

NEWSLETTER

March
2025



PEACE, PROSPERITY AND
REGIONAL INTEGRATION



AUDA-NEPAD
AFRICAN UNION DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

The Africa Demographic Dividend and Sexual and Reproductive Health (A2DSRH) Programme

*"Enhancing and Strengthening Member States Capacity in
Sexual Reproductive Services in the IGAD Region"*



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Message from the Health and Social Development Division Leadership

As we release this newsletter, we extend our deepest gratitude to the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD) for their essential collaboration with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) on the Africa Demographic Dividend and Sexual and Reproductive Health (A2DSRH) Programme. This partnership strengthens IGAD's advocacy for Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) initiatives across our Member States, directly addressing accessibility challenges faced by youth and other vulnerable populations.



We also extend appreciation to our Member States for their support during the A2DSRH Programme launch on February 19, 2025, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Your dedication mirrors our collective aspiration for cooperation and integration, significantly contributing to positive regional health outcomes.

We are pleased to share updates on the A2DSRH Programme following its endorsement, a landmark initiative between IGAD and AUDA-NEPAD. Through the Health and Social Development Division, we continue our mission to improve regional quality of life and prosperity for all. This initiative is in line with IGAD's mandate to promote and coordinate inclusive regional health initiatives.

Key focus areas under the A2DSRH Programme include:

- Revitalizing and Establishing Regional SRH Coordination Governance Structures: Preparing for the validation and endorsement of the Regional SRH Strategy.
- Conducting a Feasibility Assessment: Laying the foundation for an IGAD Regional Health Organization.
- Encouraging Knowledge Exchange and Experience Sharing: Fostering collaboration and innovation among Member States.
- Enhancing SRH Services: Disseminating best practices and strategies to ensure equitable access across the region.
- Building Capacity and Providing Technical Assistance: Offering training on regional SRH guidelines to enhance national strategies.

- Collaborating with Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the Private Sector: Engaging in health financing activities and global health forums.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Conducting research and leveraging partnerships with academic institutions to inform policy and programs.
- Knowledge Sharing and Community of Practice: Distributing materials to boost awareness and learning on SRH issues.
- Strengthening Project Management: Establishing a Project Management Unit (PMU) within the IGAD Secretariat to enhance implementation efforts.

Through the A2DSRH Programme, we anticipate making substantial strides in improving health outcomes, while simultaneously addressing underlying factors that cause poverty and inequality in the region. We welcome you to join us in this journey.

Mr. Mubarak Mabuya

Chief of Staff of Executive Secretary/
Interim Director for Health and Social
Development Division

Message from AUDA-NEPAD



Africa stands at a defining moment. With a young and rapidly growing population, the continent holds immense potential to drive economic transformation and sustainable development. But unlocking this demographic dividend requires bold action—ensuring that every young person has access to quality healthcare, education, and opportunities that empower them to thrive.

The African Demographic Dividend and Sexual and Reproductive Health (A2DSRH) Programme, spearheaded by AUDA-NEPAD, is a decisive step toward achieving this vision. With an initial investment of \$100 million, this initiative is advancing Africa's health landscape by strengthening governance, policy frameworks, and access to essential reproductive health services. In partnership with Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as IGAD, and 10 pilot Member States, we are laying the foundation for a resilient health system that is no longer chronically reliant on external support but driven by African-led solutions.

Despite remarkable progress, challenges such as gender inequality, maternal mortality, teenage pregnancies, and limited access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare persist. By prioritising sexual and reproductive health (SRH) as a cornerstone of human capital development, we are addressing these challenges and catalysing economic growth, gender equality, and universal health coverage.

IGAD's commitment to this agenda is a testament to the power of regional cooperation. Through strategic partnerships, high-level advocacy, and sustainable financing mechanisms, we can scale up impactful interventions that ensure no one is left behind. As we move forward, AUDA-NEPAD encourages the IGAD Member States, development partners, and stakeholders to elevate SRH and health systems strengthening interventions as a central pillar of national development plans—because a healthier Africa is a stronger, more prosperous Africa.

Together, we are building the future we want—one where every young person has the tools to reach their full potential and where Africa's demographic dividend is harnessed to create the Africa We Want.

Mr. Symerre Grey-Johnson

Director of Human Capital and
Institutional Development

Message from the A2DSRH Programme



We sincerely thank you for participating in the March 2025 A2DSRH Programme Newsletter.

The A2DSRH Programme, supported by AUDA-NEPAD, is a transformative initiative led by IGAD. It positions us as pioneers in advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) across Member States. Through this coordination, we aim to strengthen regional health projects, empower our Member States to promote healthier and more productive lives, and enable them to achieve their growth and development aspirations.

The critical challenges, including high maternal mortality, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, limited access to comprehensive SRH services, a heavy reliance on external donor funding, significant unmet needs for family planning, and the absence of a coherent regional strategy, highlight the urgent need for IGAD to take decisive action. Tackling these issues demands political commitment, the mobilisation of regional and domestic resources, and improved regional coordination.

A multi-faceted approach is essential, integrating policy reforms, strategic resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, and targeted capacity-building efforts. This comprehensive strategy will empower IGAD Member States to enhance their regional health initiatives, deliver equitable and sustainable sexual and reproductive health services, and effectively address the specific needs of their populations.

The A2DSRH Programme stands as a groundbreaking initiative, emphasising the vital role of comprehensive SRH in leveraging Africa's demographic dividend while aligning with regional and global objectives to ensure well-being for all and equitable access to healthcare services. Through collaborative efforts and strategic activities, the Programme aims to achieve remarkable progress, scaling up SRH services and significantly impacting the IGAD region by fostering healthier, more sustainable communities.

On behalf of the team, thank you for your continued dedication and support in driving this transformative agenda forward.

Dr. Ahmed Hassan
Co-ordinator

The A2DSRH Programme Launch in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



The Programme launched on 19 February 2025, at a Regional Meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with full participation from the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Directorates and Reproductive Health Experts from IGAD Member States, IGAD and AUDA-NEPAD.

The A2DSRH Programme is a five-year grant provided to IGAD by the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD). This support focuses on the Demographic Dividends and Sexual Reproductive Health Initiative for Regional Economic Communities and Member States, enhancing their capacity to build, strengthen, and scale up their national health systems and networks in providing sexual reproductive health services. This aligns with Goal 3 of the 2030 SDG targets, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all individuals of all ages across the region.

Dr. Mohamed Elduma, the Head of the Health Unit at the IGAD Secretariat, expressed appreciation to the Member States for their commitment to IGAD regional health Programmes and acknowledged AUDA-NEPAD for supporting IGAD in this initiative to strengthen its capacity to deliver regional health Programmes. He also noted the flexibility in the annual work plans, allowing for adaptation according to country needs.



Dr. Mohamed Elduma

On behalf of the IGAD Executive Secretary, the IGAD Head of Mission to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Mr. Abebaw Bihonegn, expressed appreciation to AUDA-NEPAD for collaborating with IGAD in strengthening Member State sexual reproductive health systems. He advised that regional health coordination mechanisms and joint initiatives should be enhanced for the effective delivery of SRH services.



Mr. Abebaw Bihonegn



Dr. Godefay Hagos Debeb

Dr. Godefay Hagos Debeb, the Senior Advisor to the CEO on A2DSRH at AUDA-NEPAD called on the IGAD Member States to deliberately prioritize SRH interventions for improved overall health outcomes to foster a healthier, more productive workforce capable of driving long-term economic participation and growth towards the “Africa We Want”

Dr. Hagos emphasised the need to strengthen regional institutions to deliver health services, noting the support provided to five RECs

in establishing Regional Health Organisations (RHOs). Additionally, he encouraged Member States to increase healthcare financing through sustainable financial mechanisms.

Dr. Fatouma Ali Abdallah, Director of the Maternal and Neonatal Department at the Ministry of Health in Djibouti, reiterated as IGAD Chair that promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) is a fundamental pillar of human capital development, which must be regarded as a cornerstone for strengthening health systems aimed at reducing maternal mortality and advancing the Universal Health Coverage agenda.



Dr. Fatouma Ali Abdallah

The A2DSRH Programme was officially launched by Dr. Mariamawit Asfaw, the Director of Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health (MCAH) Services at the Ministry of Health of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia. Dr. Mariamawit Asfaw highlighted that Africa's youthful population, comprising 60%, presents a unique opportunity for transformative growth and development if investments are made in education, skills, family planning, and other health services. She emphasised that investment in Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) is fundamental for economic development, the reduction of maternal and newborn mortality, unplanned pregnancies, and overall health and wellness. Dr. Asfaw urged Member States to prioritise policies and initiatives that focus on youth as the engine for accelerated economic growth.



Dr. Mariamawit Asfaw

A2DSRH Programme Overview

The high natural population growth rates, combined with the substantial variations in population density across member states, create significant challenges and opportunities for development.

This notable demographic factor highlights the unique characteristics of the IGAD region, with 55% of the population aged between 15 and 35. This demographic holds immense potential as a driver for economic growth, innovation, and development, but it also presents challenges in employment, education, and healthcare services, especially regarding Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH).

Focusing on youth-oriented programmes, like the A2DSRH initiative, is crucial for harnessing the demographic dividend to advance regional health and sustainable development goals.

Challenges Identified Related to Sexual and Reproductive Health

The critical challenges pressing the need for improved Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services in the IGAD region include:

- **High Maternal Mortality:** Addressing maternal health issues is vital, considering the high maternal mortality rates indicates the gaps in healthcare services, particularly during pregnancy and childbirth.
- **Inadequate Healthcare Infrastructure:** Inadequate facility equipment and well-trained personnel undermine the delivery of effective SRH services.

- **Limited Access to Comprehensive SRH Services:** Many young people and marginalized groups encounter barriers to accessing essential services, including education/sensitization on family planning and reproductive health care.
- **Dependence on External Donor Funding:** Over-reliance on donor funding creates vulnerabilities in sustaining long-term health programmes. This calls for strengthened internal funding mechanisms.
- **High Unmet Need for Family Planning:** Unmet family planning needs leading to unintended pregnancies and associated health and economic challenges for individuals and families.
- **Lack of a Coherent Regional Strategy:** The absence of a unified strategy complicates efforts to address systemic barriers collectively and effectively coordinate action across the region.

Table showing Key SRH indicators across the IGAD Member States

country	MMR/ 100,000	NMR/ 1000	USMR 1000	TFR	mCPR %	Unmet need for FP	SBA %	IMR/10 00
Djibouti	383	28	67.8	2.6	10.1	16.8	87.4	58
Ethiopia (2019)	335	21	41	4.1	41	19	49.8	28.3
Kenya (2019)	335	21	41	3.4	57	14	89	32
Somalia (2023)	692	37	106	6.9	7	26	33	86.5
South Sudan	1223	39	99	3.7	6	20	15	63.8
Sudan	216	26	52	5.2	12	37	77.7	37.2
Uganda	189	22	52	4.1	39.6	39	91	36

These challenges highlight the significance of IGAD's initiatives, including the A2DSRH Programme, which seeks to mobilise political commitment, enhance regional coordination and strengthen/build the capacity of Member States to deliver equitable and sustainable SRH services. Tackling these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes but is not limited to; policy reforms, resource allocation, stakeholder engagement and capacity-building efforts tailored to the unique needs of the region.

The A2DSRH Programme is undoubtedly a transformative initiative that acknowledges the crucial role of comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) in harnessing Africa's demographic dividend.

Why the A2DSRH Programme?

- **Harnessing the Demographic Dividend:** With a substantial youth population, the IGAD region has a unique opportunity to leverage this demographic group for sustainable development. Comprehensive SRH is also essential to empowering young people and contributing positively to societal and economic growth.
- **Alignment with Global and Regional Goals:** The Programme aligns with Goal 3 of the 2030 SDG, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages. It supports the AUDA-NEPAD institutional mandate and Agenda 2063, highlighting coordinated efforts to enhance SRH services and Universal Primary Health Care (UHC).
- **Strengthening Regional Health Initiatives:** Through the A2DSRH Programme, IGAD and its Member States will improve their ability to coordinate and execute regional health initiatives. This Programme aims to tackle critical SRH challenges while ensuring equitable access to healthcare services throughout the region.

The launch event held on 19 February 2025, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, exemplified the high-level commitment of IGAD, its Member States, and AUDA-NEPAD. The presence of SRH experts from Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda highlighted the collaborative efforts required to drive progress on the SRH agenda.

This initiative is set to make a considerable impact by enhancing access to SRH services and promoting a healthier, more sustainable future for the IGAD region.

Objectives and Key Activities

The objectives and key activities of the A2DSRH Programme are comprehensive and strategically designed to address the critical Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) needs in the IGAD region. Below is a summary highlighting the objectives and their corresponding key activities:

- To establish a Regional SRH and Demographic Dividend Coordination Governance Structure comprising a country focal person, technical working group, steering committee, and health inter-ministerial meeting. The governance structure will guide Programme implementation, development of national and regional policies on SRH, service delivery, advocacy, and political commitment to SRH by member states for the Programme implementation period.

- To conduct a feasibility assessment to establish the IGAD Regional Health Organisation (RHO) for strengthened regional health programming and financing.
- Encourage knowledge exchange and experience sharing among the IGAD Member States to harness regional expertise and reduce disparities in sexual and reproductive health (SRH), thereby improving general health across the region.
- To enhance capacity and deliver Technical Assistance (TA) by formulating and validating a Regional Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Strategy alongside its Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) Framework. In addition, the Member States will create a regional guiding toolkit and training materials on SRH.
- To foster collaboration with other RECs by forming partnerships that implement activities focused on Health Financing and by participating in international health forums.
- Monitoring and Evaluation, along with research and the dissemination of findings, will inform policy and Programming. This will be executed in collaboration with academic institutions and think tanks.
- Regional Knowledge Sharing and Community of Practice: Quarterly SRH publications developed and disseminated to promote regional knowledge sharing.
- IGAD Strengthening and Project Management Support: Coordinating project management by establishing an IGAD Project Management Unit (PMU) at the IGAD Secretariat.
- Political Commitment and Resource Mobilisation: Support and expand SRH initiatives by fostering political commitment from member States.
- Mobilise Resources for Health Financing: Strengthen regional and domestic resource mobilisation through public-private partnerships to establish an IGAD Regional Health Financing Hub.

Main GOAL



These comprehensive activities will ensure the successful implementation of the A2DSRH Programme and support the IGAD region in achieving its SRH and health goals.

Appreciation and Member State Endorsements to the A2DSRH Programme

The Member States expressed their appreciation and pledged their support to IGAD efforts towards the implementation of the A2DSRH Programme.

The A2DSRH Programme's focus and support on the governance structure and delivery of sexual and reproductive health services is a crucial step towards improving maternal and neonatal healthcare, family planning, access to healthcare and the fight against FGM.



Dr. Fatouma Ali Abdallah, Director of Maternal and Neo-natal Department Directorate of Maternal and Child Health at the Ministry of Health, Djibouti

With this support, we hope for a healthier and safer future for women and children in our region through;

- **Reduction of maternal and neonatal mortality** to save lives and improve the health of mothers and newborns in the region.
- **The development of a family planning strategy** will increase contraceptive prevalence by 19% by providing harmonized regional training tools for midwives and health care practitioners on modern and effective contraceptive methods. This will raise community awareness of the youth and other groups making healthier and informed choices.
- **Improvement of access to healthcare** will increase the coverage of prenatal consultations, supervised childbirth in healthcare facilities, and post-natal consultations to save lives.
- **Strengthen the fight against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** to ensure the survival of young girls against FGM.



The A2DSRH Programme represents a transformative vision for tackling Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) challenges in Ethiopia and the wider IGAD region. By promoting a collaborative and cohesive approach among member states, the Programme effectively establishes a platform for sharing knowledge and experience essential for meaningful change.

One of the core objectives of the A2DSRH Programme is to enhance communication and collaboration among IGAD Member States regarding SRH. This commitment represents a vital step towards addressing the pressing SRH needs in the region, where cultural, economic, and



Dr. Mariamawit Asfaw, Maternal, Child & Adolescent Health Lead Executive Officer, Ministry of Health, Ethiopia

infrastructural barriers often hinder access to essential health services. The A2DSRH newsletter is a robust tool for disseminating information, showcasing best practices, and sharing success stories that can inspire collective action.

As we align our efforts with AUDA-NEPAD's institutional mandate and the aspirations of Agenda 2063, the newsletter plays a crucial role in maintaining momentum around SRH initiatives. By actively engaging stakeholders, we ensure that support for these vital health interventions persists throughout the Programme's lifecycle. This proactive engagement fosters a sense of ownership among member states and mobilizes resources effectively, leading to sustained improvements in the SRH outcomes. Ultimately, the A2DSRH Programme, through its collaborative framework and strategic communications, will significantly enhance the region's capacity to promote and implement comprehensive SRH policies. In doing so, it will contribute meaningfully to realising Universal Primary Health Care (UHC) and bolster the health and well-being of communities within the IGAD region.

Ethiopia's contraceptive acceptance rate has progressively increased over the years, but we still face unmet needs that must be addressed. Collaboration with AUDA-NEPAD and various partners will provide the support required to meet the needs of our society.



The A2DSRH Programme is a transformative initiative that aligns with Kenya's national aspirations to enhance Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) outcomes. As a nation with a diverse population, we encounter unique challenges pertaining to SRH, including high rates of maternal mortality, adolescent pregnancies, and limited access to essential health services.

The collaborative and unified approach of the A2DSRH Programme presents an invaluable opportunity for stakeholders to come together,

leveraging shared knowledge and resources to implement effective SRH interventions. Through this Programme, we can enhance our capacity to promote and deliver comprehensive SRH services, ensuring they are accessible, affordable, and acceptable to all communities, particularly marginalised groups.

The emphasis on knowledge sharing will enable Kenyan practitioners and policymakers to learn from the successful strategies employed in other IGAD member states while contributing our experiences to the regional dialogue. Additionally, the alignment of the A2DSRH Programme with AUDA-NEPAD initiatives bolsters our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all.



Dr. Edward Serem, Head, Division of Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health, Ministry of Health, Kenya



The A2DSRH Programme is pivotal in addressing and enhancing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) service delivery in Somalia and the IGAD region. Despite being a new initiative, it fosters collaboration among various stakeholders, including public services, NGOs, community-based organizations, and international agencies focusing on SRH services.

This unified front will leverage resources, share best practices, and create a more cohesive regional SRH strategy.

The Programme emphasizes the importance of community involvement in SRH initiatives and recognizes that in post-conflict settings on the African continent, unique considerations must be made to address the significant impacts on vulnerable groups such as women, children, and youth. This is in alignment with AUDA-NEPAD's institutional mandate to accelerate the realization of Agenda 2063 by coordinating, promoting and advocating for the implementation of the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and Universal Primary Health Care (UHC) Programme and policy reforms.

Implementing robust data collection and analysis will enable the Programme to identify gaps in service delivery and measure impact effectively. This approach will inform policy decisions and resource allocation, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the most pressing needs and evidence-based solutions for healthcare access, including recommendations for improving the regional healthcare infrastructure.

Finally, the A2DSRH Programme's collaborative and unified approach will transform SRH service delivery in Somalia and the IGAD region. By harnessing the strengths of various stakeholders, focusing on community engagement, and employing data-driven strategies, the A2DSRH Programme is well-positioned to make a lasting impact on the health and well-being of populations in the region.



Dr. Naima Abdulkadir Mohamed, Maternal and Sexual Reproductive Health Manager



The Republic of South Sudan acknowledges the importance of enhancing sexual and reproductive health, including family planning services, in its community. The Ministry of Health welcomes the support of its national and international partners, including the IGAD A2DSRH Programme.



Dr. Michael Mading, Director General for Reproductive Health, Ministry of Health, Republic of South Sudan

The initiative will provide an intervention to strengthen the health systems, through the provision of quality and resilient maternal and child healthcare services to the South Sudanese population and the region at large.

The A2DSRH Programme will draw vast experiences in collaborative governance and leadership through partnerships for system strengthening, better service delivery, and the uptake of research and innovative practices. The initiative will help advance our core objective of strengthening health research information management and knowledge translation.

This will effectively contribute to reducing maternal, perinatal, and neonatal morbidity and mortality, addressing the unmet need for family planning, and improving the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents and young people, including a decrease in adolescent pregnancies. It will also promote gender equity and equality in reproductive health matters, including access to appropriate services; contribute to the reduction of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, including the HIV/AIDS burden on infected and affected individuals; and alleviate the burden of reproductive tract infections (RTIs) while enhancing access to and the quality of RTI services.

To this end, the A2DSRH Programme will specifically champion the implementation of SRH service delivery in South Sudan and sustainable interventions in our ministry of health at the national and/or subnational levels that address specific needs for enhancing the capacity to use research evidence in decision-making and using robust methods to evaluate the effectiveness and the impact of these interventions.

The A2DSRH Programme will promote the exchange of best practices, developing harmonised policies, and the scaling up of proven interventions in Sudan. Specifically, we expect that the Programme will have a significant impact on SRH service delivery in Sudan and the broader IGAD region through:



Dr. Amel Mahmoud Mohammed Mahmoud, Reproductive Health Specialist, Republic of Sudan

- The Programme's focus on capacity strengthening and infrastructure development will enhance the capability of Sudan's health systems to deliver quality SRH services.
- Expanding Access to SRH Information and Services: The A2DSRH Programme will ensure that individuals, especially women and young people, have access to the information and services they need by promoting community engagement and addressing barriers to access.
- Enhancing the Quality of SRH Services, particularly in emergencies: The Programme's focus on evidence-based interventions and quality assurance will result in better health outcomes.
- Promoting Regional Harmonisation: Through the regional SRH strategy, IGAD member states can collaborate to standardise and enhance the quality of SRH services across the region.

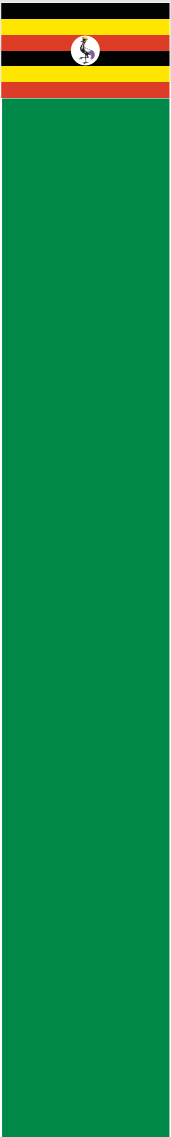
Contraceptive Utilization Status in Sudan

- In Sudan, the Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) has gradually risen from 9% in 2010 to 12.2% in 2014 (MICS).
- The 2014 Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (CPR) was 12.2% among married women (MW), 7.1% among all women (AW), 20% among urban married women (MW), and 9% among rural married women (MW).
- The level of education attained by women is strongly linked to contraceptive prevalence, which increases from 4.4 per cent among the illiterate to 13.3 per cent among those with primary education, and further to 21 per cent and 27.6 per cent for those with secondary and higher education, respectively.

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- Contraceptive pills comprise 9% of total contraceptive use, which stands at 12.2%.
- The unmet need for family planning in Sudan is estimated to be 26.6%, one of the highest rates in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Unmet need refers to the percentage of women aged 15 to 49 who are currently married, fecund, and wish to space their births or limit the number of children they have yet are not presently using contraceptives.
- We regard the A2DSRH Programme as an essential tool for enhancing the contraceptive utilisation rate in Sudan and the region. We are dedicated to collaborating with IGAD and our fellow Member States to ensure everyone can access the SRH services they need for healthy and fulfilling lives. Photo caption: Dr. Amel Mahmoud Mohammed Mahmoud, Reproductive Health Specialist, Republic of Sudan



The Africa Demographic Dividend, Sexual and Reproductive Health (A2DSRH) Programme offers an exciting and unique opportunity for all implementing Member States to learn, collaborate, and enhance the Sexual and Reproductive Health landscape in their respective countries.

The Ministry of Health in Uganda welcomes the Programme and will make the most of this opportunity and resources to enhance the policy and implementation environment needed to tackle persistent sexual and reproductive health challenges, such as a teenage pregnancy rate of 25% and a low modern contraceptive prevalence of 39.8%, among other issues.

We call upon IGAD Member States to invest in SRH to achieve a demographic dividend in which total fertility and mortality will reduce with improvement in quality of life.



Dr. Richard Mugahi,
Commissioner Health Services,
Ministry of Health Uganda and
A2DSRH Programme Focal Point,
Uganda



EARLY ACHIEVEMENTS AND MILESTONES

December 30, 2024

Signing of the Grant between AUDA-NEPAD and IGAD

February 19, 2025

Launch of the A2DSRH Programme in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

February 19-21, 2025

Establishment of the Regional Coordination bodies during the Regional Coordination Meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- Approved the Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the Coordination Bodies - Steering Committee, Technical Working Group, National Focal Point
- Member State Consultations on the Regional SRH Strategy, Research on Programmatic Activities and Disseminate Results to Inform Decision-Making in Policy and Programme Design and Situation and Feasibility Assessment on Establishing IGAD Regional Health Organization (IGAD-RHO) and a Regional Financing Hub

February 22-23, 2025

Member state consultation on regional sexual and reproductive health strategy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

March 2025

Ongoing support:

- Consultant onboarded and inception report approved for the development of Regional SRH strategy and template/guiding documents for SRH training materials and toolkits.
- Consultant onboarded and inception report approved for conducting research on Programmatic activities and disseminate results to inform decision-making in policy and Programme design
- Consultant onboarded and inception report approved for conduct of the feasibility study on the establishment of the IGAD Regional Health Organization (RHO)
- Health Financing Expert onboarded and development of Regional Health Financing Strategy through development of National Health Financing Strategies

March 2025

Publication of the inaugural A2DSRH March 2025 Newsletter

March 2025

Bi-weekly Regional and National Consultation Online Meetings

March 2025

First meeting with regional consultant and National Consultants supporting development of strategy held on 12th March 2025 and a tracking tool for SRH indicators was shared to define the baseline data.

Establishing a Regional Health Financing Hub for the IGAD Region: Why it Matters!

This article outlines the establishment of the Regional Health Financing Hub for the IGAD region, emphasizing its role in addressing health financing challenges, fostering regional collaboration, and advancing Universal Health Coverage (UHC). It highlights the hub's functions, including technical support, capacity building, and innovative financing, to improve health outcomes and strengthen health systems across the IGAD Member States.

Establishing a Regional Health Financing Hub in the IGAD region is a transforming initiative that addresses the urgent health issues confronting its members: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda. Eventually, this hub will act as a regional platform to strengthen health systems, enhance resource mobilisation, and promote regional cooperation, thereby advancing universal health coverage (UHC) and the objectives of the African Leaders Meeting (ALM) Investing in Health Declaration.

The Hub offers significant benefits to IGAD Member States by enhancing domestic resource mobilization and reducing reliance on unsustainable out-of-pocket payments and donor funding. The hub will provide technical support to mobilise private capital through modalities such as local pharmaceutical manufacturing, public-private partnerships (PPPs), direct investment, and contracting out while also assisting in digitalising health resource tracking systems for improved transparency and efficiency. Beyond this, the hub will deliver comprehensive technical support, including fiscal space analysis for health, economic evaluations, productivity and



Dr. Tesfaye Mesele, Health Financing Expert

efficiency improvements, national health account surveys, budget negotiation training, and capacity-building Programmes on health financing and health economics. Additionally, it supports the health technology assessments to guide cost-effective investments. By addressing these areas, the hub will empower member states to strengthen health financing systems, reduce financial barriers to care, and advance toward UHC, fostering long-term resilience and sustainability across the region.

Additionally acting as a regional voice and advocating for Member States on international and regional forums. Working together with partners including the African Union Commission (AUC), AUDA-NEPAD, World Bank, WHO, Africa-CDC, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and development partners, the hub will improve the worldwide profile of IGAD Member States and guarantee that health finance forums reflect MS health financing priorities. To handle cross-border health issues like infectious disease outbreaks

and climate-related health hazards, this cooperation will also help access to technical, financial, and technological resources.

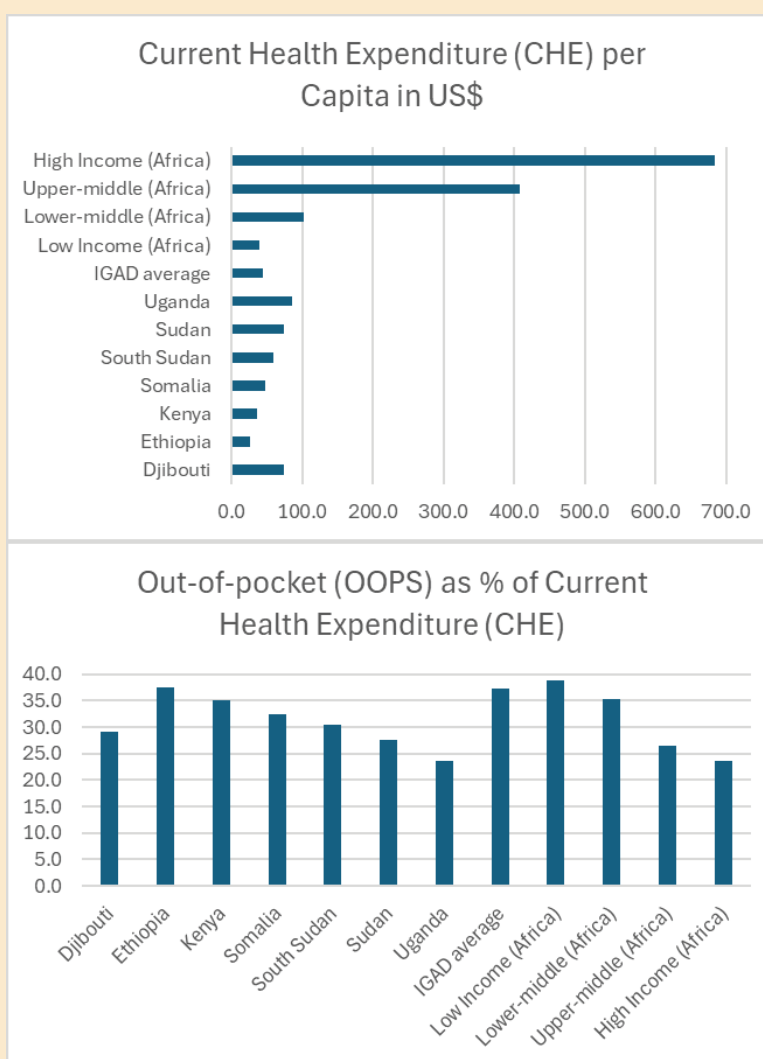
The Hub will also set pooling mechanisms to handle common health issues. Member States can collectively acquire necessary drugs, distribute health technology, and carry out cross-border health projects by using economies of scale. In addition to lowering expenses, this will help the area become more collectively capable of handling health crises.

Ultimately, for the IGAD region, the establishment of a Regional Health Financing Hub means a paradigm change. The Hub will enable Member States to attain sustainable health finance and achieve UHC by mobilising private resources, supporting regional and global collaborations, and tackling cross-border health concerns, therefore assuring healthier and more resilient populations throughout the Horn of Africa.

The graphs provide compelling evidence for establishing a Regional Health Financing Hub in the IGAD region. The data reveals that Current Health Expenditure (CHE) per capita in IGAD member states is alarmingly low, with the IGAD average falling below \$100, significantly lower than in high-income African countries. This indicates a severe underinvestment in health relative to the region's population needs. Furthermore, CHE as a percentage of GDP in IGAD countries is below the African average, demonstrating that health is not prioritised in national budgets despite its critical importance.

The high out-of-pocket (OOP) spending of CHE, exceeding 30% in some IGAD countries, underscores the heavy financial burden on households, aggravating poverty and limiting access to essential health services.

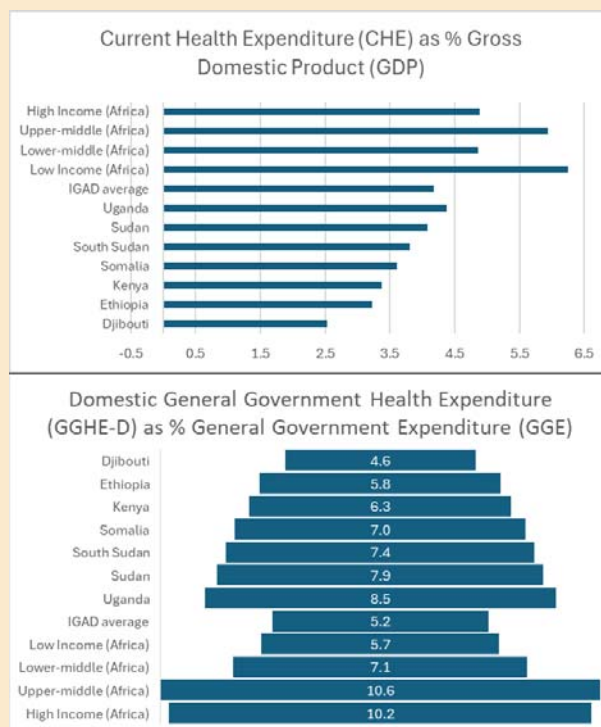
The Expenditure (GGE) is below the Africa average, reflecting insufficient government commitment to health financing. The metrics highlight systemic gaps in health financing that hinder progress toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC).



A regional health financing hub can directly address these challenges. By leveraging regional collaboration, the hub can support member states in increasing domestic resource mobilisation, reducing reliance on OOP spending, and improving the efficiency of health expenditure. For instance, the hub can promote innovative financing mechanisms, such as health taxes and social health insurance, to diversify funding sources and reduce financial barriers to care.

It can also facilitate the pooling of resources to address cross-border health challenges, such as infectious disease outbreaks, which are prevalent in the region. By providing technical assistance and capacity building, the hub can help governments prioritise health in their budgets and align spending with health priorities.

In conclusion, the evidence from the graphs underscores the urgent need for a coordinated regional approach to health financing. Establishing a Regional Health Financing Hub will empower IGAD Member States to address these systemic gaps, reduce household financial burden, and move closer to achieving UHC, ensuring healthier and more resilient communities across the Horn of Africa.



Establishing a Regional Health Organization to Strengthen Capacity and Address Future Health Challenges in the IGAD Region



Dr. Mohammed Sidahmed Abdelrahim Mohammed, Public Health Consultant

The A2DSRH Programme outlines the critical need for African and Global Health Technical and Financial Partners to join AUDA-NEPAD in supporting African RECs such as IGAD in their efforts to establish their Regional Health Organizations (RHOs) as a significant step toward Regional Health Systems Strengthening (RHSS), increase investments in health, Financing and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is to ensure healthy lives and promote the well-being for all in Africa in the context of *“Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want”* and the Sustainable Development Goals to improve equity and address social determinants of health to reduce priority diseases burden in Africa.

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly exposed the failures of global, regional and national multilateral cooperation to respond and adapt to health emergencies while observing and noting the principles of solidarity and equity, raising the question of whether the global architecture for health emergencies is possible: reshaping Africa's approach to health emergencies, leveraging and integrating the capabilities of regional organisations as crucial in improving preparedness and response efforts at community, national, continental and global levels.

Serious health systems challenges continue to grapple the region, such as low healthcare funding leading to catastrophic health expenditures for patients; inadequate health information system, infrastructure and supply chain and shortage of healthcare workers; the existence of varying health policies, standards, and regulatory frameworks, drug regulations and policies with inefficiencies that hinder the flow of medical supplies and treatments between countries and training curricula that bar the transfers and accreditations of health practitioners to mention but a few.

Why Regional Health Organizations?

Regional Health Organisations (RHOs) have been implemented in health systems throughout the world to ensure that health services meet local needs. The aim is to introduce a regionalised healthcare system and determine the key barriers to and facilitators of the implementation of regionalisation using specific country contexts, ultimately leading to a healthy population and an efficient health system.

Establishing an RHO in the IGAD Region is a critical step towards reducing health disparities, achieving the continental Agenda 2063 goals and SDGs in managing public health emergencies, and delivering effective and equitable solutions to the challenges posed by public health emergencies.

In Africa, there are four intergovernmental regional health organisations: the West African Health Organisation (WAHO) in West Africa, the East African Health Research Commission (EAHRC) in East Africa, the Organisation for Coordination of Health Sector Activities in Central Africa (OCEAC) in Central Africa, and the SADC Health Sector in Southern Africa.

Solutions that RHOs Bring to Health Systems

- Support Member countries in resource mobilization to mitigate the fragmentation and incoordination in advocacy and spending approaches that lead to a significant loss of value for African national and regional health systems
- Address the issue of fragmentation of Health Financing Systems by advocating for region-specific health priorities at global platforms and securing better terms for vaccine access, disease control, and health financing.
- Pool resources and enable better negotiation terms on pharmaceuticals, vaccines, and medical equipment at a regional level.
- Enhance the region's capacity to attract international funding and investments in health
- Support in technical assistance to improve their healthcare infrastructure, supply chain, information system and building human resource capacity.
- Address disparity in National Health Policies through harmonised and standardised policies, strategies and interventions, health regulations, health training curricula, and interventions across Member States to ensure smoother cooperation in areas such as the transfer of health specialists, health services, vaccines, drugs, etc.

- Greater control measures to contain transnational health threats through a unified response at RECs levels will help prevent disease from spreading quickly and in collaboration with Africa CDC. RECs play a great role in enhancing disease surveillance, implementing early warning systems, and ensuring rapid deployment of resources to tackle health emergencies due to their proximity and close collaboration with its citizens.
- Increase public health effectiveness
- Enhance data collection and research

Through the strengthening of the already fostered multi-sectoral partnerships and collaboration in decision-making, transparency, regional prioritisation, stakeholder engagement and shared ownership, the goal of IGAD establishing a Regional Health Organization will ensure better health care for its citizens and achieve its mandate of healthy and peaceful people living in prosperity through regional integration.

Navigating Gender Norms for better SRH Service Delivery within the IGAD Region

Gender norms refer to societal expectations regarding roles, responsibilities, and behaviors assigned to individuals based on gender. These norms significantly influence the accessibility, acceptability, and quality of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services and the overall health and well-being of individuals and communities.

The IGAD region faces significant challenges in delivering effective sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services due to entrenched gender norms, with the United Nations Family Planning Agency (UNFPA 2023) state of the world report estimating only 48% of women in the IGAD region are able to make decisions on sexual and reproductive health independently. Additionally, a systematic review and meta-analysis by Addis Eyeberu of 2022 indicates that teenage pregnancy is approximately 30%, and about 30% of girls are married off by age 18.

Also, the National Federal Government Survey of Somalia 2020 revealed that approximately 99% of women in Somalia have had Female

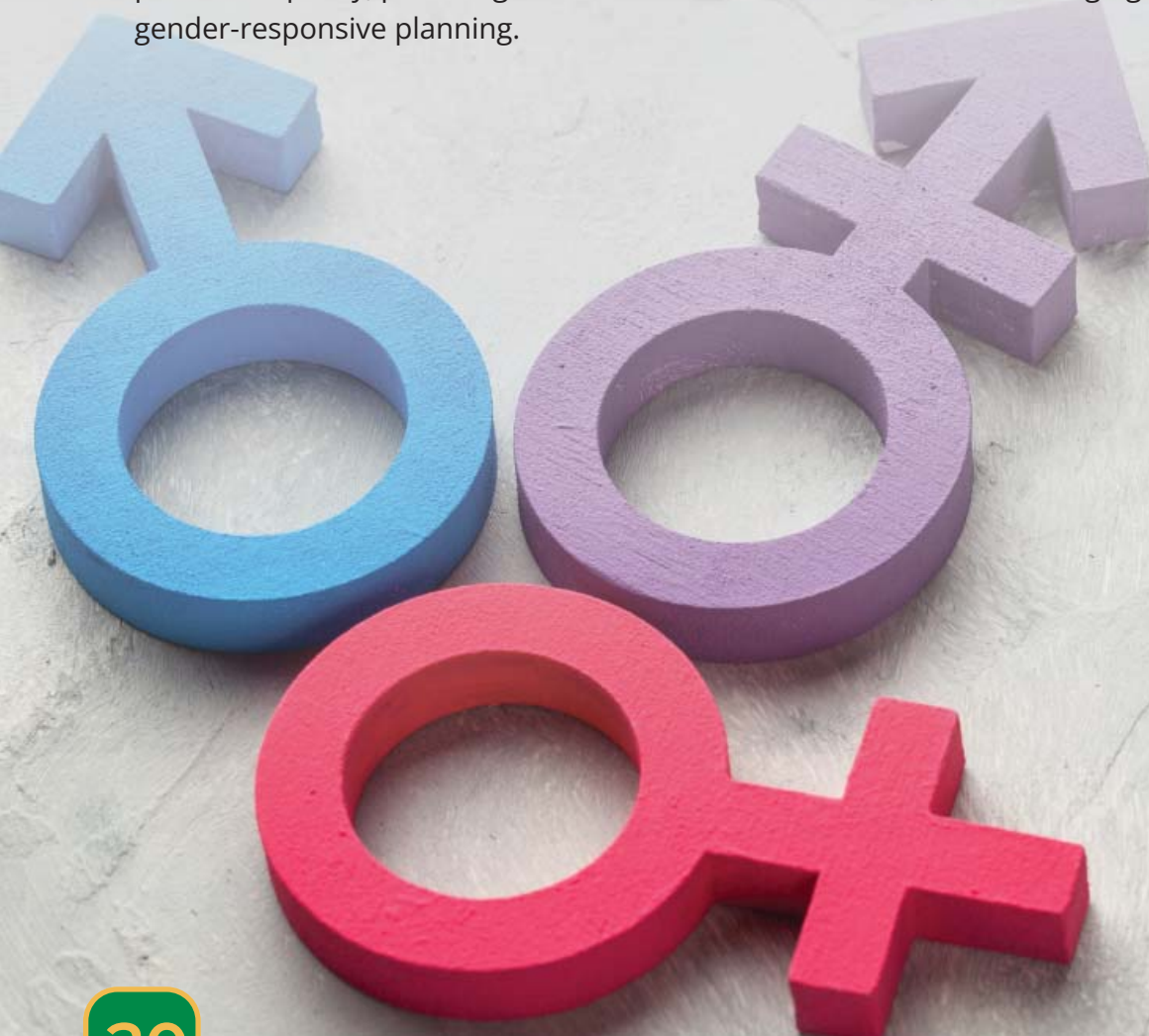


Dr. Harriet Nabukwasi, Sexual and Reproductive Health Expert, A2DSRH Programme Gender Focal Person, Health Unit

Genital Mutilation (FGM), and one in three women have experienced violence in their lifetime. This lack of decision-making power, early and forced marriage, gender-based violence, and harmful practices like FGM worsen outcomes of reproductive and child health.

Maternal and child mortality rates remain high across the region despite some progress since 2015. However, this progress is slow, and traditional patriarchal gender norms hinder the full acceptance and utilisation of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. IGAD countries risk failing to meet the 2030 targets for health and well-being for all, as well as gender equality, if entrenched inequalities and inequities are not prioritized.

The AUDA-NEPAD initiative, which promotes the Demographic Dividend in Sexual and Reproductive Health by focusing on coordination, collaboration, and optimising service delivery, is greatly appreciated. It should also address existing gender inequalities and biases to achieve universal sexual and reproductive health. This includes integrating gender in SRH policies and programs, which entails strengthening community engagement and advocacy, enhancing healthcare provider capacity, providing safe and inclusive SRH services, and leveraging data and research for gender-responsive planning.



Upcoming Events 2025 and Activities April to June

- IGAD benchmarking/study tours to SADC and WAHO on establishing a Regional Health Financing Hub and Regional Health Organization.
- IGAD technical support and participation in national health financing dialogue of member states
- In-country engagements in research.

**April
15-24**

**May
12-14**

- Regional Validation meeting on Health Financing Strategy Development Terms of Reference (ToRs)
- Continued support on the development of Regional SRH strategy and template/guiding documents for SRH training materials and toolkits
- Continued support for the conducting research on Programmatic activities and disseminating results to inform decision-making in policy and Programme design
- Continued support for the feasibility study on the establishment of the IGAD Regional Health Organization (RHO)
- Support the development of Regional Health financing Strategy through the development of National Health Financing Strategies

June

- 23-25 June** - Regular SRH Bi-Annual Meeting
- 26 June** - Health Ministerial Meeting
- 27-30 June** - Member State Capacity Building Trainings on SRH
- 30 June** - Publication of the June 2025 A2DSRH Programme newsletter

Stakeholder Engagement and *Feedback*

Would you like to

- ❖ Inquire or Comment ahmed.hassan@igad.int
cc: sharon.kuku@igad.int
- ❖ Require more information about the A2DSRH Programme
ahmed.hassan@igad.int
- ❖ Contribute to next issue –sharon.kuku@igad.int

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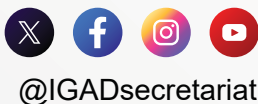


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