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CONCEPT NOTE

HIGH LEVEL SIDE EVENT ON THE MARGINS OF THE SIXTY THIRD SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN: “ACCELERATING THE ELIMINATION OF HARMFUL PRACTICES TO REAP THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND FOR AFRICA”

Venue: UNICEF Headquarters, Labouisse Hall

Date: 13 March 2019

Time: 1:20pm to 3:00pm (A light lunch will be served from 12:30pm to 1:15pm).

Background and Purpose

It is a universal truth that sustainable development will not be achieved in Africa without investment in young people and addressing the norms and structural factors related to economic, social and cultural inequalities that negatively impact their lives.

Africa is home to one of the youngest and fastest growing population. With as many as 20 million young people poised to join the workforce every year for the next three decades, the continent has an opportunity to shift the balance of local and global growth with a purpose. For African countries to capitalize on this demographic dividend, the future workforce must be educated, trained and have adequate employment opportunities. These investments hold the promise for reaping a demographic dividend in the 21st century that could lift hundreds of millions out of extreme poverty and contribute to enhanced prosperity, stability and peace on the continent.

However, failure to prioritize these investments will lead to a far bleaker scenario, because the opportunity to reap demographic dividend is time-sensitive and influenced by policies. Numerous studies have shown the transformative power of investment in essential services for children and youth, their societies and economies. Modelling exercises of Africa’s demographic dividend potential show that the continent’s per capita income could quadruple by 2050 if such investments in human capital were complemented by policies that foster job creation, empower and protect women and girls, and expand access to culturally sensitive reproductive health education and services¹.

Unfortunately, within this population young girls and women continue to experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination which leave them behind and excluded from progress. Today deeply embedded patriarchal norms that pervade across national, community and individual levels, continue to be key blockages for actualizing a transformative reality for women and girls across Africa. These norms and structural factors related to economic, social and cultural inequalities have resulted in harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child early and forced marriage. These harmful practices promote gender inequality and are a violation of the rights of women and girls, limiting their opportunities to realize their rights and full potential in terms of health, education and income. Girls who undergo FGM face severe physical and mental complications and are more likely to drop out of school and face child, early and forced

¹ https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Generation_2030_Africa_2.0.pdf



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marriage. They are often associated with serious forms of violence or are themselves a form of violence against women and girls.

Across Africa, 125 million girls and women alive today were married before their 18th birthday. At least 200 million girls and women alive today and 68 million girls are at risk of female genital mutilation between 2015 and 2030. The current estimates of 3.9 million girls mutilated each year will rise to 4.6 million by 2030, unless massively scaled up efforts are taken to prevent that from happening. Both issues are impacted by population growth in the communities where they are practiced.

We must overcome these challenges so that girls and young women can reach their full potential. Within the framework of the 2009-18 African Youth Decade, and the African Youth Charter, the adoption of an action plan was made to achieve specific objectives for the youth. Several United Nations conventions state the need to eliminate female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage including the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment (CAT). These goals provide the blueprint for the way we can collectively act to improve the lives of young people, especially – girls and young women.

The elimination of FGM and child, early and forced marriage has been firmly rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development under SDG 5 and Target 5.3 on harmful practices, which have been clearly enunciated as barriers to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. Eliminating violence against women and girls, including harmful practices such as FGM and CEFM, will make a crucial contribution across all the Sustainable Development goals and targets, which focus on good health and well-being, safe motherhood, quality education, inclusive societies and economic growth. This will require work at many levels, from dialogue and action that engages families, young people and communities, to protection and provision of care services for girls and women, laws and their enforcement, and political commitment at the local, regional, national and international levels. Moreover, comprehensive prevention strategies that address social norms, gender roles and stereotypes and unequal power relations between men and women and discrimination against women and girls, are also critical to success and long-lasting change.

It is against this background that the Governments of Burkina Faso, Canada, Italy and Zambia with support from UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women will host an event which will provide an opportunity for a Call to Action to sound the alarm on the need for commitments and innovative measures to eliminate harmful practices, especially child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation in Africa by 2030 and facilitate the delivery of the "Africa We Want" as per Agenda 2063.

Objective

- To create a platform for Member States and young people to dialogue on commitments and innovative measures to eliminate child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation as Africa's contribution to SDG 5.3 by 2030 and Agenda 2063.



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Expected Outcomes:

- Collective understanding of the critical actions to be undertaken by national governments and key stakeholder groups to catalyse the delivery of results;
- Renewed partnership to eliminate harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation in Africa, which will be articulated through short time-bound statements by Member States and young people.

Format and Participation:

An interactive session convened by the Governments of Burkina Faso, Canada, Italy and Zambia with support from UNICEF, UNFPA & UN Women. The event will be moderated by Ms. Aya Chebbi - the African Union Youth Envoy, and would feature select Member States, the UN, the AU Commissioner for Social Affairs and two members of the African Union Youth Advisory Council.

Contact: For further information on the event, please contact:

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