

International Day of the African Child: An Opportunity to Support the GFF

An open letter to governments and donors on behalf of young leaders in Africa

On this year's International Day of the African Child, we call on *our government and donors* to prioritize sustained health care access for children, adolescents, and women through investing in the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children, and Adolescents (GFF) to full fill its 2021 resource mobilization goal of USD \$1.2 billion and ensure its full resourcing need of USD \$2.5 billion by the end of 2025.

As a multi-stakeholder partnership, the GFF is a vehicle to help improve the health and quality of life for children, adolescents, and women, end preventable deaths, and accelerate gender equality. Since the GFF's origins, governments and global health partners have contributed to key health gains including improved access to family planning, child immunizations, safe births with a skilled attendant, access to safe drinking water, and child nutrition.

But the COVID-19 pandemic threatens this progress. It has rocked our communities, through a secondary crisis for women, children, and adolescents, deepening inequities and disproportionately affecting the poorest and most marginalized groups – especially adolescents and young people. In fact, 36 GFF partner countries have seen up to a 25% drop in coverage of lifesaving health interventions for women, children, and adolescents in 2020 as compared to pre-pandemic levels.

As young child, adolescent, and youth health activists, we have seen firsthand the effects of COVID-19 service disruptions on access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) information and services, and maternal and child health services. With the on and off lockdowns, school shutdowns, and many families losing means to their livelihoods, the number of teenage pregnancies has surged; gender-based violence and early girls' marriages have increased; and youth access to information for decision-making around sexuality has been further compromised. Of the 150 million people projected to be pushed into extreme poverty by the end of 2021, many will be young people.

We must mitigate the blow of the COVID-19 pandemic and its downstream impacts on children, young people and other vulnerable populations. We know the GFF, in partnership with civil society and youth, has the potential to ensure that hard-earned health gains are not erased, while supporting and empowering country-led health systems strengthening. As governments face tough trade-off decisions, it is more important than ever to ensure sufficient financing for essential reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health and nutrition, and primary health care systems.

We commend the Government of Senegal's recent commitment to co-finance GFF programs in Senegal and catalyze more domestic resources towards gender, education, and health centered projects. We call on our governments, as well as donor governments, to protect essential health services for children, adolescents, and women by committing resources to the GFF.

As youth, we call on our governments and donors to

- **Strengthen access to essential health services for children, adolescents, and women by committing resources to the GFF.**
- **Strengthen commitments to mobilize resources to ensure the achievement of the 2030 goals through the GFF.**
- **Take all necessary steps to improve and ensure continuity of SRHR services, care, and information for children, adolescents, and youth.**

On this International Day of the African Child, let's come together with shared purpose to leverage the collective power of the GFF partnership toward a healthy future for children, adolescents, and women.

Signed,

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Michael Asudi, Kenya, Organization of African Youth-Kenya

Tsigereda Zewdu ,Ethiopian Youth Federation, Addis Ababa Ethiopia

Arafat Kabugo, Uganda, Naguru Youth Health Network

Desmond, Nji, DESERVE, Cameroon

Tjedu Moyo, Zimbabwe, Ignite Youth

Oyeyemi Pitan, Nigeria, Nigerian Youth Champions for Universal Health Coverage

Olajumoke Adebayo, Nigeria, Reprlife

Mohammed Awuah Kamara, Action for Youth and Children Network, Sierra Leone

Magnifique Irakoze , Rwanda, AfriYAN

Related Country Contexts/Examples

- *In **Côte d'Ivoire**, effective civil society and youth engagement in the GFF process contributed to an increase in the government's health budget.*
- *In **Kenya**, coordinated civil society advocacy that involved youth networks led to creation of RMNCAH+N Multistakeholder Country Platform, with 2 youth seats that will champion key issues affecting women children and adolescents health.*
- *In **Nigeria**, civil society and youth engagement led to the establishment and promotion of RMNCAEH+N Multi-Stakeholder Partnership Coordination Platform. CSOs and Youth constituency are calling on the government to ensure effective utilization of the Covid 19 relief fund. Particularly, to use the funds earmarked for health to strengthen the health system beyond the Covid 19 period.*
- *In **Senegal**, youth-led monitoring and community engagement promoted sustainable community ownership and improvements in the health system through collaboration between the DSME consultation framework and civil society associations.*
- *In **Mali**, youth are engaged in the GFF process and are taking action on the ground by advocating with decision makers so that adolescents and youth have the right information and access to sexual and reproductive health services.*
- *In **Mauritania**, civil society organizations, including youth, have carried out several activities related to SRMNEA+N as part of the GFF process, and recently, BHOs and youth were invited by the Ministry of Health to participate in a workshop to plan and consolidate the 2021/2030 national health development plan and the 2021/2023 investment package.*
- *In **Burkina Faso**, youth are fully engaged in the GFF process and are leading actions on the ground to build knowledge about GFF among civil society organizations and to engage policymakers and the government in the GFF process for access to quality user-friendly sexual and reproductive health services. These efforts were reinforced in this COVID-19 period by funding two projects in favor of youth involvement and engagement in the GFF and in access to SRMNEA+N services for adolescents and youth.*
- *In **Niger**, the GFF CSO coalition implemented advocacy activities for the continuity of RH/FP services in Integrated Health Centers in the cities most affected by COVID-19 (Zinder, Tahoua and Niamey). This made it possible to evaluate the attendance of health centers and the use of RH/FP services as well as to assess the risks of transmission of COVID-19 in these centers.*

- *In **Haiti**, after the launch of the National Platform, youth are fully engaged in the GFF process. But because of the pandemic, everything is done almost remotely with heavy use of social networks. The Ministry of Public Health in Haiti is focusing on the management of COVID-19, but this does not prevent the ability to move forward with the means at hand with our efforts as young people to promote investment in the health of future generations.*
- *In **Cameroon**, loss of income, lock downs and the fear of contracting COVID-19 have led to restricted use of health services, which could lead to an increase of 11% and 16% of infant and maternal mortality rates, respectively, in 12 months. Another challenge is in Cameroon's humanitarian and fragile settings where women, children, and adolescents face restricted access to essential WCAH services. And, there is limited information about adolescent-friendly services among adolescents, an issue which affects equitable access for users.*