

Children and Youth Statement at the African Consultative Meeting on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Mr. Chair, we would like to congratulate you and the bureau on your election.

We are hopeful that these deliberations will put children and youth at the heart of our sustainable development efforts.

We are pleased to note various mentions by Member States of the critical need for these goals, targets and indicators to prioritize children and youth. We are the litmus test of how sustainable these goals will truly be. Mr. Chair, we need to make the right investments today in order to reap the demographic dividends that Africa stands to gain. Children and young people are estimated to make up 70 percent of the African population and the need to make the right investments in our education, health, employment; inclusive participation governance and security cannot be over-emphasized.

We are happy to note the proposed goals, targets and indicators made so far and we take this opportunity to make the following inputs:

Health:

Firstly, we welcome the inclusion of a zero target to eliminate child mortality by 2025. Only by aiming to eliminate preventable child deaths can we ensure that no child is left behind.

Secondly, it is great to see the proposal to have a goal on health. Whilst we support this, there is a need to focus on health in a comprehensive manner without limiting it to provision of healthcare only. This will ensure that all critical aspects of health are all addressed. We know all too well that health is not the mere absence of disease or infirmity. We therefore want an emphasis on **access to quality and comprehensive** health and not just healthcare.

Thirdly, we think there is a need to add a target on “Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights”. Mr Chair, this process must build on and address unfinished business of the MDGs. In addition, we learnt from the MDGs that leaving out

MDG5b (Universal access to SRH) from the initial set of targets was a huge omission in attempting to address the development agenda. It is important that we do not consciously repeat this mistake given that various policies adopted at our regional level by Ministers and Heads of State recommend its inclusion. These policies include the Continental Framework on SRHR which gave birth to the Maputo Plan of Action (MPOA). In fact, just a week from now the AU will be hosting an International Conference on Family Planning as well as Continental Forum on SRHR for youth. These upcoming events indicate the importance of highlighting SRHR in Africa's Common Position on SDGs

Lastly on health, we acknowledge that there is an indicator that focuses on HIV but it is important to emphasize that it can't be addressed in a vacuum. Therefore, we propose the need for additional indicators that reflect access and quality of Sexual Reproductive Health Services for all including young people.

Education

We have noted that there has rightly been a lot of emphasis on linking education to labour market demands in the discussions. Therefore, we recommend the inclusion of targets and indicators that will measure these linkages and reflect the need for high quality education and measure learning outcomes.

- Need for indicators that measure the proportion of young people that make the transition from school system to decent and productive employment.
- There needs to be a target on comprehensive sexuality education.

Employment

The issue of relevant skills has been captured here and we hope the entire framework will be strengthened by creating a link with education which provides children and youth with relevant skills. These include critical thinking, problem solving skills and increase real world application of knowledge gained.

Good governance, transparency and accountability

Under this section, we feel that there should be targets and indicators that ensure youth, women and marginalized groups including persons with disabilities are

included in governance and other decision making processes. There must also be systems put in place to improve data collection ensuring that data is reliable and comparable. To ensure no vulnerable groups are left behind, data must be disaggregated by income, gender, geography, age and disability.

On the proposed goal of eradicating poverty and hunger, we think the targets and indicators must consider the proportions of children, youth and women who live in poverty as a way to highlight the disproportionate impact poverty has on these groups. In addition, we would like to recommend relevant targets and indicators that highlight the need to improved sanitation and nutrition status for children that will result in reduced rates of stunting.

Mr. Chair, we can be the generation that ends extreme poverty in all its dimensions if we take the right measures today.

Last but not the least, we recommend a stand-alone goal on investment in the capabilities of adolescents and youth for sustainable development. Youth must be at the heart of all sustainable development efforts. Africa being the continent with the largest proportion of youth must champion this call for prioritizing youth. Africa has consistently shown the way for youth development through the development and adoption of the African Youth Charter, a whole Heads of State Summit recently in Malabo on Youth and our critical role in bringing about the International Year of the Youth in 2011. We are still in the decade of youth development as declared by the African Union. This is the time for Africa to show the world leadership again and we hope that we shall not let this opportunity pass us by. Thank you very much for your attention.