

Request – Virtual Side Event - Eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

Insights from the Break Free! Alliance – How to amplify the voices of girls and young women on access to education and gender equality (SDG 4 and SDG 5)

The prevention of **child marriage (CM)** and **teenage pregnancy (TP)** is more urgent than ever, as the COVID-19 situation has dramatically changed the context in which adolescent girls live. Evidence from Plan International Gender Assessments shows **the negative impact of COVID-19** among adolescent girls, including: increasing levels of gender-based violence, unpaid care work arising from caring for the sick, rising sexual exploitation, exclusion from (online) education and increased rates of CM and TP. According to the Sustainable Development **Goal 5** and its targets, child, early and forced marriage has to be eliminated by 2030, women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life have to be realized (5.5) and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights has to be ensured (5.6). **Goal 4** sets to eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training by 2030 (4.5)

The goals are now in their sixth year of implementation and over the years progress has been made, actions have been undertaken by governments and through Voluntary National Reviews, stakeholders have been actively involved to respond to the 2030 Agenda. Still, more progress can be made, and some stakeholders remain excluded, for example Girls and Young women (GYW) who are affected by CM and have no access to education.

Side Event

The Break Free Alliance in strategic partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, strengthens youth-led organizations and supports their meaningful participation in accountability mechanisms at local, national, regional and international level. The alliance supports GYW to demand safe and gender responsive education and exercise their right to live free from Teenage Pregnancy (TP) and CM, supported by civil society. During the side event, **the Break Free alliance will share their insights on how to amplify the voices of GYM on access to education and gender equality and promote the inclusion of these voices** in the roadmaps towards the reporting on and the implementation of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR). We will do this together with Member States, CSOs, Stakeholders and the Break Free! partners together with Girls and Young women. The Break Free! Alliance will share their experiences and best practices on the engagements of GYW at the international space and the African Union, for example the work towards the African Girls Summit 2021.

Contribution to the Forum - The side event will lead to recommendations and insights on:

- Why meaningful youth engagement, participation and leadership in the review and reporting of the SDG's is critical to its realization at all levels.
- How to ensure the meaningful participation of Girls and Young women in the process of Voluntary National Reviews throughout the continent.
- Education and access to information is key to meaningful youth participation – linkages to other processes including the African Union continental strategy on education 2016-2025
- Creating awareness and sharing lessons learned on the importance of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and the Voluntary Reviewing Processes in general

Organizers

The Break Free! Alliance consisting of Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), SRHR Africa Trust (SAT), Rozaria Memorial Trust (RMT) and Plan International

Speakers and Panelists:

(i) Governments with experience in the VNR processes (ii) Youth participants (iii) Government representatives from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Malawi, Mozambique or Zambia (iv) Representative from the AU, (v) Stakeholders (v) Girl/Young woman (vi) Consortium member