

Statement on the UPR Pre-session on Botswana

3 April 2023, Geneva

This statement is delivered as part of a chapter in the UPR report submitted to the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (BOCONGO) and on behalf of the Botswana Family Welfare Association (BOFWA) and its partners in pursuant of effective implementation of the ESA commitment beyond 2020 and actions to prevent and reduce sexual and gender-based violence. The consultative process included BOFWA responding to a survey and being a key informant.

The submission focuses on addressing the implementation of the 2030 ESA Ministerial Commitment of 2021, ‘toward fulfilling the Education, Health, and Well-Being of Adolescents and Young People in Botswana.’

Issue 1

Accountability mechanisms for the effective implementation of the 2030 ESA Ministerial Commitment

Botswana signed the ESA Ministerial Commitment (2013) and the 2030 ESA Ministerial commitment (2021). The former committed to ‘strengthening HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) efforts in ... ensuring access to good quality, comprehensive, life skills-based HIV and sexuality education (CSE) and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services for all adolescents and young people recognizing [its] each country’s socio-cultural context. The latter ‘seeks to expand the focus beyond Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Youth Friendly Health Services to the health and well-being of adolescents and young people.

While important strides have been made toward improving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) outcomes among adolescents and young people, significant gaps and barriers still exist to the realization of the ESA Commitment targets.

The evaluation of the ESA Ministerial Commitment on Comprehensive Sexuality Education and SRH services for adolescents and young people indicate that while the Commitment includes Human Rights language, and indicators monitoring the implementation of strategic interventions (including the removal of barriers to access), and strengthening of the legal and policy environment, it does not however emphasise and advocate for the protection and fulfilment of human rights among young people more broadly, it does not have an indicator to measure whether standards of non-discriminatory service provision is adhered to, or whether there is professional accountability in the system to ensure youth rights are upheld.

The 2030 ESA Commitment offers an opportunity to standardise respect of human rights among young people and improve accountability mechanisms. Adolescents and young people have continually shown poor Sexual Reproductive and Rights and HIV outcomes especially adolescent girls and young women. They experience high unintended pregnancy, low HIV and contraceptive knowledge, low condom use and low-risk perception.

HIV infection rates continue to grow amongst girls than boys. While Botswana has reached the 95, 95, 95 targets, adolescent and young people are lagging behind at about 77% viral suppression.

Issue 2

Gender Equality

Mexico recommended that Botswana ‘Implement gender equality policies that foster girls’ access to health and education and raise awareness among the population about sexual and gender-based violence’

Botswana continues to make efforts in eliminating gender inequality as indicated in the Vision 2036 pillar on Human and Social Development.

Toward achieving gender equality, the 2013 ESA Commitment influenced the prioritization of policy changes and support to end child, early and forced marriage, school-related gender-based violence, and early and unintended pregnancy.

However, the Second Botswana Youth Risk Behavioural and Biological Surveillance Survey Report (2018) states that among all students, 22.2% reported being forced to have sex the first time they had sexual intercourse and among those sexually experienced, 18.8% were forced to have sex in the last 12 months. Across the ESA region, young people continue to experience different forms of violence at school, and at home, from various perpetrators including peers, teachers and adults, with girls being at a much higher risk of experiencing such violence than their male counterparts, (UNESCO, 2020).

BOFWA and partners consider the 2030 ESA Commitment as a tool to foster girls’ access to health and education and improve adolescents’ and young people’s overall health and contribution to development.

Therefore,

In order to prevent the loss of previous gains, build upon successes and contribute toward attaining the goals of the national vision (Vision 2036), FP 2030, AU 2063 and SDGs, we recommend that Botswana:

Operationalise and implement the 2030 Eastern and Southern African Ministerial Commitments, including by earmarking funding, clarifying priority actions, designating implementation responsibilities, and establishing a national accountability mechanism based on the renewed 2030 ESA Commitment targets, in order to combat sexual and gender-based violence and advance gender equality, health and education of adolescent and young people.