



Press Statement

A call to African States to implement laws and policies on menstrual hygiene to end “period poverty”

28 May 2024: The AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA), joins the rest of the world in commemorating Menstrual Hygiene Day themed “**Together for a #PeriodFriendlyWorld**”. While menstrual health is a fundamental aspect of human rights, dignity, and public health, many states in East and Southern Africa (ESA) are falling short of this requirement with women and girls in low-income countries experiencing “period poverty” because menstrual hygiene products are out of reach for many.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, period poverty and embedded gender inequalities have resulted in pubescent girls dropping out of school or even engaging in transactional sex to obtain money to buy sanitary towels so that they can continue to attend school, according to İlayda Eskitaşçıoğlu, a UNESCO Chair on Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Access to Menstrual Products article of 2019. The media is awash with reports of women and girls resorting to using cow dung and other unhygienic means to manage their menstruation in this region. In ESA, the impact of poor menstrual hygiene has resulted in ‘1 in 10 school-aged girls failing to attend school during menstruation’ (WHO/UNICEF, 2013; The World Bank, 2005, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2015).

ARASA recognizes the efforts being made by some countries in ESA such as Ethiopia, Namibia, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Malawi, and Zimbabwe that have introduced removal or reduction of taxes and duties on menstrual hygiene products. These include government initiatives in schools and civic society led interventions to ensure accessibility and availability of menstrual hygiene products for women and girls (UNFPA East and Southern Africa Office (ESARO) Menstrual Health Management Report for ESA of June 2018. While these efforts are commendable, a lot still needs to be done.

As we commemorate Menstrual Hygiene Day, African states are being reminded that they are bound by various national, global, and regional frameworks that call on them to respect the right to access to menstrual products for women and girls. Proper menstrual hygiene is integral to achieving several **United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals** namely, **Goal 3:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, **Goal 4:** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and **Goal 5:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Women's rights to sexual and reproductive health are provided within **Article 14 of the Maputo Protocol** to the **African Charter** on the Rights of Women in Africa. The **SADC Hygiene Strategy of 2021-2025** notes that effective menstrual hygiene is vital to the health, wellbeing, dignity, empowerment, mobility and productivity of women and girls.

On Menstrual Hygiene Day 2024, African states are being urged to adopt and implement laws, policies, and measures that promote affordable menstrual hygiene products, enabling women and girls to exercise their fundamental sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and creating a #PeriodFriendlyWorld.

For more details contact: director@arasa.info Twitter: <https://x.com/ARASACOMMS> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AIDSandRightsAllianceforSouthernAfrica> Website: <https://arasa.info/> LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/aids-and-rights-alliance-of-southern-africa/> and Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/arasa_network

