The Africa Coalition
CALL TO ACTION
African Coalition Symposium on Menstrual Health
27 May, 2021

- Time to Act! Period! -

We, representatives of Governments, National Parliaments, Development Partners, United Nations, Academia, Civil Society Organizations, Communities, Faith-Based Organizations, Philanthropic Foundations, Private Sector, Youth and Women Networks and the Media, recognize our role as agents of change and providers of social services at all levels and acknowledge our responsibility to safeguard the sexual and reproductive health, rights and justice of all.

We recognize menstrual health as a critical component of the human right to health, and essential for the wellbeing, and the empowerment and rights of girls, women and all people who menstruate, communities and nations. We are aware that experiences with menstruation can either facilitate or impede the fulfilment of a broad range of human rights, in particular sexual and reproductive rights. We recognize that when human rights are protected, respected and fulfilled, girls, women and all people who menstruate are more likely to experience menstruation in a safe, healthy, and dignified manner.


We recall the 2019 Nairobi review of the International Conference on Population and Development at 25, which for the first time, addressed Menstrual Health, culminating in more than 20 commitments from governments, UN organisations, NGOs at regional and global levels. We also recall the 2019 review and 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action that highlighted the importance of taking steps to address menstrual stigma and the provision of adequate sanitation for menstrual health.
We welcome the **Generation Equality Forum** and its five year plan of action as the opportunity to take concrete actions to advance women and girls body autonomy and enable people who menstruate to manage their menstrual health in a dignified manner.

We applaud the increased attention to menstrual health over recent years in advocacy, programming and implementation, policy, research, supplies, education, and service delivery interventions. We acknowledge that the *concept of 'menstrual health' has evolved* from focusing on hygiene management to a broader concept of health, wellbeing, dignity, awareness and gender equality across the reproductive life cycle of menstruators. We acknowledge the need for integrated and holistic programming and policies to address the multi-faceted nature of menstrual health.

We are cognizant of the detrimental effects that the global COVID-19 pandemic has had on access to and availability of menstrual health information, services, products, funding and programming. We underscore that *periods don’t pause for pandemics*. While we applaud the efforts and innovations introduced to address the barriers exacerbated by the global pandemic, we are aware that a lot more remains to be done.

We are committed to ‘leave no one behind’, targeting the furthest behind first and addressing the menstrual health needs of vulnerable and marginalized populations, including adolescents girls, young people, persons with disabilities and their caregivers, people living with HIV, transgender and gender non-binary persons, sex workers, prisoners, injecting drug users, low level corporate cadres, survivors of female genital mutilation, homeless people, migrants, people on the move and internally displaced populations.

We understand the importance of addressing menstrual health for all people who menstruate in diverse contexts, especially those in vulnerable situations, including humanitarian settings, low-income contexts, remote areas, health centers, urban and peri-urban settings, informal settings, correctional and other institutional settings.

We acknowledge the progress made in many African countries to strengthen policies for menstrual health. However, we recognize that efforts to strengthen and harmonize the menstrual health policy environment remain uneven across the continent.

We affirm that menstruation and other forms of uterine bleeding are a priority across the full life cycle of girls, women and all people who menstruate. We recognize the need for programmes and policies that ensure integrated and inclusive approaches to provide menstrual health information, services and social support from pre-menstruation to menopause, ensuring bodily literacy, bodily autonomy and agency, and the right to self-determination for all people who menstruate.

We recognize the need to ensure access to and informed choices about quality menstrual health services, as part of universal health coverage, and an integrated package of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services throughout the life cycle. We support a holistic understanding of menstrual health services, including those that address menstrual disorders; vaginal bleeding associated with pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum, miscarriage,
fibroids or other morbidities, cancers and endometriosis; menopause; psychosocial and mental health issues; and menstrual stigma.

We acknowledge the need to **harmonize and develop evidence-based guidelines and standards** with clear requirements for products, supplies, water, sanitation and disposal/waste management, adhering to the AAAQ framework – Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Quality, including human resources.

We are aware of the **influence that social, religious and cultural norms**, and stigma about menstruation, have on bodily autonomy, including mental health, self-esteem, agency, and the daily practices of people who menstruate throughout their life. We emphasize the **role of communities, parents, guardians, men and boys** in overcoming social stigma and creating supportive and gender-equitable environments. We also recognize the contribution of menstrual health to the elimination of harmful practices, such as child marriage, through increasing school attendance and the reduction of school dropout rates.

We highlight the **importance of the intersectoral collaboration**, including among the **education and health sectors**, to improve access to, and the quality of menstrual health education, in and out of schools. We acknowledge that **menstrual health education is an essential component of comprehensive sexuality education**, and underscore the importance of providing girls, women and people who menstruate with accurate, timely, and empowering menstrual health information throughout the full life course.

We are aware of the urgent need to **address the environmental impacts** related to the production, distribution and disposal of menstrual products.

We recognize the need to undertake systematic efforts to **improve water and sanitation facilities**, including environmentally friendly disposal and waste management in schools, communities, health centers and workplaces, as well as accessible WASH facilities and services, including for persons with disabilities.

We are cognizant of the need to **generate more robust and standardised empirical data** on menstrual health, including the determinants of menstrual health, effective interventions for improving menstrual health and the linkages with education, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, mental health and economic and social empowerment. We recognise that systematic evidence is required to guide policy and programming decisions.

We recognise that **diseases, vaccines and treatments** affect girls, women and people who menstruate differently than men.

We underscore the need to strengthen the enabling environment for **menstrual health innovation and digital technology mainstreaming** to reach those furthest behind first with solutions that work for different ages, geographic locations, socio-economic status and physical abilities. This includes supporting innovative community-based solutions, mainstreaming digital technology, and ensuring meaningful youth participation. We also recognize the critical role of the private sector to advance innovative solutions to increase
We recognize the catalytic and transformative roles of continental and regional institutions, national governments, the United Nations Development System, multilateral development banks, international financial institutions, private sector and individuals to accelerate sustainable, evidence-based financing for menstrual health.

We underscore the unique and evolving opportunity presented by the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement, under the leadership of the African Union, to promote local manufacturing and a continental value chain.

We acknowledge the contributions made thus far by the African Coalition for Menstrual Health to advancing menstrual health across Africa, including improving the coordination among key menstrual health stakeholders, expanding the evidence-base and translating research into action, and supporting multi-sectoral policy development across Africa.

WE COMMIT TO

Advocating for specific reference to menstrual health in normative frameworks, including reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular the goals pertaining to sexual, reproductive health and rights and gender equality, the ICPD Programme of Action and other international existing accountability mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review.

Ensuring that menstrual health is included in all humanitarian emergency response and recovery plans, disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, COVID-19 response and recovery.

Identifying, documenting and scaling-up high impact practices for integrating menstrual health within sexual and reproductive health and rights, and WASH programmes, service delivery, education, and supply chain management to address the needs of girls, women and people who menstruate by following a people-centred, right-based, life-cycle approach.

Collaborating with global, regional and national stakeholders to create clearly defined set of standardized, valid and objectively measurable indicators to assess menstrual health outcomes, cost and benefits of menstrual health interventions, and the social and economic costs of inadequately addressing the menstrual health and how it impacts other health and development outcomes.

Investing in innovative solutions to integrate menstrual health in national financing frameworks and policies, including monetary policies, costed multi-sectoral policies and plans at the national and sub-national levels, as well as leveraging sustainable financing instruments and financial protection strategies for menstrual health.

Galvanizing political leadership, improving cross-sectoral collaboration, and establishing accountability mechanisms for menstrual health on a national, regional and transnational level.
This includes ensuring **effective coordination for the integration of menstrual health within existing development, humanitarian and peace building programmes.**

Encouraging the **private sector to play an active role** in multi stakeholder partnerships, and increasing innovations to improve the quality, safety, affordability and accessibility of menstrual products, information and services.

**Leaving no one behind**, targeting the further left behind first by ensuring the full and meaningful participation of vulnerable and marginalised groups in all phases of decision making for menstrual health policy and programmes, as well as scaling-up tailored interventions to meet their specific needs.

Positioning efforts to ensure **bodily autonomy and integrity** by tackling menstrual stigma and restrictive social and cultural norms as central to menstrual health efforts. This includes engaging with individuals, parents, communities, religious and cultural leaders, men and boys to create a normative, supportive socio-cultural environment for menstrual health.

Advancing efforts to create standards for efficacy, health and **environmental safety** of a full range of menstrual products and materials. Expanding the research on how diseases, treatments and vaccines affect girls, women and people who menstruate differently to adapt promotive, preventive and treatment measures to produce better health.

**Strengthening the mandate, functionality and membership base of the African Coalition for Menstrual Health**, with a focus on convening a community of practitioners for menstrual health in Africa and facilitating scale-up of evidence-based solutions for menstrual health. In addition, strengthen the capacity of the Coalition to strengthen connection and collaboration with global and other regional platforms and coordination mechanisms on the continent for menstrual health to enhance collective effort.

Finally, we re-commit to holding the **next symposium on menstrual health in 2023** to review progress made on frameworks, and research and share key successes, challenges and lessons learned.