

## **Sexual Reproductive Health among Women and Young Girls in Lamu: An Urgent Call for Action**

Lamu is an exquisite coast and forms part of the Eastern part of Kenya, and emerging issues include a spike in neglect of women and girls' sexual reproductive health SRH. Although improvements to health have been a significant concern for the country over the past few decades, Lamu remains one of the areas that lags in the provision and access to SRH services, and there is limited education on the subject. Such reports by the health departments make it essential for authorities to focus on such areas in order to accord the necessary care to the female populace in the region.

The Lamu situation was recently described by Dr. Rashid Aman, Kenya's Chief Administrative Secretary for Health, as one of the worst since the coastal county has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancies in the country. Consequently, results from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) 2022 show that 29% of girls aged 15-19 in Lamu have begun childbearing, while the national average of the same age group is 18%.

Poor education standards compound this. Early marriages in the region only make the situation worse. Despite significant strides to improve Gender Parity, there are established factors such as cultural practices when it comes to female education, early marriages, and socio-economic factors that make girls get married and get pregnant at a tender age. They also deny young girls their rights and limit them from attaining their education and polishing their careers.

The most revealing indication of limited access to SRH services in Lamu is the fact that there are very few facilities that offer the full range of services. The acting director general of health in the region, Dr. Patrick Amoth, said that the region needs more human capital, including qualified health officers and an essential list of medical equipment and prescriptions. This availability hampers access to birth control, antenatal care, and other safe birth services in the

country, leaving Women and young girls more vulnerable to complications during pregnancy and childbirth.

It is worsened by poor knowledge of sexual education that most women have due to barriers such as cultural taboos, lack of awareness, and accessibility. In Lamu, the survey showed that many young girls are ignorant of their reproductive health rights or the services they can access. By now, the Ministry of Health, together with local Non-Governmental organizations, has been trying to spread education programs in different schools and groups within the communities. However, there is some resistance to these intakes because of cultural beliefs and the taboo in the manner cultures in the region approach discussions concerning sexual health.

Notable development partners that are contributing towards this noble cause include non-governmental organizations such as SheRises Foundation, AMREF Health Africa and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). They fund programs and policymakers that seek to enhance access and utilization of contraceptives, expand quality maternal care and services, and advance gender equality for women and girls.