

'No need for birth control': Tanzanian president's views cause outrage

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John Magufuli says people who use contraceptives are lazy, and outsiders who promote birth control are giving bad advice

Women's rights campaigners have expressed outrage after the Tanzanian president said there is no need for birth control.

The president, John Magufuli, told a rally in Meatu, in the Simiyu region, that outsiders who promote birth control are giving bad advice, and that people who use contraceptives are lazy, according to local media.

"You people of Meatu keep livestock. You are good farmers. You can feed your children. Why would you opt for birth control? These are my views, but I don't see any need for birth control in [Tanzania](#)," he said.

People who use birth control do so because they do not want to work hard and feed a large family, he added.

The Citizen newspaper, which [reported the comments](#), said there was no indication the statement will lead to a change in national policy. But campaigners fear Magufuli's speech may influence services offered in some areas.

"It's a statement by a sitting head of state at a time when Tanzania takes every statement that he issues to be law," said Judy Gitau, regional coordinator for Africa for the charity Equality Now. "From past experiences whenever the president issues a statement on a given issue, in practice it becomes policy, and so we can expect ramifications."

Backtracking from commitments on family planning will have a devastating impact on women's rights, she said: "We will end up with women having unplanned children, huge families and unable to sustain their lives."

The issue of contraception in Tanzania is a man's decision

Petrider Paul, gender equality activist

Tanzania has ratified the [Maputo Protocol](#), which states that women have the right to control their fertility and choose any method of contraception. But access to services is limited, said Jennifer Kayombo, a youth activist in sexual and reproductive health and rights and sustainable development goal ambassador in Tanzania. "We still have less centres compared to demand for family planning services, [and] few numbers of youth-friendly service providers," she said.

A third of women in Tanzania use family planning, according to the UN population fund, UNFPA,

with access most limited in rural areas. On average, women give birth to five children.

Petrider Paul, a gender equality activist in Tanzania, said the president's comments could be used to further undermine women's reproductive rights. "The whole issue of contraception in Tanzania is a man's decision. A woman cannot make her own decision to use contraceptives without the approval of the man," said Paul. "Most men will be boastful: 'The president has said this, we should keep producing more children. Why should we use birth control?'"

Magufuli told the rally he had seen the harmful effects of birth control in Europe, where countries have declining population growth and no labour force. But Justa Mwaituka, the executive director of the NGO Kiota Women's Health and Development, said birth control can be used to support large, healthy families by allowing mothers to space out pregnancies.

"Spacing [through birth control] promotes enough time for breastfeeding. A woman can at least breastfeed her child for two to two and half years as it's recommended by the World Health Organisation," she said.

Gitau said the situation facing Tanzanian women and girls is dire, and deteriorating.

Last year, the Magufuli commented that pregnant school girls [should be banned](#) from school, telling a rally: "As long as I am president ... no pregnant student will be allowed to return to school ... After getting pregnant, you are done." Human rights groups have tried unsuccessfully to challenge the ban in the courts.

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The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/sep/11/no-need-for-birth-control-tanzanian-p-residents-views-cause-outrage>