Africa’s population is estimated to be 1.1 billion people of the global population of 7.6 billion. Among this 1.1 billion, Africa has 70 percent of its population aged below 30 years. Today, approximately 375,000 people in Africa are aged between the age of 10 and 24 years. This makes the African continent one of the youngest populations on the globe. In addition, it has also been projected that the African population as a percentage of the global population will continue to get younger: 13 percent in 2000, 20 percent in 2050 and ultimately 24 percent in 2100. Despite this observed increase in population growth in Africa for the most part of 1950 to 2000, the continent maintains a decreasing population growth rate:

This current population transition provides the African continent with a window of opportunity to attain the demographic dividend. However, for this opportunity to be attained requires several investments in health, education, governance and economy. Particularly in the area of health, adolescents (10-19 years) and youths (15 – 24) sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR) remain a critical element of a healthy population in Africa. Therefore, investments should ensure the full attainment of sexual and reproductive health services as provided in the newly adapted sustainable development goals and targets (Goal 3 and Goal 5):

Between these two sustainable development goals, targets aimed at addressing young people’s access to contraceptive information and services remain vital ensuring young people stay healthy. These targets include the following specific targets on family planning:

3.7 by 2030 ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes.

5.6 To ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform of Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

In addition to the Agenda 2030, Sub-Saharan Africa has been a signatory of several commitments which would ensure young people’s access to comprehensive contraceptive information and quality services if implemented. These national, sub-regional and global commitments including: The African Charter for children’s Welfare (ACCW) based on the United Nations Convention for the rights of the child (UNCRC), International Convention for Human Rights (ICHR), Maputo Plan of Action (MPoA), African Youth Decade of Action, African Health Strategy and Maputo Protocol. Furthermore, the implementation of these commitments must be done within a human rights perspective guaranteeing young people’s accessibility, acceptability and availability of contraception information and services is provided without stigma, discrimination and violence. In addition, these commitments should embrace innovative strategies such as access to comprehensive sexuality education for in school and out of school children in order to accelerate progress in implementation (Ref).

In conclusion, the call for action to ensure human rights in the provision of comprehensive contraceptive information and quality services for young people is recommended to address the current status of the African region in regards to the above issues. It is imperative to note that relevant stakeholders should be held accountable for the current status in uptake of contraception in Africa in lieu of the fact that the above mentioned commitments are all in support of the development, survival, non-discrimination and best interest of adolescents and youth health. Notwithstanding the fact that decisions made for adolescents and youth be made with total, meaningful and sustained participation by them in determining their futures.

State of Contraceptive Use in Sub-Saharan Africa

In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action recommended that all signatories seek to provide universal access to a full range of safe and reliable family-planning methods by 2015. This commitment was reaffirmed during the ICPD review process held in 2015.

Despite several countries in the Sub-Saharan African region having signed this commitment, it remains with one of the highest levels of the unmet need to family planning globally. This lack of access to modern contraceptive services has contributed to the sustained level of high maternal mortality in Africa. In the case of young people, their access to comprehensive information and quality services remain extremely low. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that more than 60 percent of adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa who wish to avoid unwanted pregnancy do not have access to modern contraception. This lack of access results in young people using less effective, less reliable traditional methods of contraception, which have been proved to account for more than 80% of unintended pregnancies.

In 2014, the Power of the 1.9 Billion, Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future (New York: United Nations Population Fund) underlined the need to reach both young women and men. The ICPD Programme of Action is a call to action to integrate SRHR into the post-2015 agenda. This is a commitment and a call to action to the world community and governments to lead in an integrated approach to achieving good health and well-being, education and rights of young people. It is a call to all decision-makers to take action to transform the lives of young people. It is a call to all those involved in planning, financing, implementing and monitoring to ensure an integrated approach.

II. ibid. 2015.
We call upon our government, international organizations, United Nations agencies, civil society organizations, development partners and other duty bearers to ensure:

Laws and Policies

- Enable laws and policies that ensure that programmes implemented provide comprehensive contraceptive information and quality services for all young people. These programmes must focus on marginalized young people irrespective of their characteristics (i.e. marital status, indigenous young people, persons with disabilities, displaced young people due to crisis and conflict) and/or socio-economic status (i.e. rural, poor, young people facing geographical barriers, displaced young people those in crisis and conflict settings and survivors of sexual violence).

- Guarantee adequate financial and technical resources for youth led and youth serving organizations and initiatives.

- Ensure the elimination of mandatory parental/guardian authorization/notification for young people’s access to contraceptive information and services.

- Eliminate coercive population policies and practices such as forced sterilization, which violate the aforementioned rights of young people.

Comprehensive Contraceptive Information and Quality Services

- Guarantee scientifically accurate and comprehensive age-appropriate, sexuality education and information programmes within and outside of schools that include information on contraceptive use and acquisition.

- Make available for young people a range of contraceptive methods, including emergency contraception, within the essential medicine supply chain.

- Guarantee the privacy of young people in the provision of contraceptive information and quality services, including confidentiality of medical and other personal information.

- Provide comprehensive contraceptive information and quality services during antenatal and postpartum care, safe abortion and post-abortion care and counselling services to young people.

- Provide on-going competency-based training and supervision of health-care personnel on the delivery of youth-sensitive and youth-friendly contraceptive, education, information and services.

- Ensure the elimination of financial barriers to young people’s access to quality modern contraception.

- Ensure quality assurance processes, including medical standards of care and client feedback mechanisms are incorporated into contraceptive programmes.

Young People’s Participation

- Provide youth-friendly, and promote youth-led counselling and education on contraceptives, its side-effects based on scientifically accurate information. This education should include skills building in communications and negotiations tailored to meet the needs of young people.

- Empower young people to make informed choice for their own use of modern contraception (including a range of emergency, short-acting, long-acting and permanent methods) without discrimination.

- Integrate HIV testing, treatment and care into sexual and reproductive health services including comprehensive contraceptive information and quality services at all levels of health care provision.

- Facilitate young people to have a meaningful and sustained engagement, participation and inclusive decision making about contraceptive programme and policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Youth-led democratization of data and Accountability

- Ensure application and use of research, monitoring and evaluation data that is disaggregated for strategic and policy formulation purposes and for improving on service delivery for young people.

- Ensure that effective and transparent accountability and redress mechanisms are in place at the individual and systems levels for young people.

*The Call for Action has been produced as part of the “Global South Youth Strategizing meeting, 24th January 2016, organized by the Asian Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), on the side-lines of the International Conference on Family Planning 2016. This meeting brought together Global South partners from AIDS Accountability International (AAI); African Youth and Adolescence Network on Population and Development (AFRIYAN), Chanan Development Association (CDA) Pakistan; Pravah, India; Reproductive Health Association of Cambodia (RHAC); YUWA, Nepal. This brief will be further deliberated at the national level before consensus is reached on the final text.*/