



Reshaping, Re-planning and Re-Committing to the Youth Agenda in Southern Africa!



#SARSYC2022 Research Indaba Report

24-25 August 2022,
Lilongwe, Malawi, Sunbird Capital Hotel

1.1. Introduction and Background

This report gives a summary narrative of the key deliberations of the Research Indaba which was hosted during the Southern African Regional Students And Youth Conference (SARSYC) on the 24th of August 2022 in Malawi. Convening the conference was the Students And Youth Working on reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT) in partnership with Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) and the Girls Activists Youth Organisation (GAYO). The conference ran under the theme Reshaping, Re-planning and Re-Committing to the Youth Agenda in the Southern African Region.

The research indaba was technically designed to address the unmet evidence needs in youth programming and the limited use of research to inform youth advocacy across the SADC region, below are some of the key contextual points:

- Young people with knowledge on key issues shaping their realities do not have readily available and accessible platform to advance their experiences. In most instances, their contributions are informal, and are subsequently relegated in the academic circles. The lack of platforms to mainstream researches disincentives young people from advancing their knowledge, robbing us of their unique insights and experiences that are critical in improving their health outcomes.
- In the absence of formalized researches, basic advocacy and programming are unlikely to be impactful. Research arms young people with the ammunition to make their issues concrete and difficult to reject, and this has been an unfortunate missing link. Young people are locked out by those with monopoly in the academic circles. African researches are rarely prioritized in academic discourse, and this is even worse for the young African, who is also a victim of ageism.
- The research indaba was therefore a panacea to the aforementioned problems. It was such a critical component of the 4th Edition of SARSYC in which current bachelors and postgraduate students had an opportunity to contribute in evidence building and share knowledge with policy makers and influencers, fellow students and young people as they shared their research findings largely relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications to the health and socio-economic wellbeing of young people, including their health and education.

In summary, the research indaba managed to;

- Give students a platform to present research findings from their researches with a focus on young people
- Build the capacity of aspiring young people in key aspects of academic life and research.
- Motivate interest in scientific research and other non-academic careers, globally.
- Inform delegates on current trends in reproductive health research and policy among the youth.

1.2. Process towards Hosting the Research Indaba

In the build up towards hosting this inaugural Regional Research Indaba during SARSYC, the conference convener, SAYWHAT, announced a call for proposals from Southern African young people to submit abstracts for research areas that relate to the COVID-19 and its impact on young people, including their sexual and reproductive health.

The call was advertised in various online publications and social media platforms in all the countries in Southern Africa. Youth structures and student structures in each respective country were also used as publicity platforms, encouraging youths to take part in the initiative by submitting their bids. This made the process a competitive one and exciting for young people. A total of 21 abstracts were received with topics as outlined below

1. The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Students' Mental Health.
2. The antidote of drug and substance abuse amongst adolescent
3. An assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of social media campaigns in prevention of drug and substance abuse in Malawi's rural communities
4. Effects of covid -19 on Sexual reproductive health and rights in Zimbabwe
5. Advancing Psychosocial Support and Mental Health services in unearthing and addressing the hidden and complex Sexual Exploitation against girls and women at water points in peri-urban of Domboramwari Epworth.
6. Students' well-being suffocating; education in Zimbabwe a right being violated and privatized.
7. Substance and drug abuse
8. Media and social injustice: the untold stories of LGBTQIA+ community.
9. The antidote of drug and substance abuse amongst adolescent
10. Mental Health Status of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the Advent of COVID-19.
11. COVID-19, Education and Wellbeing: Understanding the Effects of COVID19 on Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia.
12. Drug and Substance abuse among the youth
13. The impact of Covid-19 on the access to sexual and reproductive health care by young deaf women in Zimbabwe.
14. Implications of COVID-19 pandemic on SRHR on young people in one of the teachers colleges in Bulawayo region in Zimbabwe.
15. The efficacy of awareness campaigns employed to reduce substance abuse amongst young people in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic: The case of Epworth, Harare, Zimbabwe.
16. Influence of Pre-operative Patient Education on Post-operative Opioid Consumption: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis.
17. Drug and Substance Abuse

However only a total of 5 abstracts were shortlisted and the students had an opportunity to present during the research indaba as outlined below. Deliberations of the presentations shall be outlined in the section below.

1.3. Research Indaba Delegation

The research Indaba was attended by a total of 118 delegates comprised of various stakeholders representing students and youth, members of the academic field, civil society organisations, government representatives, SADC PF researchers and representatives from UN Agencies, among other delegates. This enabled rich discussions on each respective research area, while at the same time providing a platform for the student researchers to learn from experts not only on technical aspects of research but also the relevant reach areas they focused on.

Research Presentations

The following are the researches presented during the Research Indaba

1.3.1. Development and Implementation of the SADC SRHR Strategy; Young People's Perspectives

Presenter: Jephiter Tsamwi - Advocacy and Communications Consultant

Introduction

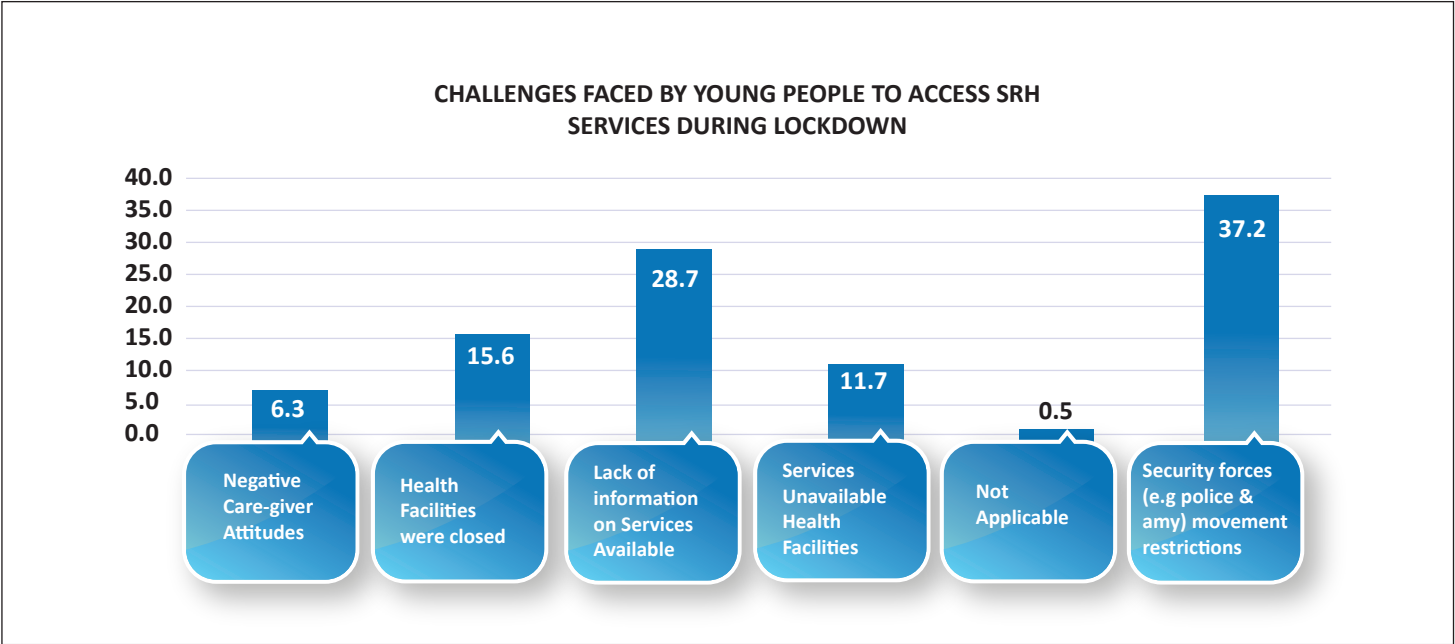
The research Indaba started with a research presentation that sought to highlight results from a study that was conducted as part of implementing a key recommendation from the 3rd edition of SARYC which was held in Lusaka, Zambia. During the previous conference, students called for stakeholders to establish consultative platforms in which young people can give feedback regarding strategy formulation and implementation process for it to reflect the wishes of young people in the region. To ensure effective implementation of the strategy, the Students and Youth Working on Reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT) initiated a consultative process

with young people to understand how young people have and are interacting with the strategy, both at regional and country level. This was done through an online survey. Results from this survey were presented during this 4th edition of SARSYC

The key results from this survey were as follows;

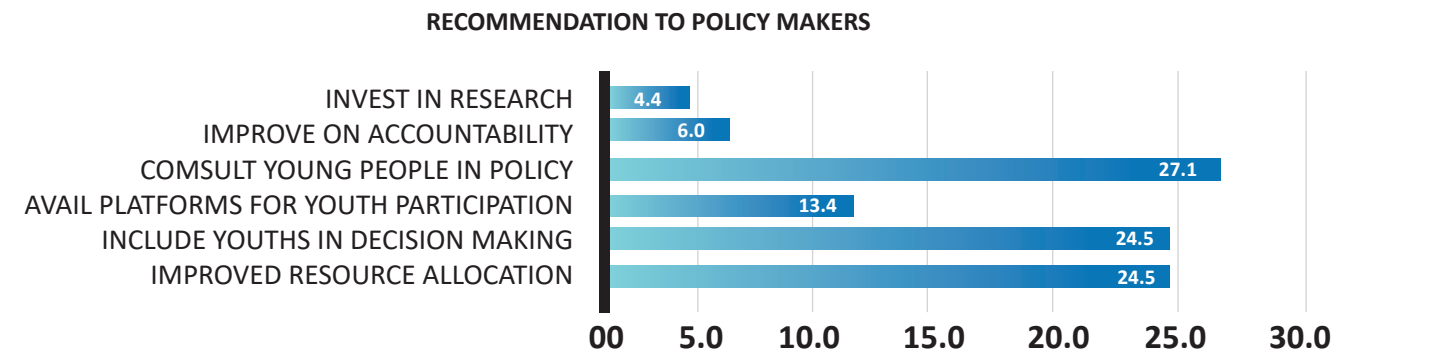
About 74% of the youths confirmed they knew about the SADC SRHR Strategy, and the majority acknowledged having interacted with it via internet or social media. However, those that were not involved in SRH activities did not know about the strategy, indicating the need to widen reach to young people beyond the circles of youths who are involved in civil society related work. The survey further interrogated young people to understand if they were currently participating in initiatives related to the strategy implementation in their respective countries. The majority (69.4%) confirmed there were no initiatives in their countries where young people could take part in the strategy implementation highlighting a key gap that needs to be filled in as far as participation of young people in strategy implementation is concerned.

The survey further looked into priority outcomes in the strategy implementation. Out of all the 10 outcomes, only ending AIDS by 2030 and addressing gender-based violence are where governments in the region and young people in agreement that these must be top of the agenda. For young people, priority issues include addressing



rates of unplanned pregnancies (14.4%), followed by addressing sexual gender-based violence (13%) and creation of an enabling environment (12.8%. Interestingly, issues related to barriers to youth realisation of their SRHR were ranked among the lowest on government priorities but young people rate it as one of the top priorities (10.1%). About 84% of the respondents confirmed facing challenges in access sexual and reproductive health services during lockdown with security forces restrictions being the most confronted challenge (including when one intended to access SRHR services)

The strategy further consulted young people regarding what they considered as priority interventions to be included as part of the strategy implementation. SRHR in emergencies, sexual harassment and young sex workers



were ranked top three priority areas. The survey therefore concluded that in the strategy implementation, there was a disconnect between what governments were prioritising versus what young people wanted prioritised and further concluded that the structures and bodies that represent young people were not giving feedback to young people when they took part in policy development processes. Also, SRHR related programs and information is currently concentrated only to a group of few young people that are involved in SRH Programs and the civil society. Youths from non-health sectors of youth development are excluded

Recommendations

The survey recommended the following

Policy Recommendations

- There is need for clear policy frameworks to guide SRHR related programs, processes and interventions in the context of emergencies for young people to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health rights without interruption
- There is need to establish a youth consultation framework to guide policy formulation processes in relation to youth consultation
- There is need for increased resource allocation to fund the SADC SRHR Strategy by both the governments and civil society organisations

Programmatic Related Recommendations

- There is need to widen channels through which young people can participate in public policy formulation especially those that relate to their SRHR
- There is need for more investment in building the capacity of young people to advocate and hold governments accountable
- There is need to widen the reach of SRH related matters to young people in other spheres for collective and inclusive advocacy on SRHR matters

1.3.2. Effects of covid-19 on sexual reproductive health & rights in Zimbabwe

Presenter: Bothwell Gwatidzo-Youthwyze Zimbabwe

Research Objectives



- To identify and assess the available SRHR services during the peak of COVID-19,
- To ascertain the ease of accessing the available SRHR services by young people,
- To assess the affordability of the SRHR services available by young people,
- To ascertain the effects of not accessing SRHR services by young people

Methodology

The researcher held whatsapp group discussions and zoom meetings on a weekly basis with different young people on how they were accessing services in their communities and challenges they were facing. Participants were provided with Internet data and these comprised of different age groups between 16 and 24. A total of 40 interviews were done between the period of Jan and May 2021. 20 Interviews targeted participants identified as key informants and these were young people knowledgeable about the aspect at hand and gave an account from their perspective without having to live the experience. 20 interviews were done with young people who were affected by the implementation of lockdown measures and failed to access services.

Findings

The findings from this research generated several issues related to young people's SRHR during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was limited access to SRHR services due to movement restriction as per lockdown regulations. Young people were asked to produce travel documents at roadblocks of which these were only given to essential service providers. Clinics and pharmacies being hot spots for COVID-19. Young people were rather scared to go to these places to access services and resorted to use of unsafe alternatives. Other critical challenges that resulted from the lockdown include sexual or intimate partner violence and increased rate of teenage pregnancies as well as early and unplanned marriages.

- Effects were that nearly 5,000 teenage girls became pregnant in January and February 2021 and about 1,800 entered early marriages during the same period (official statistical reports that were released by the government)
- Young people also reported having to access services from private individuals at a very high cost.
- Condoms that are usually distributed for free were now being sold in some communities
- Young people who reside in vulnerable areas were the most affected

Recommendations

- Introduction of integrated services through mobile clinics ,which would bring the service to young people who were unable to go past the travel restrictions
- Dial-a-service toll free numbers which would allow young people to get in touch with service providers
- Community based outreaches in the form of scheduled visits by service providers on given dates, times and central locations.
- Training of community based peer supporters on HIV/AIDS counselling and testing, Contraceptives, and STI screening
- Establish safe spaces and resource centres in communities
- Identifying and assessing the availability of SRHR services during the COVID 19 outbreak

1.3.3. Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on students' mental health

Presenter: Shantel Wilford- University of Cape Town

"You remember what happened during the COVID-19 pandemic....you open this TV channel, and this radio station, all of them focussing on the widespread ramifications of Covid-19 pandemic and its dire implications on individuals' collective health. Remember how the pandemic further disrupted young people's daily lives.... Yet there was and there still is very limited research on psychological impact on all this to students and other young people," Shantel



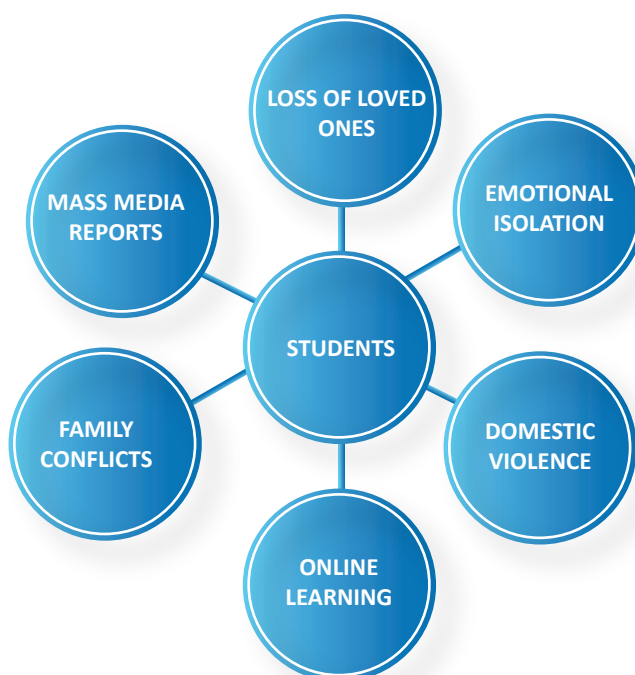
Covid-19 related stressors

“Pandemic changed a lot of things and took away a lot of special people”

(Interview 1)

“Being stuck at home with my parents was overwhelming and we were always fighting”

(Interview 33)



As an undergraduate student at the University of Cape Town, Shantel’s research was an investigation on the Covid 19 related stressors and how they impacted on students while assessing the severity of depression in students due to the pandemic. The researcher employed in-depth interviews and questionnaires in collecting data.

The findings from the research illustrated that young people within tertiary institutions suffered from the bereavement of loved ones while domestic violence was a menace in most households. Due to confinement at

home, family conflicts were inevitable and that caused anxiety for 61.5% young people who participated in the study.

Recommendations

The research established 3 main recommendations which are

- The need to invest in developing coping mechanisms for young people during emergencies
- The need to invest in Student wellness program at universities and communities
- Apply psychological crisis intervention model to assist students in need of psychological support

1.3.4. Advancing psychosocial support & mental health services for girls and women at water points in peri-urban of Domboramwari Epworth

Presenter: Cosmas Rongoti- Shanduko Yeupenyu Child Care

The organization operates in the Epworth peri-urban area in Zimbabwe and its main goal is to provide sustainable support to girls and women focusing on:

- Female headed rural households
- Urban women and girls
- And rural adolescent girls.



The study unearthed sexual exploitation of young girls and women aged 9-15 years with an increase of 35% in 2022 compared to 2021 in which 19% of the girls were exploited at borehole water points. The study implied that the vulnerability of young girls was worsened by perennial water shortages in Epworth where men self-imposed as borehole marshals exploit vulnerable young women. The researcher pointed out that, the presence of these perpetrators of sexual violence, teenage pregnancies are on the rise and early sexual debuts among the girls leaves them susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases. Through the study, the major findings were that, psychosocial support services coupled by mental health services for adolescents were not common in Epworth.

Thus the researcher recommended that;

- There is need to strengthen child protection systems to avoid the exploitation of girls
- Conduct capacity building for relevant service providers to enhance the quality of services to adolescents.
- Dissemination of information on mental health psycho support to adolescents and the community at large.

1.3.5. Assessment of the implementation & effectiveness of social media campaigns in prevention of drug and substance abuse in Malawi's rural communities

Presenter: Aubrey Chidziwaniso

The use of media, including the mobile phone, has potential for engaging youth in civic affairs and service, microenterprise, and non-formal education. However, there is still very little understanding on how social media can be used as a campaign strategy especially in curbing drug and substance abuse in rural communities

Research Objectives

- To identify social media campaigns on drug and substance prevention in Malawi's rural communities
- To understand on how social media can be used as a campaign strategy in curbing drug and substance abuse
- To find out the effectiveness of social media campaigns in drug and substance prevention in Malawi's rural communities

Research Design and Methodology

The population of interest of this study comprised of youth from Malawi's rural communities. The study also recruited drug and substance abuse content producers and social media influencers. The target population is 100 young people selected randomly across Malawi's rural communities. Purpose sampling method was used during data collection

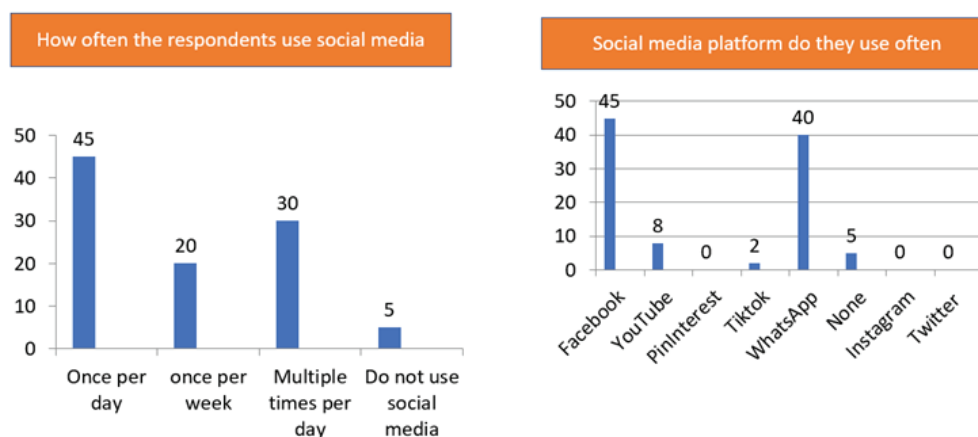
The primary data was collected by means of questionnaire, interview schedule, and observation. The main modes of questionnaire administration was through phone calls and face to face interviews. The social media campaigns about drug and substance abuse prevention were identified through internet searches and key informant interviews. The social media content was analysed using cognitive dissonance theory.

Key Research Findings

The study sampled 100 youth respondents from five districts of Malawi, namely; - Mchinji, Lilongwe, Mzimba, Dedza and Chiradzulu. The participants were grouped into the age range of 15 -19, 20-25, 26-30, and 31-35. All the sampled respondents had smart phones and came from Malawi's rural communities



A total of six social media campaigns were selected for analysis. The analysis was based on the following



variables; frequency coverage of drug and substance abuse, and the content influence on attitudes and norms, uncover benefits of drug free lifestyle, and awareness creation on dangers of Drugs and Substance abuse.

The research shows that, in Malawi there is very few social media campaigns solely focusing on drug and substance abuse prevention. Out of the six sampled social media campaigns only three solely focused on drug and substance abuse prevention.

Out of three social media campaigns, two were frequently covering issues of drug and substance prevention, one was the special program on drug and substance abuse. The social media campaigns on drug and substance abuse received mixed reactions from the general public both negative and positive. The study also found that most social media campaigns content focus on awareness on dangers of drug and substance abuses.

Study Conclusion

- The study concluded that the issue of drug and substance abuse prevention is not frequently covered.
- The study concluded that most social media campaigns focus on awareness on dangers on drug and substance abuse and less focus on to others variables such as benefits of drug free lifestyle that influence their attitudes and norms.
- The need for advocates on drug and substance to be more aggressive in their online campaigns to reach a wider audience and influence behavioural change
- There is need for frequent coverage and awareness on the health benefits of a drug free lifestyle
- Feedback and Comments from Panellists and Audiences
- The panellists i.e. Dr Kamoto, Dr Molekele and Dr Melessie applauded the efforts by students in making presentations on their research findings. However, they emphasized that students should not limit themselves to qualitative research methodologies but should merge with quantitative research methodologies.
- The panellists further encourage members of the academic in the respective universities to mentor students in research including the technical aspects and basics in research like constructing better research topics, structuring presentations and referencing
- A participant applauded the research that focused on Mental Health of students noting that the research brought in a new perspective that is rarely prioritised within the civil society and the academic.
- Another participant also implored Universities to invest in working solutions identified to put programs and systems in colleges that ensure that the mental health of students is catered for even when there is no emergencies like COVID-19.

1.4. Life after bachelor's degree: Labour market/scholarship opportunities in both Academia and non-academic industries

Presenter: Dr T Melesse- World Bank

Dr T Melesse focused on sharing with young people some opportunities available for young people within international organizations. Dr Melesse took students through on how to identify and successfully apply for scholarships and research grants. Her presentation empowered the young people with knowledge on how to apply for grants to pursue their proposed interventions.

She noted that there are so many opportunities including under World Bank but youth in Southern Africa seem to have limited knowledge about them. She encouraged youths to always be on the lookout for these opportunities as they are specifically designed to help empower them and realise their dreams.

1.5. Next Steps

The SAYWHAT Research Unit endeavours to collate students' presentations and other quality papers that did not make it to the conference. These papers will be merged into a journal which serves as an advocacy tool that carries all the issues that affected young people in the Southern African region during the COVID-19 era. This journal subsequently will be published and the process leading to the creation of this advocacy tool is explained below.

1.5.1. Mentorship

For the mentorship program, as this is a regional work, the SAYWHAT research team engaged a seasoned academic from Kenya to mentor and work closely with the research fellows as they perfect their research papers. With the guidance of the mentor, the research team seeks to select another batch of abstracts which were not successful for presentations at SARSYC. This group shall therefore be working together with the one that presented at the conference and the mentorship program is expected to run for 30 days. Upon perfection and completion, these papers will provide a compendium which shall be erected into a journal. The journal is the key deliverable that the SAYWHAT Research Unit is looking forward to.



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