



JOINT STATEMENT ON THE WORRYING NUMBERS OF TEENAGE PREGNANCIES IN LUUKA AND KALIRO DISTRICTS.

Reference is made to the NBS TV's 01:00pm bulletin of 7th June 2020 where in, a story was aired about the increasing rates of teenage pregnancies in Busoga sub-region ([link](#)). In particular, this bulletin indicated that over 60 learners between the age of 13-15 years in Luuka and Kaliro districts were pregnant and likely to miss school when 2nd term re-opens. It further indicated that these pregnancies are partly attributed to the Coronavirus lockdown which has exposed young girls to perpetrators.

It should be noted that Uganda, just like the rest of the World is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. To combat further spread of the disease, the President of the Republic of Uganda, His Excellency Kaguta Yoweri Museveni closed schools indefinitely on the 18th of March 2020 and plans to re-open are expected around July 2nd 2020. During this lockdown, different strategies have been adopted to ensure that school going children access learning materials but obviously this is not possible to some poor households in the country

Child marriages and teenage pregnancy have for years been a national concern in Busoga sub region and the Alliance has integrated several interventions to address this with the latest being the '*Get UP Speak Out for youth Rights*' project, however such interventions have been locked out by the government's directives on the closure of schools, ban on public gatherings, ban on public transport and the stay home order.

On 27th April 2020 The SRHR Alliance partners wrote to the Prime Minister of Uganda, Rt Hon. Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda on the need to prioritize sexual reproductive health under a campaign #UnlockMySRHR which gained massive support especially from Ugandans on twitter including the Minister of Gender labour and social development Hon. Frank Tumwebaze who pledged to address the concerns raised during his national press address. The President during one of his corona virus updates to the nation highlighted the need to prioritize maternal health, in this case pregnant women. However, our efforts have not been matched with improved SRHR service delivery during the lockdown for government hasn't prioritized access to sexual reproductive health and rights information and services.

Unfortunately, the negative impacts of not prioritizing SRHR are starting to manifest affecting young people most. Whereas Uganda's target was to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancies from 25% to approximately 13% by 2020, reduce unmet family planning needs from 28% to 10% by 2022 as well as ensure operationalization National Sexuality Education frameworks (as per the FP

2020 targets and the presidential commitment during the ICPD25 summit in Nairobi), these will not be possible, if no appropriate and deliberate actions are taken by government. Teenage pregnancy continues to be the leading cause of school drop outs in Uganda to date, contributing to over 30% of all drop out (UDHS, 2016, MoES, 2016). Also, teenage girls account for 17.2% of all maternal deaths in Uganda to date (UBOS and ICF, 2017); And child sexual abuse continues to be one of the leading crimes in Uganda with the police crime report annually rating them as one of the top three crimes reported. Defilement accounted 5.4% and 6.4% of all crimes in 2018 and 2019 respectively (Uganda Police, 2018, 2019) with majority of all cases being adolescent girls.

As an Alliance that prioritizes better health for all, we totally support the fact that the lockdown is important in curbing the spread of COVID19 in Uganda, but we also believe that providing sufficient options for providing SRHR information and services in a broad and contextual manner is an essential service and should be considered right away. This will not only preserve the integrity of our Youths especially girls through empowering them to resist sexual advances from men of all ages and classifications, but will also build communities that respect and promote the rights for all. This will also give young girls an opportunity to go back to school when school re-opens and increase their chances at a positive and enabling life.

Providing context specific SRHR Education will save the country the burden of ill sexual health ranging from increased teenage pregnancy, unsafe abortions, still births, Fistula and sexually transmitted infections like HIV and AIDS especially among the young generation.

We therefore call upon Government through Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of gender, labor and Social development and the COVID-19 Response task force to:

- Take **immediate action** to ensure young people at home have access to sexuality education lessons and information through incorporating delivery of sexuality education materials to the learners by the Ministry of Education.
- Ensure that Uganda Police immediately investigates and prosecutes the perpetrators of sexual violence including rape and defilement across the country in accordance with the laws of Uganda; the men implicated in the 60 cases of defilement in Kaliro and Luuka districts should immediately serve as a starting point.
- Ensure that the 60 and all other girls in these circumstances, are given free antenatal services and are given an opportunity to resume school as soon as they give birth;
- Work with Civil society partners and faith-based leaders to explore most innovative and resilient approaches to prevent the further occurrence of teenage pregnancy in Uganda during the lock down and post lock down periods.
- We also call upon Local Government leaders, parents and all community leaders to be on high alert and strengthen mechanisms to protect adolescent girls and boys during this period of lockdown;

We strongly believe the story of the 60 girls is just a tip of “iceberg” and there are many other unreported cases across the country. For instance, the daily monitor ([link](#)) published a story of a 20 year old girl in Kampala district who lost her life to unsafe abortion. This calls for urgent need

to prioritize and open all the channels of access to essential SRHR Service packages including SRHR information, ARVs, condoms, contraceptives and other family planning commodities.

The SRHR Alliance remains committed to champion and play a role in the promotion of health for all Young people of Uganda and to work with government to realize better health outcomes for Youth.

SRHR Matters! Act Now to Save lives!

