



OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF UGANDA ON PRIORITIZING YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES DURING THE COVID19 RESPONSE

Office of the Prime Minister

P.O Box 341, Plot 2-1 A-C Apollo Kagwa Road
Kampala, Uganda

Friday, 20th April, 2020.

Dear Rt. Hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda:

Re: Availability and accessibility of essential Sexual Reproductive Health and other health services during the fight against COVID-19.

We, the Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Alliance partners in Uganda write to you today with requests and recommendations towards ensuring that Young people's access to essential Sexual Reproductive Health services during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown are prioritized.

The Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Alliance Uganda would like to commend the leadership of His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Uganda; Yoweri Kaguta Museveni for the great plan and directives towards curbing the spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic. It is through these directives, that Uganda has indeed become one of the first countries' in the world to move towards flattening the Corona virus spread curve. This is much appreciated.

It is clear that this pandemic has stalled and affected many interventions within the health sector and we commend the President for revising his Public Health Emergency directives and lifting the travel ban for pregnant women and People living with HIV/AIDS. However, we are worried that if access to essential SRHR services such as contraceptives and other family planning packages like condoms, access to ARVs, menstrual health materials by young people and the general communities are not prioritized during the lockdown, it will have devastating effects on already alarming statistics regarding unmet family planning needs, teenage pregnancy, HIV infections and menstrual health among other.

As you may be aware, the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2016 points to over 25% teenage pregnancies, several sexually active young people by the age of 18, this is worrying. In addition, it states that the unmet need for family planning in this country stands at 28%. In this regard, the President committed, to reduce the unmet need for Family Planning amongst adolescents from 30.4% in 2016 to 25% in 2021 through operationalizing the National Adolescent Health Policy and the National Sexuality Education Framework. The President reaffirmed these commitments during International Conference on Population and Development held in Nairobi to reduce this unmet need to 10% by 2022. **WE ARE WORRIED THAT THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN MAY REVERSE PROGRESS MADE TOWARDS ATTAINING THESE COMMITMENTS IF ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SRHR SERVICES BY YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE GENERAL COMMUNITIES IS NOT PRIORITIZED.**

While we acknowledge and commend your task force for the steps taken so far to ensure that people at all levels access basic services, we have the following practical recommendations to make to you:

1. That young people in Uganda are availed with reliable and age appropriate and culturally acceptable information in line with the presidential commitments during this lockdown. This could be done with a fully funded and active mobile Family Planning clinic specifically targeting young people in most affected districts.
2. That Sexual Reproductive Health services including access to contraceptives, condoms and menstrual health packages are incorporated as part of the COVID-19 response messaging channels.
3. That the reporting pathways of Sexual and Gender Based Violence against adolescent girls and young women are popularized around the country in order to enable survivors seek and access justice, psychosocial support and care.
4. That all health workers including those providing youth friendly services at youth corners and facilities get a waiver to move using any means of transport available including Boda Boda to their respective health centers to attend to young people with their identifications as the only means of verifications.
5. That your task force directs the Ministry of Health to issue guidelines and Standard Operational Procedures on out-reaches, such that partners can continue bringing services and commodities nearer to young people in their communities even during the lockdown.
6. Local council leaders should be directed to give permission to young people and general communities seeking sexual reproductive health related services like ART/ARVs, menstrual health packages, condoms and contraceptives without disclosure.

Finally we can call upon you and the task force to rally behind champions and societal icons and heed to their concerns like the newly elected Archbishop of the Church of Uganda who emphasized the need for women to use contraceptives as a means of preventing the country from being overwhelmed by the high numbers of unintended pregnancies after the lockdown. We have confidence that amidst these immense challenges, there are unprecedented

opportunities for leaders and Ugandans to collaborate, adapt and innovate to save lives while strengthening the health systems for a better Uganda.

ABOUT SRHR ALLIANCE UGANDA

The Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Alliance Uganda is a consortium of 8 like-minded organizations that work towards advancing the sexual reproductive health and rights of young people in Uganda. See www.srhrallianceug.org

Sincerely,

SRHR ALLIANCE UGANDA

