

## **17th International Inter-Ministerial Conference on South-South Cooperation in Population and Development**

*Nairobi Commitments and the 2030 Agenda:  
Taking stock and looking ahead in post COVID-19 crisis*

### ***Technical Session 2*** **Youth Engagement through South-South Cooperation in Advocacy and Innovative Programming**

**Speaking Notes for the Minister of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu, MP on the  
occasion of the Partners in Population and Development (PPD) Session on Youth  
Engagement through South-South Cooperation in Advocacy and Innovative  
Programming**

**Friday, 27 November 2020**

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**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good morning/ afternoon/ evening wherever you are.

#### **SALUTATIONS.**

Let me start by congratulating Partners in Population and Development (PPD), the National Health Commission of China (NHC) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for organising and for the kind invitation to participate in this session that gives the youth a voice on matters that concern them.

The importance of this session today stems from the necessity for young people of developing countries to play veritable and participatory roles in determining the future and progress of their countries. That is why I commend organisers of this session toward the promotion of South-South Cooperation amongst young people.

This session seeks to connect young people to work together on matters of common interest through South-South Cooperation to attain the objectives of the ICPD during and post the global COVID-19 pandemic, which threatens to reverse many of the gains we have registered over the years.

As we manage the changes and transitions occasioned by the global COVID-19 pandemic experienced by our respective nations across the globe, we must maintain that our greatest asset is the determination and commitment of our youth to surmount all challenges and to take us forward. It is with this in mind that our youth must demand with the greatest sense of urgency that we band together as developing nations to take the youth cause and the cause of our nations forward.

The youth constitute the largest and ablest sector of our global population, yet many are still overlooked in the design, implementation, and monitoring of programmes. It is therefore clear and without question that any policy or action which seeks to marginalise youth can only retard the development of our nations. We must therefore spare no effort in ensuring that the talents of our youth are positively engaged in the process of working towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The former Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon defined youth as [I quote] the “***torchbearers of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)***” ***who, like generations before them, can engage actively as “living architects of their own future”***, and can help achieve the Goals by 2030 and, in effect, the full attainment of their rights.

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As we commit ourselves to the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind, and other related frameworks, in particular, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Programme of Action for Youth, we also commit in both words and deeds to the optimal fulfillment of our youths’ political, social, cultural, economic and educational aspirations and we dare say that the future belongs to them.

As a country with a large youth population, we do not share the doomsayers’ belief that our youth are idle and in despair. Nor do we subscribe to the notion that our youth constitute a “lost generation”. The South African Constitution is premised on the universal human rights principles and the values of non-discrimination that emerged from decades of struggle and the progressive agenda that arose from 1994 Cairo Conference.

South Africa is committed to South-South Cooperation on adolescent and youth issues, in particular, Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, which include abortion rights, including Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and gender non-conforming persons.

Young people's SRHR includes their ability to prevent unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, STIs (including HIV/AIDS), and all forms of sexual violence and coercion. In the absence of these services, young girls resort to unsafe backstreet abortions, with major health complications. It is estimated that 4 million girls between 15–19 years undergo unsafe abortions every year in the developing world. Approximately 10% of maternal mortality among all women are attributable to backstreet and unsafe abortions.

Many multi-lateral and bilateral agencies have strategies focused on young people and their rights, including the major UN agencies, the development banks, regional entities like the EU and African Union, and many bilateral agencies. The global space for youth engagement has grown and is becoming a flourishing space. While this is cause for optimism, inclusive and meaningful youth engagement remains a challenge in many parts of the world.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

“Youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow but are the drivers of change today.” Given the foregoing, the question uppermost is: what is youth engagement? The Youth Leadership Institute (2009) defines youth engagement as “***The active, empowered, and intentional partnership with youth as stakeholders, problem solvers, and change agents in their communities.***” Prioritising the participation of youth is based on the premise that youth have the right to express themselves, be involved in decisions that affect their lives, and be active participants, rather than just passive beneficiaries.

However, youth leadership would only be strong if adults believe that before young people are citizens tomorrow, they are citizens today, and therefore they need to be fully incorporated into society. In other words, society needs to reposition youth and youth leaders and support them, in taking full responsibility of shaping their lives and future.

Let me hasten to add that this does not mean that young people must just be added in societal structures of governance, but it means recognising that the knowledge that young people have, their views and their voices are important and should thus be centred. It is therefore important to encourage young people to devise strategies and interventions and locate these within the larger context of the surrounding society.

Ladies and Gentlemen, when we talk South-South Cooperation, we should not narrowly reduce it to government-government collaboration, but also include the creation of platforms for youth engagements and sharing of knowledge and ideas of innovative ideas driven by youth themselves. An example of good practice of the latter is The Because We Can! (BWC) Campaign. It is a coalition of youth-serving SRHR and faith organizations, the young people, working with governments, came together to develop a joint campaign to promote young people's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services in 8 Southern Africa countries. Its overall objective is to contribute to positive changes in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) policies and laws and to defend progressive policies.

The campaign ensures a more effective domestication and monitoring of the Maputo Plan of Action, Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) commitments and SADC SRHR strategy 2019-2030. During COVID-19 the BWC partners intensified their online presence with targeted SRHR and CSE messages through various media packages including - awareness and training videos, posters, blogs, online meetings and webinars. Since its inception, the campaign has reached over 1 million young people through online platforms.

#### WHAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY?

Technology can be useful in supporting youth engagement and South-South Cooperation amongst young people themselves. The power of new technologies and modes of communication have been crucial dimensions in transforming young people's engagement and in amplifying their voices.

Although technology includes many benefits, it is also limited by the digital data divide. Some young people still find it difficult to participate in online activities due to lack of access – these may include most marginalised populations like the rural youth and girls or young women from more restrictive cultures. The advent of the global COVID-19 has highlighted the impact of digital divide on young people, particularly with regard to online or remote learning.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I do hope this conference will reinvigorate and expand meaningful youth engagement and leadership to push forward the ICPD agenda on all fronts. We need to share experiences and ideas of innovative ways of engaging young people more effectively. Resolutely we must commit to young engagement.

I thank you.