



## **Concept Note: MenEngage Africa SRHR Learning and Exchange Symposium on theme**

### ***SRHR for All: Building a Better Future for Africa's Youth***

**Venue: Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre, South Africa**

**Dates : 23 – 25th October 2023**

### **Introduction and Background**

MenEngage Africa (MEA), in collaboration with Save the Children International (SCI), Frontline AIDS, Y+ Global and other partners is planning to host a three-day SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights) Learning and Exchange Symposium, aimed at fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and action towards strengthening comprehensive sexuality education, safe abortion, and youth-friendly health services. The engagement aligns with the strategic plan outlined in the [MEA SRHR Strategic Plan \(2023-2027\)](#) and focuses on the LINK, LEARN, IMPROVE, and INFLUENCE strategies, as well as the Youth Participation and Youth Leadership initiatives that describe the major thrust of other international partners such as SCI, UNESCO, UNAIDS etc programming direction.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are essential for human well-being and constitute an integral part of human development, gender equality, and social development, but there are still many challenges in Africa. Access to comprehensive sexuality education, safe abortion, and youth-friendly services is limited, especially for marginalized populations. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest pregnancy rate and unintended pregnancy rate in the world, with 77% of abortions being unsafe. This leads to high rates of maternal death and hospitalization. Only 37% of young people in sub-Saharan Africa have comprehensive knowledge about HIV prevention and transmission, and early marriage and unintended pregnancy are global concerns for girls' health and education. These issues hinder efforts to address high rates of teenage pregnancy, STIs, and gender-based violence.

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in Africa is crucial for promoting the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of individuals, particularly young people. CSE equips individuals with knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to make informed decisions, navigate relationships, and protect themselves from sexual and gender-based violence and diseases. CSE programs in Africa are age-appropriate, tailored to the developmental stages of learners, and address topics such as puberty, relationships, consent, contraceptive methods, STIs, gender roles, and sexual rights. CSE takes a holistic approach, encompassing biological, psychological, social, and cultural aspects of sexuality and goes beyond mere provision of information, encouraging critical thinking, communication skills, and values clarification.

several socio ecological factors contribute to adolescents and young people's mental health concerns, interpersonal violence, poverty and lack of educational and economic opportunity, and substance abuse (Hill et al., 2019). The concepts, sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex are linked by common issues of safety and promoting and protecting sexual health. Therefore, it is a priority to promote human rights in order to condemn abuses related to sexual orientation or gender identity and to protect and provide supportive services for LGBTQ youth.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a deeply entrenched and pervasive issue in Africa, affecting millions of individuals, with women and girls being disproportionately impacted. GBV intersects with Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in multifaceted ways, creating complex challenges that undermine individuals' sexual and reproductive well-being. Survivors of GBV may face significant reproductive health consequences, including unintended pregnancies resulting from sexual violence. Limited access to safe abortion services and supportive resources further exacerbates the challenges faced by survivors. Addressing GBV is a fundamental prerequisite for advancing SRHR and promoting gender equality in Africa. Comprehensive sexuality education plays a crucial role in preventing GBV, encompassing discussions about consent, healthy relationships, and the prevention of violence.

### **Rationale for the Symposium**

The MenEngage Africa SRHR Learning and Exchange Engagement is an important event that brings together diverse stakeholders to address critical issues related to gender-based violence (GBV), comprehensive sexuality education, safe abortion, and access to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) in Africa. The symposium provides a unique platform for collective action and collaboration towards transformative change, aiming to bridge existing gaps and challenges in the field of SRHR and GBV. The timing of the symposium aligns with significant milestones in the realm of SRHR and women's rights, including the 30th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the 20th anniversary of the Maputo Protocol, and the upcoming African Union Convention to end violence against women. The symposium serves as a platform to address pressing issues, foster collaboration, and strategize to ensure progress and empowerment for individuals across the continent.

The MenEngage Africa SRHR Learning and Exchange Symposium is a significant event that brings together diverse stakeholders to address critical issues related to gender-based violence (GBV), comprehensive sexuality education, safe abortion, and access to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) in Africa. It provides a unique opportunity to build upon past achievements, confront emerging challenges, and pave the way for transformative change, empowerment, and gender equality across the continent. As Africa progresses towards the African Union Convention to end violence against women, this symposium plays a crucial role in advocating for comprehensive and inclusive approaches to SRHR. Through collaboration, knowledge sharing,



and collective action, the symposium contributes to a brighter future for the youth of Africa, where SRHR is a reality for all.

## **Objectives**

The primary objectives of the symposium are as follows:

- Foster networking and knowledge exchange among stakeholders promoting SRHR, gender equality, and addressing gender-based violence in Africa.
- Evaluate the status of comprehensive sexuality education, safe abortion, and youth-friendly services, considering the impact of restrictive socio political environments.
- Identify and share innovative approaches and best practices to enhance comprehensive sexuality education, safe abortion, and youth-friendly services across the continent.
- Strengthen partnerships and collaborations among stakeholders to drive policy and programmatic changes that advance SRHR, gender equality, and combat gender-based violence.
- Develop actionable recommendations and strategies for effective advocacy towards improved SRHR policies and programs, ensuring the rights and well-being of all individuals in Africa.

## **Target Audience:**

The MenEngage Africa SRHR Learning and Exchange Symposium aims to engage a diverse range of stakeholders dedicated to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Africa. The primary target audience includes youth leaders, civil society organizations, government representatives, healthcare providers, academia and researchers, international and regional partners, young people, and religious and traditional leaders. These individuals and organizations are actively involved in promoting SRHR, advocating for policy reforms, delivering youth-friendly SRHR services, and contributing to the evidence-based understanding of SRHR in Africa.

## **Expected Outcomes:**

The MenEngage Africa SRHR Learning and Exchange Symposium aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- a) **Enhanced Knowledge and Collaboration:** Participants will gain a deeper understanding of SRHR issues, effective CSE strategies, and best practices. The symposium will foster networking and collaboration among stakeholders, encouraging partnerships to address shared challenges.
- b) **Strengthened Advocacy and Policy Influence:** Through interactive sessions and discussions, participants will identify actionable recommendations to advance SRHR

policies and programs. The symposium will enable youth and civil society advocates to leverage their collective influence and engage policymakers at national and regional levels.

- c) **Innovative Approaches and Youth-Driven Solutions:** The symposium will showcase innovative approaches to promoting SRHR, featuring youth-led initiatives, technological advancements, and creative solutions. Participants will gain inspiration to implement these initiatives within their respective contexts.
- d) **Increased Awareness and Support:** By aligning with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the symposium will amplify the importance of SRHR and youth empowerment. This awareness-raising will garner increased support from various stakeholders, including governments, donors, and the international community.

### **Key Contribution Anticipated from Partners:**

The success of the MenEngage Africa SRHR Learning and Exchange Symposium relies on meaningful contributions from partners. Partners are expected to:

- a) **Contribute Expertise and Knowledge:** Partners will share their expertise, experiences, and research findings in the field of SRHR, CSE, and youth-friendly services. This knowledge exchange will enrich the symposium's content and discussions.
- b) **Mobilize Resources and Support:** Partners will play a vital role in mobilizing financial and technical resources to ensure the smooth organization and implementation of the symposium. This support will help accommodate participants, facilitate logistics, and provide necessary materials.
- c) **Engage in Collaborative Programming:** Partners will actively collaborate in designing the symposium's program, identifying relevant topics, and proposing speakers and facilitators. This collaborative effort will ensure the symposium addresses the specific needs and challenges faced by various regions and demographics in Africa.
- d) **Advocate for SRHR and CSE:** Partners are encouraged to leverage their networks and platforms to advocate for SRHR and CSE in the lead-up to the symposium and beyond. This collective advocacy will promote the symposium's objectives and highlight the importance of SRHR on the regional and international stage.

By uniting diverse stakeholders and fostering collaboration, the MenEngage Africa SRHR Learning and Exchange Symposium endeavors to contribute significantly to the advancement of SRHR and CSE in Africa, particularly during the commemoration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ICPD.