

A Speech Presented by **EGBE DORIS TAKANG**

Advocacy speech, analyzing the 2018-2022 National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS and STIs, and possible suggestions, favoring AGYW in the new upcoming policy.

Ministry of health, Honorable Members of Parliament, Education delegates, MINPROFF Delegates, Distinguished members, ladies and gentlemen,
I salute you all!

2021, marks 40 years since HIV and AIDS was discovered in 1981. Over the past 40 years, 36.3 million people have died of HIV, about 79.3 million infected, and over 38.6 million people across the globe are currently living with HIV. But over the past 2 years there has been a great change, we have observed a tremendous decline in HIV and AIDS death rate, many people now do HIV tests, the use of condom has increased. This change is attributed to the 2018-2022 HIV/AIDS and STIs National Strategic Plan. Statistics according to the ministry of public health reveals that between 2004 and 2020, the HIV and STI prevalence rate dropped from 5.6% to 2.7% among persons aged between 15 and 49 in Cameroon.



Despite these improvements, challenges remain such as reducing the prevalence rate among adolescent girls and young women aged between 15 and 24, who are 9 times more infected than young boys in the same age group. As a young woman and an HIV ambassador, I am highly concerned with the health situation of AGYW.

I greatly appreciate the effort put in place by the 2018-2022 national strategic plan in the fight against HIV and STIs among AGYW. But after critically analyzing the Plan, and equally based on my research and experience, I realized that some key points were stipulated in the plan, but

never or not effectively implemented in the field. In order to attend the 90-90-90 target, put in place by UNAIDS in 2020, in the fight against HIV, the following strategies were stipulated.

- a) **‘Introduction of topics on HIV, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence and STIs into the curricula of schools and teachers training college’ article 3.5.1.** The continuous increase in HIV infection among AGYW, is due to lack of knowledge on the disease. The introduction of topics on HIV into the school curricula, was a major strategy to

educate AGYW on the danger of the disease hence, reducing the rate of infections among AGYW. But unfortunately, this was never implemented in our schools.

- b) **“Integrating the topic of safe sex negotiation in all components of the BCC programmed for girls in school / universities and out of school with the involvement of social institutions and CSOs, taking gender-based norms into account in prevention messages” article 3.6.** The implementation of sex negotiation studies, was another strategy used to reduce the rate of HIV and STIs infections among AGYW. Unfortunately, this is not visible in our schools.
- c) **Both public and private sectors were stipulated as key implementation unit according to the national strategic plan. Article 4.2.** Private and public health sectors are some of the key units through which adolescent girls can access free HIV services, such as free testing and many others. Unfortunately, through my experience and research, these free services are only available in public sectors and almost absent in private sectors.
- d) **“Strengthening the "social vaccine" campaign in university settings” article 3.6.** This was equally stipulated with the aim of reducing the effect of HIV among AGYW. Through out my stay in the university, (2017-2021) I haven’t heard nor come across this social vaccine campaign.
- e) **“Strengthening the leadership of girls for active participation in the national response” Article 3.6.** This leadership participation is only seen in the urban communities and not visible in the rural communities. For example, every summer holidays, the government launches **“AIDS-Free Holiday”** in cities. A program that permits youths to carry out free testing, move around sensitizing the population, and sharing preservatives. But this is not the case in rural communities.

After critically analyzing the 2018-2022 national strategic plan, I stand to advocate on the fact that;

Firstly, the new policy should fully take into consideration the implementation of HIV, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence and STIs studies into school curricula, not only documented, but full actions taken. By so doing, a great number of AGYW, will be fully informed about HIV and STIs infection. Hence reducing the rate of HIV prevalence among AGYW. Social vaccines campaign, should equally be seen in full action in our various Universities. Topics on sex negotiation should equally be well addressed.

I equally advocate on the fact that the new policy should equally promote general education among AGYW. Let AGYW in Cameroon especially those in rural community, be given the opportunity to go to school. The inability of girls to read and write is another great reason for the continuous prevalence of HIV among AGYW.

Secondly, I advocate on the fact the new policy should be able to subsidize private hospitals in such a way that they can also offer free HIV services to AGYW.

In addition, AGYW should be economically empowered. Statistics have proven that more than 80% of HIV cases among AGYW is as a result early sexual activity. Due to desperation caused by poverty, AGYW indulges into early sex, which eventually lead to the contraction of HIV and other sexually related diseases. Economically empowering them, will help them stand their grounds, hence eradicating poverty among AGYW and reducing the rate of HIV infections.

Finally, the new policy should pay a close attention, to AGYW found in the rural communities in terms of leadership participation. HIV programs launched in cities, should equally be launched in villages.

Thank you very much for taking the time to listen to the analysis of the 2018-2022 national strategic plan, and equally the suggested proposals favoring AGYW in the upcoming new policy. We believe if these suggestions are appropriately handled, many adolescent girls will be saved

from the havoc caused by HIV and STIs. Remember **Barack Obama** once said “*the single best indicator of whether a nation will succeed is how it treats its women*”.

Thank You