

# Health Systems Advocacy Partnership

The Health Systems Advocacy (HSA) Partnership contributes to stronger health systems so people in Sub-Saharan Africa can realise their right to the highest attainable sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The HSA Partnership focuses on strengthening human resources for health and access to essential sexual and reproductive health commodities, while advocating for good governance and equitable health financing.

## Health Systems in Sub-Saharan Africa Fail on SRHR

Despite progress made in Sub-Saharan Africa towards achievement of the previous Millennium Development Goals, maternal mortality remains high: the risk of a woman dying during childbirth, or from a pregnancy complication, is one in 38. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that increasing numbers of women are now seeking care during childbirth in health facilities<sup>i</sup>, but still less than 55% of women in Sub-Saharan Africa deliver under the supervision of a skilled birth attendant<sup>ii</sup>. Underlying causes for the poor status of SRHR in Sub-Saharan Africa are manifold and include financial obstacles to health services, limited access to contraceptives and other sexual and reproductive health commodities, poor availability of professionally trained health personnel, gender inequality and socio-cultural practices and beliefs.

## Equitable Access to High-quality SRHR Services by Strengthening Health Systems

Improved maternal and child health outcomes can be achieved, even in politically and socially challenged contexts. Current commitments at national and international

levels are promising: in the past five years, 77% of country governments implemented concrete measures to increase women's access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, regardless of marital status and age<sup>i</sup>. Moreover, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda includes specific targets on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, as well as sexual and reproductive rights, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on health (SDG 3) and gender (SDG 5), respectively.

At the end of 2015—the start of the SDG era—the HSA Partnership was launched by Amref Flying Doctors/Amref Health Africa, the African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation (ACHEST), Health Action International, Wemos and the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. The HSA Partnership contributes to stronger health systems that enable people in Sub-Saharan Africa to equitably access high-quality sexual and reproductive health services. It builds on the unique capacities and strengths of the participating organisations and focuses on

four of the WHO's building blocks for strong health systems: human resources for health, essential health commodities, good governance and equitable health financing.

The HSA Partnership works from the premise that there is considerable interest in understanding and documenting what works to support national planning, to promote policy dialogue across different stakeholders and sectors and to facilitate learning within and across countries and communities. The Partnership is carrying out its work in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania and Malawi.

### Promoting Strong Civil Society & Health Stewards

Improving access to high-quality health workers and sexual and reproductive health commodities, while also advocating for good governance and equitable health financing, is challenging. It requires a vibrant and influential civil society and network of health stewards (leaders in healthcare facilities, communities and countries) to initiate discussion and reform. Together, these individuals and organisations have the potential to act as watchdogs—to hold the private and public sectors to account—and to advocate for stronger health systems, share their expert knowledge in an effort to shape health policy, and represent the voices of fellow citizens who are unable to realise their right to health.

To this end, the HSA Partnership works with partners in Sub-Saharan Africa to develop and strengthen the skills, processes and resources of civil society actors and key health stewards across the region.

### Advocating for Healthy Systems & Healthy People

Together, HSA Partners:

- 1** Contribute to capacity building. We equip civil society actors and health stewards with needed knowledge, technical skills and tools to develop and implement evidence-based advocacy strategies. This includes specialised training on topics, such as SRHR issues, essential sexual and reproductive health commodities, national and international policies and agreements, leadership and networking, and policy research and analysis.
- 2** Strengthen links between organisations and networks advocating at the local, national, regional (European Union and African Region) and international levels, so decision-making on these issues can be addressed and implementation can be monitored in a coordinated manner.
- 3** Advocate in Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi, the Netherlands, the European Union, the African Region and internationally for strong health systems that promote SRHR.

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<sup>i</sup> World Health Organization (2015). *Health in 2015: from MDGs to SDGs*.

[http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/200009/1/9789241565110\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/200009/1/9789241565110_eng.pdf?ua=1).

<sup>ii</sup> Snow, R.C., Laski, L. and Mutumba, M. (2015). Sexual and reproductive health: Progress and outstanding needs. *Global Public Health*, 10:2, 149-173.