A call for accelerated efforts to improve Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child, and Adolescent Health in Tanzania

Tanzania’s vision is to become a middle-income, semi-industrialized nation characterized by: (i) high quality and sustainable livelihoods; (ii) peace, stability and unity; (iii) good governance and the rule of law; (iv) an educated and learning society; and (v) a strong and competitive economy; by 2025. The current National Five Year Development Plan 2016/17 – 2020/21 has “Nurturing Industrialization for Economic Transformation and Human Development” as its overriding theme.

However, current progress in Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child, and Adolescent Health places the country at crossroads in its efforts to attain its Vision 2025. Total fertility is still high at 5.2 children per woman in the reproductive age, maternal mortality has increased from 454 to 556 deaths for every 100,000 live births between 2010 and 2015, teenage pregnancies have risen to 27% from 23% during the same period.

High fertility is the factor behind high child dependence placing the country at a situation in which the demands for provision of quality social services such as education, healthcare, and nutrition for its population and particularly the young segments of society faces more challenges than prospects. Consequently, efforts to prepare younger inhabitants to become a healthy and high quality workforce to transform the country’s economy are profoundly constrained.

Increasing maternal mortality and morbidity continue to rob the nation by taking away the female workforce and minimizing the contribution of women in the country’s development efforts. Furthermore, this situation violates basic human rights for women such as the right to life and dignity.

Teenage pregnancies are increasingly threatening the health and educational ambitions of girls, impedes achievements in attaining gender equality and empowerment of women, and keeps women in poverty and dependence – limiting their ability to effectively participate in social and economic activities. Pregnancies at younger ages are highly risky to the health of girls and children and are major contributors to maternal and child mortality. National efforts to reduce teenage pregnancies and keep girls in school are commendable but need to be enhanced.

This week, members of Tanzania Parliamentary Association on Population and Development (TPAPD) were joined by a delegation of members of Parliaments from the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF) in a tour to learn about and progress and challenges in the provision of Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child, and Adolescent Health in Tanzania. We have visited a number of health facilities in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar and found that needs are still high, confirming our national statistics on the situation. We have seen long lines of women, children, and young people at facilities seeking for services while spaces and staff to meeting their needs are limited.
We call upon the government to increase efforts in accelerating the provision of Reproductive, Maternal, New-born, Child, and Adolescent Health in Tanzania. Specifically, expansion of friendly reproductive health information, counselling and services to Adolescents and Young people to reduce teenage pregnancies as well as prioritizing family planning services after delivery (post-partum family planning – PPFP) to facilitate spacing and breastfeeding would greatly contribute to reducing unplanned pregnancies, lower fertility rate, and expedite the pace of minimizing dependence.

We call upon the government to deliver on its promises: consistently increasing allocations for the services and making timely disbursements of allocated resources to support the provision of services.

Given the current high deficit in human resources for health in Tanzania, we commend the government for its continued efforts to recruit and retain health staff across the country. However, we recognize that the magnitude of the need is high and growing, not matching the pace at which it can be filled using high cadres of facility-based health professional who also take a long time to prepare. We call upon the government to move swiftly in enrolling trained Community Health Workers into the public service scheme and deploy them to their communities, particularly in areas where there are no health facilities and where the numbers of skilled health services providers are lowest, to complement the efforts in accelerating in the provision of health services.

If these actions are taken now, the nation will be in a better position to realize its vision and will reap many returns on the investments it will make to implement the se actions.

We commit to do our part in supporting our President as he leads the nation towards a middle-income, semi-industrialized status, and we join hands with all Tanzanians to see the transformation of our nation into a prosperous and stable developed economy.