West African Youth Position Paper on Population and Development

We, the representatives of youth and youth organizations from the ECOWAS Member States and the Sahel, convened in Banjul, The Gambia from 23-24 October 2019 for the first ever West Africa Youth Leaders Forum on Population and Development under the theme: ICPD25, The Contributions of West African Youth to Accelerating the Promise; jointly organized by the African Youth Commission (AYC) and The Gambia National Youth Council under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Health in partnership with the West African Health Organization (WAHO), UNFPA The Gambia, African Youth and Adolescents Network (AfriYAN) Gambia, Plan International and SheDecides Movement;

Inspired by the forthcoming Nairobi High Level Summit on International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD25);

Building on the recommendations of the 3rd AYC Pan African Youth Conference on African Unity and Development which calls for youth leadership, inclusion of young people, children and adolescents in ICPD conversations;

Recalling that 25 years ago, 179 governments met at International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Egypt and adopted a Programme of Action, recognizing that reproductive health, women’s empowerment and gender equality are the pathway to sustainable development;

Conscious of the fact that gains made since then are remarkable but there is a long way to go before we can claim to have lived up to the commitments pledged in Cairo;

Aware of the need to create awareness on the Africa 2063 Agenda (The Africa We Want), its domestication and dissemination as well as the African Union Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth;

Recognising the importance of the Nairobi High Level Summit on ICPD25 and the opportunity it brings for all actors including Governments, Inter-governmental organizations, young people in Africa and diaspora, civil society organizations, youth organizations, youth networks, youth movements, and other development partners especially in intensifying our collective efforts for the full, effective and accelerated implementation and funding of the ICPD Programme of Action as well as the 2030 and 2063 Agendas for sustainable development.

Acknowledge the passion, the energy and contributions of young people to the realization of our various national, sub-regional, continental and global development agendas and the need to sustain the meaningful engagement, involvement and participation of young people in popular access to information and quality Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights services and sustainable development issues, especially at national level.

Renew our commitments to mobilize, organize, build capacity and strengthen stakeholder partnership to take grassroots actions to deliver the Promise for rights and choices for all beyond the Nairobi Summit;
Recognise steps taken by governments, inter-governmental organizations, youth-led organizations, networks and initiatives, civil society organizations, and other development partners towards the realization of ICPD Unfinished Business;

Appreciate the contribution of West African Health Organization (WAHO) and other development partners in improving access to sexual and reproductive information and services of adolescents and young people in the ECOWAS Region;

Guided by the sub-themes of the first ever West Africa Youth Leaders Conference on Population and Development;

Therefore Commit ourselves to:

**Population and Sustainable Development** – Advocate for more trust in young people and more investment in youth-led and youth focused initiatives on population and sustainable development; particularly initiatives supporting young people from rural areas and people with disabilities;

**Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Adolescents and Young People (SRHRAY)** - Create awareness on existing policies and frameworks on SRHRAY by leveraging on innovative means of communication that are easily accessible by young people across West Africa;

**Access to Reproductive Health (RH) Quality Services and Information for Young People** - Break the culture of silence and stigmatization of sexual health issues by amplifying the voices of young people in the areas of adolescents and youth sexual reproductive health that need attention and investment;

**Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and Youth Friendly Services** - Ensure the implementation of CSE at all levels and youth friendly services; and promote evidence-based innovative initiatives with the aim of ensuring young people are fully aware of their sexuality and existing youth friendly centers and services in their localities that they can take advantage of;

**Gender Based Violence and Empowerment of Young Women and Men** – Advocate for ending of gender-based violence and empowerment of young men and women by creating platforms for young people across West Africa to meet, engage and share experiences on lessons learned and best practices towards the elimination of gender-based violence in all its forms and empowerment of young women and men;

**Urbanization and Internal Migration** – Advocate for decentralization of services and opportunities and equitable distribution of resources and services to adequately cater for the needs of all young people, particularly the provision of sexual reproductive health and rights information and quality services;

**Mental Health and Disabilities** - Advocate for more attention to people with disabilities and for improvement of mental health infrastructures and services, provision of incentives for mental health practitioners to support young people with mental health issues particularly those resulting from sexual reproductive health issues and psychoactive substance abuse;
We call on Governments, other actors and development partners in the ECOWAS and Sahel region to:

**Population and Sustainable Development** - Fully harness the demographic dividend by investing in the health and education of young people, allocate at least 10% of the national budget towards youth sector, create ECOWAS Youth Council and appoint the ECOWAS Youth Envoy among whose functions will be to promote and defend the interests of young people in ECOWAS Commission, ensure ease of access to reproductive health information and services to adolescents and young people as well as support full implementation of universal health coverage at Member States level;

**Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Adolescents and Young People** - Fulfill commitments made towards realization of adolescent and youth sexual reproductive health and rights including the allocation of 15% of national budgets towards health sector as stipulated in the 2001 Abuja Declaration;

**Access to Reproductive Health (RH) Quality Services and Information for Young People** - Invest in initiatives that target information dissemination to young people, particularly in provision of accurate and factual information on sexual and reproductive health on digital platforms that are accessed by young people;

**Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and Youth Friendly Services** - Enforce implementation of modern life-skills and comprehensive sexuality education; Make deliberate investments in youth friendly services and centers and support youth-led and youth focused initiatives on sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents and young people

**Gender Based Violence and Empowerment of Young Women and Men** – Enforce strict measures on perpetrators of gender-based violence and invest in initiatives towards empowerment of young women and men including their full participation in policy and decision-making processes to realize their full potential;

**Urbanization and Internal Migration** – Enforce the implementation of ECOWAS protocol on free movement of people, goods and services so as to prevent cases of gender based violence and discrimination that occur during migration at all levels;

**Mental Health and Disabilities** – Create infrastructures and incentive mechanisms for mental health specialists so as to create a pool of practitioners to cater for the needs of modern adolescent and mental health needs of adolescents and youth in today’s dynamic world.

Done in Banjul on 24th October 2019