



2nd Annual Adolescent Health Symposium, 22nd – 24th November 2017

Theme: *Fast tracking Adolescent Health for the Demographic Dividend*

Side Event: *'Realization of the Demographic Dividend'*

Host: Centre for the Study of Adolescence

WE Centre for the Study of Adolescence, Kenya SRHR Alliance, DSW Kenya, Marie Stopes Kenya and Family Health Options Kenya together with youth and demographic dividend champions from Nairobi, Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Kericho, Nandi, Kisii, Migori, Homabay, Kisumu, Bungoma, Busia, Kakamega, Meru, Murang'a, Narok, Kajiado, Kitui, Kiambu, Taita Taveta, and Bomet Counties. As organizations and individuals advocating for the rights of young people and adolescents, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, we particularly call for the attention and provide recommendation in relation to our country's **young population age structure** characterized by **high fertility and fast population growth**.

Future population age structures will be determined by today's actions, investments, laws and policies – in particular when these actions respect, protect and fulfil **young people's and adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights**; and ensure their access to comprehensive sexuality education, youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services. Such actions if taken now will enable our country to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend, and find the right path towards sustainability. **Meaningful youth participation** is also essential to be effective in reaping the benefits of the demographic dividend. For instance, it allows for young people to shape sexual and reproductive health services to better answer to their demands; and sexuality education curricula to better answer to the questions and realities lived by young people in particular contexts. To fulfil young peoples' and adolescents' human rights, governments need to meaningfully engage young people and adolescents in legal, policy and budgetary processes. Proactive strategies are therefore needed such as **earmarked funding for youth participation**, including through youth-led and youth-focused organizations, in decision-making, policy formulation and implementation.

Unfortunately, too little is invested and too many social, economic, legal, cultural and religious barriers remain preventing universal access to contraceptives; to sexual and reproductive health information and education, including comprehensive sexuality education; and to a full spectrum of sexual and reproductive health services, including youth-friendly services. Too little is being done to fight the root causes of gender-based and sexual violence, and harmful practices such as female genital cutting and child, early and forced marriages.

Governments' (National and County) commitments to sustainable development and the realities of young people and adolescents in our country call for concrete actions today. For our country to benefit from the demographic dividend, **we recommend the following:**

1. Earmark funding for meaningful youth participation in national decision-making, including by investing in youth-led and youth-focused organizations;
2. Earmark and accelerate funding for and implementation of accessible, acceptable, affordable and quality sexual and reproductive health services and supplies that meet need of young people. This includes the removal of barriers, such as based on age and marital status and parental consent to access modern contraceptives;
3. Invest in universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and education, ensuring the integration of comprehensive sexuality education in national education curricula, with attention to peer-to-peer sexuality education;

