



Press Statement

African states urged to invest in resilient SRHR systems to reduce impacts of climate change on women and girls

5 June 2024: The AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA), joins the world in celebrating the World Environment Day for 2024, whose theme is **Land Restoration, Desertification and Drought Resilience,** under the slogan **“Our land. Our future. We are #GenerationRestoration”**. As we commemorate the World Environment Day, ARASA recognises the efforts of African countries in supporting various adaptation and mitigation strategies to reduce the impact of climate change, particularly on the most vulnerable groups, including women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals. However, responding to climate change should go beyond addressing 'land restoration' and African states should invest in strong health systems, including sexual reproductive health (SRH) services, and gender-based violence (GBV) response, for the interventions to be more resilient and holistic.

In its 2023-2028 Increased Capacity, Coordination and Accountability (ICCA) for Equality Strategy, ARASA notes that mega-trends such as climate change have increased the vulnerability of women and girls in East and Southern Africa (ESA), to GBV and reduced their access to SRH services. Women and girls experiencing extreme poverty, discrimination, and limited access to basic services are more vulnerable. During climate-induced emergencies, there is also an increase in sexual violence, child marriage, and son preference, which disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, hitting them the hardest.

Women and girls are up to 14 times more likely to be harmed during a disaster according to the Centre of Biotechnology Report of 2019. Some of the negative impacts of climate-induced disasters include limited access to post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV, HIV treatment, emergency contraception, safe abortion services, post-abortion care, maternal and childcare, treatment for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), counselling, and psychosocial support for crisis-affected communities (Women Deliver Report on the Link between Climate Change and SRHR of 2021). Climate change has also perpetuated discriminatory gender and sexuality-related stereotypes or norms, exacerbating gaps in the realization of SRHR. For example, LGBTQI+ individuals face the risk of losing their already limited safe physical spaces and support services, including healthcare, according to the Women Deliver Report.

On World Environment Day, ARASA is calling for the following actions directed to policy makers, civil society organisations, funding partners, and all stakeholders in the health sector in ESA:

- Invest in and mainstream SRH services, including building more resilient healthcare systems.
- Ensure stronger protection for GBV services, to complement the land restoration efforts, which are equally critical during climate change interventions.
- Involve women and girls in their diversities in climate change interventions, as they are disproportionately affected and
- Develop and implement emergency preparedness and response policies that meet the SRHR needs of those impacted.

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