



H.E Mrs. Nardos Bekele-Thomas
CEO, AUDA-NEPAD Agency

STATEMENT

High Level Side Event on “Prioritising Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) to accelerate progress towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Harnessing Africa’s Demographic Dividend: *Reinforcing Coordination, Accelerating Policy Harmonisation and Implementation*”

And

Launch of the 24 Priority Medical Products and Roadmap for Regional Manufacturing in Africa Report

13 February 2025 | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

18h00

Check against delivery

- **Minister Mekdes Daba, the Honourable Minister of Health of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, and our co-host tonight,**
- **Your Excellency, Former President of the Republic of Mauritius, H.E Dr. Ameenah Gurib-Fakim,**
- **Your Excellency, Former Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma,**
- **Your Excellency, outgoing Commissioner of Health, Humanitarian and Social Services, Amb. Minata Cessouma Samate,**
- **Your Excellencies, Executive Secretaries of the Regional Economic Communities,**
- **Your Excellencies Ministers of Health in attendance,**
- **Your Excellency, the United Nations USG, and Deputy Executive Director of the UNFPA, Ms Diene Keita,**
- **Director General of Africa CDC, Dr Jean Kaseya,**
- **Your Excellency, H.E. Dr Michel Sidibe, The African Union Special Envoy on the Africa Medicines Agency (AMA),**
- **Professor Senait Fisseha, Vice President for Global Programmes at the Susan Thompson Buffet Foundation, and your team,**
- **The Vice President, for Women and Newborn Health at the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI) Dr. Caitlin Glover,**
- **Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, (All Protocol Observed)**

- I am privileged to welcome you to this **High-Level Meeting** in the **beautiful and historic city of Addis Ababa**, a city that stands as the **diplomatic heart of Africa, a beacon of unity, and my beloved home.**
- The critical issues that lie before us, as have been mentioned already, include **access to quality sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services**, which remains a major challenge in Africa. An estimated 218 million women and girls lack essential care, including family planning and maternal health services.
- **Gender-based violence and stigma** further obstruct access, affecting nearly 30% of women aged 15 and above. **Teenage pregnancy** is another pressing concern, with one in five adolescent girls becoming pregnant before the age of 19, while persistently high **HIV/AIDS rates** continue to slow progress toward Universal Health Coverage.

- We must act with urgency and resolve to break this cycle. Africa's demographic dividend will remain an untapped promise if millions of women and young people continue to be denied their fundamental rights to health, education, and economic participation.
- Securing these rights is not just a moral imperative, it is a prerequisite for sustainable development, economic resilience, and long-term prosperity.
- And given the shifting of global dynamics, so too must our approach evolve. It is imperative that Africa's health and development agenda is driven by our own priorities rather than external influences.
- In this regard, I specifically refer to the recent withdrawal of funding from the United States through USAID to African countries. While this presents challenges, it also offers an opportunity to rethink our strategies and strengthen our resilience.
- To this end, in the coming days, I will reach out to you, Excellencies, through this Coalition Platform, to propose a virtual meeting where we can collectively reflect on these developments and forge a common African position on the way forward.
- The African Union Development Agency is also in the process of establishing a Development Fund that will take such shifts into account. We are committed to scaling up our interventions in the health financing space and invite you to collaborate with us in this endeavor. Together, we can ensure sustainable, African-led solutions for our continent's health and development.
- This is why we gather tonight. To chart a way forward that places Africa at the centre and prioritizes women, children, and sexual and reproductive health as cornerstones of progress.
- By doing so, we are accelerating economic growth, achieving Universal Health Coverage, and laying the foundation for a resilient, self-sustaining Africa, where human capital is our greatest asset and our

demographic dividend is fully realized, even in a rapidly evolving global landscape..

- The answer lies in tackling the deep structural and systemic challenges in healthcare access, especially for our most vulnerable groups, with a particular focus on women and girls.

Excellencies,

- In line with this commitment, the African Union Development Agency, the continent's premier development agency, successfully launched the **African Demographic Dividend and Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme (A2DSRH)** last year.
- This initiative is designed to expand access to safe, effective, and affordable healthcare, strengthen Africa's workforce, and unlock the full potential of our youth as drivers of sustainable economic development. I am pleased to note that several RECs present here today are already benefiting from this transformative program.
- Since its launch, we have committed to disburse over USD 10 million to **11 Member States and 5 RECs**, with a steadfast commitment to expanding our reach to all African nations and regional bodies. Our interventions are strategically focused on:
 - **Advancing policy and high-level advocacy** at national, regional, and global levels;
 - **Strengthening governance and coordination** through multi-sectoral collaboration;
 - **Supporting RECs in establishing Regional Health Organizations** to drive localized solutions;
 - **Increasing healthcare financing** through sustainable mechanisms; and
 - **Enhancing technical and institutional capacity** with a strong emphasis on research, innovation, and implementation.
- **But this is only the beginning.** We will continue to **leverage partnerships, mobilize resources, and drive implementation** to ensure that no African country is left behind. We are committed to

working hand in hand with governments, regional bodies, civil society, and development partners to build a strong and resilient Africa.

Excellencies,

- To drive meaningful progress in sexual and reproductive health and advance self-reliance, I wish to propose the following solutions:
- **First**, Africa has no shortage of comprehensive frameworks to tackle the pressing issues we face as a continent. Together, we have crafted and endorsed transformative policies such as the Maputo Plan of Action, the Africa Health Strategy, and the AU Roadmap on the Demographic Dividend. However, policies alone will not drive change..
- Governments must integrate these frameworks into national strategies, ensuring that reproductive health is prioritized in budget allocations and that healthcare systems are strengthened to deliver services equitably.
- **Second**, we must work in solidarity, bringing African countries together to collectively address the challenges that persist. Sexual and reproductive health must not remain a secondary issue, relegated to the back burner. Instead, we must elevate it as a continental priority, ensuring that policies, resources, and actions are aligned to make a tangible impact.
- **Third**, in this spirit of solidarity, we must develop a community of practice, where ministers, policymakers, and key stakeholders, including First Ladies, can come together to engage, exchange ideas, and collaborate as public servants committed to advancing reproductive health.
- This platform will serve as a knowledge hub, providing access to expertise, best practices, and a peer-to-peer support system that fosters cooperation and knowledge transfer. By leveraging this space, we can build a self-sustaining ecosystem where African experts support

one another, reducing dependence on external actors and strengthening our own capacity.

- With its clear mandate for coordination, its role as a technical interface, and its leadership in knowledge management, the African Union Development Agency, is ready to take the lead in managing this platform, ensuring that when one country faces a challenge, we step in together, fostering regional integration, reinforcing solidarity, and positioning Africa to take full ownership of its reproductive health agenda.

Excellencies,

- With these solutions in mind, tonight marks a **defining moment** in our journey.
- I am honored to officially launch the **24 Priority Medical Products and Roadmap for Regional Manufacturing in Africa Report**, a bold initiative that strengthens Africa's **pharmaceutical and medical manufacturing capabilities** and moves us closer to **health sovereignty**.
- Following a robust continental scoping analysis, over 65% of the priority medical products identified for local production directly address maternal, newborn, and child health challenges.
- This data underscores the clear gaps in access and the urgent demand for a more comprehensive approach to SRH, one that moves beyond policy frameworks to tangible solutions that secure Africa's health future.
- Building on today's milestones, tomorrow, under the leadership of H.E. President Paul Kagame and in alignment with the AU's vision for Domestic Health Financing, I will join Heads of State at the **2025 High-Level Presidential Meeting on Health Financing**.

- This convening will reinforce the urgency of investing in Africa's health sector and showcase the Programme for Investment and Financing in Africa's Health (PIFAH) as a key mechanism for Member States to attract financing and investment.

Excellencies, Finally,

- I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to **Member States and the RECs** for their **unwavering commitment and readiness**, both at the **political and technical levels**, to tackle these pressing challenges.
- I also wish to sincerely thank my dear sister, **Professor Senait Fisseha** for her **steadfast leadership and invaluable support** in advancing this critical initiative.
- *As I come to a close*, we cannot afford to let another generation be held back by inadequate healthcare, limited opportunities, and unfulfilled potential.
- By taking ownership of our sexual and reproductive health agenda, investing in homegrown solutions, and standing together in solidarity, we can build a healthier, more resilient, and self-reliant Africa.

I thank you.