



#YouthPower Driving #ESA

Call to Action: for ESA countries to accelerate the implementation of laws and policies on menstrual hygiene to end “period poverty.”

We urgently **call** on the responsible governments in Sub-Saharan Africa to prioritise menstrual hygiene for adolescent girls and young women. The stark reality is that many school-going young girls miss an average of five school days every month (due to lack of sanitary wear), significantly impacting their performance. This is a recurring issue for many vulnerable girls in remote areas in the region. The gravity of this situation is evident in the fact that girls missing school undermine United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. The consequences of poor menstrual hygiene are alarming, with ‘1 in 10 school-aged girls failing to attend school during menstruation’ (WHO/UNICEF, 2013; The World Bank, 2005, 2016). Period poverty is a harsh reality for many girls, forcing them to resort to unhygienic methods of managing their periods. This also undermines the UN SDG Goal 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages.

The SADC Hygiene Strategy of 2021-2025 notes that effective menstrual hygiene is vital to women's and girls' health, well-being, dignity, empowerment, mobility, and productivity. The Maputo Plan of Action (2016-2030) calls for governments to invest in the Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) needs of adolescents, youth, and other vulnerable, marginalised populations, improve the sexual reproductive health and Reproductive Rights (SRH&RR) status of the poor, and empower and support community-led efforts to address their sexual rights needs challenges and advance inclusion.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education plays a pivotal role in fostering menstrual hygiene for adolescent girls and young women. It's crucial to understand that there can be no comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) without menstrual hygiene. The ESA Ministerial Commitments on Health include efforts to accelerate action for young people's access to CSE and SRH services to ensure that young people attain and enjoy full and healthy lives by 2030. Menstruation is a significant physiological change in young women and girl's well-being. The lack of knowledge, poor practices, socio-cultural barriers, poor access to products and their improper disposal has profound implications for the health, dignity and well-being of women and adolescent girls. When girls and women have access to safe and affordable sanitary wear to manage their menstruation, they reduce the risk of health infections and enhance their psycho-social well-being.

We acknowledge and commend the efforts and progress made by many member states in East and Southern Africa to ensure young people's good health and well-being. These states have taken significant steps by introducing the removal or reduction of taxes and duties on menstrual hygiene products. However, there is still much work to be done to fully address the issue of menstrual hygiene and ensure the rights and well-being of women and girls.

The #YouthPower Driving #ESA network (**Hope for Adolescent and Youth, Dzuka Cholinga Zambia, Jeneration Agenda Uganda, Towvirane Malawi and Positive Young Women Voices Kenya**) joins the rest of the world in commemorating Menstrual Hygiene Day under the “Together for a #PeriodFriendlyWorld”. We call on all governments to adopt and implement laws, policies and strategies that promote affordable menstrual hygiene products, enabling women and girls to meet their sexual rights.

