



PUBLIC STATEMENT ON TEENAGE PREGNANCY CRISIS IN WEBUYE EAST, BUNGOMA COUNTY

ADVANCING THE RIGHTS, HEALTH AND FUTURE OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH NETWORK KENYA(RHNC), CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS(CRR), KELIN, THE SEXUAL, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR) ALLIANCE KENYA and KISUMU MEDICAL AND EDUCATION TRUST(KMET) note with grave concern reports that 36 girls at a school in Webuye, Bungoma County, have become pregnant. According to school authorities, 13 of these girls have already given birth, 13 are currently expectant, and 10 have dropped out of school. This is a stark indication of the scale at which adolescent girls' rights to health, education, and bodily autonomy continue to be violated, and demands urgent, coordinated action from duty-bearers at all levels.

We join stakeholders across Kenya in calling for renewed and coordinated action to address the triple threat (interconnected and overlapping crises of new HIV infections, adolescent pregnancies, and sexual and gender-based violence) and ensure that every adolescent girl can access reproductive health information, services and opportunities she needs to make informed decisions about her sexual and reproductive health and future.

The Webuye incidence is not an isolated crisis; it highlights a pervasive national systemic failure in protecting young girls from sexual abuse, exploitation, and barriers to their sexual and reproductive health rights. Teenage pregnancy is not simply a health issue; according to Kenya Demographic and Health Survey 2022, 15 percent of girls aged 15 have begun childbearing reflecting the continued vulnerability of adolescent girls within different contexts due to amongst other factors poverty, marginalization and limited access to support systems. These barriers are compounded by their effect on girls' education as early and unintended pregnancies remain a leading cause of school dropout, limiting girls' educational attainment and, in turn, narrowing their long-term economic and social opportunities.

In order to address teenage pregnancies, we must confront the underlying structural and social factors driving unintended pregnancies among adolescent girls. Fragmented service delivery, poor coordination among actors, misaligned health programs, legal and policy barriers that continue to undermine progress toward quality, equitable and accessible sexual reproductive health information and services, particularly for female adolescents. The existing legal and policy frameworks fail to address the lived realities of adolescents by amongst other ways creating



barriers such as third-party consent requirements before adolescents can access reproductive health services.

We are concerned that adolescents continue to face barriers to accessing scientifically accurate reproductive health information and confidential youth-friendly services. These barriers limit their ability to prevent unintended pregnancies and seek timely and appropriate care when they need it. Harmful practices like FGM, early marriage, beading, among others, deprive young girls of the ability to get to higher education, leads to maternal deaths, not to mention the high risk of HIV and STI infection.

Call to Action

We call on the Government of Kenya, health sector actors, county governments, communities, development partners and civil society to strengthen coordinated action to:

- Investigate and ensure speedy prosecution in order to secure justice for the victims. Under Article 29 (c) of the Constitution of Kenya, every person has the right to freedom and security of the person, which includes the right not to be subjected to any form of violence from either public or private sources. Article 21(3) of the Constitution also places an obligation on all State organs including the Judiciary to address the needs of vulnerable groups within society, including girls. The right of women to be free from all forms of violence creates a corresponding duty to the State to take measures to protect women and girls from violence.
- Ensure access to scientifically accurate, age-appropriate reproductive health education
- Strengthen access to adolescent- and youth-friendly SRH services, without stigma or discrimination
- Address sexual and gender-based violence, exploitation and harmful cultural practices that increase adolescents' vulnerability to unintended pregnancy
- Keep pregnant and parenting adolescents in school and strengthen measures that support their continued education and reintegration, by fully implementing the *National Guidelines for School Re-Entry in Early Learning and Basic Education (2020)*
- Strengthen Health Systems, which includes reducing maternal mortality and teenage pregnancy rates by enhancing adolescent-friendly health services and education, cutting the unmet need for family planning and new HIV infections by expanding access to



contraceptives, HIV prevention, and community engagement, and increasing school retention rates by aligning health and education policies to support adolescent girls.

- Strengthen accountability and implementation of existing laws and policies that protect adolescents' health, rights, and access to essential services by prioritizing urgent alignment of legal and policy framework to the lived realities of adolescents especially adolescent girls in Kenya in line with the constitution rights and regional and global human rights state obligations including the right to health, best interest of the child and the right to education.

We further call for public discourse on teenage pregnancy to be grounded in evidence, dignity and respect for adolescents' rights. Effective prevention requires an enabling environment in which young people have access to accurate information, quality health services, education and opportunities. Addressing teenage pregnancy requires more than responding after a pregnancy occurs. It requires sustained investment in prevention, protection, access to services, education, empowerment and accountability.

RHNK, the Center for Reproductive Rights, KELIN, SRHR Alliance Kenya and KMET remain committed to working with the government, communities, young people, healthcare providers, civil society and other partners to advance adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights and ensure that no adolescent is left behind.