



ICASA 2023

Adolescent Girls and Young Women: Re-claiming Our Voice with Power and Purpose - ICASA 2023

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Developed in collaboration with Y+ Global (Her Voice Fund) and Speak Up Africa (Voix EssentiELLES)

We, women, girls and gender diverse communities, gathered at ICASA 2023 as part of the global movement for Re-claiming Our Voice with Power and Purpose, urgently call on policy makers, donors, implementers, governments and leaders to take strong actions in order to inequalities, barriers and challenges being face by communities -in our diversity.

Gender equality, community engagement and health are powerfully linked. The inequality and discrimination faced by women, girls, and gender-diverse communities put our health and well-being at risk. Reducing inequalities is one of the major priorities of the region, considering that it is the most unequal region in the world. The inequalities that exist in countries across Africa result in the exclusion and marginalization of women in their diversity, girls and youth.

Additionally, a global, well-funded anti-rights movement, aligned with conservative, faith-based groups, opposes gender justice, actively obstructing progress for the rights of women, girls and gender diverse communities. Harassment, discrimination, and violence against key populations are escalating. These actions have led to a severe hindrance in accessing life-saving healthcare and information, forcing clinics to limit or withdraw services, endangering the physical and mental well-being of women, girls and gender diverse communities. These movements further impede comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), spreading misinformation and creating distrust, limiting young people's access to vital sexual health services. This movement, backed by international organizations, aims to undermine human rights under the guise of protecting cultural norms and traditional values while further harming and criminalizing these communities.

AGYW are also more likely to be under-diagnosed due to different presentations of TB and are more likely to suffer negative consequences from TB stigma, including intimate partner violence, loss of livelihoods and divorce than their male counterparts. For example, TB in AGYW can interrupt girls' education and lead to disenfranchisement and limited livelihood opportunities. Likewise, cultural, and financial barriers to care can lead to delayed diagnosis, treatment, and more severe illness.

More broadly, women's health has always been reduced to reproductive health, forgetting our overall health and well-being of our bodies, especially looking closer to our diverse sex and gender in all aspects of the HIV.TB/Malaria diseases and expanding to non-communicable diseases. It is a crucial time for rethinking women's health including engaging and full participation of women, girls, and gender diverse at key decision making platforms, financing women's health holistically and letting women lead in project design, implementation and monitoring.

At the same time, improved gender equality makes everyone healthier and better able to fulfil their potential. For example, when women, girls, and gender diverse are educated, they and their families have better health. When AGYW control their sexual and reproductive health and exercises their rights, they can complete their education and take up economic opportunities.

What is our urgency as women, girls and gender diverse communities.

- The intentionality of meaningful and ethical engagement as well as leadership of women, girls and gender diverse communities in the discourse of the HIV/TB/Malaria with strong lens of gender transformative approaches

- Investments should be anchored and focused on what matters the most, with more emphasis on the importance of community-led interventions, and of delivering Health-care services in ways that are accessible to every women-in our diversity
- Women's Health should not be centered only on HIV/SRHR but should take a broader approach from HIV prevention, reproductive justice, Health system integration and tackling inequalities.
- Decolonize the women volunteerism syndrome and advance institutionalization of community led services, which will secure our long term recognition and gains.
- We call for strong political will from our governments, with emphasis on promoting and creating safer and non-conservatism environments, making sure our communities have access to services without fear of being criminalized nor our human rights violated.
- Prevention technologies and innovations-accessible, affordable and available- that empower us as women in our diversity to have autonomy and choice over our reproductive health and being able to realize our rights for all.

Invest more in data modelling and availability for women demographics is critical to ascertain the identification, diagnosis and management of our overall health for all. Strengthening a sex- and gender-informed data value chain across the lifespan will enhance understanding of women's health needs, policy and programmatic decision making and ultimately, healthcare and outcomes for all women, girls and gender diverse communities are not victims. We drive the change in what we want to see for our overall health, rights and well-being. The urgency is clear-we need to dismantle the barriers(rotten systems and structures, punitive laws and legislations, criminalization, stigma and discrimination, colonized and red taped funding) and foster a world where gender equality is not theory or aspiration rather lived reality.

With one of the key decision making platforms such as ICASA 2023 in December 2023, it is imperative that women , girls and gender-diverse communities claim back our power and repurpose our agenda. It's an opportunity to strategize on our priorities , deliver on our key tasks and propose solutions for women's health to be realized.

We also call on governments and leaders to respect their obligations to protect their citizens by eliminating all forms of inequality and discrimination against women. Aware that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are essential for sustainable development, we ask African governments and leaders to guarantee women and girls a safe socio-legal and institutional environment in order to enable them to live without fear of genital mutilation, forced marriage, rape or any other form of sexual, physical or verbal violence.

We encourage them to maintain and strengthen their efforts to promote access to quality education, including sexuality education, in order to develop self-esteem and empower women and girls to defend their rights and take control of their health.

African governments must investigate external influences shaping policies regarding women, girls and gender justice due to the infiltration of well-funded global anti-rights movements, impacting access to HIV and SRHR services. These movements seek to regress LGBTQ+ rights, creating extensive harassment, discrimination, and violence within these communities. Understanding and mitigating these influences are vital to safeguarding women, girls and gender diverse communities' access to crucial healthcare and information. Investigation becomes imperative as these external forces attempt to spread misinformation, misinterpret comprehensive sexuality education, and discredit advocacy efforts, ultimately undermining local cultural norms and traditions.

Governments should also analyze legislative, socio-political, and aid policies to grasp potential risks to marginalized communities, especially in HIV interventions. Integrating community-led monitoring into national health programs and using data-driven insights is crucial for informed decision-making, capacity building, and effective health interventions.

Recalling that it is essential to invest in female leadership and women's empowerment, we call for the development and financial support of women's and girls' organizations that work to amplify women's voices. These organizations are essential to creating the thriving societies we want.

In order to capitalize on their potential and optimize their actions, we urge these organizations of women, girls and gender diverse communities wherever they are, as well as all civil society organizations engaged in defending women's rights, to work together, to unite their voices and their strengths for a fairer world to which we all aspire.



GLOBAL NETWORK OF
YOUNG PEOPLE
LIVING WITH HIV

