



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

Keynote Address

Deputy Minister of Sport, Youth and National Service

Honourable Emma Kantema-Gaomas

at the

**Official Opening of the National Consultation with Young
People on Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) Ministerial
Commitment - Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

27 May 2021

Safari Court Hotel, Windhoek



Director of ceremonies,

Hon. Emma Theofilus, Deputy Minister of Information and Communication Technology,

Ms. Sanet Steenkamp, Executive Director, Ministry of Education, Art & Culture,

Taimi Amaambo, Country Director, Society for Family Health,

Heads of the United Nations agencies;

Local and International Development Partners,

Representatives of Public Enterprises and Government,

Distinguish Invited Guests;

Members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. It is my pleasure to stand in front of you today at the Official Opening of the National Consultation with Young People on Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) Ministerial Commitment (on) - Comprehensive Sexuality Education. The Ministry of Sport, Youth and National Service is absolutely delighted to be part of this shared efforts and vision to transform positively the lives of millions of young people. I must say that this national consultation on CSE is very timely as the mainstream national discourse is currently occupied by debates about matters pertaining to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR).
2. Namibia became party to ESA in 2016 in Durban, South Africa, when the Ministers responsible for Education, Health, Gender and Youth signed Namibia's accession to ESA. In Namibia, ESA places particular emphasis on linking prevention and awareness raising about services. It is aligned with the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) implemented as part of the Life Skills curriculum in schools, and Adolescent Friendly Health Services (AFHS) framework. In Namibia, since 2016,

implementation of ESA is coordinated and overseen at the national level by the National School Health Task Force which has a dedicated ESA Sub-committee n tasked with implementing and monitoring progress at country level.

3. The purpose of the Sub-committee on ESA is to convene and coordinate the work of Government and Civil Society, using the curriculum schools as its backbone. ESA commitment in Namibia operates within a multi-sectoral approach led by Government with defined specific targets. These defined targets are:

- Pre and in-service SRH and CSE training for teachers, health and social workers;
- Reduce number of adolescents and young people who do not have access to SRH services;
- Reduce unintended pregnancies among youth, and;
- Eliminate gender based violence.

4. We know for a fact that Southern Africa has one of the youngest populations in the world – more than one-third of the population is between the ages of 10 and 24. And in Namibia, that demographic comprises over half the population. And we also know that healthy, educated and empowered youth are the key to a better and more prosperous future for each young person, their community and the continent as a whole. In the case of Namibia, we continue to demonstrate strong commitment to health responses by implementing a combination of coordinated interventions of which one is improving comprehensive knowledge around universal sexual and reproductive health rights.

5. In what is turning out to be an incredibly extraordinary year, our immediate future is profoundly affected by the prevailing Covid 19 pandemic, which has thrust public health into the spotlight. Despite swift responses from our government and others around the world, the truth is, livelihoods were diminished and lives were lost. Therefore, this national consultation on CSE is very befitting. Not only are we taking stock of the progress we have made in advancing the health and rights of

youth, but we are committing ourselves to redouble our efforts for this next stage of our journey.

Director of Ceremony, Ladies and Gentlemen

CSE is delivering the desired outcomes in the region and Africa in general. This is evidenced by the following:

- a) Young people being able to exercise their rights to make informed choices over their own bodies. For example, the adolescent birth rate has declined by 40%, from 137 per 1,000 live births in 1995-1999 to 97 in 2015-2019 in Africa.
- b) Young people being able to exercise their rights to make informed choices for a healthy and successful transition into adulthood. For example, the proportion of young women (aged 20 to 24 years) who report having been married before the age of 18 has decreased by close to 20%¹ since ICPD. Beyond the figures, young women have been empowered to know and exercise their rights.
- c) Access to education among girls has increased from 50% to 75%² between 1994 and 2017. Education is critical to women's empowerment ensuring that women are able to have choices, increase their earning capacity and independence.

Director of Ceremonies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

6. But the work is not yet done, we are equally well aware of the challenges we still need to overcome. Not all young people face the same reality when it comes to their education and health. There are high rates of teenage pregnancy, child marriage, HIV and STIs among others challenges. As we all know, teenage pregnancy raises the risk of school drop-out, limits economic prospects, and may eventually perpetuate intergenerational poverty. Youth unemployment remains

¹ UNICEF: Child Marriage - Latest trends and future prospects. UNICEF 2018 (<https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Child-Marriage-Data-Brief.pdf>)

² World Bank (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.NENR.FE?end=2017&start=1994>) accessed 24/04/2019

high, and many young people are exposed to informal, low-wage and insecure work. This is especially true for young women, the disabled and indigenous youth.

The situation of young people in Southern Africa does not appear satisfactory, as yet.

- The prevalence of child marriage and adolescent birth rates in Africa are around two times higher than the global averages and HIV transmission, especially among young women, continues to be high.
- In many countries, there are legal and policy barriers adversely impacting adolescents' and young people's uptake of sexual and reproductive health services and the quality of these services vary across countries and even within the country.
- Net enrollment in secondary education is less than 40% (i.e., 39% for boys and 33% for girls).
- Knowledge on physical and sexual well-being (Comprehensive Sexuality Education) is poor; with only 37% of young women and 41% of young men in the East and Southern Africa region have comprehensive and correct knowledge of HIV prevention.
- Many countries in the region, including middle-income and high-income countries, and the most marginalized populations such as key populations, disabled people, prisoners and displaced people face deepening inequalities that particularly impact young people.
- Progress on youth participation and leadership has been slow. Only 1.5% of members of parliament are young people below the age of 30 years in Africa, which improves to 16% by age 40.
- Young people continue to be plagued with poverty stemming from the irregularity of work and the lack of formal employment and social protection.

These are all associated with social and economic costs that undoubtedly affect the larger community and not only the single individual.

7. It is for this reason that we as government are taking deliberate strides to increase youth participation

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8. Today, it is a great opportunity for all of us to reflect on changing cultural and moral norms, and attitudes towards CSE and to acknowledge what more needs to be done to fulfill young people's outlook for their own future. That is what makes this national consultation so important. I can never overemphasize the importance of wide ranging consultations on issues that affect the constituents we want to create policy for. In 2021, We simply cannot make any policy decision on behalf of the youth without their input. We simply cannot make any policy decision without the youth driving the process that informs those policy decisions. One of the cornerstones of liberal democracies around the world is the quality and frequency of consultations between government and its citizens on policy matters.
9. I would on behalf of Government through the Ministry of Sport Youth and National Service like to thank our development partners, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). I would also, like to thank Society for Family Health for organizing these consultations. All stakeholders that either contributed directly or indirectly to this consultations, your work is integral in our collective efforts to build an educated, healthy and productive population.
10. I thank you.