



## Concept Note:

### **Bridging Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR) and HIV Prevention with Universal Health Coverage (UHC)**

#### **1.0 Introduction:**

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Universal Health Coverage (UHC) as the assurance that all individuals and communities receive the health services, they need without enduring financial hardship. Many countries, especially in Africa, aspire to achieve UHC as a crucial goal, given the challenges under-resourced health systems face that result in service delivery gaps and disparities in access to care. Despite progress in improving health outcomes, Africa continues to grapple with weak health systems, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to essential services, impeding the journey towards UHC. As part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, nations worldwide are committed to attaining universal health coverage by 2030. However, the approach to achieving this goal varies significantly among countries, reflecting diverse strategies in structuring and financing their health systems. Sexual and reproductive health care is integral to realizing universal health coverage and is enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals, which mandate countries to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, including HIV prevention and treatment, by 2030.

Despite efforts to expand access to sexual and reproductive health care and HIV prevention and treatment services, gaps persist in achieving universal coverage and addressing the underlying social, economic, and cultural factors affecting health. The overreliance on external funding for healthcare services in many African countries poses a significant risk, as a transition away from international assistance could leave communities vulnerable to inadequate access to essential health services. To mitigate this risk, countries can incorporate essential health services into their UHC packages and national medical lists, ensuring that critical commodities and supplies are funded through domestic resources should externally funding cease.

Taking a comprehensive approach to strengthening health systems under UHC and bolstering health security is imperative. Strengthening health systems stands as the most effective and sustainable pathway toward achieving UHC and other health security objectives. Connecting sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) with HIV prevention under the umbrella of primary health coverage is pivotal for advancing health equity, and health security and fostering sustainable development across continents. By embedding SRHR and HIV services within the framework of UHC that

encompasses Pandemic, Prevention, Preparedness, and Response (PPPR) nations can effectively tackle underlying health disparities, promote social justice, and empower individuals to lead healthy, fulfilling lives. This initiative offers an opportunity for key stakeholders to chart a roadmap to achieve this vision and catalyze enduring regional transformation.

The initiative is a collaboration project with AfNHi, WACI Health, CASPR, WHO, CSEM, Frontline AIDS, and nine countries, with lead advocates spearheading the process at the country level. The project will commence with a needs assessment, informing the development of training workshops and adopting an advocate's guide based on the WHO handbook. Stakeholder engagement will involve collaboration with government officials and other civil society organizations at the country level to gather evidence. Small advocacy grants will support local initiatives, while policy reviews will inform targeted interventions. Through meticulous planning, implementation, and monitoring, the project aims to empower advocates to navigate UHC national frameworks effectively, address gaps in service integration, and advocate for policy changes conducive to comprehensive SRHR and HIV service provision.

## **2.0 Target Countries**

The initiative will be implemented in nine (9) **Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Malawi, Uganda, Burundi, and Kenya**. These countries were selected based on existing partnerships between the collaborating entities and country partners who are already engaging in the integration of SRHR and UHC. Partners at the country level who are driving policy change for UHC.

## **3.0 Objectives:**

**3.1 To strengthen the capacity of community-led and civil society organizations to advocate for comprehensive integration of SRHR and HIV services with UHC national policies.**

### **3.1.1 Key Activities include:**

- Four (4) training sessions will be conducted, one (1) face-to-face and three (3) virtual sessions using the WHO SRHR handbook. <https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2022/07/12/default-calendar/launch-of-who-s-new-handbook-actions-for-achieving-universal-access-to-srh>.
- Development of an advocate's guide on the inclusion of SRHR, and HIV services into UHC
- Engaging in the UHC processes and mechanisms at the country level with government officials, civil society organizations, and other key stakeholders for evidence on the current implementation of UHC and the components of the benefits packages.
- Peer-to-peer learning from country experiences
- Development of targeted interventions and policy recommendations to address gaps in integrating SRHR and HIV services within the context of UHC and PPPR that advocates can advocate for at the national level.

### **3.2 To examine the status of SRHR and HIV prevention and treatment prioritization within the context of UHC and during health crises and pandemics.**

#### **3.2.1 Key Activities include:**

- Assess the status of SRHR and HIV prevention and treatment prioritization within the context of UHC and during health crises and pandemics by conducting desk reviews in the target countries and through stakeholder consultations.
- Review of national health policies, strategic plans, and regulatory frameworks to assess alignment with UHC principles and identify opportunities for integration of SRHR and HIV services.
- Develop targeted interventions and policy recommendations to address gaps in integrating SRHR and HIV services within the context of UHC and during health crises and pandemics.

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#### **4.0 Stakeholders**

1. Communities and Civil Societies from (9 countries)
2. Government officials (MOH and Policy & planning division)
3. WHO HRP department
4. WHO Country office

#### **4.1 Key expected outcomes include:**

1. Recommendations for priority interventions and policy amendments to strengthen SRHR and HIV prevention and treatment in UHC.
2. Strengthened capacity of advocates to engage with national governments to demand the inclusion of SRHR, HIV prevention, and treatment into UHC to ensure an equitable, accessible, and sustainable response.
3. Advocates guide on the inclusion of SRHR, HIV prevention, and treatment into UHC.
4. Updated guidelines and policies that prioritize SRHR and HIV prevention and treatment into UHC benefit packages in 5 countries.