responsible for teenage pregnancies, ensuring they face consequences for their actions.

Youth must be part of decision-making

(12th August 2024, The Star, By Kerry Mwita.)

The recent youth uprising witnessed in Africa and beyond is about the clamour for accountability and good governance. From Kenya to Uganda, Nigeria and Bangladesh, the world's most passionate and vibrant demographic has made it clear that they will not be cowed in the face of injustice. The commemoration of the International Youth Day yesterday paves the way for a robust discussion on engaging this demographic that has often been relegated to the fringes of

decision-making tables.

Despite the many hurdles they face, young people have historically kept proving that impossibilities are mere constructs of mind, birthing landmark institutional reforms and fundamental liberties. This underscores their immense capabilities if engaged as actors rather than by-standers. With a population of over 50 million, 75 per cent of which is youthful, the government and civil society should prioritise civic education

to build the capacity of young people on policy and law-making. Many youth remain unaware of the legal processes and their decision-making roles, resulting in misinformation. While many civil society groups have upped their game by establishing youth advisory boards and panels, the government should also increase youth spaces at the decision-making by appointing more young people to senior positions such as Cabinet and principal secretaries.

Change the culture of victim-blaming

(Thursday, 1st February 2024, Daily Nation, By Doris Kathia)

The surge in gender-based violence (GBV) has pushed the nation to a critical juncture, revealing the alarming vulnerability of women in various settings. From homes to schools, clubs to churches, and hospitals, women face the harsh reality that their safety is not assured. Since 2016, over 500 recorded instances of brutal murders underscore deep-seated issues of misogyny, victim-blaming, and systemic failures that sustain violence against women. From the brutal murders of young women to cases of assault, harassment, and rape, the pervasive issue of GBV has shaken the foundations of our society.

The recent cases of murder show the disturbing frequency with which women are subjected to violence, often met with impunity and a lack of justice. There's a tendency to blame the victims, shifting the focus away from the real issue at hand- the prevalence of a culture that allows such atrocities to occur. Women are being subjected to a vicious cycle of blame, from the way they



This victim-blaming culture further perpetuates a toxic narrative that excuses the actions of perpetrators and places an undue burden on women

Doris Kathia
Youth Advocate

dress to their choices in relationships. This victim-blaming culture further perpetuates a toxic narrative that excuses the actions of perpetrators and places an undue burden on women to navigate a world where their safety is not guaranteed. Women must feel safe without constant vigilance. The burden of ensuring personal safety shouldn't solely be on them. The idea of exhaustive due diligence on every encounter is impractical and unjust. Safety is a right,

not a privilege contingent on proactive measures.

Violence against women is pervasive across all walks of life, from sex workers to mothers and LGBTQ women. This indiscriminate targeting highlights the urgent need for systemic change. Justice for victims should not be a luxury but a non-negotiable demand. Victims cannot speak when they have already been silenced by violence. The bottom line is simple: Stop killing women. No justifications or excuses absolve individuals or society from the responsibility of protecting women. The solution demands a multifaceted approach, one that extends beyond the immediate outrage and necessitates systemic changes at various levels of society. Governments must prioritize citizen safety by deploying resources, ensuring robust law enforcement, well-lit streets, and secure public spaces. The presence of patrol officers is essential to deter potential criminals and ensure swift responses to emergencies.

Femicide crisis: It is time for action, not empty words

(19th February 2024, *The Standard*, By Ermiyas Males)



“Through education, we can foster a culture of respect and equality, where individuals are valued for their humanity rather than constrained by restrictive gender roles.”

- Ermiyas Males, Youth Advocate.

The recent surge in gender-based violence (GBV) has reached alarming proportions, painting a grim picture of the pervasive misogyny that plagues our society. According to recent statistics, instances of GBV have risen sharply, with femicide emerging as a particularly disturbing trend. This reality hits home with the anguishing and heartbreaking story of Rita Waeni, a young woman whose life was tragically cut short. Her murder is just one among many, highlighting the urgent need for action to address the root causes of this epidemic.

As the threads of compassion unravel in the face of such atrocities, it becomes painfully clear that transformative measures are not only necessary but imperative. Femicide, the ultimate manifestation of gender-based violence, lurks in the shadows, claiming the lives of countless women in Kenya. Yet, amidst this grim reality, duty-bearers at the national and county levels remain largely silent, failing to acknowledge their role in addressing this grave injustice. The insidious nature of misogyny casts a long shadow over our society, perpetuating toxic masculinity and breeding a culture

of violence against women. From the corridors of power to the streets of our cities, women bear the brunt of this systemic oppression, living in constant fear for their lives.

Education emerges as a potent weapon in our arsenal against femicide and gender-based violence. By implementing comprehensive, gender-inclusive academic programs from an early age, we can challenge the entrenched stereotypes that fuel toxic masculinity.

Through education, we can foster a culture of respect and equality, where individuals are valued for their humanity rather than constrained by restrictive gender roles. Furthermore, the criminal justice system must play a pivotal role in holding perpetrators of femicide and gender-based violence accountable. This requires a re-evaluation of existing laws to ensure they reflect the severity of these crimes and send a clear message that such atrocities will not be tolerated.

Additionally, resources must be allocated to support victims and survivors, while law enforcement

agencies must be strengthened to effectively investigate and prosecute cases of femicide and violence against women. But our efforts cannot stop there. We must also harness the power of the media to reshape societal perceptions and dismantle harmful stereotypes. Responsible reporting and portrayal of gender dynamics can help challenge ingrained prejudices and promote positive examples of masculinity that prioritize empathy and respect. Above all, in the exact words of the last statement of demand from the End Femicide Ke Movement, “We must stand together in solidarity with all victims of femicide and their families, survivors of intimate partner violence, and violence against women (VAW). VAW and femicide are crimes already, and as such, all leaders, men, and women alike, should publicly condemn them!”. It is only through collective action and unwavering determination that we can break free from the shackles of gender-based violence and create a safer, more equitable society for all.

Let's take action to end corruption-fuelled unequal treatment of Kenyans under the law

(1st March 2024, *The Standard*, By Onyimbi Nelson)



The government needs to strengthen the justice system through a pragmatic weeding out of impunity and educating communities about the legal system to enhance equal justice.

By Onyimbi Nelson
Youth Advocate

Despite the constitutional provision that guarantees citizens equal benefits of the law in Article 27 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010), legal processes, aside from being marred by corruption, have often been unbearably slow. More often than not, this has led to the derailing of justice, and survivors of crimes, including sexual crimes such as rape and defilement, have been denied the fundamental right to justice.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights affirms that all humans are born

free and equal in rights and dignity, including legal rights. Through the Constitution of Kenya, the law should be accorded fairly to every citizen without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, and social class. However, the picture that is painted is far from it, with several citizens expressing significant dissatisfaction with the legal system of the land.

A recent report by Afro Barometer (2020) indicates that about 56 percent of Kenyans say they are often or always treated unfairly before the law, which occasionally allows some officials and financially able citizens to buy their ways out. About 62 per cent of Kenyans further believe that unequal treatment under the law has increased over the years. The delay in providing justice aids in derailing justice through corruption, witness and survivor interference, and evidence distortion. Evidence, as the primary determinant of judgments, may lose quality over time, which then empowers perpetrators of social crimes, for example, child rights offenders, sexual predators, and custodians of

harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation.

As survivors suffer trauma and agony, and sometimes, death, perpetrators get away with as much as a slap on the wrist and are released back into society where they endeavour to recommit the crimes. The government needs to strengthen the justice system through a pragmatic weeding out of impunity and educating communities about the legal system to enhance equal justice. Through this, citizens accused of crimes should also equally benefit from the law, underpinned by Article 49(1) of the constitution, which gives the right to arrested persons to be released on bond or bail, unless there are compelling reasons not to be released until their fate is determined through fair hearing

(Article 50). Communities should also work with the police and chiefs to ensure criminals are brought to book and that through the society, building upwards, Kenyans can coexist in safer and more inclusive environments.

End the teen pregnancy crisis

(1st March 2024, The Daily Nation, By Leticia Afandi)

Teenage pregnancy is rarely addressed. It's the "dark side" of teenage pregnancy that is, unfortunately, engulfed by silence. Yet this is something that has been with us for a long time.

Ministry of Health data show one in every five adolescents aged 15-19 is already a mother, who is then forced to drop out of school.

We then get the socioeconomic status of this young woman, a child growing up in a low-income home because their mother did not finish school, so she can't get a decent job and, therefore, a decent life for herself and the child. As a country, we must acknowledge the problem

and take up the issue because it is our business to end teenage pregnancy. The main drivers of teenage pregnancies include sexual violence, including by people close to the victim; poverty, which forces girls to engage in sexual activity for survival; and forced early marriage, which some communities still practice. However, sometimes teenage pregnancy occurs because teenagers are uninformed.

Their parents don't give them comprehensive sexual education; they bury their heads in the sand, thinking that their children don't know about sex. The society, too, shies off from telling children about the consequences

of sex, such as pregnancy and diseases. Let's not put the blame on anybody but work towards a sustainable solution to the menace. Parents, schools, religious organizations, and civil society should also do this.

Men also have a role to play here. Let's have open and bold conversations with teenagers about sex. We should also be ready to answer their questions all the time and educate them well. The government should put in place a robust strategy to tame the vice.

Let's not wait for teenagers to get pregnant but empower them enough to shun premature sexual relations.

Improve menstrual hygiene in our schools

(20th May 2024, The Standard, By Dancan Kemanga)

Schoolgirls still face barriers to safe, hygienic, and dignified menstruation worldwide due to lack of proper facilities and support.

To effectively manage their menstruation, they require access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, affordable and appropriate menstrual hygiene materials, information on good

practices, and a supportive environment where they can manage menstruation without embarrassment and stigma.

According to UNICEF 2015, in low income countries, half of the schools lack adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene services crucial to enable girls and female teachers to manage menstruation. Inadequate sanitary facilities affect girls'

experiences at school, causing them to miss classes during their menstruation or even drop out.

To address this issue, schools should ensure availability of clean and private restroom facilities that are well equipped with sanitation amenities.

Society should work towards creating a safer and more inclusive online environment for women

(8th March 2024, *The Standard*, By Duncan Kemanga)

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV) is a growing global problem often overlooked. It involves any act that is amplified using digital tools, causing physical, psychological, sexual, social, political, and economic harm to women and girls. According to the Institute of Development Studies, between 16-58 per cent of women have experienced technological-facilitated gender-based violence.

The rapid evolution of the digital landscape has created a toxic environment and avenues for perpetrators of GBV to target, harm, and undermine women and their participation in the digital spaces. Misogyny and cyber bullying, the intertwined aspects that employ discrimination and harassment as tactics for digital bullying, encompasses a range of behaviours that target women. This can include sexist remarks, derogatory comments, objectification, and threats of violence.

Social media platforms, forums, and comment sections are often rife with such behaviours, creating hostile environments that deter women from fully participating in online spaces. The effects of digital misogyny and cyber bullying extend beyond the digital realm

and impact women's mental health, self-esteem, and sense of safety.



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Duncan Kemanga,
Youth Advocate

Constant exposure to sexist and demanding content can lead to anxiety, depression, suicide, suicidal thoughts, trauma, and feelings of powerlessness. Moreover, Women who speak out against misogyny and Cyber bullying often face further harassment and retaliation.

However, combatting online misogyny and cyber bullying presents numerous challenges, including the anonymity afforded by the internet, insufficient legal frameworks to

curb online harassment, and the normalization of using abusive and hate speeches in digital spaces. Empowering women to safely navigate in digital spaces requires a holistic approach, involving social media companies, policymakers, government agencies, civil society organizations, and private users. Social media platforms should enforce stricter policies against hate speech and harassment, implement effective and safe reporting mechanisms, and provide support resources for victims.

Education and awareness-raising initiatives are also essential in fostering a culture of respect in online platforms.

As we commemorate the International Day for Women today, let us strive towards investing in women's mental well-being and recognizing the impacts of online misogyny and cyber bullying on our young girls and women and the significant threats associated with them in the digital age.

By recognizing the intersectionality of these issues and adopting a feminist and intersectional approach to address them, we can work towards creating a safer and more inclusive online environment for women.

Religious groups should protest the killing of women and the mistreatment of marginalized communities

(15th March 2024, *The Standard*, By Doris Kathia)



“The killing of women remains unaddressed. Despite the urgent need for advocacy and action to protect and preserve the lives of women subjected to gender-based violence, the very groups orchestrating the “March for Life” have remained conspicuously silent, failing to denounce these atrocities or to advocate for measures to protect and safeguard the vulnerable. - Doris Kathia, Youth Advocate.

Occasionally, we see news stories about Christians marching on the streets to protest abortion. Many claim they are marching to defend and promote life, yet restrict their agenda to fetuses even as news of Kenyans dying from hunger, crime, and intimate partner violence dominate our headlines.

This year, Kenyans have witnessed an increase in the killing of women. Yet, the voices that rally for life remain conspicuously silent on this epidemic of violence against women. Where is the outrage for these lost lives? Where is the demand for justice and accountability by these religious groups? Additionally, the appalling incidents of rape continue to plague the nation.

We keep seeing documented cases of sexual abuse and exploitation perpetrated by individuals in positions of authority, including religious leaders,

against children in Kenya. Such cases highlight the vulnerability of children by those entrusted with their care and guidance and the need for robust protection mechanisms to prevent and address instances of abuse within religious institutions.

Similarly, the killing of women remains unaddressed. Despite the urgent need for advocacy and action to protect and preserve the lives of women subjected to gender-based violence, the very groups orchestrating the “March for Life” have remained conspicuously silent, failing to denounce these atrocities or to advocate for measures to protect and safeguard the vulnerable.

The lack of support and advocacy for the human rights of all Kenyans, especially those we disagree with or disapprove of, further highlights the disconnect between the supposed

values of these anti-abortion groups and their actions toward marginalised communities.

What would Jesus do? The moralists and some religious leaders must recognize the hypocrisy inherent in their selective-advocacy for life. It is disingenuous to advocate for the rights of the unborn while turning a blind eye to the myriad injustices faced by women, girls, and marginalised communities such as LGBTQ. If we are truly committed to the sanctity of life, then we must be consistent in our advocacy for all lives, not just those that fit a narrow ideological agenda. The “March for Life” should be a platform for genuine solidarity and compassion, encompassing the full spectrum of human experience and standing against all forms of injustice and oppression.

Discriminatory practices must be eradicated

(28th March 2024, *The Daily Nation*, By Doris Kathia)

The recent revelations of the Kenya Revenue Authority's (KRA) dismissal of 133 job applicants owing to mandatory HIV and pregnancy tests along with intrusive inquiries into contraceptive methods are profoundly troubling and raise serious concerns. The mandatory medical examinations represent a clear violation of constitutional and human rights.

Article 27 of the Constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination based on one's health status. By subjecting candidates to these tests and checking for contraceptive methods without their consent, KRA infringes upon their right to informed consent, fair labour practices, and bodily autonomy and integrity. It perpetuates discrimination against women, reinforces harmful gender stereotypes, and denies reproductive justice. It not only violates individual rights but also contributes to gender-based discrimination in employment practices. Besides, compulsory HIV testing is explicitly prohibited under the HIV and Aids Prevention and Control Act, 2006, which prohibits compelling individuals to undergo HIV tests as a condition for recruitment or continued employment. KRA's actions in this regard not only contravene the law but

also undermine efforts to combat stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV.

The explanation by Risper Simiyu, Commissioner of Domestic Taxes at the authority, that these tests were necessary due to the paramilitary nature of the training, is not only weak but outright unacceptable. Such justification attempts to cloak discrimination and invasion of privacy in the guise of training requirements. It is a thinly veiled attempt at justifying gross violation of fundamental rights. KRA must be held accountable for gross human rights violations and the concerned officers suspended with a demand for individual accountability. And there is a pressing need for remedial measures to address the harm suffered by the affected candidates.

Parliamentary intervention is essential to investigate this matter thoroughly. It is crucial to ensure that such violations do not recur. There is a demand for transparency in recruitment policies, emphasizing a non-discriminatory approach that aligns with constitutional provisions. It is crucial to tackle the underlying issue of HIV-related stigma in Kenya. We must prioritize education and awareness campaigns that promote



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Doris Kathia,
Youth Advocate

understanding and compassion towards people living with HIV/Aids.

Robust legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms are essential to protect the rights of individuals and prevent discrimination in all spheres of life, including employment. The violations perpetrated by KRA are not only an affront to the dignity and rights of the affected candidates but also a stain on Kenya's commitment to upholding human rights and the rule of law. Society must unequivocally condemn such actions and demand accountability from those entrusted with power: Only through collective action can we ensure that such injustices are never repeated.

Clergy must speak for women

(28th March 2024, *Daily Nation*, By Kelvin Mokaya)

Earlier this year, villagers at Riang'ombe Nene, at Amariba in Kisii County, reportedly stumbled on suspected sex-enhancing drugs in a house where a Pentecostal cleric allegedly defiled a Grade Four girl, 8, after she had been sent by her mother to deliver breakfast to the 'man of the cloth'. At the height of the HIV/Aids epidemic when up to 12 million people were infected across sub-Saharan Africa, Nyumbani Children's Home offered refuge to Kenya's dying children. Later, the institute, run by a Catholic charity, fought for the first batches of antiretroviral drugs for its sick toddlers.

Contributions poured in, especially from American personalities. But the privately funded orphanage allegedly concealed terrible secrets of abuse and

rape of the children by their caregivers.

A 2019 Kenyan TV feature, "Defiled in Church", sparked outrage amid condemnation of the paedophiles disguised as priests. It is a pity that we keep witnessing many cases of sexual abuse by clergy in the country but justice has never been served. The "moral custodians" of our nation are the ones making headlines for ruining, endangering, and, sometimes, ending young lives.

Thousands of children and women worldwide have become victims of rape, sexual assault, child marriage, sexual mutilation, and human trafficking due to the church's negligence and outright defiance of local and international laws. In 2022 alone, Kenya recorded 725

femicide cases, according to a UN Office on Drugs and Crime report, the highest number since data collection began in 2015. In 2023, more than 150 Kenyan women were murdered.

Studies reveal that one of the main root causes of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the country is cultural and religious beliefs. Religious ideologies on a woman being inferior to a man promote the perception of their being "unclean" and portray virtuous women as "submissive".

Religion depresses women's rights in general and their reproductive health and choices in particular: We cannot claim to be Christian but remain silent on the raging epidemic among women and girls.

Do more to end child labour and teenage pregnancies

(20th June 2024, *The Standard*, By Eve Sasi)

Kenyan children face challenges arising from child marriage, family leadership roles, teenage pregnancies, and the abandonment of education. Parental neglect forces them to assume their care and that of their siblings. A recent report by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics indicates that 1.3 million Kenyan children are involved in child labour. While balancing household

duties with school, these children struggle academically. Their aspirations to rise above poverty are dashed by inadequate support, resulting in poor grades.

Child marriages add another layer to the issue of child labour, with young people coerced into assuming adult duties. They face domestic violence and are often too young to make

informed life choices, leading to a relentless cycle of labour without respite. The lack of family planning knowledge or community support leads to early childbearing, exacerbating their economic hardships and workload. Our collective determination to safeguard the rights and futures of our children must be fortified.

Strengthen families to combat GBV

(28th March 2024, The Star, By Stephen Maginga)

Gender-based violence remains a major problem in the world, affecting people individually, in families, in intimate relationships, and communities at large. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of relationship structures in the fight against GBV. A foundation of nurturing, support, and values from strong families and relationships can aid in the prevention of GBV.

According to the World Health Organization, data indicates that globally about 1 in 3 women has been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate violence or non-partner violence in their lifetime, inflicting girls' mental health, and psychological

and physical well-being. WHO further indicates that most violence is a result of intimate partner violence. Worldwide, about 27 per cent of women aged 15-19 who have been in a relationship report that they have been subjected to some form of physical or sexual violence by their intimate partner. The statistics raise an alarm for collaborative efforts to intervene and strengthen relationship structures.

GBV encompasses a variety of destructive behaviours targeted at people because of their gender identity or assumed roles. Beyond the immediate harm inflicted, GBV perpetuates cycles of trauma, and

inequalities and undermines social cohesion. Family structures are crucial in influencing attitudes, convictions, and actions concerning gender roles and interpersonal relationships.

Children acquire knowledge about consent, power dynamics, and respect within the family unit, which can either support or contradict societal norms. The normalization of violence and discrimination is resisted by strong familial bonds marked by empathy, open communication, and respect for one another. Family structures must be strengthened, and healthy relationships encouraged, to effectively combat GBV.

Encourage open discussions on sexuality

(25th November 2024, The Standard, By Evelyn Sasi)

The concept of respecting oneself and sexuality is a powerful tool for developing good relationships with oneself and others. Appreciating and accepting oneself allows us to embrace our bodies and desires without feeling shame or guilt.

Lack of proper education on sex-related topics contributes to confusion and negative thinking since many individuals grow up with limited knowledge of sexual health and their

bodies. Encouraging open discussions about sexuality allows people to communicate their needs.

The absence of support for these types of interactions may lead to a fear of being evaluated, which may impede self-expression.

Mental health is one of the most common concerns that young people face. Anxiety and depression, for example, can have an impact on a

person's self-esteem and capacity to love themselves. These issues can be worsened by societal demands linked with sensuality, impeding the journey to body positivity and confidence.

Individuals must be given the ability to make informed decisions about their bodies and relationships, which can be achieved by embracing their interests and preferences.

Culture and religion are key factors hindering media coverage of reproductive health- experts

(2nd April 2024, Standard Digital feature, By Sharon Wanga)

Culture and religion are some of the key factors that hinder media coverage of reproductive health, experts say. This is according to speeches at a journalist capacity building on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), organized by the Network for Adolescent and Youth of Africa (NAYA) in Nairobi.

According to the experts, some journalists face religious and cultural challenges in their quest to cover reproductive health stories.

Doctor Joyce Omwoha of the Technical University of Kenya revealed how she witnessed several instances where survivors refused to open up because of religion and culture.

“During my research on reproductive health, I realized that some survivors were not willing to tell their stories for fear of stigmatization by the community. Some would want to seek permission first from their religious leaders before opening up,” she narrates.

She noted some cultural norms do not allow community members to discuss private life with non-community

members which makes it difficult for survivors to open up to journalists. Omwoha also noted that there was still a set of challenges leading to inaccurate reporting by journalists citing a lack of awareness and capacity building.

“Journalists should help in creating awareness about the prevalence, health risks, and cultural implications of SRHR through their reporting, educating the public and policymakers,” she said. “Therefore to improve the reporting quality, journalists should be equipped with skills for accuracy, ethics, avoiding sensationalism or perpetuating harmful stereotypes.”

Gender-based violence activists and a youth advocate at NAYA also concurred that most survivors tend to withdraw their consent after a story is aired because of religious and cultural pressure.

Mwita, a legal student at Mount Kenya University noted that getting an informed consent form signed before an interview is an ethical step towards helping journalists avoid landing in legal problems.

“Journalists or media houses should always prepare legal consent forms before conducting interviews for SRHR stories. Once a consent form is signed, the subject has a right to withdraw consent before publication or airing of the story but can’t do so after the story is aired,” Mwita explained.

During the training, journalists got the opportunity to highlight some challenges they go through while covering such stories. However, some journalists expressed challenges like cases where survivors are not willing to talk for fear of discrimination, inaccessibility to them, and lack of experts to highlight solutions to the problems, especially for vernacular reporters.

The science journalists were encouraged to write more on SRHR to provide a platform for survivors to share their stories advocating for change and impact policies attracting relevant stakeholders to address the issues potentially resulting in stronger laws.

Safe environment will curb sexual assaults

(Thursday, 11th April 2024, Daily Nation, By Purity Nthiana)

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). Sexual assault, which is prevalent in the country, is an act of violence that not only inflicts physical harm but also leaves deep emotional scars, shattering lives and undermining trust. Sexual assault encompasses behaviours of non-consensual sexual acts, rape, molestation, harassment, and coercion to sex.

Consent is the cornerstone of a healthy sexual interaction; otherwise, it is an infringement on an individual's autonomy and rights. Fostering a culture of consent such as promoting open and honest communication about boundaries, desires, and intentions in sexual encounters is important in combating sexual assault. It must be freely given.

Consent is not a one-time agreement but an ongoing dialogue that can be withdrawn at any point. Many cases of assault are towards people in relationships, mostly women, especially where one party feels superior.

One should communicate on using protection after consenting and making your partner realize that you have a say in the relationship and a right to protect yourself. Many women have been killed just because they refused to give in to sexual advances. Prevention of sexual assaults will go a long way in ensuring a safe environment for everyone but helping victims is equally important.

Survivors often face immense challenges in coming forward due to fear of

judgment, retribution, or disbelief. Spaces where they can seek help. Believing and validating survivors' experiences is a fundamental step towards healing and justice.

We must confront issues of gender inequality, toxic masculinity, and institutional failures in responding to reports of sexual assault that make the perpetrators thrive and not face justice.

Sadly, most cases are not taken seriously, especially if the victim and the assailant had a relationship. Let's teach the youth, more so men, to seek consent and accept a 'No'. The defilement of minors is something we should not even discuss; the Constitution is very clear about the matter:

Allocate more financial resources to the health sector

(24th June 2024, the Standard, By Philip Ngotiek)

Kenya's healthcare system is at a crossroads. Recent budgetary allocations in the Finance Bill 2024 reflect a worrying decrease in funding for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health (RMNCAH). It is disconcerting that the National Treasury has reduced the budget for free delivery services and Maternal Health Programme from Sh4 billion each to Sh2 billion. As a result,

many gains made in reducing maternal as well as neonatal mortality may be reversed.

Each year, between 6,000 and 8,000 women die in Kenya during childbirth, with neonatal mortality as high as 21 per 1000 live births. These numbers are a grim reminder of the ongoing crisis in maternal and child health. This decrease in financing is more than just

an economic question; it means life or death for thousands of mothers and their newborns. Adequate funding for programmes is crucial to enhance access and quality of maternal and child health services, particularly in underserved areas.

The proposed budget cuts will cause shortages of essential supplies, reduced staff and compromised service delivery.

Strike is rolling back reproductive healthcare gains

(25th April 2024, *People Daily*, By Purity Nthiana)

It has been over a month since the doctor's strike started leading to the disruption of healthcare services in public healthcare facilities in the country.

This strike may roll back years of hard work, particularly in ensuring reproductive healthcare services are available to all women.

Strikes disrupt the availability of reproductive health services such as prenatal care, postnatal care, and family planning counseling. This can have adverse effects on maternal and infant health outcomes. Access to testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is also affected during

strikes. This leads to undiagnosed or untreated STIs, which can have long-term health consequences and contribute to the spread of infections within communities.

Access to emergency drugs such as PEP or PREP is limited during doctor strikes. This can be particularly concerning for individuals who require timely access to prevent HIV after unprotected sex.

It is time for the government and Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU) to reach an agreement and find a long-term solution.

As the KMPDU secretary general said, "You can't say healthcare is essential if you can't budget for it." For the sake of all Kenyans, Let's uphold human rights including affordable, accessible, and adequate healthcare services.

Let us put the health care of our vulnerable groups in mind as we look for an amicable agreement.

As doctors and the government go back and forth, let's be aware of the suffering of those who need these services the most, people who cannot afford to seek healthcare services anywhere else.

Act tough on those who impregnate young girls

(6th August 2024, *The Standard*, By John Matiko)

Teenage Pregnancies are a serious problem in Kuria, Migori. Many young girls have been forced out of school since parents neglect them once they notice they are pregnant and refuse to pay their school fees. This results in the victims going for unsafe abortions or becoming suicidal. According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey, 2022, about 23 per cent of young and adolescent

girls aged 15-19 have been pregnant in Kuria. The report also highlights that more young girls from relatively humble backgrounds record more cases of teenage pregnancies than girls from relatively well-off families.

In both Kuria East and Kuria West sub-counties, like many other parts of the country, a majority of these cases are

caused by defilement and retrogressive cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and parental negligence. Many culprits of defilement go scot-free due to the widespread prevalence of traditional kangaroo courts. This gives them more room to continue perpetrating the sexual violations without fear of apprehension.

Take measures to address loopholes in medical sector that put lives of expectant mothers at risk

(26th April 2024, *The Standard*, By Doris Kathia)



Social The government's refusal to negotiate a fair deal with healthcare workers is not only a breach of their rights but also puts the lives of many expectant women at risk.

Doris Kathia,
Youth Advocate

Imagine being pregnant in the midst of a health crisis, feeling the weight of uncertainty crashing down with each passing day. You should be receiving prenatal care, reassurance, and support from trained professionals. Instead, you're left to navigate a broken system alone, praying that complications won't arise because if they do, there's no guarantee anyone will be there to help.

This is the hope of many pregnant women in Kenya at the moment. Maternal mortality is a serious global

issue with the maternal mortality ratio estimated to be 342 per 100,000 live births in 2017 in Kenya. This is further exacerbated by the ongoing healthcare strikes, which have been affecting public hospitals and healthcare services across the country for more than one month now. Nurses and doctors have been protesting to demand better pay and working conditions, leaving many expectant women at risk.

In Kenya, basic healthcare is treated as a luxury rather than a fundamental human right. Women are paying the price for this negligence with their lives, and it's about time someone held those in power accountable.

The healthcare system in Kenya is already faced with challenges, including low birth weight, neural tube defects, and syphilitic babies, as well as children with preventable infectious diseases. The strikes further exacerbate these issues, leading to potential inter-generational health impacts.

The decline in postpartum hemorrhage (PPH) attendance alone points to increased maternal and

newborn mortality, which is a significant concern for Kenya. Furthermore, poor and disadvantaged persons report higher unmet needs for health care when there are strikes.

Health systems in developing countries, including Kenya, are subject to multiple challenges, including drug and commodity stock-outs, under staffing, and inadequate funding.

The government's refusal to negotiate a fair deal with healthcare workers is not only a breach of their rights but also puts the lives of many expectant women at risk. The strike has led to a shortage of staff in public hospitals, resulting in delayed or inadequate care for pregnant women. We urgently need reforms in Kenya's healthcare system.

This strike is just a symptom of a much larger problem: a healthcare system in desperate need of reform. It's a system plagued by corruption, mismanagement, and a blatant disregard for the well-being of its citizens, particularly its women. Every woman has the right to access quality maternal healthcare, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Lobby groups push for youth sexual and reproductive health rights ahead of Civil Society Summit

(17th May 2024, *The Standard*, Feature, By Sharon Wanga)

A group of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) have called on the United Nations and Heads of State to protect and respect the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people by including it in the Pact of the Future and multilateral declarations.

The organizations led by the Network for Adolescents and Youth of Africa (NAYA) and 40 other CSOs convened a forum in Nairobi together with the youth to table their demands on adolescents' reproductive health issues.

Their meeting was convened following a UN Civil Society Conference held in Nairobi last week that gave opportunity to relevant organizations to put a global perspective on specific issues of concern.

They have particularly called on the UN and Member states to recommit to full implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action. Specifically, the Programme for Action adopted in 1994 at Cairo called for all people to have access to comprehensive reproductive health care including voluntary family planning, safe pregnancy and childbirth services, and prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections.

The organizations also want the young people's meaningful and inclusive participation in such civil society conferences to be strengthened.

They further want the UN and the member states to strengthen access to evidence-based, comprehensive sexuality education to enable young people to make informed choices on their sexuality.

The CSOs call for alignment and acknowledgment of the pact of the future to existing treaties that align with the African continent, for instance, the Maputo protocol. "Highlight action and pathways towards the realization and adaptation of the UN binding treaty on business and human rights ensuring a more sustainable future for young people in Africa," they noted.

The organizations noted that despite progress in realizing sexual reproductive health and rights through various frameworks, adolescents and young people are still disproportionately affected by reproductive health challenges like the high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, unplanned pregnancies and unsafe abortions, maternal morbidity and mortalities, sexual and gender-based violence, child mar-

riage, female genital mutilation and more that are caused by inadequate youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services.

At the closing session of the conference in Nairobi, Secretary-General António Guterres and President William Ruto lauded the civil society for their indispensable contributions to countries of operations.

Guterres said that he had witnessed the enormous impact of civil society in every corner of the world; easing suffering, pushing for peace and justice, standing for truth, and advancing gender equality and sustainable development, with many working at great personal risk.

"We need you to use your networks, knowledge, and contacts to implement solutions, and to persuade governments to act. Your contributions have been indispensable, and I thank you," Guterres said.

He further invited civil society to lift their spirit to the "Action Day" that is to be held in connection with the awaited UN summit on the future.

Addressing the delegates at the conference President Ruto showed commit-

ment in recognition of the civil society sector within and outside the country.

“Civil society has a role to play in the development of our country. We may not necessarily always agree but that is the beauty of having a diverse opinion,” said Ruto. He said the operationalisation of the Public Benefits Organisation Act demonstrates the government’s com-

mitment to forging a strong partnership with civil society.

“We have made it possible for Public Benefit Organizations from outside Kenya not to be taken through unnecessary vigorous processes before they begin their operations in Kenya,” he added.

The conference took place ahead of the major summit that is anticipated to

be held at UN headquarters, in New York in September 2024.

Heads of state and relevant organizations are expected to work towards the Pact of the Future, an outcome document that will be used to determine the future of the world.

Give teenage mothers support, not scorn

(3rd May 2024, The Daily Nation, By Evelyn Sasi)

Teen pregnancy is a complicated subject with many social, mental, and physical difficulties, despite sometimes being portrayed as a typical occurrence and carefree experience. For the mother-to-be, it’s typically a maze of unanticipated issues. The young lady is then left to walk a difficult path that may have long-term effects on her and her unborn child.

Data show a worrying picture: Last year, a startling 696 teenage girls became pregnant every day, the al Syndemic Disease Control Council (NSDCC) reported. The absence of appropriate prenatal care is one of the biggest obstacles for them. Their inability to access services or fear of being known and abandoned can cause patients to miss or put off important healthcare appointments, putting them and their

babies in danger. Teenage bodies are still developing and have different nutritional needs to women’s. A young mother’s diet should be high in important vitamins and minerals to support both her health and the baby’s development.

Sadly, they may lack the knowledge or resources to obtain this essential sustenance, resulting in deficiencies that can affect the mother and baby. The emotional cost is equally devastating. Social stigma and loneliness frequently result in loved ones abandoning young mothers, which feeds emotions of hopelessness and sadness. Some are forced to drop out of school, further limiting their future opportunities. In desperate situations, teenagers may resort to unsafe abortions performed by quacks.

This domino effect can lead to poverty due to the bleak future for mother and child. In some cases, child marriage is seen as an escape from societal pressure. For others, substance abuse becomes a dangerous coping mechanism for emotional pain.

This can lead to birth complications and health problems or even death for mother and baby. Let’s move away from judgment and isolation.

The youngsters need love and support, not scorn. Acknowledge their mistake but emphasize the brighter future that awaits them and their child. By offering tools, counseling, and access to prenatal care, we can help them create a better future for themselves and their children.

Embrace diversity in families

(14th May 2024, *The Daily Nation*, By Purity Nthiana)



Social When one musters the courage to quit, let's support and not condemn them for breaking the family— in the name of protecting the family unit. As society evolves, so does the landscape of familial relationships.

Purity Nthiana,
Youth Advocate

The International Day of Families is celebrated every May 15, to promote the importance of families and reflect on the challenges of modern families. Family dynamics and values have been defined in different ways over the years.

They do not fit only the father-mother-and-children model anymore. Many people choose this, as per the Scriptures. But to some, family is not

blood; it is the bond you form with an erstwhile stranger that keeps turning up in your life. It is a baby that smiled at you in an orphanage and became your child. It is a mentor who helped you.

The safety of family members is more important than blood relationship.

While many institutions want to protect the family from external influence, the most important thing is love and respect because diversity of opinions, professional religious beliefs, and economic status no longer matter much. We cannot push people into unwanted spaces to protect these values.

Marriages end in divorce sometimes, then we have single-parent families and blended ones. We can go on to elaborate on how families are different in so many ways.

We don't need to go through a checklist of beliefs before we are allowed to be part of our family. The important aspect of a family is how they treat and care for each other.

Where two people meet and decide to have a family comes great challenges. Some of these become such a burden that they decide to part ways or one partner leaves, and there are many reasons for divorce, such as abuse, conjugal and intimacy issues, and infidelity.

Do we call these people criminals for leaving a marriage where they were unhappy?

When one musters the courage to quit, let's support and not condemn them for breaking the family— in the name of protecting the family unit. As society evolves, so does the landscape of familial relationships.

The diversity of family dynamics reflects the richness of human experience and boundless capacity for love, resilience, and connection. By embracing and celebrating that, we honor the inherent worth of all families.

Sexual education, healthcare services are basic human rights

(16th May 2024, *The Standard*, By Doris Kathia)

Diversity encompasses various aspects such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, socioeconomic status, physical ability, and cultural background, among others. In essence, diversity acknowledges and celebrates the differences that exist among individuals and groups, recognising that each person brings unique perspectives, experiences, and strengths to the table.

To ensure that we create an inclusive environment where all individuals are valued, respected, and given equal opportunities to contribute and thrive, we must embrace diversity.

This year's theme for the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexphobia, and Transphobia is "No one left behind: Equality, freedom, and justice for all!" Emphasises the urgent need for inclusive societies where every person can live authentically without fear of discrimination or persecution.

Recently, many countries have been envisioning a world where everyone has access to quality sexual and reproductive health education, information, and services.

Therefore, we need to collectively advocate for more than just tolerance;

we need to advocate for acceptance and celebration of diversity. Individuals in all their diversity, should feel safe and empowered to openly express their identities and love, free from judgment or condemnation.

Central to this vision is the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) within equitable and gender just frameworks.

Combat stigma

Although we live in a conservative world, there is a need to increase awareness about the importance of SRHR for all individuals. Regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics.

Access to comprehensive sexual education and healthcare services are not privileges but fundamental human rights. Yet, stigma and discrimination often hinder marginalised communities, including LGBTQI+ individuals, from accessing these essential services. Secondly, we need to combat stigma and discrimination by challenging stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory practices that perpetuate inequality.

Moreover, we must advocate for policy changes that protect the rights of marginalised groups. Inclusive policies not only safeguard SRHR but also foster an environment of acceptance and inclusivity. Additionally, advocacy efforts aimed at policy change have the potential to transform legal frameworks, ensuring the protection of SRHR for all individuals.

With comprehensive sexuality education, youth-friendly services, and safe spaces, young people will be empowered with the knowledge, agency, and confidence to make informed decisions about their bodies and lives.

When young people are empowered, they become catalysts for change, driving societal progress toward greater acceptance and inclusivity.

The theme "No one left behind: Equality, freedom, and justice for all!" Means that we must uphold the rights and dignity of all individuals, irrespective of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics.

Only through collective action can we truly achieve equality, freedom, and justice for all.

Youths call for action on global issues at historic UN summit

(18th May, 2024, *The Daily Nation*, Feature, By Wanja Mbutia)



“Meaningful youth participation in decision-making is not just a policy and legal requirement but there’s evidence that when young people are engaged, everyone benefits from their creativity, ingenuity, their passion, energies and networks.”

- Robert Aseda, the Head of Programmes at NAYA

Susan* was already having a hard time when she went to the hospital.

She had to deal with the stigma and social pressure of being a teenage mother.

So she thought it would be easier in the hospital, where she hoped the medical staff would be understanding and accommodating. She was wrong.

“Getting quality reproductive healthcare in hospitals is quite a challenge, especially for us adolescent mothers,” recounts Susan.

“When I was pregnant and went for antenatal care at a public hospital, the nurse attending to me shamed me, calling me ‘immoral’ for all to hear. This made me avoid subsequent appointments until delivery, where I experienced obstetric violence in yet another public facility.

I’ve heard similar experiences from other teen mothers I interacted with. By giving us a chance to speak up and

contribute to the “Pact for the Future” document, we can change this narrative. We are not just the future; we are the present.”

Susan is one of the youth who participated in the United Nations Civil Society Conference on May 9-10.

The historic event, the first of its kind in Africa, was held at the United Nations Office in Nairobi.

The conference, attended by over 3,000 delegates, civil society, government officials and global leaders, aimed to shape the upcoming “Pact for the Future.”

This critical document, to be adopted in September 2024 during the “Summit of the Future” in New York, will guide global development agendas for years to come.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), these trends pose substantial risks to progress on global goals, including sexual and

reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

The “Summit of the Future” is a transformative event, aiming to reaffirm the UN’s commitment to its Charter and accelerate the implementation of current global commitments while addressing emerging challenges.

The summit will cover five essential areas: sustainable development and financing, international peace and security, science and technology, youth and future generations and the transformation of global governance.

The UN’s commitment to global development has evolved through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) between 1990 and 2015 and the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While these frameworks have achieved notable successes, progress remains uneven, particularly in developing nations.

The “Pact for the Future” seeks to address these disparities by fostering a

more inclusive, equitable and sustainable global governance framework.

In a demonstration of engagement, the Network for Adolescent and Youth of Africa (NAYA) facilitated a dialogue involving over 40 civil society organisations and 200 young people.

This dialogue resulted in a position paper reflecting the collective demands of youth regarding the “Pact for the Future.”

The paper underscores the importance of integrating young voices into global decision-making processes to ensure that future development frameworks are relevant, practical, and innovative.

According to Robert Aseda, the Head of Programmes at NAYA, they decided to engage the youth in the dialogue because they believe the voices of young people are critical in ensuring that the development agenda is alive to their realities and situations.

“There are several conventions that call on states to ensure that the voices of young people are included in decision-making,” he said.

“Meaningful youth participation in decision-making is not just a policy and legal requirement but there’s evidence that when young people are engaged, everyone benefits from their creativity,

ingenuity, their passion, energies and networks. We held the consultations with young people because they are the most affected by these issues and it’s only fair that they have a platform to ensure the development framework does not exclude them and their lived realities.”

The position paper, which emerged from virtual and physical meetings, outlines deep concerns about the ongoing challenges in SRHR faced by adolescents and young people.

Despite progress in various developmental frameworks, these challenges persist, exacerbated by inadequate access to youth-friendly health services and information, socio-cultural barriers, and restrictive norms.

Issues such as high rates of sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, maternal morbidity, and sexual and gender-based violence remain prevalent among young populations.

During the conference, discussions among the youth present reflected that despite advancements, issues such as high rates of sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, maternal morbidity, and gender-based violence remain prevalent.

These problems are compounded by inadequate access to youth-friendly

health services and socio-cultural barriers like stigma and restrictive norms surrounding youth sexuality.

“During our consultations young people stressed that they want to be engaged more in the development of the Pact for the Future. They want their issues to strongly feature in the agreement because they are the most affected by the major issues. Young people also emphasized that they need access to non-judgemental youth-friendly reproductive health services and information that are responsive to their needs,” notes Mr Aseda.

The conference, officially closed by UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Kenyan President Dr William Ruto, highlighted the urgent need for renewed global cooperation in the face of significant mega trends such as climate change, shifting population dynamics, and technological advancements.

As the world prepares for this summit, youth voices will be crucial in crafting an equitable, sustainable and inclusive future for all generations.

How about we adopt reusable pads?

(29th May 2024, The Star, By Mercy Robi)

There is a need to embrace reusable sanitary products such as menstrual cups and cloth pad. This May 28 is a very important day as it is a day we observe Menstrual Hygiene Day. Menstrual hygiene is an importance aspect in promoting menstrual health and a critical aspect in public health and environmental conservation. Despite advocating ways of promoting good hygiene, we should also look at the negative effects on the environment. This is because menstrual hygiene means proper and more use of sanitary materials, which also contribute to increase in sanitary waste in society.

Poor disposal of sanitary towels harms the environment, especially in areas with inadequate waste management systems. The use of sanitary towels and tampons is an important way of promoting and maintaining proper menstrual hygiene and support the well-being of girls and women. However, their longer decomposing time results in build-ups of sanitary waste in dumpsites, which in turn contribute to environmental hazards. Burning sanitary towels is not the answer because this will in turn cause air pollution, which is as bad as will prevent accumulation of sanitary

waste. A policy should be developed where manufactures will be encouraged to produce biodegradable sanitary products to help reduce environmental pollution.

Different stakeholders in the community should start initiatives to create awareness on the need for proper disposal of sanitary products as well as in schools to empower learners on menstrual hygiene that will help in their well-being.

Why sanitary waste should be disposed well

(29th May 2024, The Star, By Mercy Robi)

Menstrual hygiene is an important aspect of health. However, even as we promote good hygiene, we should also look at the negative effects that sanitary materials cause to the environment. In most parts of the country, lack of proper disposal of sanitary towels poses a great challenge to the environment, especially in areas with poor waste management systems.

The use of sanitary towels and tampons is an important way of

promoting and maintaining proper menstrual hygiene of young girls and women in the society.

However, sanitary towels have a prolonged decomposing period because they contain non-biodegradable materials such as plastics and synthetic fibers which can take many years to decompose. This longer decomposition time results in the buildup of sanitary waste in landfills which in turn contribute to environmental hazards. Sanitary

waste, when not correctly disposed and is littered around in public places, diminishes aesthetics and hygiene of these places. It also attracts pests, contributing to spread of diseases.

Sanitary towels need proper disposal rather than open burning that causes air pollution.

There is a need to embrace reusable sanitary products like menstrual cups and cloth pads.

Embrace comprehensive sexuality education

(1st July 2024, *The Star*, By Kelvin Obegi Mokaya)



“Parents and teachers often lack the proper training, ease, and impartial viewpoint needed to effectively teach CSE, resulting in inconsistent and incomplete information. Standardised CSE programmes, taught by trained professionals, ensure children receive precise, thorough, and unbiased education on these vital topics.”

- Kevin Obegi Mokaya, Youth Advocate

For a very long time, our society has borne the brunt of teenage pregnancies, high HIV infections, sexually transmitted diseases, and gender-based violence.

We're yet to fully address all these issues that have life-changing consequences, more so for young people. This is where Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) comes in. According to the World Health Organisation, CSE is the dissemination of age-appropriate information about sexuality and sexual and reproductive health.

For a much clearer definition, UNESCO describes CSE as a curriculum that teaches about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality, aiming to equip people with the knowledge and skills to ensure their health, well-being, respectful relationships, and rights.

For starters, the notion that CSE is all about teaching young people sex is false. That CSE lowers the age of sexual debut is an even bigger myth. CSE promotes delayed sexual initiation, decreased frequency of sexual intercourse, decreased number of sexual partners, reduced risk-taking, and increased and more consistent condom and contraceptive use. CSE extends beyond mere conversations about sex, embracing a wide array of critical topics.

An effective curriculum covers fundamental areas such as human rights, family life, interpersonal relationships, personal and collective values, cultural and social norms, gender equality, and non-discrimination.

Additionally, it addresses sexual behaviour, gender-based violence, the importance of consent and bodily

autonomy, sexual abuse, and harmful practices like child, early, and forced marriages, along with female genital mutilation. The recent backlash against CSE is very unfortunate. The clergy has been loud in opposing CSE. Their solution is to have parents and teachers talk to young people about CSE.

Parents and teachers often lack the proper training, ease, and impartial viewpoint needed to effectively teach CSE, resulting in inconsistent and incomplete information. Standardised CSE programmes, taught by trained professionals, ensure children receive precise, thorough, and unbiased education on these vital topics.

Generation Z has embraced the use of social media to rally the masses and organise protests

(5th July 2024, *The Standard*, By Benedict's Loci)

The world has transformed into a global village, with Generation Z embracing cutting-edge technology to network, organise, and communicate on social media platforms like X Spaces, Facebook, Google Meet, and TikTok. These media platforms have enabled young people across the globe to connect, channel unprecedented business partnership ideas, and create job opportunities for their peers.

Kenya is currently experiencing a youthful revolution, with Generation Z embracing social media to quickly rally the masses and plan protests aiming to do away with oppressive laws. They have also used these social media platforms to challenge the government on issues of corruption in the country, police brutality, and the existing unemployment rate that perpetuates the poverty index which stands at 37.5 per cent.

The government should address the concerns of its youth. However, youths in Nairobi have been subjected to not only violations amounting to physical violence, but also disregard for their fundamental right of assembly and picketing, as guaranteed by Article 37 of the Constitution. Social media influencers and activists have been

abducted and held incommunicado by unknown people. Law enforcers should uphold the law and protect citizens.

Parliamentarians should embrace public participation, involving all stakeholders. In Kenya, unfortunately, legislators appear to be in conflict with the youth they represent because the MPs seem to live in a parallel universe, unaffected by the high cost of living, increasing unemployment rate, food security, climate change, and global inflation.

Due to cutting-edge technology, Gen Z, unlike previous generations, has exposed police brutality using digital gadgets, showing the imprudent use of force against protesters both locally and internationally, and prodding an instant reaction from the state. The government should prioritise investing more resources in educating young people and developing technology by building computer hubs.

This technique would create more jobs, particularly in Artificial Intelligence, freelance and global bronline writing companies, and help address global crises such as inflation, food insecurity, soaring energy, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Young people's street calls are not noise; it is their way of expressing themselves. They are urging the government to address the increasing rate of unemployment and the high cost of living.

It is their plea for adaptable laws that give affordability, economic stability, and job creation top priority. Ignoring these voices might increase inequality and endanger young people's chances for a prosperous future.



Youths in Nairobi have been subjected to not only violations amounting to physical violence, but also disregard for their fundamental right of assembly and picketing, as guaranteed by Article 37 of the Constitution.

Benedict's Loci,
Youth Advocate

Social media have brought youths together

(8th July 2024, The Star, By Samuel Mwita)

Youth-led initiatives that have been deployed by young Kenyans such as the use of social media platforms, specifically X space, Tiktok, and Instagram have played a vital role in bringing them together and enabling them to speak in one voice, advocate for their rights, and act as the voice of the voiceless in the country. Due to high taxes on basic commodities, many Kenyan adolescents and young women will still struggle to access affordable, quality, and accessible

healthcare despite government efforts to establish health facilities.

A case in point is the eco Levy where the government imposed taxes on the importation of basic commodities such as sanitary pads and baby diapers without considering the local market and availability of raw materials such as cotton. To effectively address these challenges, it is necessary to seek an alternative way of generating income

rather than overburdening the already suffering citizens. Elected leaders should embrace the Constitution and uphold the rule of law by engaging the people they are representing at the community level.

Public participation stands as a beacon and a link between the people and the legislatures.

Act swiftly to curb the spread of red eye disease

(8th February 2024, Business Daily, By Ngotiek Philip)

The latest outbreak of red eye ailment in Kenya has been a challenge for many citizens. The Health Ministry has issued safety precautions, including hand washing, hand sanitizing, prompt remedy, and self-isolation for affected people. The authorities ought to act swiftly to curb the further spread of the disease. Red eye disease, also called conjunctivitis, is an infection of the eyes that can be due to viral, fungal, or bacterial attacks, chemicals, and other irritants. The most common conjunctivitis risk factors are poor hygiene, contact lens misuse, contaminated personal articles,

and crowding. Bacterial conjunctivitis peaks during the cold season, even as viral infections occur in the dry season.

The authorities must take proactive measures to tame the disease. This consists of creating public awareness of the ailment, supplying low-cost medication, and equipping hospitals and clinics to deal with the inflow of patients. Also, the government must invest in research to gain insights into the prevalence of the red eye sickness and develop effective remedies. This should include funding medical research,

and developing the latest drugs and vaccines.

The government should act with speed to address the rising cases of the disease. This requires a coordinated effort between the government, businesses, healthcare carriers, and local communities at the grassroots. By prioritizing public health and investing in research, the authorities can assist save the public from outbreaks and ensure that all citizens have access to the healthcare they need.

Silence of female lawmakers troubling

(9th July 2024, the Star, By Purity Nthiana)

The Finance Bill, 2024 raised an uproar last month. It has shed light on a broken system and we can now understand better how Bills and policies affect us, and more so our women and girls. When the 2010 Constitution came to be, as the female gender, we were excited because there was increased representation.

But the last couple of weeks have had us thinking, where are the women? The ones that are speaking say they use tampons and not pads. Sickening! But where are the rest? We have not seen them nor heard them. Is the Member of Parliament for Suba North Constituency the only voice we have?

Women in governance often push for policies that address gender inequalities, such as laws against gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and equal

access to education and health care. Their presence in decision-making positions ensures that issues affecting women and girls are given due consideration and priority.

They inspire other women and girls to pursue leadership roles. When women in governance do not speak up on critical Bills, it may reflect a failure of representation and advocacy for gender-sensitive policies. You cannot cower to face your fellow representatives on matters affecting women and girls in your area.

Bills related to finance often impact women differently, such as tax policies affecting businesses owned by women or funding for programmes benefiting women and girls. Women in leadership should first sit and understand how

policies affect women and girls including the ones in the rural areas of Turkana.

Citizens expect their representatives, including women in governance, to actively participate in debates and decision-making processes that affect Kenya's economic policies. Addressing these gaps requires active participation and advocacy from women in governance to ensure that financial policies consider and benefit women and girls equitably. Our women in leadership have failed us a great deal.

You cannot possibly wait for your PR moment on World Menstrual Hygiene Day where you take pictures giving girls sanitary towels and expect us to sing your praises. Let your voices be heard. Be loud and bold!



"The slashing of funds for the Linda Mama initiative increases the risk of maternal and infant mortality rates as some women may opt for home births due to the reduced availability of free maternity care services. For the government to implement Universal Health Coverage, it needs to be wary of how these budget cuts cause huge regressions in the health sector"

By Tamia Nuna

6th August 2024, The Daily Nation

Demos show Kenya's hospitals lack capacity to handle emergencies

(8th July 2024, *The Star*)



SHIF should be foolproof to seal loopholes identified in NHIF, and fortified with noble initiatives such as the Linda Mama programme, which significantly reduced maternal mortality and morbidity rates. - By Onyimbi Nelson

The recent political developments consisting of the popular Generation Z uprising to castigate poor governance and leadership have exposed the soft underbelly of the health system. It is now clear as day that the country is still incapacitated in terms of handling numerous casualties in case of an emergency, for example, a natural calamity.

As much as the 2010 constitution guarantees every citizen the right to the highest attainable standards of health, including emergency treatment, the recent happenings have shown that what is on paper is not adequately implemented.

In many instances where peaceful protesters were admitted for emergency treatment with gunshot wounds and after clobbering, many other patients in critical conditions hosted in the various health facilities, including national hospitals, had to be abandoned.

Some emergency admissions were

made to wait due to the facilities and personnel being overwhelmed. As a result, lives that could have been saved were unnecessarily lost, in complete disregard of human dignity.

Given the number of medical doctors, clinical officers, nurses and other health experts with the backdrop of the recent health officers' strikes, the government has done very little to cushion citizens against health emergencies.

Additionally, the government has failed to convince Kenyans of the effectiveness of the Social Health Insurance Fund as much as it did with the National Health Insurance Fund. Despite deductions from Kenyans hard-earned money, NHIF has been marred by ineffective service delivery and massive allegations of corruption.

The auditor general last week exposed grand rot in the leadership of the NHIF that should cushion Kenyans against insurmountable health costs. The misappropriation of funds has been

done with impunity, all to the detriment of Kenyans who, in large numbers, are still living below the poverty line.

The government, through the Ministry of Health, needs to effectively allocate public resources to health expenditures. In so doing, any investment in health gives returns to every other sector. The government should also employ adequate personnel to ensure the recommended doctor-to-patient and nurse-to-patient ratios.

SHIF should be foolproof to seal loopholes identified in NHIF, and fortified with noble initiatives such as the Linda Mama programme, which significantly reduced maternal mortality and morbidity rates.

Above all, the President should champion anti-corruption by being a role model and dealing harshly with graft cases per the law alongside the Director of Public Prosecutions.

We're losing too much to graft, it's time to end it

(12th July 2024, *The Daily Nation*, By Doris Kathia)

Corruption is a cancer that continues to eat away at the very fabric of our society. Auditor General Nancy Gathungu recently unveiled alarming cases of financial misappropriation of Sh7 billion at the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF), money that could have significantly improved the state of healthcare.

These misappropriated funds could have been utilised to fund various initiatives on non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and cancer, and to support reproductive, maternal, new-born, child and adolescent health and nutrition programmes. For Sh2.2 billion of the misappropriated funds, the National Blood Transfusion Services could have been supported to ensure adequate and safe blood supply for those in need.

Another critical area that could have benefited from these funds is menstrual hygiene management. The Ministry of Gender, Culture, Arts and Heritage estimates that Sh4.8 billion is required annually to provide sanitary towels to

5.7 million girls every month. Similarly, the Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (KEMSA) scandal, where Kenyans lost Sh2.3 billion in the procurement of Covid-19 items, shows the rampant fraud and collusion between government officials and private companies.

The Auditor General's report exposed how KEMSA over-procured items worth Sh6.3 billion, which are now lying idle in warehouses. These cases are not isolated. The National Youth Service scandal, which saw almost Sh1 billion stolen through fraudulent schemes, the Anglo Leasing scandal, the Goldenberg scam, and the fertiliser and maize scandals are just a few examples from a long list of major corruption cases in Kenya.

The government's failure to prosecute and hold to account those involved in corrupt practices has only served to embolden others to engage in similar acts of graft, creating a cycle of corruption that erodes public trust in the government and undermines the country's development agenda.

Stopping budgeted corruption depends on our collective will to address the root causes and strengthen accountability mechanisms. Firstly, there must be political will at the highest levels to combat corruption and to ensure that those found guilty are held to account, regardless of their position or influence.

Further, there is a need for stringent enforcement of anti-corruption laws. The Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission and other oversight bodies must do their job. Lastly, there is a need for a culture shift. Public education campaigns that expose the detrimental effects of corruption can help change attitudes and promote a culture of integrity. Schools and universities should incorporate positive values in the young.

Kenya stands at a crossroads. We can either continue down the path of budgeted corruption, or we can choose a future where integrity, transparency and accountability are the pillars of our society. The choice is ours, and the time to act is now.

Youth participation in public forums critical

(12th July 2024, *The Standard*, By Evelyn Sasi)

For long, young people have been on the sidelines when it comes to politics and public participation. However, this reluctant approach is harmful to their well-being, hindering the development and implementation of projects that can create positive change. Government-led initiatives, such as county-level public participation forums and chief barazas,

have often failed to attract young attendees. The perception that these events are exclusively for government officials and their parents has kept many youths away. Unfortunately, this lack of involvement has had adverse effects on their lives, as decisions made without their input fail to address their challenges. Recent protests against

the finance bill have demonstrated the immense power that youth hold.

With the majority of the population being young, collective action and vocal advocacy can drive significant change. By actively participating in public discussions, young people can influence policies that directly impact their lives.

Stop budget cuts in health

(29th July 2024, *the Daily Nation*, By Tamia Nuna)

The Kenyan youth have taken massive strides in holding the government accountable. As a result, the Finance Bill was withdrawn, and the rollout plan to lower total spending in the supplementary budget from Sh3.99 trillion to Sh.87 trillion was implemented, cutting 2024-2025 spending by 1.9 per cent. These cuts signify that major sectors such as health are affected, with the health sector now facing a Sh. 14.2 billion reduction.

Delving into the details, it is quite unfortunate that the Sh6 billion aimed at indigent healthcare in the 2023/2024 financial year has been reduced to zero due to the Finance Bill withdrawal, leaving four million Kenyans unable to

afford healthcare. It is crucial not to turn a blind eye to the implications of budget cuts on the healthcare sector. According to the Medical Services principal secretary reductions in the 2024/2025 health budget would greatly affect the Primary Health Care Fund, Emergency, Chronic, and Critical Illness Funds, translating to subpar Universal Health Coverage. Previous budget cuts have also left paediatricians in complicated states as major vaccine companies halted supplies due to unpaid debts by the government, massively impacting children's health.

Additionally, unions such as the Kenya Medical Practitioners Pharmacists and Dentists Union (KMPDU), the

Kenya Union of Clinical Officers, and the Kenya National Union of Nurses have threatened a strike due to unpaid salaries. Lastly, the slashing of funds for the Linda Mama initiative increases the risk of maternal and infant mortality rates as some women may opt for home births due to the reduced availability of free maternity care services. The Constitution affirms that every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including the right to healthcare services.

For the government to implement Universal Health Coverage, it needs to be wary of how these budget cuts cause huge regressions in the health sector.

Create a supportive environment for breastfeeding

(5th August 2024, *The Star*, By Morgan Wanyonyi)

World Breastfeeding Week, held annually in the first week of August, is a major initiative supported by WHO, UNICEF, and many ministries of health and civil society. The 2024 theme, 'Bridging the Gap: Supporting Breastfeeding for All, highlights the need for comprehensive and inclusive support systems for breastfeeding mothers, recognising the diverse experiences and challenges they face.

Breastfeeding is widely recognised as the optimal source of nutrition for infants, providing benefits for both mother and child. However, the breastfeeding journey is often fraught with pitfalls. From physical discomfort to social stigma to lack of accommodation in the workplace, mothers face many obstacles that can hinder their ability to breastfeed successfully. This year's campaign aims to bridge these gaps by promoting an enabling environment for families, society, communities and healthcare workers. One of the most important aspects of this initiative

is the recognition of the diversity of breastfeeding mothers.

Each mother's journey is unique, shaped by her cultural background, socioeconomic status and personal circumstances. By celebrating this diversity, the campaign aims to promote a more inclusive society where all mothers feel respected and supported, regardless of their challenges.

Families play a central role in supporting breastfeeding mothers. Spouses, partners and extended family members can provide emotional support, share household responsibilities and encourage mothers to continue breastfeeding, even when difficulties arise. Social attitudes toward breastfeeding also need to change. Public spaces must be welcoming and accommodating, allowing mothers to breastfeed without fear of judgment or discrimination. Communities and healthcare providers also play an important role in this support network.

Community programmes can provide

peer support groups, breastfeeding counselling and educational resources to empower mothers. Health professionals, including nurses, midwives and paediatricians, must be properly trained to provide evidence-based advice and support to breastfeeding mothers. Workplace policies are another area that needs attention.

Employers should implement family-friendly measures, such as flexible working hours and designated breastfeeding areas, to help mothers balance work and life responsibilities. Legal measures, such as extended maternity leave and protection against workplace discrimination, are also needed.

This is a call to action for a collective effort to create a supportive environment for all breastfeeding mothers. By recognising their diverse experiences and providing comprehensive support, we can ensure that every mother has the opportunity to breastfeed successfully, which benefits both her and her baby.

Fighting corruption provides the best way forward for the government to tackle youth disillusionment

(12th August 2024, *The Standard*, By Purity Nthiana)

August 12 is International Youth Day. On this day, we acknowledge the contributions of youth in development worldwide. The theme of International Youth Day 2024 is, "Youth Engagement for Global Action". Kenyan youth face many challenges.

Unemployment is one such major challenge, with many youths failing to secure stable, meaningful work. They see opportunities that suit them but they are grabbed by politicians and people in power who have a lot and still want more. Frustration pushes them into the streets to say enough is enough!

The government has several initiatives to assist in that regard, but these projects have been covered with corruption and personal gain and therefore have not made impacts that can be felt by the majority of the young people. The other critical area is education, where the agenda is on improving access to quality education and vocational training. The CBC is an important step

in ensuring the relevance of education to what the market wants and building skills starting at an early age. While we embrace change, we need to be able to sustain this change. While many people are working towards gaining higher learning, the government has made this impossible without securing a loan.

The CBC system is not fully functional because a child in Baringo does not have a junior secondary school teacher. How do you implement a curriculum and not employ the teacher? Youth involvement in governance and decision-making is being advanced through initiatives like a Youth Advisory Council and increased youth representation in parliaments.

The youth however have said that even without being in leadership positions, their voices will be heard. It is a shame that as a country, we keep recycling old people in leadership positions. People with previous cases of corruption and injustices. People who served the same position years back and

have no achievements to back them up while we have young people with the proper qualifications but only one in the entire cabinet. This will ensure that young people are genuinely empowered to participate in policy formulation and be heard in decisions affecting their lives.

Technology and innovation are driving youth empowerment in Kenya. From freelancing to tech startups, the digital economy creates huge opportunities for the young. International Youth Day in Kenya is a call to action, rather than a celebration alone. It drives home the message of investing in young people, giving them opportunities, and supporting their aspirations.

By engaging, empowering, and equipping young people, Kenya can harness the full potential of its youthful population to drive sustainable development and create a brighter future for all.

Protect reproductive rights

(26th August 2024, The Daily Nation, By Purity Nthiana and Doris Kathia)

The 2010 constitution was a great milestone for Kenyans. With the change in governance to allow for the inclusion of women in leadership, there was hope that sexual and reproductive health and rights (SHR) issues would gain prominence. But stalled implementation of the constitution, lack of awareness and ill-advised amendments have undermined these rights.

The legal inaccessibility of family planning and reproductive health services has resulted in a high unmet need and a high maternal mortality rate. The government should ensure that all Kenyans, particularly women, have affordable, suitable and reliable access to family planning and reproductive health

services. This will improve maternal health, support the achievement of national development goals, improve gender equality, and improve overall social and economic well-being.

As Kenya prepares to celebrate the 14th anniversary of the promulgation of the constitution tomorrow, there's concern over the potential alteration of key constitutional clauses that could significantly impact SHR. These proposals that are crafted to take Kenya backwards will affect women and girls greatly. Denying women and girls safe abortion, yet we know too well that abortion is the leading cause of maternal death, is simply unacceptable.

Restricting access to abortions and

contraceptive services could have dire consequences for women's health and autonomy. Such change might push individuals to seek unsafe alternatives, endangering their lives. The church is trying to turn a blind eye to the fact that young people are having unprotected sex. Proposing to make abortion and some reproductive services illegal will not prevent young people from engaging in sexually risky behaviours.

Giving young people adequate information and proper needed healthcare services including reproductive healthcare will have a more positive outcome.



The government should ensure that all Kenyans, particularly women, have affordable, suitable and reliable access to family planning and reproductive health services. This will improve maternal health, support the achievement of national development goals, improve gender equality, and improve overall social and economic well-being.

By Doris Kathia

3rd September 2024, The Daily Nation

Stop relying on external donors to fund critical programmes

(10th September 2024, *The Standard*, By Doris Kathia)

Health is a fundamental human right, not a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder. Yet, in Kenya, the state of health care often feels like it's caught up in a donor-driven whirlwind. While external funding has been essential in supporting the health sector, we must ask ourselves: How sustainable is a health system that relies on donor aid? Can we truly achieve universal health coverage if our strategies and priorities are dictated by external forces rather than our own needs? It's time for Kenya to reclaim ownership of its health agenda and move away from its dependence on donors.

Kenya's health system has long relied on foreign aid to fund critical programmes, particularly in areas like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and reproductive and maternal health. Major donors such as the Global Fund, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have been instrumental in providing life-saving treatments and interventions for decades. However, the over-reliance on donor funding comes at a cost: Limited autonomy and weakened sustainability.

When a country's health priorities

are shaped by donors, it often leads to a skewed focus on areas that align with the donor's interests rather than the country's immediate and long-term needs. While diseases like HIV/AIDS and malaria are undeniably important, Kenya is also grappling with a growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension, and cancer. These conditions receive far less attention and funding because they are not the focus of international aid. Moreover, the volatility of donor funding is another risk.

What happens when the global priorities shift or donor fatigue sets in? For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the health systems globally scrambled to secure resources, exposing the vulnerability of Kenya's health system, which was already heavily dependent on external support. If donors pull out or scale down their contributions, the consequences for the Kenyan health system could be catastrophic. Kenya's health sector needs a paradigm shift from donor dependency to local ownership. The government must invest significantly in strengthening its health systems to ensure that they are resilient, accessible, and of high quality. Healthcare financing should be primarily

drawn from domestic resources, not foreign aid.

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for instance, is a key pillar of Kenya's Vision 2030, which cannot be achieved with donor dependency. The government's allocation to health, which has consistently fallen short of the Abuja Declaration target of 15 percent of the national budget, must be increased. This will ensure that we not only provide better services but also develop a health workforce that is well-compensated, well-trained, and motivated. Investing in primary health care, improving health infrastructure, and ensuring equitable access to health services for all Kenyans, especially in marginalised regions, should be priorities.

This requires the political will to push through health reforms and the accountability to ensure that allocated resources reach their intended targets. Additionally, Kenya must look inward to generate more revenue for health through innovative mechanisms such as taxing unhealthy products like tobacco, alcohol, and sugar-sweetened beverages, which contribute to the NCD burden.

Act to end the killing of our female athletes

(10th September 2024, The Standard, By Sharon Namarome)

The death of Rebecca Cheptegei, a Kenyan-born Ugandan athlete is heart-wrenching. This incident is not isolated but highlights a disturbing global pattern of violence against female athletes. The pressures of fame, success, and personal relationships in sports can create perilous environments, calling for urgent action. In 2021, Agnes Tirop, an internationally renowned Kenyan long-distance runner, was brutally murdered. Despite breaking records on the track, she fell victim to a

violent relationship. Her untimely death sent shockwaves through the global athletics community, sparking calls for robust protection for women in sports.

Athletes often face intense public scrutiny, which can strain their relationships. In many cases, they are the primary breadwinners, leading to power imbalances and resentment in relationships. The financial and emotional pressures these women endure can trap them in abusive

situations, making it difficult to seek help or leave. To address this, a robust support system must be created within the athletics community to empower female athletes to recognise and escape abusive relationships.

Sports organisations should invest in mental health services and provide counselling to athletes and their partners.

Stop attacks on women through the internet

(12th September 2024, The Standard, By Mercy Robi and Philip Ngotiek)

In recent years, Kenya has witnessed a surge in Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV), a disturbing trend that disproportionately affects women and young adults. As we navigate the digital age, we must address this issue head-on and create a safer online environment for all. TFGBV not only violates individuals' right to privacy, dignity and security but also perpetuates discrimination and gender inequality. A study conducted by the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development in

collaboration with University of Nairobi Women's Economic Empowerment Hub, funded by the UNFPA, sheds light on the gravity of the situation. Shockingly, nearly 90 per cent of young adults enrolled in Nairobi's tertiary institutions have witnessed TFGBV, with 39 per cent having personally experienced it. While online violence knows no boundaries, female students bear the brunt of its impact. TFGBV manifests in various forms, including cyber bullying, revenge porn, cyber stalking and harassment.

The most common TFGBV witnessed is revenge porn where perpetrators use images and videos mostly acquired during a relationship to blackmail victims after a breakup. Perpetrators exploit technology to demean, threaten, and violate the dignity of their victims. Social media platforms, dating apps, and messaging services become breeding grounds for toxic behaviour.

Let's work to prevent suicide

(14th September 2024, The Daily Nation, By Purity Nthiana)

Each September, we observe Suicide Prevention Month, a time to bring attention to the widespread issue of suicide, which affects millions of people worldwide. It is a time to remember the lives lost to suicide and the millions of people experiencing suicidal thoughts each day. An estimated 703,000 people a year die by suicide around the world. For every suicide, there are likely 20 other people making a suicide attempt and many more have serious thoughts of suicide.

Millions of people suffer intense grief or are otherwise profoundly impacted by suicidal behaviours. "Changing the Narrative on Suicide" is the triennial theme for World Suicide Prevention Day

from 2024-2026. This theme aims to raise awareness about the importance of reducing stigma and encouraging open conversations to prevent suicide. Mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and substance abuse are among the most significant risk factors for suicide. Life circumstances, such as trauma, isolation, financial stress, or the loss of a loved one, can contribute to overwhelming feelings of hopelessness. While some people cope easily with these, some struggle. Support systems are the cornerstone of suicide prevention.

We need to reach out to someone in distress, ask them how they are feeling and offer a non-judgemental

listening ear. Encourage someone to seek professional help and assist them to find resources. By understanding mental health issues and being aware of the signs of someone in distress, communities become better equipped to intervene and provide support. The government of Kenya should ensure that counselling is free in public hospitals because not everyone can afford it. We need to improve comprehensive and integrated mental health services. By fostering a culture of care, providing support, and taking meaningful action, we can help reduce the stigma around mental health and prevent unnecessary loss of life.

Educate people about data privacy and protection

(1st October 2024, The Standard, By Evelyn Sasi)

More people are using technology and online platforms to make job applications, generate income, do business marketing, and many more.

Organizations and companies use online platforms to advertise jobs and receive applications since they are fast and cost-effective.

However, alongside these positive outcomes, there are negative ones. Individuals often share personal

information during these processes, and if organizations do not have proper data protection mechanisms, this poses a threat.

Many people lack knowledge on how to protect their data and privacy when sharing information online. This can lead to their information being misused, with some websites leaking client information, causing intrusion into personal spaces.

Cyber harassment and trolling have become rampant and many people are unaware that they can report such cases online for they are protected by the Constitution, leaving them vulnerable.

To create a safer digital environment, more awareness about data privacy and protection should be raised by governments, organizations, and companies.

End HIV drug shortage

(3rd October 2024, The Daily Nation, By Doris Kathia)

Since January 2020, more than 1.5 million Kenyans living with HIV have faced delays in accessing life-saving antiretroviral (ARV) medicines. The shortage stems from two key factors - disputes between the government and USAID and corruption at the Kenya Medical Supplies Agency (Kemsa).

The breakdown in trust prompted donors to circumvent Kemsa, causing further fragmentation in healthcare. Strangely, taxes were added to these drugs, deepening the crisis for public hospitals.

For a country that heavily depends on foreign aid for HIV response, the disruptions have led to stockouts of

drugs, testing kits and medications to treat opportunistic infections.

Failures of the Ministry of Health and Kemsa are about mismanagement and fundamental breaches of the Constitution.

The Constitution guarantees the right to the highest attainable standard of health. Without proper medication, people living with HIV face severe health risks and even death.

Access to healthcare

The right to access information has also been violated. People living with HIV and their caregivers have been left in the dark on availability of ARVs, testing kits and other supplies. Failure

to communicate information about the supply chain for HIV treatment is negligence. Finally, disparities in access to healthcare, where only those with financial means can secure treatment, infringe on the right to equal protection.

Kenya must move towards a healthcare system that is resilient, transparent and independent of foreign aid. Reforming Kemsa must be swift, comprehensive and transparent. The institution must rebuild trust with donors, healthcare workers and Kenyans.

The petition by people living with HIV is a fight for dignity, equality and justice. We must demand that the state uphold its constitutional duties.

Involve girls in addressing challenges that affect them

(10th October 2024, *The Standard*, By Sharon Namarome)

Today, the world marks the International Day of the Girl Child under the theme "Girls' Vision for the Future." This day was enacted to acknowledge the rights of girls and the unique challenges they face, calling for global efforts to address them while promoting their empowerment and human rights. In Kenya, although significant strides have been made, actively involving girls

in policy making and program design remains crucial, especially in tackling issues that directly impact their health, education, and overall well-being. Girls in Kenya are affected by societal challenges such as early pregnancies, gender-based violence, and limited access to education. However, they are often excluded from the discussions and decisions intended to resolve these

issues. Actively engaging them in such strategies can create more inclusive, sustainable, and impactful interventions as policies developed without their input often fail to capture the complexities of their challenges. Involving girls ensures that their real needs are factored in, leading to practical and effective solutions.

How Kenya can solve medical interns' issue

(2nd December 2024, *The Daily Nation*, By Sharon Namarome)

For years, the plight of medical interns in Kenya—inadequate compensation, poor working conditions and frequent delays in deployment—have remained unresolved. It's disheartening that while the government recognises their importance, little has been done to address these issues comprehensively.

The government needs to learn from other countries that have successfully structured their medical internship programmes. Countries like the United Kingdom and India have well-established internship systems.

In the UK, the National Health Service (NHS) allocates significant resources to support medical trainees, offering them clear career progression paths and adequate welfare provisions. Similarly,

India's program provides stipends and subsidised housing to interns, ensuring they can focus on their professional growth without undue financial stress. These systems demonstrate that a robust policy framework and strategic investment can yield tangible results.

By leveraging the county healthcare framework, the government can decentralise internships, ensuring fair distribution of interns across all counties. Counties could allocate funds to cater for stipends and housing, like it happens in South Africa.

Kenya's health budget, though limited, can be better utilised through public-private partnerships. Canada, for example, has successfully involved private healthcare facilities in hosting

medical interns. Kenya can adopt this by incentivising private hospitals to participate in the internship programme through tax breaks or subsidies. This would increase internship opportunities and expose interns to diverse healthcare settings.

Moreover, digital health technologies can be deployed to enhance internship training and monitoring. Platforms for virtual mentorship and online learning modules, as seen in Australia's medical training system, can ensure interns in remote areas still receive quality supervision. Kenya has the potential to replicate such successes. By implementing structured policies inspired by global practices, Kenya can secure the future of its healthcare professionals.

Laws will save women and girls

(16th November 2024, *The Daily Nation*, By Purity Nthiana)

Unsafe abortion remains a leading cause of maternal morbidity and mortality in Kenya with an estimated seven women dying every day. Women seek abortion services due to unavoidable circumstances. A contraceptive method could have failed for some, while others may have been forced to have unprotected sex by their partners leading to a pregnancy that they do not wish to keep. While as an African country we push back the thought of teenagers and school-going children having sex, it is time we accept that our teenagers are having it. We need to give them information on how to do it safely or we will have to deal with the consequences of backstreet abortions.

Young girls' lack of information on safe sex (because we want to assume they are abstaining) has led to many getting unwanted pregnancies, which

then leads to seeking abortion services. And since there is a lot of stigma that comes with abortion, they will use backstreet methods which may lead to death. The cost of treating unsafe abortion is high.

Some 330 women and girls are hospitalized every day due to unsafe abortion complications. Why shouldn't we help our young girls access safe procedures? There are many lies and myths about abortion that cause stigma and misinformation. Abortion does not cause infertility. When the procedure is performed by a qualified health practitioner, one can easily get pregnant again. Kenya anti-abortion crusader Aketch Aimba has continued to spread lies on this harmful narrative. If we keep an open mind and have a dialogue with women, it will be known that nine out of 10 women who get safe abortions get

pregnant and have healthy children. Yes, we advocate for safe sex by all means, but sometimes unexpected things occur: We cannot deny women to do as they wish with their bodies because a mistake has occurred. It is modern-day slavery to ask a woman to keep a child she does not want.

Safe abortion does not cause long-term mental health consequences, on the contrary, there is a feeling of relief rather than regret, but forced abortion can lead to long-term distress. Will we force a raped girl to keep a pregnancy from her victim for fear of psychological distress? Which is worse?

Access to comprehensive sexuality education is key to raising awareness on safe procedures and also education on access to contraception and abstinence.

Let's keep children safe from abuse

(21st October 2024, *The Daily Nation*, By Purity Nthiana)

Holidays are times when families meet and spend quality time while giving the children a break from their school program. However, for some, it is a time when predators with immoral ideas will want to harm them.

Sexual and gender-based violence increases when the children are at home. Many of the perpetrators get their opportunity when parents leave their children unsupervised as they go to work. The use of mobile phones and the internet has made reaching children easy and luring them into bad situations. Education and awareness among our children will ensure that they are not vulnerable to monsters that do not see them as children but as objects of sexual abuse.

Economic hardship in Kenya has led to an increase in abuse. Young girls' lack of basic needs such as sanitary pads will lead them to their prey. This situation is

often exacerbated during the holidays when the safety net provided by schools is not available. During holidays, access to school-based support systems like guidance counsellors, teachers, and peer groups is reduced.

This lack of support can leave children without a safe space to report or seek help. This is where the parents have to tighten their grip on their children. Take time to talk to your child about their day, what they did, whom they met, or where they went. Ask them how they feel about those places and the people they met.

Empowering the community, especially women and girls to have a firm voice to call out their abusers will be a step in the right direction. Since many mothers are young, sensitization will ensure they are informed of their rights. Improving their economic status will prevent transactional sex that can lead to abuse of their children. Teach them

how to raise children who will not make the same mistakes they made. Avoiding 'Disco Matangas', cat-calling by boda boda riders, and small tokens will help protect young girls.

The justice system has failed our children. Bribery and corruption in such cases are unacceptable (though corruption in all cases is unacceptable), but there needs to be a line that cannot be crossed.

Cases of sexual abuse should be fast-tracked. A child cannot keep seeing her abuser; it is emotional and mental torture. It is a shameful thing when a 15 or 16-year-old girl is defiled and the matter is ruled as consent. How does a child consent to an act whose consequences she does not understand?

Empowering communities will reduce cases of child sexual abuse during school holidays

(22nd October 2024, *The Standard*, By Purity Nthiana)

Holidays present families with opportunities to meet, spend quality time with children, and give children a break from school. But, unfortunately, it is during such times that predators strike. Sexual and gender-based violence increases when the children are at home.

Many of the perpetrators get their opportunity when parents leave their children unsupervised.

The use of mobile phones and the internet have made reaching children easy, and some have been lured into bad situations. Education and awareness among children will ensure that they are not vulnerable to these monsters.

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During holidays, access to school-based support systems like guidance counsellors, teachers, and peer groups is reduced.

This lack of support can leave victims without a safe space to report or seek help. This is where the parents have to tighten their grip on their children.

Take time to talk to your child about their day, what they did, who they met, and where they went.

Ask them how they feel about those places and the people.

Empowering this community, especially the women and girls to have a firm voice in calling out their abusers will be a step in the right direction. With many of the mothers being young, proper education on even matters of comprehensive sexuality education will ensure they are informed of their rights. Improving their economic lives will also prevent transac-

tional sex that can transform into abuse of their children.

Teach them how to raise children who will not make the same mistakes they did. Avoiding disco matanga and randy boda boda riders. The justice system in this Country has failed our children. Bribery and corruption in such cases are unacceptable (though corruption in all cases is unacceptable), but there needs to be a line that cannot be crossed.

The court cases on sexual abuse should be fast-tracked. The shameful thing is when a 15 or 16-year-old is defiled, and the case is juggled as consented. How does a child consent to an act that she does not understand? Those who abuse children deserve time behind bars. The law is very clear on the age of consent.

Understanding contraceptive choices for a healthier future

(29th October 2024, *The Standard*, By Ermiyas Males)

In an ever-evolving world, the conversation around reproductive health and contraceptive methods is becoming increasingly critical. Access to contraceptives is not merely a health issue; it is a matter of fundamental human rights and personal autonomy that plays a pivotal role in shaping families, communities, and nations.

Contraceptives are tools that enable individuals and couples to prevent unintended pregnancies, making them integral to family planning. They come in various forms, including hormonal pills, intrauterine devices, condoms, and natural methods, each with its benefits and considerations.

Understanding these options empowers individuals to make informed decisions regarding their reproductive health, thus enhancing their quality of life.

The choice of contraceptive methods allows for greater control over family planning, which is crucial for women and men alike. By being able to plan when to have children, individuals can pursue education and career opportunities, ultimately contributing to the economic growth of their communities.

Despite the availability of contraceptives, misinformation, and cultural stigma still surround their

use. It is essential to approach these misconceptions with a fact-based narrative.

Common myths—such as the belief that contraceptives lead to infertility or that they are a form of population control—need to be addressed. Proper education is key to dismantling these myths and fostering an environment where individuals feel comfortable discussing their options without fear of judgment.

Healthcare professionals play a crucial role in guiding individuals toward the right contraceptive methods based on their unique needs and health circumstances.

They must engage in open dialogues with their patients, providing comprehensive education about each option's effectiveness, potential side effects, and long-term implications.

Access to contraceptives remains a challenge in many regions, where social, economic, and political barriers can impede availability. Addressing these gaps should be a priority for governments and healthcare systems, ensuring that individuals can obtain the contraceptives they need without undue obstacles. Moreover, public campaigns that promote the importance of contraceptive use can help normalize the

conversation around family planning, ultimately leading to broader acceptance and usage.

Sexual health education is a vital component in fostering informed decision-making regarding contraceptives. Educational programs in schools and communities that address reproductive health, responsible parenting, and the impact of unintended pregnancies can lay the groundwork for societal change.

By promoting open and honest conversations about these topics, we can equip future generations with the knowledge they need to make informed choices.

Contraceptives are more than mere medical products; they represent agency, control, and the empowered ability to shape one's future. At the core of this discussion is the belief that everyone deserves access to the full range of contraceptive options without stigma or judgment.

Adhering to the principles of comprehensive reporting and upholding the values of accuracy and fairness, we can contribute to a more informed society where reproductive health is openly discussed, and choices are respected.

How we can contribute to ending femicide

(14th November 2024, The Star, By Sharon Namarome)

Like a tragic song on endless replay, femicide in Kenya has escalated at an alarming rate, with Africa Data Hub reporting over 500 women murdered between 2016 and 2023. This year alone, the situation has intensified: Femicide Count in Kenya noted at least 32 women killed by male perpetrators in January, averaging nearly one woman per day. Police records show 97 women have been killed in the past three months.

Despite strong legislative measures, the killings persist. Recent cases - such as the discovery of six mutilated female bodies at the Kware dump site and the brutal murders of a mother, her daughter, and niece - have brought the issue into sharper focus. The same suspect linked to these crimes is also connected to the boiled remains of a woman found near

Lang'ata Cemetery on October 3, raising concerns about further undiscovered victims. This grim reality calls for urgent reflection on root causes, particularly the societal pressures affecting men.

Men's predominance as perpetrators prompts a difficult but essential inquiry into their motives.

Tackling femicide demands understanding what drives men to such violence, as this could offer insights into prevention.

It is important to recognize that men, too, experience gender-based violence and mental health struggles, often silently. Society's failure to support men facing distress often leaves them to suffer in isolation, sometimes leading to tragic consequences. The assumption

that men are "fine" even in challenging times not only fuels internal suffering but can lead some to self-harm or violence against others. These societal expectations leave many men feeling marginalized, amplifying the need to address male mental health, dismantle harmful stereotypes, and offer genuine support. Addressing these issues can foster a society that values the well-being of all its members.

Finally, responsible parenting is essential. Teaching boys to respect girls as equals and equipping young people with tools to manage relationships respectfully can create a safer, more supportive society for everyone.

Teach young people about sexual health

(20th November 2024, The Standard, By Elsharon Ngobiro)

According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2022 and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2019 reports, Homa Bay County has been experiencing high rates of teenage pregnancies. This is widely caused by poverty, lack of information on sexual reproductive health, myths, and misconceptions about contraceptives.

Community organizations should train youth advocates and peer educators on the evolving sexual reproductive health and rights and empower them with appropriate knowledge.

This will make it easier to disseminate the right information to more adolescents and young people within the various communities. Integrating

youth advocates and peer educators in the interventions of our health facilities may help in bridging the gaps that cause adolescents to fear visiting hospitals, optimize the outreaches and youth forums in the community, and also help to sensitize many to make informed decisions on their reproductive health.

Misogyny is the catalyst for femicide

(29th November 2024, The Daily Nation, By Tamia Nuna)

The recent rise in femicide cases in Kenya is alarming. In the past three months alone, 97 cases have been reported, and earlier this year, 14 cases were reported in January. Yet, what worsens the issue is the persistent gender war that erupts on social media whenever such tragedies come to light.

Kenya is deeply rooted in a patriarchal system which grants men dominance in many aspects of life including economics, politics and culture, whereas women are considered subordinates. This ideology suppresses women, consequently encouraging victim blaming whenever femicide occurs.

Misogynistic attitudes also become apparent in arguments that femicide should simply be categorised as a crime, ignoring its specificity as the deliberate

killing of women and girls because of their gender.

These beliefs not only negate the issue, but also create a dual battle for feminists who must fight for justice while confronting deeply entrenched misogyny.

Challenging harmful stereotypes

Patriarchy reinforces sexist attitudes and beliefs, which in turn encourages some men to resort to violence and abuse. Social media platforms have unfortunately become breeding grounds for these ideologies.

It is not uncommon to find degrading comments or jokes on women's bodies as well as regressive ideologies on womanhood, especially after public outcries over femicide. Such comments often shift blame to women while

excusing or overlooking the actions of aggressors.

While the government has promised to bring perpetrators to justice, systemic change requires more than legal action. Each of us must introspect and confront the misogynistic beliefs we may hold.

Unlearning misogyny involves actively challenging harmful stereotypes, educating ourselves and others about gender equality, and promoting respect for women both online and offline.

Femicide is not just a women's issue; it is a societal issue that demands our concerted action. For us to have a safer, more equitable society, we need to address the roots of misogyny and patriarchy and unlearn these ideologies.



Patriarchy reinforces sexist attitudes and beliefs, which in turn encourages some men to resort to violence and abuse. Social media platforms have unfortunately become breeding grounds for these ideologies.

By Tamia Nuna

1st December 2024, The Daily Nation

Comprehensive sexuality education can help prevent cases of gender-based violence

(4th December 2024, The Standard, By Purity Nthiana)

It is that time of the year when the world unites for the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) campaign. This global movement aims to raise awareness, drive action, and advocate for the elimination of violence against women and girls. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one out of three women go through violence, physical or sexual.

Apart from the physical harm that these women go through, the experience takes a toll on their mental health and often traps them in a cycle of poverty. Unfortunately, many cases go unreported due to stigma, and a lack of information and resources. Child marriages and FGM are some of the factors that lead to an increase in SGBV and GBV.

The 16 Days of Activism are aimed at involving the community in ending the cycle of violence. We all know that

the perpetrators are our brothers, uncles, fathers, and sons. This year's theme, "Strengthening Grassroots Action," recognizes the pivotal role of local communities in combating GBV. Violence is usually experienced within us and in the fight against it, the community should spearhead action.

But first, we must understand that there is no justification for violence. There is simply no excuse to take anyone's life. When we establish that baseline then we can be able to deal with issues such as femicide in a better way. When someone comes out to condemn violence but then tries to justify it, it cancels out the whole condemnation.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) will play a big role in preventing cases of gender-based violence. This is because CSE teaches individuals about bodily autonomy, human rights, and the importance of consent.

It also equips individuals with the ability to identify abusive behaviour and unsafe situations, empowering them to seek help or intervene. It challenges harmful societal norms that normalize violence, such as victim-blaming or viewing women and girls as inferior.

Boys grow up understanding that each gender is different but still special in their way. Over time, CSE contributes to societal changes that reduce tolerance for violence and discrimination by engaging boys and men as allies in the fight against GBV by redefining masculinity to include respect, empathy, and non-violence.

CSE fosters respect and equality between genders, addressing the root causes of GBV, such as patriarchy, toxic masculinity, and gender stereotypes.

