

# A BETTER FUTURE WITH HEALTH FOR ALL IN EAST AFRICA

Being the *Nairobi Declaration* of the East African Health Sector Unions' Network,  
of its campaign for Universal Public Health Care

## [DRAFT]

**Whereas** "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health," is universally considered a fundamental human right, as recognised in international human rights treaties which all Partner States of the East African Community (EAC) have ratified and provide constitutional safeguards for, the immense majority of the people in East Africa lack access to quality health care services, and the region has some of the worst health indices in the world;

**Understanding** that this worrisome situation reflects deep social inequalities, which it further reinforces, and that vulnerable social groups, particularly women and children in poor rural and urban areas are most adversely affected with an average maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of 450 per 100,000 live births, compared to the global average of 221 in 2015;

**Realizing** that inadequate funding of public health care and the promotion of user fees, as well as the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of increasing private sector provision of health services undermines the achievement of universal health care in the region;

**Noting** that this situation is worsened by policies and actions which place profit over people, such as privatisation, PPPs, commercialisation of health, liberalisation of health services, and implementation of fiscal measures with adverse impact on poor people;

**Bothered** by the growing state of precarious employment of the health workforce, violation of trade union rights in the sector and migration of health workers as a result of poor working conditions and remuneration in East African countries;

**Considering** the need for reinvigorated concerted efforts within and across countries in the region between governments, trade unions, civil society organisations and the communities for attainment of the health targets of the Sustainable Development Goals;

**Inspired** by renewed commitment of the international community to a better future with health for all as expressed in Target 3.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals and recognition of the fact that this requires social dialogue, and enhanced employment and improved working conditions for health workers as resolved upon by the 70<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly as the *Working for Health: Five-Year Action Plan for Health Employment and Inclusive Economic Growth*;

**Motivated** by the renewed commitment of the EAC Partner States to *Infrastructure and Health Financing and Development* as resolved upon at the Joint EAC Heads of State Retreat on 22 February 2018;

**Fully Committed** to the realisation of the human right to health in East Africa which of necessity requires the prioritisation of public healthcare to guarantee the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of healthcare for all without discrimination and in ways and manners that promote accountability, transparency and the active participation of individuals and communities in decision-making on issues that affect their health,

**The East African Health Sector Unions Network will campaign for Universal Health Care in the East Africa.** Thus, all health sector trade unions in the region will take

action to concretely influence the formulation and implementation of policies leading to Universal Public Health Care at the regional, national and local levels within the EAC, thus:

- **Public Health for All:** Only a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) to the pursuit of Universal Health Coverage, can translate into health for all, in the region. This requires universal public health systems that guarantee the quality and totality of health and social care for everybody in all the EAC countries. For health to be realised as the fundamental human right which it is, EAC Partner States must take responsibility for the provision of healthcare.

While we recognise the presence of private providers in the sector, it is pertinent to stress that healthcare delivery is a public function, no matter the nature of the provider, requiring the application of equal rules in terms of standards for patients and workers and also in terms of accessibility and quality for both public and private providers. East African health sector unions shall thus campaign for stronger governance, best practices and models which harness the full potentials for delivering health services under the overarching responsibility of the EAC, its Partner States and local governments;

- **Our Health is Not for Sale:** as a human right, health is not a commodity. Health and Social Care services globally are estimated at US\$5.8 trillion annually, this is the driving force behind increased incursion of for-profit interests into the health and social sector. Privatisation and commercialisation including PPPs and outsourcing are expressions of big businesses interest to maximise profit from what otherwise should be an investment in a better future for all.

The claim that all these forms of privatization will stimulate competition and enhance quality and efficiency of healthcare is contradicted by the fact that private health care systems are usually more expensive and less accessible than the public ones.

East African health sector unions are particularly bothered by the expansion of big business led by multinational health care, pharmaceutical and insurance companies into the region, using a variety of marketization strategies to propose private services delivery. This poses grave danger for the achievement of universal access to quality health care for patients, on working conditions for health workers and on the financial sustainability of the health systems.

The related increase in liberalisation and trade in services, including envisaged further negotiations of the EAC-EU Economic Partnership Agreements would gravely undermine the delivery of public health services, and entrench a two-tiered health

system where the rich could have quality health and social services while the poor, including women and children are left in limbo.

The East African Health Sector Unions Network will thus promote research for evidence-based policy advocacy to EAC and the EAC Partner States and organise awareness campaigns to build popular resistance against the threats of privatisation and commercialisation of health under any guise presented by big businesses, in East Africa;

- **Fiscal Justice for Funding Health:** quality health for all in East Africa requires adequate public funding. The argument of insufficient financial resources as an excuse for inadequate funding of health, is not tenable. The right to health is a most fundamental human right without which it is impossible for people to enjoy all other human rights.

Apart from illicit financial flows, which governments in the region appear committed to fighting, EAC Partner States lose over US\$3bn annually from tax waivers which include: corporate tax holidays and exemptions from import duties on machinery, raw materials and inputs, as well as from stamp duty and value added tax in Export Processing Zones and Special Economic Zones. This is despite the evidence-based conclusions of international financial institutions such as even the International Monetary Fund (and the African Development Bank) that “investment incentives – particularly tax incentives – are not an important factor in attracting foreign investment.”

Thus, there is the need for EAC Partner States to redouble their efforts along with other African countries to stop the bleeding of the country through IFFs, including by championing radical reforms of the global taxation architecture on one hand and to stop the race to the bottom with tax breaks on the other. Multinational corporations must be made to pay their fair share of tax, to ensure adequate domestic resource mobilisation for public provision of health and social services;

- **Strengthening Health Systems Requires Investment and People’s Participation:** epidemics know no borders. Strengthening health systems require concerted investment in epidemic surveillance and response, preventive and primary healthcare, health infrastructure and human resources for health, and a more peaceful region. It equally entails the involvement of patients, health workers and communities with governments in decision-making processes that enhance better health outcomes and accountability in healthcare delivery

Thus, while the East African Health Sector Unions Network welcomes the EAC’s health emergency preparedness as expressed at its ‘Lessons for the Future – What East African

Experts learned from fighting the Ebola epidemic in West Africa' Conference in December 2017, we urge the EAC Partner States to: invest adequately in strengthening crisis preparedness; ensure the occupational safety and health of health workers, including regular training for this, and; entrench the needed social dialogue and community mobilisation needed to guarantee timely response;

- **Safe and Effective Staffing for Health Saves Lives:** safe staffing through health professionals-to-patient ratios is a proven method to ensure that the necessary staff are available when needed. Patients are exposed to unnecessary health and vital risks when health professionals-to-patient ratios fall below safe levels. The health personnel to population ratios in East African are appallingly low. This is one of the major reasons for the dismal health indices in the region.

The East African Health Sector Unions Network shall thus campaign for enhanced improvement of staff-to-patient ratios in the health and social sector, including by expanding medical and health training facilities and the numbers of their intakes. We note the efforts of EAC Partner States in improving health employment. But this has been largely inadequate and its impact whittled down by health worker migration due to severe decent work deficits;

- **Decent Work and Decent Working Conditions:** Universal health coverage in East Africa is impossible without health workers. And to deliver quality health services, health workers, including community health workers that are questionably categorized as “volunteers” need adequate remuneration, decent working conditions, and occupational health and safety. Of importance as well is freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining for health workers. Migration of professionals who leave their countries due to low wages and poor working conditions threatens guaranteed health delivery in the region.

Decent work also requires that health care workers are able to speak freely and without fear of repercussion about the conditions in which they work. Indeed, when they speak about their working environment, they are primarily advocating for the rights of patients to effective, safe and quality care, irrespective of government policies.

The East African Health Sector Unions Network shall thus advocate for decent work and decent working conditions in all its ramifications, including for EAC Partner States to respect workers and trade union rights as well as prioritize social dialogue, and thus enthrone much needed industrial peace and harmony in the sector;

- **Keeping Faith with International Covenants on Health:** The East African Health Sector Unions Network's **Health for All in East Africa Campaign** is based on several international instruments ratified by EAC Partner States which recognise health as a fundamental human right. The formal recognition of this fundamental right has however not translated into its concrete realisation.

East African health sector unions would thus vigorously campaign for EAC Partner States to keep faith with these international covenants, including making the human right to health explicitly justiciable in their constitutions, thus making governments accountable for providing universal public health coverage. In this light, we shall equally advocate for all EAC Partner States to set aside at least 15% of their annual budgetary allocations for public healthcare delivery, in line with the 2001 *Abuja Declaration*;

- **Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls:** The East African Health Sector Unions Network notes the great significance of the passage of the East African Gender Equality and Development Act by the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) last year, after a decade of the policy process by EAC Partner States and civil society advocacy. Ensuring the empowerment of women and girls and combating gender inequality requires that health systems respond to the specific health needs of women and girls. Improving women's and girls' health, benefit the whole community. Moreover, women are the majority of the workforce in health and social care services. The feminization of the sector is part of the reason contributes to gender pay gap in the region.

Thus, in line with the EAC Gender Equality and Development Act, East African health sector unions shall advocate for EAC Partner States': implementation of legislative frameworks, policies and programmes that enhance gender sensitive, appropriate and affordable health care; reduction of child and maternal mortality ratios by at least 5% every five years; addressing primary health care needs of all; strengthening existing legislation on mental health; making adequate budgetary provisions with appropriate gender considerations; implementation of gender sensitive policies and programmes and; enactment of legislation for prevention, treatment, care and support of persons with HIV and AIDS, while taking into account the conditions, practices and biological factors that predispose women and girls to HIV and AIDS.

***The East African Health Sector Unions Network will promote the aims and objectives of this campaign for Health for All in East Africa with every legitimate means including: mass mobilisation of members of the unions constituting the Network in all countries within the East African region for days of action; lobbying governments and the East African Community's institutions; building alliances and forging coalitions with civil society organisations, and; conducting relevant***

*research on the state of health and social care in East Africa and how to improve this, towards ensuring universal health care and guarantee a better future for all women, men, youth and children in East Africa.*

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