Terms of Reference: Collaborating on using SMS Platform to increase uptake of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Information and Services among University Students

1. Background

UNESCO has a longstanding commitment to strengthening the links between education, health and well-being, consistent with international commitments set out in the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, the 1990 Jomtien World Declaration on Education For All, the 2000 Dakar World Education Forum Framework for Action and, more recently, the 2015 Incheon Declaration, Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Based on its mandate and comparative advantage, UNESCO gives priority to supporting the education sector to ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed for healthy lives and relationships in the context of a supportive learning environment. However, UNESCO recognizes that the education sector cannot achieve better health and well-being alone and hence also supports education sector collaboration with other sectors and with the health sector in particular.

This Request for Expression of Interest will build on UNESCO’s work on promoting comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and more comprehensive education sector approaches to health and well-being. It will contribute to achieving the objectives of UNESCO’s Education Strategy 2014-2021, especially the objective of ‘promoting health through education’, which commits UNESCO to ‘strengthen support for Member States to deliver health education that contributes to healthy lifestyles and gender equality through safe and equitable learning environments that promote overall well-being, good quality education and learning outcomes for all’ and the education sector result in UNESCO’s Medium Term Strategy. It will also contribute to Member States’ achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular the education and health goals.

UNESCO brings to the process linkages with the education sector and technical expertise on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE); and therefore the possibility of reaching out to young people with relevant messages grounded on evidence and addressing the felt needs of the target groups.

2. Problem Statement/Rationale

While major advances have been made in almost every area of the response to HIV, progress for adolescents and young people is falling behind. New HIV infections among adolescents and
young people are not declining as quickly as among other age groups. In 2014, nearly 225,000 adolescents (aged 15 – 19 years) were newly infected with HIV. Adolescent girls, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, are most affected. Adolescent girls aged 15 – 19 years account for over 60 per cent of new HIV infections in adolescents in this age group, and adolescent girls aged 10 – 19 years account for approximately 54 per cent of all adolescents aged 10 – 19 years living with HIV (ALHIV). Today, AIDS is the leading cause of death among adolescents in Africa and the second most common cause of death among adolescents globally.

Young women and men aged 15 – 24 are the population group in Zimbabwe with the lowest percentage of comprehensive knowledge of HIV prevention and transmission at 41.4% (ZDHS 2015), despite the fact that such knowledge is the most important tool an individual can have to avoid HIV infection. Zimbabwe has managed to halve the HIV prevalence rate in the last decade from 26.5 % to 14.3 % (ZNASP III). However, young people are amongst the most affected by HIV/AIDS and are defined by the Government of Zimbabwe as a key population because of their increased risk of infection. Within this group, young women are disproportionately affected and tend to get infected at a younger age than men within the same age group, due to cross-generational as well as transactional sex and early marriages (ZNASP III). Thus, the recently released Prevention Gap Report (UNAIDS 2016) identifies young women aged 15 - 24 as a group that is at risk of being left behind in the global response against AIDS. As the statistics above show, multiple factors drive young women’s increased risk to HIV and successful interventions need to be able to address these multiple drivers and vulnerabilities.

On the supply side, a host of factors emerge as major barriers to the uptake of SRH services, such as inappropriate targeting, insufficient coverage, and low intensity and short duration of HIV prevention strategies. The lack of meaningful involvement of the targeted groups in the design of those programs compounds these issues, making it difficult to identify and develop effective solutions for barriers to uptake.

To address this inequity in the AIDS response, UNESCO is working with partners to promote Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and access to sexual and reproductive health services for young people in Eastern and Southern Africa. In December 2013, Ministers of Health and Education from 20 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa endorsed and affirmed a commitment to:

“Work together on a common agenda for all adolescents and young people to deliver comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly SRH services that will strengthen our national responses to the HIV epidemic and reduce new HIV/STI infections, early and unintended pregnancy and strengthen care and support, particularly for those living with HIV.” (see www.youngpeopletoday.net for full text of this commitment).

CSE is cited as one of the five recommendations in the UNAIDS and African Union to fast track the HIV response and end the AIDS epidemic among young women and girls across Africa.
3. **Project Description**

ICTs are providing young people with new communication channels and realms to form and explore their own social identity. This, combined with the reach and level of engagement among young people, provides programs with new opportunities for both increasing HIV awareness and reducing sexual risk-taking among young people. This project on comprehensive sexuality education seeks to contribute to the national multi-sectoral HIV and AIDS response by empowering young people to protect themselves from HIV, by increasing comprehensive knowledge of HIV prevention using the platforms of social media, mobile phones and the internet. Young people’s access to reliable information on SRH is an essential first step to improving their sexuality.

While social media and radio are two of the most popular channels among young people in Zimbabwe, text messaging has remained a basic means to send and receive short-yet-useful content. Even today the majority of young people in higher and tertiary education institutions have access to mobile phones, and a greater number of them use the device to send and receive text messages. In addition, young people are among the most prolific users of new technology and social media, thus innovative communication platforms using mobile phones and internet have the potential to play a critical role in engaging adolescents and young people on sexuality and other issues they are concerned with and providing them with critical HIV information and referrals to services.

4. **Objectives**

The overall objective of this project is to design and implement a SMS platform that provides young people in universities with essential, age appropriate and gender sensitive information on sexual and reproductive health, including HIV and AIDS. This project seeks to use SMS as a tool for providing young people in tertiary institutions with a platform to access sexual and reproductive health information, including interactive responding to questions about sexuality and reproductive health and rights. The SMS system should have capabilities to be linked to social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp etc.).

This Request for Expression of Interest aims to provide mobile SMS technology services to university students through appropriate and regular SMS messages on SRH to promote increased information, access and utilization of SRH services. The SMS mobile platform technology also enables implementing agencies to create demand for, and improve supply of, sexual and reproductive health services at universities.

5. **Scope**

The Collaborating partner will focus on design, implementation and maintenance of a system that is able to broadcast bulk SMSs as well as receive SMS’ to young people at Bindura University of Science Education. The platform shall allow for interaction between the sender and receiver as well as capabilities to link with social media platforms. The messages will target
these age groups 15-19, 20-24 and 25 and above year olds and have the capacity to be disaggregated by gender.

The platform should provide confidential, free of charge, individualized and interactive services on SRH, HIV and STI to adolescents and young people. Any university student on any network (ECONET, TELECEL, and NETONE) should be able to ask questions, voice their opinions on SRHR matters, and be referred to youth friendly services.

6. Responsibilities/Key Assignments

Under direct supervision of UNESCO with overall guidance from a multi stakeholder technical working group, the Collaborating Partner will:

- Prepare and present an Inception Report;
- Compile a database of phone contacts of all university students and a standalone database for Bindura University of Science Education students, the pilot project focus.
- Develop appropriate SRHR education messages and referrals to services;
- Regularly send interactive SMS to all students with SRHR education messages and information tips.
- Design and set up bulk SMS platform with the following features as a minimum:
  1. Capacity to send and receive messages to/from all mobile phone networks in Zimbabwe.
  2. Produce standard reports which are disaggregated by age (including age categories 15-19, 20-24, and 25 and above), sex, university, and academic program. UNESCO and Collaborating Partner will define the content of the reports.
  3. A zero rated return SMS system will be preferred. Alternatively, a USSD based system will be preferred.
  4. Capture cell phone numbers and social media accounts of young people in universities through both manual input and SMS based registration with the following minimum details;
     - Date of birth
     - Sex
     - Town/city name
     - University name
     - Academic program (by faculty)
  5. Segment age groups, university groups, and gender groups for specific messages. For example, dividing university students into young men and young women reveals disparities in their average daily life, which allows these two groups to be targeted differently. This makes the project more likely to succeed.
  6. Send messages to participants including birthday messages to each participant. The messages will be developed by the Collaborating Partner in conjunction with UNESCO and the multi stakeholder technical working group.
  7. Clearly state the terms and conditions of registration in the database.
  8. Send at a minimum the following automatic messages to each participant;
     - Welcome message upon successful registration
• Error message for registrations with errors; this message should specify the error
• Birthday messages

9. Schedule bulk messages
• Provide technical trouble shooting and back up of data for the SMS platform.
• Monitor the SMS platform and all the technical matters throughout the contract period.
• Ensure that the system adheres to the standard privacy issues and other relevant legal issues in Zimbabwe.
• SMS information service should not only send out general messages about SRH issues but tailor the messages to include available services and referrals to the nearest youth friendly health services such as HIV testing and counselling, voluntary medical male circumcision and anti-retroviral treatment.
• The service should provide anonymity for young people, as there is often concern about the stigma attached to seeking information regarding sexual health. Consider using an anonymous code system and/or an assumed name which makes young people feel more comfortable to seek personal help.
• Link the SMS platform to other social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Twitter to facilitate social interaction with other young people and sharing information;
• Allow students to be the generators of some of the information to be shared, including anonymous quotations.

7. Target Population

The project will initially target students at Bindura University of Science Education where UNESCO is supporting the roll out of a compulsory health education course for all first year students. The course has a strong component of sexuality education. Beyond this four months pilot phase, there are plans to reach out to young people in institutions of higher learning (universities, polytechnics, teachers’ colleges).

8. Time Frame

The time period for the project is four (4) months (September – December 2016). Interested applicants should follow the instructions in the ToRs, submit relevant documents especially a technical proposal (a short summary of their approach to the work) together with a quote for services. The response should include a work plan, itemized budget and profile of the organization and/or individual(s) involved in the project.

9. Deliverables

The key deliverables expected for this assignment are:
• Inception Report
• Set up of SMS platform
• Mobile number database (1. Bindura university students 2. other University students)
• Key Message Development Workshop Report
• Weekly CSE messages/Questions
• Monthly SMS delivery report/ Monthly progress report
• A Final report

10. Eligibility Criterion (Desired Background and Experience)

Any organization and/or individuals that wishes to apply should have existing capacity and meet the following conditions:

• The assignment would suit local non-governmental organizations and/or such entities, should be registered, with traceable contact address who are already doing similar work, disseminating health information through the agency of the SMS platform.

• The prospective Collaborating Partner should have acquired and have an active short code from a mobile network operator (Econet, NetOne or Telecel). The short code must be able to provide reverse billing or an equivalent service to make the SMS free to the end user.

• Experience in directly dealing with mobile network providers in Zimbabwe will be an added advantage

• A minimum of 2 years’ experience developing mobile phone solutions for development programs; preferably in health or HIV and AIDS programs and/or reasonably good experiences in managing similar projects, attach evidence.

• Prior experience managing and implementing SRHR programs in higher and tertiary education institutions an added advantage

• Key staff must possess the following skills
  a. At least a Bachelor degree in Computer Science
  b. Excellent computer skills and knowledge of software programmes including Word, PowerPoint and Excel, and comfortable using web based content management sites, databases and information portals.
  c. Experience in designing IT/Mobile solutions for young people
  d. Excellent research and writing skills
  e. Strong communication skills, especially in multi-cultural environments

11. Deadline for Submitting Proposals

Interested organizations and/or eligible entities should respond to this Request for Expression of Interest by submitting a technical proposal together with a quotation for services. Electronic copies in pdf format are preferred to hard copies. The proposal should not exceed 8 pages.

Proposals should be submitted to:
Ms. Nancy Gota, UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa, 8 Kenilworth Road, Newlands, Harare or by e-mail: n.gota@unesco.org no later than 5 September 2016, by 16.30 hours Harare time (GMT+2).

Questions for clarity should be sent to l.halimani@unesco.org.

1 UNAIDS and African Union (2015)