

ESSAY



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THE MULTI-SECTORAL FORUM ON AGE OF CONSENT FOR SEX

On 30th April 2019, I was highly privileged to attend a consultative forum offered by the mighty National Gender and Equality Commission to discuss the age consent for sex at Laico Regency Hotel. During this forum it was brought into the light that it has been proposed by the court of appeal to have a law change to lower the age of consent for sex from 18 years to 16 years. Among the many reasons behind the cause for change for the lower age consent is the realities and challenges of maturity, morality, autonomy and protection of children. It was a great honor to interact with the Chairperson of The National Gender and Equality Commission, Dr. Joyce Mutinda, PhD, the commissioner of The National Gender and Equality Commission, Dr. Florence Nyokabi Wachira, Bishop Adoyo from CITAM Valley Road and Madam Kemunto Kenani.



A beautiful selfie with Dr. Joyce Mutinda, Bishop Adoyo and my colleague, Martin Omondi

Ms. Betty Sungura Nyabuto, the commission secretary at The National Gender and Equality Commission mentioned that the consequences would be dire if the age for sex consent would be lowered. A report by Worldatlas shows that Kenya has a prevailing HIV infection rate of 5.40% making it to be ranked 12th worldwide amongst other countries with high HIV infection rates. The Lancet reveals that half a million abortions take place yearly in Kenya. It is important to also note that 18% of young women aged between 15-19 years give birth or are impregnated annually. I sincerely support her claim because it is clearly evident that the numbers of victims affected by early sexual encounters will sky rocket to the top. In view, it is important to practice effective altruism to bring to the table the most effective solutions to the problems we, the youth face. It was alleged that the minimum age of sexual consent aims to protect adolescents from abuse and from the consequences that they may not be fully aware of when engaging in early sexual activity. In my view, this is not a viable solution.

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Applying the great critical skills I have learnt from AKAD Africa and the great gift I have for ideation, I came up with a proposed solution to my elders. I positively challenged them to consider recommending a sex education curriculum to be taught in both primary and secondary schools. Did you know that sex education discourages youth from sex rather than encourages them? Sex education is not just about sexual activity but also about developing meaningful relationships. I believe there is room for more emphasis to be put into core principles and values to promote good social conduct in our society. It is clearly evident that my generation is highly hyper sexual and this can be seen in the current music industry. Where did the good morals and ethics go? Where did we go wrong? I trust that my knowledge from high school, The Lenana School, is right regarding the African Traditional Society whereby there was no age consent for sex but human sexuality was highly respected and the young members of the community got comprehensive education to make informed decisions. Why is this not being applied now? Why are we considering a lower age consent currently?

It is very important to benchmark from countries such as the Netherlands whereby children learn about relationships from as young as four year old. The results are impeccable. The Netherlands registers the lowest teenage pregnancies, abortion rates and STD infections in Europe. Policy makers ought to play their role. We sincerely need stronger, ethical, human and secular laws that will guide us all into becoming more responsible citizens of our country. It is important that we are taught to make informed decisions. With this at heart, I sincerely disagree with the recommendation from the three judges, Roselyn Nambuye, Daniel Musiga and Patrick Kiage to lower the age consent to 16 years.

My biggest aspiration is to have a society that is well educated and morally upright. As a result of all this information, I want to take the initiative to bring more light to Kenyans so they can see the need for effective solutions to their problems. As a leader of my generation, I have begun to voluntarily teach my students from Kawangware Primary School during my gap year in partnership with Orian Outreach to become good citizens of our country. Together, we are instilling the right moral values to the young children and giving them an opportunity to learn about emotional



Carrying out mentorship at Kawangware Primary School

relations and responsibilities and their human sexuality. I would want to thank AKAD Africa for giving me an opportunity to represent them in such a forum. It was a great honor.