

## **Summary of CHOICE Kenya Annual 2024 Report on Health and Health-Related Sustainable Development Goals (HHSDGs)**

### **I. Introduction**

Kenya's progress towards Health and Health Sustainable Development Goals (HHSDGs) has been inconsistent, exacerbated by economic downturns post-COVID-19, conflict, climate change, food insecurity, and governance challenges. Rapid urbanization, social and economic inequalities, and climate-related disasters further impede progress. The impacts of climate change also pose significant threats, particularly to marginalized communities affecting also their well-being and also mental health status. Despite these challenges, we see Kenya making strides in gender equality and mental health awareness, but disparities and stigma remain. Hence, the intersectionality of mental health, gender dynamics, and climate change is crucial for sustainable development. Thus, there is need to focus on advancing health and well-being in Kenya, particularly within the framework of the Health and Health-related Sustainable Development Goals (HHSDGs).

The CHOICE Kenya Annual Report thus addresses the progress and challenges in achieving Health and Health-related Sustainable Development Goals (HHSDGs) in Kenya. The report focuses on three critical areas: mental health, gender equality, and climate change. This summary from gray literature, organizational documents and policy reviews on HHSDGs outlines key achievements, challenges, and recommendations, emphasizing the need for integrated approaches and stakeholder collaboration. A significant aspect also noted from the report is the need to establishment a dynamic think tank aimed at supporting implementation of HHSDGs and localized advocacy for the same. The think tank is aimed at facilitating grassroots engagement, establishing frameworks to track HHSDG progress, monitoring and evaluating actions towards HHSDGs, and promote evidence-based policy-making. It aims to foster cross-sectoral partnerships and ensure inclusive development by addressing gender equality, mental health, and climate action. This is by facilitating dialogue between government entities, civil society, and local communities, the think tank aims to foster accountability, participation, and shared responsibility.

### **II. Key Themes and Findings from Gray literature, Document reviews and Policy Reviews**

#### **1. Mental Health**

##### **Achievements**

- Integration of mental health into primary healthcare has seen progress. Efforts are ongoing to integrate mental health into primary healthcare systems in Kenya.
- Initiatives aimed at reducing stigma and raising awareness about mental health issues are being undertaken. i.e. public awareness campaigns and programs aimed at reducing stigma associated with mental illness
- Capacity building for healthcare workers to manage mental health issues is ongoing.

### **Challenges**

- Mental health services remain underfunded and understaffed, resulting in limited accessibility to many Kenyans especially in rural areas
- Persistent stigma and discrimination against individuals with mental health conditions hinder their willingness to seek help.
- Limited resources and inadequate infrastructure continue to pose significant barriers to the delivery of effective mental health care services.

## **2. Gender Equality**

### **Achievements**

- There are also initiatives to promote women's participation in decision-making roles e.g. in health matters as well as in leadership roles resulting to positive outcomes.
- Programs addressing sexual and reproductive health rights have been implemented, providing essential services and education to women and girls.
- There is progress in increasing girls' access to education helping to close the gender gap in education.

### **Challenges**

- Gender inequalities persist in across various sectors, including healthcare employment and high-level representation levels.
- Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a significant issue with limited access to justice and support services for survivors.
- Cultural practices, societal norms and stereotypes continue to affect the health and wellbeing of women and girls, particularly in rural areas.

## **3. Climate Change**

### **Achievements**

- There is implementation of environmental conservation and sustainable development initiatives, such as afforestation programs and promoting renewable energy sources.
- Kenya has also committed to regional agreements on climate action.
- Policies and frameworks for climate action are being developed and operationalized to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

### **Challenges**

- Kenya faces significant climate change impacts, including droughts, floods, and extreme weather events, posing significant challenges to Kenya's development including implementation of HHSDGs.
- Limited resources and technical capacity for climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.
- There is need for increased climate finance to support advocacy, capacity building, mitigation strategies and implementation of climate resilient strategies.

### III. Results from bottleneck analysis

Bottle neck analysis was also done to identify areas of improvement. The Key issues identified include:

- a) Limited access to mental health services and pervasive stigma.
- b) Insufficient adaptation measures and climate finance to mitigate climate change impacts. These climate impacts usually affect health outcomes
- c) Systemic barriers and harmful cultural practices affecting women's health and equality. Addressing these challenges requires robust indicators to track progress, targeted policies, and collaborative efforts from all stakeholders.
- d) Persistent gender disparities in health sector, education, employment, and leadership.
- e) Micro-level data gaps. There is lack of well tracked and reliable meaningful data at local and regional levels on HHSDGs.

### IV. Recommendations

The report outlines several recommendations and notable ones according to the three themes are:

#### 1. Mental Health

- a) Enhancing mental health research and improving data tracking for mental health outcomes not only at national level but also at local levels.
- b) Policy Development and Integration: Develop comprehensive policies that encompass a broader spectrum of mental health issues and integrate mental health into all aspects of healthcare.
- c) Public Awareness and Stigma Reduction: Enhance mental health literacy and reduce stigma through targeted public awareness campaigns.
- d) Advocate for the integration of mental health into primary healthcare.
- e) Resource Allocation: Mental health spending is notably insufficient, highlighting a critical area for improvement. Advocate for increased funding and resources for mental health services, including infrastructure, training, and support system.

#### 2. Gender Equality

- a) Address gender-based violence and harmful cultural practices through better enforcement of existing policies, laws and increased funding for support services.
- b) Strengthen gender equality through policies promoting women's access to education and healthcare.
- c) Education and Empowerment through continuous grassroots efforts to increase girls' access to education and provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education and services.
- d) Enhance women's leadership and empower them for decision-making roles even in health and health related sectors.

### 3. Climate Change

- a) Prioritizing and supporting adaptation and mitigation actions. i.e. Develop and operationalize carbon market frameworks and strengthen adaptation and mitigation actions.
- b) Climate Finance: Advocate for increased climate finance to support adaptation and mitigation efforts, particularly in vulnerable communities.
- c) Capacity Building: Enhance institutional capacities for climate action through training and resource allocation.
- d) Sustainable Practices: Promote awareness and adoption of climate-smart agriculture and other sustainable practices among communities affected by climate change.

#### **Cross cutting recommendations**

1. *Data tracking and monitoring:* More robust mechanisms for data collection and monitoring of health and health related SDGs indicators are needed to track progress accurately not only at regional but local levels.
2. *Exploring contextual innovative solutions and technologies,* particularly in climate change mitigation and mental health service delivery. This could enhance the effectiveness of HHSDGs interventions. There is need to tailoring interventions to the local context and actively engage communities in decision-making processes.
3. *Strengthen institutional capacity and coordination* among government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities. This is in addition to enhancing development of clear policies, frameworks, and action plans in alignment with strategic plans and A.U. Agenda 2063 targets
4. *Integrated and Intersectional approaches:* recognizing the interconnections between various sectors such as health, education, and environment, a stronger emphasis on intersectional approaches that address overlapping issues such as gender equality, climate issues and health issues would provide a more holistic view.
5. *Engaging think tanks* to support implementation and advocate for HHSDGs.

### **V. Conclusion and Next Steps**

The CHOICE Kenya Annual Report highlights significant progress in achieving HHSDGs, yet challenges remain. Hence, continued efforts and investments are necessary to ensure sustainable progress of these HHSDG goals. The CHOICE annual report underscores the importance of policy coherence, data tracking and monitoring both at local and national levels and adequate resource allocation for HHSDGs. Additionally, collaboration among government agencies, NGOs, community-based organizations and Academia is crucial to address the gaps and leverage opportunities for achieving health and health-related SDGs. The establishment of a regional Think Tank is thus seen as the next step to bring together experts from the mentioned thematic areas to support progress on gender equality, mental health, and climate change. By focusing on these recommendations, addressing the identified gaps and fostering active engagement, Kenya can make substantial strides towards a healthier, more equitable future and achieve Sustainable Development Goals related to health.