



International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa

BREAK barriers to accessing Family Planning information, services and commodities

Kampala, Wednesday, September 26, 2018, The International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa joins the globe in commemorating the World Contraceptives day, 2018 with a call for eliminating barriers to access to Family Planning information, services and commodities for Women in all their diversities. ICWEA recognizes that access to safe and voluntary family planning is a human right. Family planning leads to fewer cases of unintended pregnancies among women including women living with HIV which is key for improving the lives of mothers and children, as well as elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV. Family planning also leads to reduced unsafe abortions, maternal and child mortality. Family planning is central to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Given the benefits of family planning, the East African Community (EAC) member states committed to ensure, respect, and promote the fundamental right of individuals to decide, freely and for themselves, whether, when, and how many children to have. The EAC member states demonstrated their commitments through signing of Family Planning 2020¹ which provides for securing and fulfilling the rights of an additional 120 million women and girls to access family planning information and services by the year 2020; committed resources for Family Planning; developed/reviewed Family Planning related policies and plans.

However, women and girls in EAC continue to experience limited access to FP information and services with the Contraceptive prevalence rate for the region standing at 39% (Tanzania 34%, Uganda 30%, Rwanda 53% and Kenya at 58%)² Contraceptive use in the region is characterized by stock outs of Family Planning commodities, reduced spaces for autonomy to make informed choices, human right violations, gender based violence, lack of enabling environments for Family Planning awareness raising and demand creation so as to increase uptake to family planning services.

The use of the new HIV antiretroviral medicine Dolutegravir (DTG) that countries in the region will soon roll out calls for effective contraceptives use by women of reproductive age to avoid accidents where women may have children with Neural Tube defects.

¹ <http://www.familyplanning2020.org/entities>

² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322626055_Family_Planning_in_East_AfricaTrends_and_Dynamics

ICWEA is concerned that the most common contraceptive method in the region happens to be hormonal contraception (DMPA), which still has mixed evidence as to whether its use is associated with a woman's risk of acquiring HIV or not. This calls for more information as well as mixed methods that women can choose from. Addressing the unmet family planning needs of women in our diversities call for political will, leadership and meaningful partnerships among the beneficiaries, governments, private sector, and civil society organizations.

ICWEA calls upon governments, private sectors and development partners to:

1. Create an enabling environment to ensure sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and girls and prioritize it within EAC member states
2. EAC member states should invest in, engage in, and support trials/ studies on HIV and Contraceptives including the on-going study on the Evidence for Contraceptive Options and HIV Outcomes (ECHO) whose results are expected in 2019.
3. Support girls and women's engagement in the region (Rwanda) by increasing domestic investments in family planning because it is central to ending poverty, achieving women's empowerment and gender equality.