



Every adolescent girl
in Africa completing
secondary school, safe,
strong, empowered:
time for Education Plus,
2022





A new advocacy initiative for adolescent girls' education and empowerment in sub-Saharan Africa, backed by an unstoppable coalition for change led by adolescent girls and young women, was launched in July 2021 at the Generation Equality Forum in Paris.





The **Africa continental launch** of the Education Plus Initiative took place during the African Union Mid-Year Summit in Lusaka, Zambia in July 2022. H.E Mr. Macky Sall, President of Senegal as the 2022 Chairperson of the African Union, alongside

H.E Mr. Hakainde Hichilema, President of Zambia, and the African Union Commission Chairperson H.E Mr. Moussa Faki, alongside other leaders, launched the initiative.





Co-led by the heads of UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, Education Plus represents a rights-based, gender-responsive action agenda that is poised to be a game changer and an accelerator for achieving global and continental commitments covering the SDGs, the Africa Agenda 2063, the Africa Youth Charter, the Maputo Protocol on women’s rights, regional

Commitments on education and health rights of adolescents in Africa.





Education Plus Initiative positions completion of secondary education **for all girls and boys** not only as a right but as a key pathway for adolescent girls and young women to be protected against HIV, among its multiple social and economic benefits. Securing the health rights of adolescents and addressing gender discrimination and

harmful gender norms both in and out of school is central to realizing Africa's young people's full potential.



WHY DOES EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT MATTER FOR GIRLS, AND FOR AFRICA?

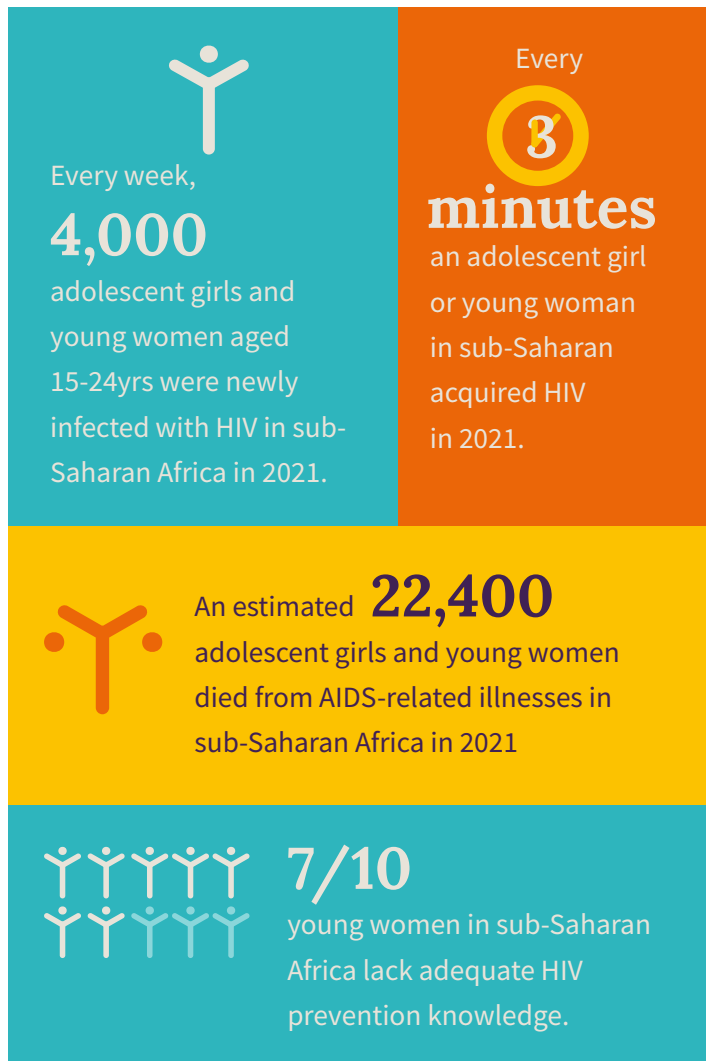
When educated and empowered, adolescent girls are an engine of progress, transforming communities and driving sustainable economic prosperity. Yet, 18 years after Africa came together to sign the Maputo Protocol and affirmed the rights of women and girls, many adolescent girls are still shut out of vital services, including secondary education.

The COVID-19 crisis is worsening their vulnerabilities. School closures worsen gender inequality, since girls are less likely to return to school than boys. Girls are forced to enter the informal job market or shoulder unpaid care work at home, leading to increased experiences of violence, spikes in adolescent pregnancies and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the epicentre of the AIDS epidemic, HIV continues to disproportionately impact adolescent girls. And adolescent girls and young women face discrimination fuelled by gender inequalities that compounds their vulnerabilities to HIV. Adolescent girls and young women are largely invisible, underserved and underrepresented in policies, services and investments.

In 2021, six in seven adolescents aged between 15 and 19 years newly infected with HIV in the region are girls. About 560 girls and young women aged 15-24 in Sub-Saharan Africa were infected daily. AIDS-related illnesses are still the second leading cause of death among young women aged 15–24 years in the region.

The majority of adolescent girls do not have comprehensive knowledge about how to prevent transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted



infections. However, we know that enabling girls to complete their secondary education protects them against HIV and improves many other health and development outcomes. Evidence from high prevalence countries in Africa shows that keeping girls in secondary school reduces their risk of HIV infection by half.

The lack of educational and economic opportunities that results in the diminished participation of women in the labour force is estimated to cost sub-Saharan Africa US\$ 60 billion in economic losses every year. And to young women themselves, the benefits—of a full secondary education, of social and economic empowerment and of the full enjoyment of their human rights—are priceless. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals hangs in the balance unless the scale and quality of investments in adolescent girls’ and young women’s empowerment and gender equality are radically intensified.



WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Africa's recovery from the COVID-19 crisis requires us to do more than go back to normal. We need a reset. As well as getting all girls back into the classrooms they were in, we need also to reach the 34 million secondary school-aged girls in sub-Saharan Africa who were being denied a full education even before COVID-19 struck.

We need to deliver proven, multisectoral, rightsbased interventions to address the vulnerabilities that girls face, including HIV. To do this requires that adolescent girls complete quality secondary education. They must have universal access to comprehensive sexuality education, have their sexual and reproductive health and rights fulfilled—including HIV prevention, testing, treatment and care—be free from gender-based and sexual violence, be able to transition from school to work and be economically secure and empowered. Only through this can the full potential of Africa's adolescent girls and young women be realized.

Achieving this will require bold domestic leadership, to make the national investments and changes required and to challenge discrimination

and patriarchy, and also bold international solidarity in order to ensure that governments are not held back by fiscal constraints imposed by debt, by conditionalities or by shortages of essential aid support.

Education Plus will seek to bring partners together to respond to the crisis that adolescent girls and young women face in sub-Saharan Africa. Adolescent girls and young women will not be just the beneficiaries of the initiative, but empowered agents of change driving it forward.

We will work to ensure the levels of public financing required to roll out free universal access to education and health services, to end discriminatory policies, laws and practices that deny girls their right to secondary education and to leverage educational systems to advance gender equality and the empowerment of all adolescent girls and young women. We will work to reignite commitment to adolescent girls' secondary education and empowerment. Results in countries that drive the boldest progress will help to shift norms and expectations across the continent through the power of example.





WHO CAN BRING ABOUT THIS CHANGE?

Government and parliamentary leadership is key, as this is about transforming policies, practices and investments. But adolescent girls and young women themselves, empowered to demand their right to universal secondary education, will play a vital role in championing change.

We know also that change on this scale can only be brought about by coming together in a movement. Grass-roots groups, including young female activists from diverse networks of young people and feminists, have led the way in pushing for action.

We do this not for Africa's adolescent girls and young women, but together with them. Empowered adolescent girls and young women will engage and participate in and help lead the initiative. This generation of feminist leaders can beat AIDS, achieve gender equality and secure the human rights of all girls.



YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Adolescent girls' and young women's leadership is at the heart of the Education Plus Initiative. In July 2020, in the early stages of formulating the initiative, a virtual consultation with adolescent girls and young women across 22 countries in sub-Saharan Africa was held featuring Aya Chebbi, the then African Union's Youth Envoy, in dialogue with Winnie Byanyima and Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of UNAIDS and UN Women respectively. Young women validated the initiative, including its responsiveness to girls' priority demands which were integrated into the design of the initiative.

The Initiative's young women's leadership hub- the Nerve Center- and a Speakers' Bureau are key pillars of the initiative, comprising vibrant young women advocates from across the continent. The Nerve Center is strategically positioned to co-create the initiative and promote linkages and movement building across sectors and agendas.






CHAMPION COUNTRIES

Since the official launch of the Education Plus Initiative, several champion countries made public commitments and are implementing the Initiative. As of December 2022, Benin, Cameroon, Eswatini, Gabon, Gambia, Lesotho, Malawi, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia have joined and many more are working to join these renewed efforts to secure education and health rights of young people.

PARTNERSHIPS

Education Plus partners play a key role in supporting and driving advocacy for impact and accountability from decision-makers and budget-holders, as well as in fostering sustainability beyond the initiative. An inaugural partners coordination meeting held in June 2022 brought together 200 participants from diverse organizations. The initiative's open advocacy platform aims to facilitate wider mobilization and coalition-building across diverse partners to scale up the multi-sectoral 'Education Plus' package and its rights-based, gender-responsive approach.





**Let's power up for an Africa
in which every adolescent girl
and young woman is completing
school safe, healthy, skilled
and empowered!**

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