



Issue 36, April 2021

Welcome to the ARASA newsletter!

Our first newsletter of 2021 finds us cautiously optimistic. As vaccine roll out begins across the region, concerns around COVID-19 vaccine equity mount, as most middle to lower income countries struggle with global north countries' monopoly on vaccine distribution. Within various countries there are fears that access to equitable and universal health care is still low, particularly for marginalised and vulnerable populations and together with our partners we continue to advocate to address these inequalities.

We started off the year with two major International Days of Action. On the first of March we issued a statement for Zero Discrimination. To commemorate International Women's Day, we provided financial support to a few of our partners to run their advocacy campaigns in the days leading up to the day of action. Additionally, we partnered with the ATHENA Network, a feminist network advocating for gender equity and human rights through the HIV response, to host a regional webinar, "#ChooseToChallenge - Young African Women Fighting for Bodily Autonomy and Integrity".

We hosted the first module of our annual Training and Leadership Programme (TaLP) online due to continued inability to have physical meetings. As part of our continuous ad hoc online training, we hosted an exciting online training for the Global Network of Young People Living with HIV Her Voice Ambassadors in partnership with HEARD on advocating for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

Lastly on World Health Day we issued a statement under the theme of "Building a fairer, healthier world" and launched our new Budget Advocacy for Health resources page on our website.

We trust that you are well during these trying times and are practicing physical distancing and social solidarity!

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Should you have any questions, comments or contributions for future editions of the newsletter, please email ARASA Communications at communications@arasa.info.

For updates and more information on ARASA's work, visit our website www.arasa.info and connect with us on Facebook [@ARASA](#), Twitter [@_ARASACOMMS](#) and Instagram [@arasa_network](#).

Until next time!

#ChooseToChallenge - International Women's Day 2021



WEBINAR #CHOOSETOCHALLENGE – YOUNG AFRICAN WOMEN FIGHTING FOR BODILY AUTONOMY AND INTEGRITY



Moderated by:



Felicita Hikuam,
ARASA Director



Catherine Nyambura,
Director of Programmes,
ATHENA Network



Date: 8 March 2021

Time: 14h30 (SAST), 15h30 (EAT)



With Panelists:



Beauty Boois,
Co-Founder, Voices
for Choices and Rights
Coalition (VCRC)



Womba Wanki,
Executive Director,
Generation Alive



Robinah Babirye,
Youth Advocate

Join us this International Women's Day!
#SheReady #EveryBodyCounts #IWD2021

Register today:
<http://bit.ly/choose2challenge>

This International Women's Day, ARASA partnered with the [ATHENA Network](#), a feminist network of individual and institutional members created to advance gender equity and human rights through the HIV response, working at the intersection of HIV, women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender-based violence, to host a webinar, ["#ChooseToChallenge - Young African Women Fighting for Bodily Autonomy and Integrity"](#), to draw attention to how bodily autonomy and integrity (BAI) impacts on women, in their diversity, in southern and east Africa.

The webinar, moderated by ARASA's Director, Felicita Hikuam and ATHENA Network's Director of Programmes, Catherine Nyambura, brought together expert gender and feminist activists including Robinah Babirye, an advocate for young people living with HIV and the focal point for the ATHENA Network in Uganda, Beauty Boois, co-founder of [Voices for Choices and Rights Coalition \(VCRC\)](#) and Namibian genderqueer activist and Womba Wanki, the Executive Director of [Generation Alive](#), a dynamic Zambian feminist organisation working to advance women's rights with a special focus on SRHR.

During the webinar discussions centred around the exploration of opportunities for and challenges to, advocacy for women's leadership, gender parity and the rights to BAI. Furthermore, we addressed the harmful laws, policies and practices that perpetuate inequalities in regards to the health and wellbeing of adolescent girls and young women. Young women (age 15-24) in the region are especially at risk for new HIV infections, with young women accounting for 200 000 out of the total 290 000 new HIV infections. Therefore it is of the utmost importance that we continue to advocate for these SRH challenges, such as high levels of unintended and unwanted pregnancy, lack of access to contraception, comprehensive sex education (CSE) and abortion, sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage.

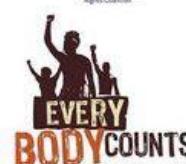
Additionally, after an open call for proposals ARASA provided 3 small grants to strategic partners for various activities to commemorate International Women's Day to [Womandla](#), an organisation centred on gender issues, child marriages, sexual harassment and gender-based violence in Zimbabwe, [CUT \(Collectif Urgence Toxida\)](#) an NGO working in the field of harm reduction for people who use drugs in Mauritius and Voices for Choices and Rights Coalition (VCRC), a movement organisation focused on advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights, reproductive justice, women's reproductive health, women's rights and abortion rights in Namibia. Our selected partners hosted in-country activities centred on body positivity, hosted radio shows and ran online campaigns on the importance of access to safe abortion care and the need for gender equality in relation to health.

Voices for Choices and
Rights Coalition (VCRC) &
AIDS and Rights Alliance
for Southern Africa
(ARASA) presents:

JESSICA MANDANDA
MALAWI

Health Consequences of illegal,
backdoor abortions –
Understanding the impact of
backdoor abortions on women's
health and the overall public
health care
sector

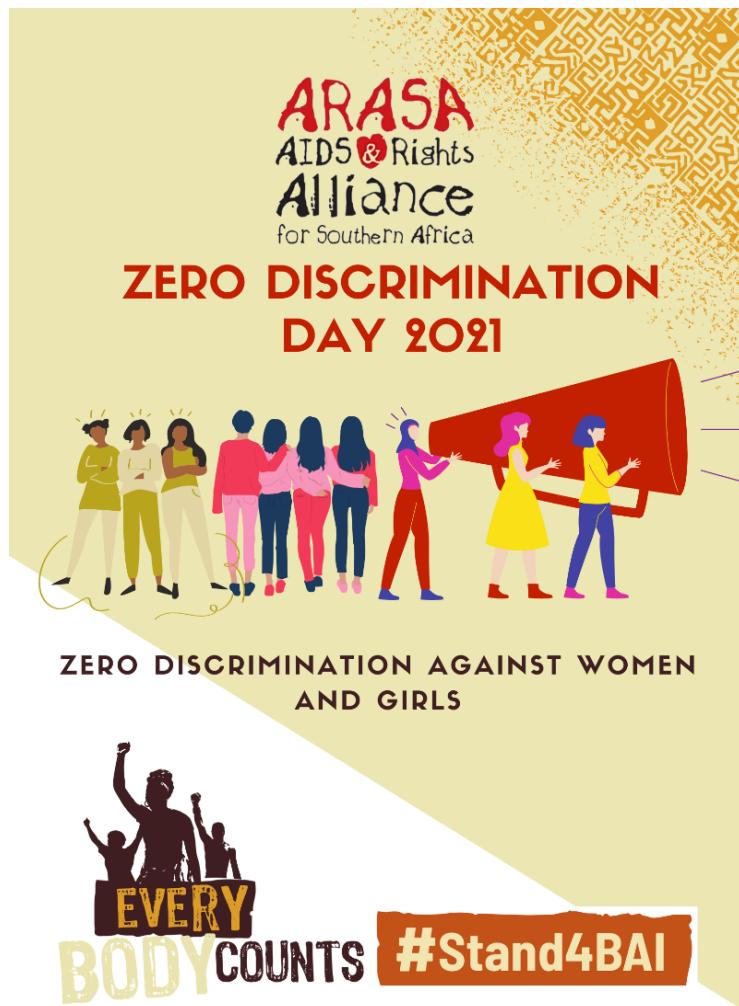
March 10, 2021
7 P.M. CAT
Instagram Live



Zero Discrimination Day 2021

On 1 March 2021, ARASA commemorated International Zero Discrimination Day under the theme “Zero Discrimination against Women and Girls” by issuing a statement calling on civil society, governments and development partners to continue to intensify their efforts and commit to the protection and promotion of the rights to bodily autonomy and integrity for women and girls in an effort to address gender inequality and discrimination.

Read our full statement [here](#)



Racial Diversity in Global Health Roundtable



On 25 February 2021, the AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA), in partnership with [Matahari Global Solutions](#), a research and policy group that provides global health policy and research services, monitoring and evaluation, and civil society support, hosted a roundtable discussion on the state of racial diversity in global health.

The roundtable, which brought together 20 black and brown leaders in global health, academics, members of international civil society organisations, global health agencies and communities, marked the beginning of a year long partnership to conduct research of pervasive white supremacy within global health systems. “Our goal is to illuminate how an upstream scarcity of black and brown people manifests downstream,” stated Felicita Hikuam, Director of ARASA. “Black and brown people are still being used as tokens of diversity, asked to perform a representative function without the power to make decisions. We have to acknowledge that sadly, so much regarding the inclusion and exclusion of Black and brown people remains the same.”

During the discussion participants described the current state of global health and the challenges therein. These challenges ranged from lack of inclusivity and diversity in recruitment processes, governance and leadership. Discourse also centred on the continual racism of actors from the Global North, the absence of white voices in conversations such as these and the need for white global health leaders to participate in dismantling systems of oppression.

A comprehensive report on the roundtable will be published before the end of April and the next steps for the project will be an in-depth qualitative research study that will explore views of mostly black and brown global health leaders on racial diversity in global health.

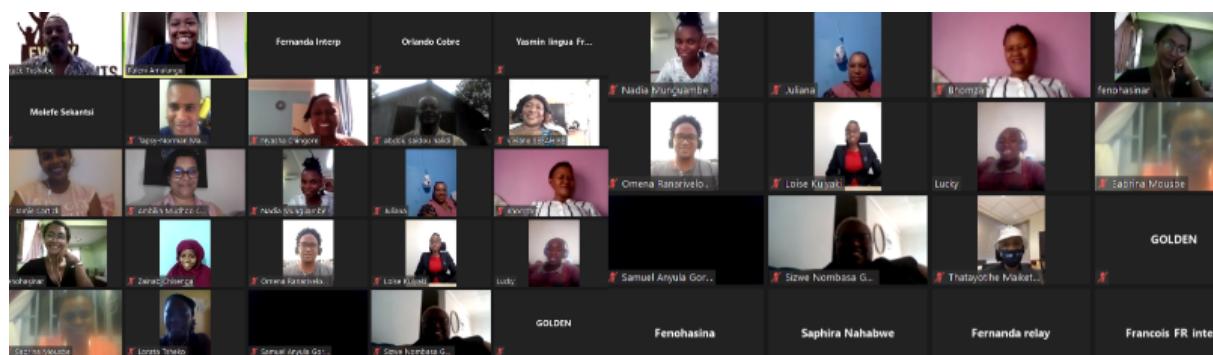
Read more about the roundtable in a ARASA and Matahari Global Solutions [statement](#) and an op-ed that was published in February 2021:

- [The Windhoek Observer \(Namibia\)](#)
- [Health Policy Watch](#)



In March 2021 ARASA hosted the first module of its annual Training and Leadership Programme (TaLP) where 38 participants were selected from southern, east Africa and ocean countries. Module 1, was convened online from 22 March - 1 April 2021, due to ongoing challenges associated with travel due to COVID-19 restrictions. Facilitators and participants engaged in Zoom calls to cover topics ranging from, but not limited to, bodily autonomy and integrity (BAI), sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR), human rights instruments, human rights monitoring and enforcement, and access to safe abortion. The module was facilitated by former ARASA Director, Michaela Clayton and ARASA Programmes Lead, Nyasha Chingore-Munazvo.

The TaLP is a pivotal part of ARASA's training and capacity strengthening programme that aims at strengthening the capacity of ARASA partners and other civil society organisations (CSOs) in the SADC and East African region. Among the selected trainers for 2021 are health workers, legal aid workers, social workers, community health advocates, members of civil society organisations and activists.



Additional Online Courses:

- **UHC Her Voice HEARD Online Training** - In the last week of February 2021 ARASA, in partnership with [University of KwaZulu Natal Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division \(HEARD\)](#), hosted a week-long online training on Universal Health Care (UHC) for the Global Network of Young People Living with HIV's Her Voice Ambassadors. The training covered topics such as health financing, SRHR and how health services must be available, accessible and acceptable and equitably distributed. Read more about UHC on our website.
- **Monitoring and advocating for HIV prevention and online short course** - ARASA launched this online course on 12 April 2021. The course will enable participants to understand structural barriers to HIV prevention and how they relate to bodily autonomy and integrity, as well as common terminology, basic epidemiology, and monitoring of progress towards HIV prevention. This will run until the beginning of May 2021. Read more about Structural Barriers to HIV on our [website](#).

Upcoming Courses:

Advocacy For and Monitoring Of Access to Safe Abortion Online Course.

This online short course will be facilitated by ARASA in collaboration with Health Economics And HIV/AIDS Research Division (HEARD) University of KwaZulu Natal.

This course will enable participants to:

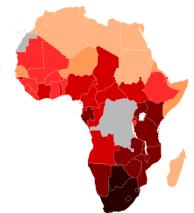
- Understand the wide range of legal, social, reproductive health and rights issues for dealing with safe abortion as an important but sensitive advocacy issues
- Articulate the different concepts, terminologies and language used in the field of global health and abortion.
- Utilize the acquired knowledge and skills to examine and critically appraise locally available resources and information for action planning in his/her own setting.

The deadline for applications is 26 April 2021 and will run from 10 May 2021 to 11 June 2021.

To read the full call for applications and how to apply visit our [website](#).

ARASA Launches New Budget Advocacy for Health Resource Page

DOMESTIC RESOURCE MOBILISATION



This World Health Day, which is commemorated on 7 April 2021, ARASA launched its new “Budget Advocacy for Health” resource page on our [website](#). Through budget advocacy knowledge civil society organisations and communities are able to be involved in how government resources are allocated and spent, and how these allocations address the needs of different population groups such as key populations, women and girls, people with disability and other vulnerable and marginalised groups in society.

This new page will provide access to resources, such as advocacy briefs and training materials that will provide much needed tools to enhance the knowledge and technical expertise of civil society organisations in southern and east Africa on domestic financing for HIV and budget advocacy.

Under the global theme of “Building a fairer, healthier world” for all, ARASA is determined to work to ensure that every person has the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Marginalised and key populations that live in poverty continue to face challenges such as lack of access to safe housing, lack of access to sanitation and nutrition, whilst having the additional social barrier of stigma and discrimination which impedes their right to health. It is only through the understanding of how health systems work and the budget allocations thereof that we are able to lobby for the equitable distribution of resources to provide qualitative universal health coverage.

Read our full World Health Day 2021 statement [here](#)

WORLD HEALTH DAY 2021

#EVERYBODYCOUNTS #STAND4BAI #HEALTH4ALL

