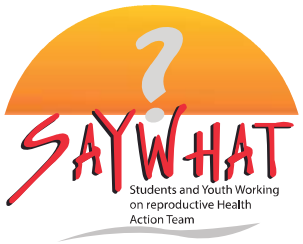
Southern African Regional Students & Youth Conference on Sexual & Reproductive Health

SARSYC

5th Edition Report







SARSYC 5th Edition

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The 5th Edition of the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference was convened by SAYWHAT in partnership with the University of Botswana from the 17 – 19 of July 2024 in Gaborone Botswana under theme "Building Bridges, Navigating Emerging Issues: Advancing Equitable Access to Public Health and Education".

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Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
CSA&G	Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
PEP	Post-Exposure Prophylaxis
PREP	Pre-exposure Prophylaxis
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SARSYC	Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference on Sexual Reproductive Health
SAYWHAT	Students And Youths Working on reproductive Health Action Team
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SH	Sexual Harassment
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TB	Tuberculosis
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
YETT	Youth Empowerment and Education Trust

Introduction

Students and Youths Working on Reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT) convened the biennial Southern African Regional Students and Youth (SARSYC) 5th Edition from the 17th-19th July 2024 in Gaborone, Botswana in partnership with the University of Botswana. The regional conference was attended by delegates from Angola, Botswana, Kingdom of Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, representing the Southern African Development Community. The conference was held under the theme **Building Bridges, Navigating Emerging Issues: Advancing Equitable Access to Public Health and Education.** This narrative report captures the proceedings and outcomes of the conference and advocacy messages from young people.



About SAYWHAT

Students and Youth Working on reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT) is a Zimbabwean public health social movement with 20 years of experience in championing health including Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) rights of young people. The organization addresses policy, structural and community level barriers to the realization of health rights of young people.

SAYWHAT envisions **"A generation of healthy and empowered young people (students, youth, adolescents and children) across Africa"** driven by the mission "To promote students, youth, adolescents and children's access to health and education rights, services and commodities across Africa. SAYWHAT's programmatic approach is rooted in the health rights movement which is sustained through its strategic pillars of capacity building, research, documentation, advocacy and engagement.

SAYWHAT's Key Programming Focus Areas

- Comprehensive Sexuality Education
- Service help line facility (Emergency toll free number 577)
- Gender Equality and Equity Advocacy
- Ending Child marriages
- Safe and Legal abortion advocacy
- Menstrual Health Management
- Mental Health Education
- Child Protection – Child Safeguarding
- Right to Education Advocacy
- Demand generation for SRH and GBV services
- Linking young people to SRH and GBV services
- Responding to young people's health needs during emergencies and humanitarian crisis situations
- Transnational advocacy on the right to health and education
- Budget tracking on health and education for young people



About SARSYC

Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference (SARSYC) is a regional solution focussed gathering of young people and key actors in the youth development space where stakeholders dialogue on contemporary challenges that young people confront and collaborate to address them. The conference is the brainchild of SAYWHAT, created with vision to amplify the young people's voice as solution bearers to the challenges they face. The conference started in 2015 and over the years, it has strengthened its position as the only space in the region where young people coordinate to have one voice in all matters related to their sexual and reproductive health. SARSYC is held biennially on rotational basis across all the countries in the SADC region.

The 5th Edition of the Southern Africa Regional Students and Youth Conference (SARSYC V) was held from the 17-19 July 2024 in Gaborone, Botswana. This year's conference was held under the theme Advancing Equitable Access to Public Health and Education; reinforcing the critical role of strengthening education system in the region as a strategic necessity to address the intersecting socio-economic, political and public health concerns confronted by young people.

SARSYC V Thematic Areas

a) ICPD30: As we approach the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 30th anniversary, it is a time for celebration and introspection. SARSYC presented an opportunity for the youths to examine the ICPD's impact and relevance in today's context, ensuring that their voices contribute to shaping the future trajectory of population and development discourse.

b) HIV, TB, and other communicable diseases: Southern Africa continues to face a high burden of HIV and tuberculosis (TB). These not only strain healthcare systems but also cast shadows over economic productivity and social stability. SARSYC is an opportunity for students and young leaders to converge and dissect policies, evaluate the intersections of communicable diseases with other aspects of life, and forge actionable plans.

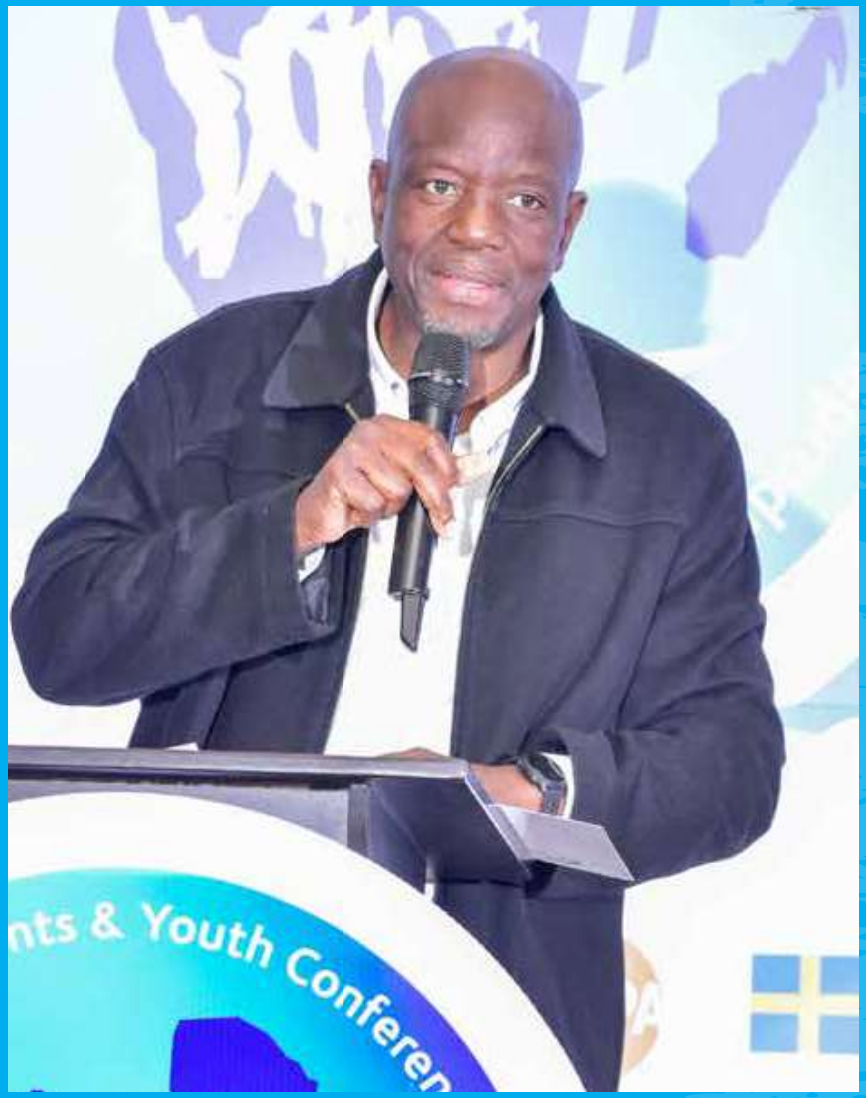
c) Emerging Issues in Public Health: The Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference (SARSYC) is a strategic opportunity to address critical emerging public health concerns. In this edition, the focus areas were climate change, the AI revolution and its negative and positive implications in the youth's wellbeing.

d) Intersecting Quality Education, Gender Equality, and Public Health: Advancing SDGs 3, 4, and 5. The African Union's proclamation of 2023 as the Year of Education comes at a critical time when millions of girls drop out of school in Sub-Saharan Africa due to constraints such as vulnerability to sexual harassment, menstrual health challenges, and early marriage. These barriers not only disrupt individual lives but also impede the region's progress. SARSYC ignited dialogue on these matters and foster partnerships to develop educational interventions that are responsive to the emerging challenges within the region.

e) Research: SAYWHAT recognises the power of research to address the contemporary challenges that young people confront. As part of the SARSYC V, SAYWHAT conducted the 2nd Edition of the Regional Research Indaba with the aim of contributing to evidence-based programming in the organization and offer research proposals that address contemporary challenges faced by young people. The regional indaba promotes and strengthens the linkages of research, training, policy and practice to achieve universal access to health services in Southern Africa


DAY 1
ADVANCING EQUITABLE

Welcome Remarks



Acting Vice Chancellor of the University of Botswana, Professor Richard Tabulawa, warmly welcomed delegates from across the SADC Region, including policymakers, government officials, development partners, researchers, academics, and students, to the 5th Edition of the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference on Sexual Reproductive Health. He emphasized that the convergence of these diverse stakeholders underscores a collective commitment to Advancing Equitable Access to Public Health and Education for young people in the SADC region. Professor Tabulawa highlighted the ongoing challenges posed by HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis (TB), and non-communicable diseases, which continue to hinder youth education. Nevertheless, he expressed optimism that through collaborative efforts, universal health coverage can be advanced, noting that the theme of SARSYC V directly addresses youth inclusion in health interventions.

Addressing the concerning issue of drug and substance abuse among young people, the Vice Chancellor stressed its detrimental effects on their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. He suggested that the Mugota movement and Web for Life Forum could learn from each other's strategies to effect lasting change. Reflecting on the milestone of convening SARSYC V alongside discussions on ICPD 30, he celebrated the conference's decade-long impact and the opportunity it presents for participants to contribute meaningfully.

Professor Tabulawa concluded by celebrating the rich cultural diversity represented at the conference, foreseeing how it would enrich knowledge across various sessions aimed at fostering a responsive SADC region for young people. He urged all delegates to actively engage in making the conference both memorable and productive.

Objectives of SARSYC V

As the SAYWHAT National Coordinating Committee Chairperson, Miah Tsinakwadi highlighted the objectives of the conference as follows.

- **To promote meaningful youth participation in addressing the impacts of climate change and other emerging issues on the health, education, and overall well-being of young people in Southern Africa.**
- **To foster synergy between the health and education sectors in addressing the needs of young people.**
- **To account for the progress made by stakeholders in implementing commitments related to the health, education, and livelihoods of young people since SARSYC IV.**
- **To amplify the voices of young people in shaping the ICPD30 agenda between 2024 and 2026**

Documentary-5 Editions and Counting! SARSYC: A Catalyst for Change

Delegates were offered a unique opportunity to reflect on the 10-year journey of SARSYC through a documentary that showcased pivotal moments from its inception. This visual presentation highlighted key achievements from past editions and underscored the ongoing efforts of young people in advancing Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). It emphasized their advocacy initiatives aimed at engaging policymakers to uphold and protect these gains. Central to the documentary was the mantra of **"Thinking Global and Acting Local,"** recognizing the collaborative efforts of partners and stakeholders who have been instrumental in SARSYC's success.

Click the link below to watch the documentary
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMgr4xCbJGw





The Research Indaba

In 2019, SAYWHAT established the Research Unit within the organisation. In 2022, the organisation hosted the 1st Edition of the Regional Research Indaba in 2022 during the 4th Edition of the SARSYC conference in Lilongwe, Malawi. The Indaba witnessed five young researchers drawn from Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa present their research abstracts in the presence of seasoned researchers, development partners, academia and students. The abstracts were inspired by the lived realities experienced by young people during the COVID-19 pandemic era hence. After the conference, the young researchers underwent an intensive 6-month mentorship process focussed on advocacy, research and writing. The final products were research papers which were consolidated into a book which was launched at the 5th of edition of the conference in Gaborone.

The 2nd edition of this Regional Research Indaba represents growth and implementation of lessons as SAYWHAT leveraged on the past experiences to organise a more solid event that saw expanded disciplines of research work being presented by young people.

The Rationale of the 2nd Edition of the Regional Research Indaba

The 2nd Edition of the Regional Research Indaba was an opportunity for the youths to present research proposals that address contemporary challenges faced by young people aligning with the commitment to bridge the gap between research and society.

The Indaba is an interactive platform that allows several players such as established researchers, policy makers, legal practitioners and the academia in the Southern African Region to deliberate and disseminate the outcomes of their research to a broader audience. It allows participants to reflect on innovations and lessons from the field and how these may be expanded to aid young people to access health services. It also provides a conduit for collaboration in public health research.

The 2nd edition of the Regional Indaba was hosted during SARSYC V under the theme Innovative Pathways: Research Insights Shaping Equitable Youth Development in Southern Africa. The theme depicts the significance of research to drive the development of innovative solutions that redress public health challenges faced by the youth within their unique context of Southern Africa.

> Young people are the present and the future; they should intentionally pursue research, which may uncover credible and verified information that could be leveraged by policymakers as they develop programs and policies to address the contemporary challenges confronted by the youths,
>
> **Jimmy Wilford,**
> **Executive Director, SAYWHAT.**

Objectives of the Research Indaba

- **To facilitate knowledge sharing and Innovation.**
- **To strengthen partnerships and collaboration in public health research.**
- **Influence policy and practice translating research findings and recommendations into actionable policy briefs and materials.**

Overview of the Research Indaba

As the convener of the SARYSC V conference, Jimmy Wilford, the Executive Director of SAYWHAT, provided an overview of the 2nd Edition of the Regional Research Indaba. Wilford emphasized the essential role of research for society and young people in establishing credibility and relevance for public health interventions.

Mr Wilford acknowledged the presence and appreciated the advocacy efforts of SAYWHAT's TB Champions. He stressed that research aims to answer the underlying **"why"** and **"what"** questions to identify the root causes of challenges, such as the rise in sexually transmitted diseases reported in the Zimbabwean media.

Mr Wilford further highlighted that young people require three critical skills - reading, writing, and speaking - to meaningfully contribute to development work through research. He noted that SAYWHAT aspires to inform public health programming from a non-clinical, social movement perspective.

For the current conference, 10 abstracts from young researchers were selected for further study, advancing SAYWHAT's knowledge generation mission. The organization also facilitated the documentation of young researchers' lived experiences and findings in a publication titled **"A SADC Regional Perspective by Young People on COVID-19."**

In conclusion, the SARSYC Convener emphasized the need to assess how artificial intelligence can aid research, while cautioning against potential misuse. He also stressed the importance of ongoing partnerships with established media outlets to build credibility for the research undertaken by young people.

Official Book Launch

Following the overview of the Regional Research Indaba, three books with articles researched and written by the researchers with the assistance of seasoned academics were officially launched. These books were a product of SAYWHAT Research Unit's. The books were described as **"a must read as they capture the intellectual capabilities of young people."**

The books were officially launched and signed by the following delegates;

- **Dr Taurai Sengerai-** Chinhoyi University of Technology Dean of Students
- **Mr Sheuneni Kurasha-** Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF)
- **Dr Chilindi Maloiso-** University of Botswana
- **Professor Bontle Mbongwe-** University of Botswana, School of Public Health
- **Mrs Sarafina Mudavanhu**- Harare Institute of Technology Dean of Students
- **Professor Choolwe Muzyamba-** University of Amsterdam, Netherlands
- **Jimmy Wilford-** SARSYC Convener

The following are the titles of the books launched.

A SADC Regional Perspective by Young People on COVID 19.
The book aptly captures the peculiar challenges that young people faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

BREAKING THE CYCLE: Overcoming Drug and Substance Abuse Among Young People in Zimbabwe. The book comprises of 8 articles written by the recruited and dedicated cohort of young people through the Young Peoples Research Programme that tackles the scourge of DSA withing universities.





The 2023 Young Researchers' Cohort also launched a book during the 2023 National Students Conference entitled **Empowering Young Voices: Unveiling the hidden realities of young people in Zimbabwe.** This book captures various thematic issues around drug and substance abuse and mental health. It was also signed during this event.



Students and Young People Research Abstract Presentations and Discussions

This session was led by young researchers who shared their research findings to the conference delegates. The delegates included academics, public health experts, fellow students and other development partners.

The following are presentations made by young people;

1 **An Exploration of the phenomenon of children in conflict with the law in Highfield, Harare Zimbabwe**- Isheanotida Makosa, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe.

The study sought to;

- **To understand the socio-economic factors contributing to unlawful behaviour amongst children in Highfield**
- **To examine the nature of offences committed by children in Highfield**
- **Establish the rehabilitation support services available for children in conflict with the law**

2 **Creative storytelling as a tool to foster patient engagement and drive quality improvement in neonatal care: experiences from Kamuzu Central Hospital (Malawi) and Chinhoyi Provincial Hospital (Zimbabwe)-** Lekodi Magombo, Global Health Informatics, Malawi

The researcher presented a collaborative project involving 14 authors from Malawi and Zimbabwe. The work was triggered by a lack of sensitivity to the sociocultural beliefs of mothers and caregivers in clinical settings within low- and middle-income countries.

To address this, a participatory community engagement project was undertaken with Neotree, a digital quality improvement platform that supports healthcare professionals. The project is currently being implemented in three hospitals - one in Malawi and two in Zimbabwe.

3 **Exploring the Impact of Testing Positive for Tuberculosis (TB) on Young Peoples social and family Life-** Alexa Sumbureru, Harare Institute of Technology, Zimbabwe.

The research study was inspired by the lack of data on the impact of TB on young people's social and family life, as existing research has been heavily focused on biological and quantitative clinical aspects. The study aimed to investigate the impact of TB on young people, particularly in terms of:

- **Relationships, social networks, and family dynamics**
- **Stigma and isolation**
- **Disruption to education, social activities, and employment**

4 **Unhealthy Habits in Youths and the rise of non-communicable diseases in Gaborone, Botswana-** Moipene Selepe, University of Botswana.

Non-communicable diseases such as heart attacks, strokes, and diabetes are a leading cause of death globally and have been typically associated with older adults. However, there has been a shift in this trend as they are becoming more prevalent in young people, hence it triggered the undertaking of this research.

Unhealthy habits formed in young people significantly increase the risk of chronic diseases in the future, hence the study sought to investigate how social and environmental factors influence the adoption and maintenance of unhealthy habits amongst young people aged 15-35 years. The study aimed at exploring participants' perceptions on risks associated with unhealthy habits through the qualitative research methodology at the University of Botswana. The researcher gathered data through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and online platforms, and analysed it through thematic analysis.

The Findings

- **Financial constraints restricted the access of young people to healthy food choices, as fast foods were readily available and affordable around campus.**
- **A lack of knowledge on the best nutrition and awareness militated against young people in making informed dietary decisions and understanding the health risks associated with unhealthy behaviours, as exemplified by the sale of "amagwinya," a fried dough bread.**

Due to these unhealthy habits

- **Obesity becomes inevitable as young people experience weight gain, and feeling conscious about these changes, they struggle to manage their weight.**
-
- **There is an increase in chronic heart diseases due to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.**
-
- **In conclusion, the study recommended a multi-faceted approach to address the social and environmental factors, focusing on empowering young people and creating supportive environments for healthy lifestyles. This should be complemented by public health initiatives like educational programs, awareness campaigns, and increased access to affordable healthy foods.**

5

Design and Development of an Intelligent Performance Analytics System: Advancing Precision Education for Enhanced Learning Outcomes in Zimbabwe- Craig Chadiwa, Zimbabwe Centre for High-Performance Computing, University of Zimbabwe.

> "The creation of simple technological tools and advancements can have far-reaching positive effects. These small, intentional strides ensure that Africa can continuously develop for the better. This is demonstrated in Kenya, where simple technologies are changing lives for the better," said
>
> **Professor Choolwe Muzyamba**

The provision of education services in Zimbabwe is marred by a plethora of challenges particularly in areas with high student to teacher ratios. Conventional ways of relying on human monitoring i.e., the teacher being the facilitator oftentimes fail to accurately identify students' areas of improvement. This research sought to address these attendant challenges with the development of **"Tech4Education"**. It is a digital platform designed by three students from the Centre of High-Performance Computing that integrates Generative Artificial Intelligence and Learning Analytics to automate student performance monitoring and provide personalized data. The research used qualitative methodology to identify key areas of need within the education sector drawing from the National Development Strategy 1, reports from the Ministry of Education and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

The system development took over one year and it aims to solve the following challenges in education;

- **High student ratios**
- **Generalized learning approaches**
- **Lack of comprehensive information management system which weakens the foundation for evidence-based policy making.**

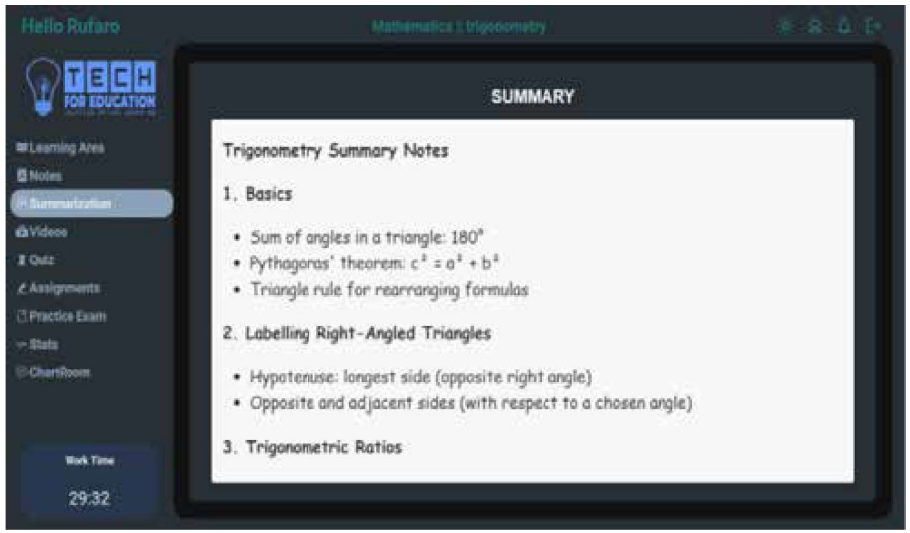
In developing the system architecture i.e., how it is designed including its components and interactions, the researchers used pre-existing components chosen for their individual strengths and these include;

- **The JavaScript frontend was selected for its speed and ability to create visually appealing and appealing interactive designs that are essential for user engagement.**
- **A Django server was chosen for its scalability and integration with Python's machine-learning libraries.**
- **Learning Analytics were used to assess and analyse student statistics which would be used to fine-tune Generative Artificial Intelligence models to create personalized educational content**

The following were the results from the research

- **Improved teacher efficiency through automated performance monitoring and the system generates personalized educational content to individual student needs.**
- **The system automatically learns the requirements of the student based on his performance and produces relevant content through analysis of engagement metrics and statistics.**
- **Insights drawn from collected data may be to develop and implement targeted strategies and in guiding evidence-based policy making.**

Below is an excerpt of the results that the digital platform generates;



In conclusion, the research indicates that generative AI holds promise for enhancing access to quality education through personalized content. But realizing this potential will require both expanding the research to diverse school contexts and prioritizing comprehensive training for teachers on the use of the digital platform. This multi-pronged approach is necessary to maximize the impact of this technological innovation in education.

Panel Discussion

Navigating Contemporary Challenges in Southern Africa- A Research Perspective.

"What makes sense and works in London may not work in Malawi due to contextual variables" Professor Muzyamba

The panel discussion was composed of Professors Choolwe Muzyamba and Bontle Mbongwe flanked by Naledi Raisibe Mphahlele, a student and climate change activist at the University of Pretoria and Cosmas Ngoma, a student and innovator at Copperbelt University in Zambia who developed a self-care toolkit for Zimbabwe and Zambia for young people. The discussion sought to unpack on how research driven innovations and solutions may be leveraged on to address contemporary youths' challenges and advancing education and maternal health while ensuring its sustainability. The following were contributions made during the discussion;

- **Dr. Muzyamba believed that research should provide results that address the needs of young people and Africa, particularly in knowledge creation, rather than focusing on idealistic policies initiated by overseas researchers.**
- **African young people must research African problems, and they need to be empowered to be innovative in order to drive lasting, impactful change, which occurs incrementally rather than instantaneously. For instance, Prof. Muzyamba cited the ease of transportation for pregnant mothers in rural areas to nearby health facilities as a small but meaningful innovation.**
- **Cosmas Ngoma, a young researcher and innovator, emphasized the need to publicize the challenges faced by young people and ensure their meaningful involvement in policymaking, as this provides a vantage point for them to address the contemporary challenges they endure.**
- **Regarding the goals of ICPD30, Professor Mbongwe stated that research identifies the specific needs of young people. Non-communicable diseases and mental health affect everyone, and specific research leads to tailored interventions for young people, which is key to aligning with the ICPD30 objectives.**
- **As a public health expert, Prof. Mbongwe underlined that health service delivery should be youth-centric, where young people serve other young people, as this peer-to-peer interaction creates a friendly, safe space that promotes positive health-seeking behavior among young people.**
- **Naledi, a student activist of human rights and climate change, emphasized that research opportunities should be accessible, and the information relayed from research findings must be relevant to young people. In this regard, young people should collaborate and undertake research that is relevant and specific to their environment.**
- **Regarding innovative solutions for advancing maternal health, Prof. Mbongwe suggested that research generates information for targeted interventions. A multi-sectoral approach is essential to ensure that innovations reach marginalized areas and those with disabilities. Telemedicine and storytelling were cited as examples of transformative tools.**

The panel discussion concluded with the encouragement for further research and innovations from young people that address African problems while fostering inclusivity and accessibility. Collaborations were argued to be critical in spearheading change and drawing lessons from each other within the SADC region.

Closing Remarks

As the Regional Research Indaba ended, Dorcas Chikorova, the Head of Programs at SAYWHAT, applauded the young people who had shared their research abstracts during the event. She acknowledged that some individuals can be evasive and unexcited about research. However, Chikorova expressed optimism, noting that the current generation of young people is embracing research, which she deemed a positive step towards ensuring sustainable development. Mrs Chikorova emphasized that for SAYWHAT, research remains a critical component that contributes to knowledge-based advocacy. The organization is committed to strengthening research initiatives and continuously engage with the academic community to leverage their expertise. She further noted that such collaborations are essential to ensure meaningful change in the lives of young people through evidence-based interventions that directly address their needs.



The Web for Life Symposium

WebForLife is a young women's movement that was created to amplify the voices of young women in advocacy on various health and wellbeing issues that affect girls and young women. The movement started in Zimbabwe and expanded into the region for inter-country collaborations in dealing with the challenges that young women

Symposium Delegates

The symposium was attended by the following delegates

- **Students and young people from the region**
- **Representatives of youth movements**
- **Civil society actors**
- **Representatives from regional and global bodies like ICASA**
- **Feminists**

Symposium Proceedings

Who are we, where are we coming from and where are we going?

This session was led by Esinath Sibanda Programs Officer from SAYWHAT Zimbabwe. She noted that WebForLife was created as a platform to amplify the voices of young women in advocacy on various health and wellbeing issues. She added that the movement started in Zimbabwe, driven by the need to address specific challenges faced by young women in the region.

Sibanda highlighted that the WebForLife has successfully expanded beyond Zimbabwe, fostering inter-country collaborations to tackle shared challenges and the movement now includes a network of young women across several countries, working together to drive change.

Core Objectives

- **To advocate for policies and programs that address the health and wellbeing needs of young women.**
- **To empower young women through capacity building and leadership development initiatives.**
- **To create a supportive community where young women can share experiences, resources, and strategies.**

In terms of the future directions and goals, the program officer indicated that they ate exploring to separate Web 4 Life from SAYWHAT even though this initiative is a brainchild of SAYWHAT. She further noted that the network seeks to continue its expansion to include more young women from different regions and strengthening partnerships with other organizations, governments, and stakeholders to enhance the impact of their advocacy efforts

Catching up with the girls-What are the current issues?

In this session, representatives from various countries highlighted the major problems facing young women in their regions. The session highlighted the diverse and pressing challenges faced by young women across different countries, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions and collaborative efforts to address these issues effectively. Here are the key issues raised:

Gender-Based Violence: Across all countries, there is a high prevalence of gender-based violence, with South Africa experiencing the highest rates. Activism has empowered young women and girls, giving them a voice, which has, in turn, threatened some men who feel the need to reaffirm their power through violence. While most colleges and universities have progressively formulated sexual harassment policies, the implementation of the policies remains weak with majority of students not even aware that of the existence of such policies and the reporting mechanisms in the tertiary institutions.
Mental Health Challenges: Mental health issues such as Premenstrual Disorder and depression are common, leading to increased drug and substance misuse as a coping mechanism.
Teenage Pregnancies and Child Marriages: High rates of teenage pregnancies and child marriages are a significant concern. Abigail Miranzi from Zimbabwe shared details about their "Not in My Village" campaign, launched in Mashonaland Central. This initiative involves traditional leaders imposing punishments and fines on perpetrators to prevent these practices.
Sex Work and Child Exploitation: In Angola, there are high levels of sex work and child exploitation, especially in Chinese mining areas.
Lack of Access to Feminine Products: There is a widespread lack of access to essential feminine products like sanitary wear.
Sexual Exploitation: Sexual exploitation remains a pervasive issue. Alarmingly, women are increasingly becoming perpetrators, with authors romanticizing and profiting from these exploitative narratives.
Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services: In Zambia, access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services is limited, primarily due to the distance to health facilities. Additionally, the high rate of backyard abortions is a major issue since the country's restrictive abortion laws require approval from three doctors, a challenging requirement in areas with few medical professionals.

Proposed Solutions

Informed by the above stated challenges, the young women came up with suggestions on how these could be effectively addressed within the varying contexts of the region. Some of the key resolutions established were as follows:

Safeguarding Programs in Higher and Tertiary Institutions: The young women advocated for stakeholders to partner with universities to increase support for programs to promote safeguarding against sexual harassment and gender-based violence in higher and tertiary institutions. These programs must include clear accountability measures to ensure a safe and supportive environment for all students.

Male Engagement in Advocacy: There is a need for increased male engagement in the advocacy space for women. By involving men in these efforts, they can better understand the experiences and feelings of women, fostering a more supportive and empathetic environment.
Youth Involvement in Policy and Decision Making: The young women made an emphasis on the need for young people to be involved in key decision-making processes and policy formulation work. They noted that their perspectives and insights are crucial for creating policies that accurately reflect their needs and challenges.

Affordable Mental Health Services: The young women called for stakeholders to Immediately establish a clear roadmap to address drug abuse as an urgent public health and socio-economic challenge that calls for a multi-sectoral and inter-disciplinary measures for it to be addressed. Further, there is need for the provision of affordable mental health services tailored to meet the needs of young people. These services should be accessible and designed to address the specific mental health challenges faced by youth.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Schools need to provide comprehensive sexuality education. This will equip young people with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. The young women acknowledged the work that has been done so far by partners like UNESCO to ensure that CSE is mainstreamed in the education system, but highlighted a concern that the continuity of implementation of that approach has not been standardized across all schools.

Parent-to-Child Communication and Youth-Friendly Centers: The young women bemoaned the lack of parental involvement on youth SRH issues. They noted that communities should be sensitized on the importance of effective parent-to-child communication. This can help bridge gaps in understanding and support, particularly on issues related to health and wellbeing. To further strengthen this community level interventions, the young women indicated that advocacy is needed to establish more youth-friendly centers, especially in marginalized areas. These centers should provide Inclusive access to services and resources, promoting both equity and equality.

Youth Friendly Service Provision Training for Healthcare Providers: The young women expressed dissatisfaction towards the quality-of-service provision being given to young people. They shared concerns about the attitudes of some of the health care service providers especially in public health care facilities. They recommended that Healthcare providers should be trained to improve their attitudes towards clients, and this can help reduce stigma and discrimination, making healthcare services more accessible and welcoming for all.

Legislative Measures for Government Accountability and Decentralization of Investigative Procedures: WebforLife delegates noted that adopting legislative measures to hold the government accountable is essential. This ensures that policies and programs are implemented effectively and that the rights of young people are protected. Further, procedures for investigative committee councils need to be decentralized. This can improve access to justice and ensure that investigations are conducted efficiently and fairly.

Motivational Talk-Dean Sarafina Mudavanhu –Harare Institute of Technology

Dean Sarafina Mudavanhu from the Harare Institute of Technology delivered an inspiring motivational talk to the young ladies present. She encouraged them to strive towards becoming respected individuals within their communities. She outlined what can be termed an empowerment Blueprint, highlighting seven key pillars for ambitious young women. These can be summarized as follows:

Money Has No Gender: Dean Mudavanhu emphasized that financial success is not limited by gender. She encouraged the young women to pursue their financial goals with determination and confidence, breaking away from traditional gender roles that might limit their potential.



Step into the Field, Not the Bed: She advised the ladies to focus on their careers and professional growth rather than relying on relationships for financial stability or success. This message was aimed at empowering them to seek independence and self-reliance.

Trade Your Brand, Not Your Private Part: Dean Mudavanhu stressed the importance of building a personal brand based on skills, talents, and professional achievements. She urged the young women to avoid compromising their integrity and self-worth for short-term gains or societal pressures.

The Instrument of Money-Making Is Under the Hat, Not the Skirt: Highlighting the value of intelligence and hard work, she encouraged the ladies to utilize their brains and skills as the primary tools for making money. This lesson underscored the importance of education, innovation, and perseverance in achieving financial success.

Never Pray to Marry a Rich Man but to Become the Rich Girl: Dean Mudavanhu inspired the young women to aspire to be wealthy and successful, rather than depending on a partner's wealth. This lesson was about fostering a sense of ambition and self-empowerment.

Never Trade Your Relationship with God for Anyone: She reminded the ladies to hold on to their spiritual beliefs and values, regardless of external influences or relationships. Maintaining a strong moral and ethical foundation was emphasized as crucial for personal and professional integrity.

The Internet Never Forgets: Dean Mudavanhu warned about the permanence of online activities, advising the young women to be mindful of their digital footprints. She stressed the importance of using social media responsibly and the potential long-term consequences of their online actions on future opportunities.

Conclusion

The [illegible] and sessions held during the SARSYC WebForLife Symposium provided invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by young women across the region. From addressing the high prevalence of gender-based violence and mental health issues to advocating for comprehensive sexuality education and improved access to essential services, a multifaceted approach is needed to support and empower young women effectively. The sessions highlighted the importance of involving young people in policymaking, the need for comprehensive education and resources, and the crucial role of male engagement in advocacy efforts.



Mugota/Ixhiba Young Men's Forum

Mugota complements the work and discussions in conference thematic areas by bringing out the young men's perspectives, who also represent an often-neglected group in the discourse to address challenges that affect young people.

Role of Mugota Symposium in the SARSYC Movement

The name Mugota is borrowed from the Traditional Shona Culture in Zimbabwe, which defines a male only gathering where they come together to dialogue on critical men's issues. In the typical traditional set up, Mugota is the space where elders teach the young boys about being responsible to their families and the society. It is also a space for candid talk in which men challenge each other and encourage accountability. This concept was adopted in the modern world to provide a platform for young men to be on their own and reflect on their own issues in the typical traditional men to men gathering of honour, education and power dialogues.

With this background, the contemporary Mugota, as designed by SAYWHAT, represents a space for young men to reflect on the various socio-cultural aspects, belief systems and norms that expose them to various sexual and reproductive health challenges. It enables young men to challenge themselves to be enablers of social transformation as they reflect on negative masculinity aspects and other gendered norms that perpetuate inequality in the society and expose the young men to various SRH challenges.

Purposes of Mugota

- **Provide a safe and inclusive space for young men to critically examine and challenge prevailing socio-cultural norms, beliefs, and practices that contribute to gender inequality and expose them to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) challenges.**

- **Facilitate discussions and reflections among young men on the concept of "negative masculinity" and how it perpetuates harmful gender-based norms within the society, with the aim of transforming these mindsets and behaviors.**

- **Empower young men to become active agents of social change by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to challenge and reshape restrictive gender roles and norms that impact their own SRH and that of their communities.**

- **Serve as a platform for young men to explore and redefine positive masculinity traits, such as compassion, respect, and responsibility, that can contribute to more equitable and inclusive gender dynamics within the region.**

- **Collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including healthcare providers, policymakers, and women's rights organizations, to develop and implement evidence-based interventions that address the specific SRH needs, and challenges faced by young men in the region.**

Key Highlights Of The Deliberations

The man in the mirror: Who are we, where are we coming from and where are we going? – Charlton Mapfaka (Mugota Coordinator)

This session was facilitated by Charlton Mapfaka, the Mugota Coordinator. He emphasized the importance of self-reflection, empowerment, and collective action among young men in Southern Africa. The speech highlighted the significance of the MUGOTA initiative, established by SAYWHAT, as a culturally resonant space for young men to discuss their health, well-being, and conceptions of masculinity without judgment.

Key Points From The Speech

- **The coordinator noted that the initiative has grown from a local program in Zimbabwe to a regional movement, with successful implementations in South Africa, Zambia, and Malawi.**

- **He noted that this evolution and growth is testament to young men's readiness to address challenges that the young men confront and emphasized that the platform is a space to advocate; it represents the voice of vulnerable groups and engage with regional policies.**

Objectives for the Mugota Movement

The coordinator noted the objectives of Mugota as:

- **Establishing a secure forum for young men to freely express themselves, reflect on their lives, and share knowledge, opinions, and experiences.**

- **Strengthening the MUGOTA movement by providing networking opportunities, forming alliances, and promoting intercultural interactions between young men and CSOs.**

- **Protecting male youths' rights and well-being by enhancing their ability to impact local and national decision-making processes.**

Vision for MUGOTA's future, including expansion into a leading platform for men's health and wellness, with:

- **Online resources and community engagement to support members across the region.**

- **Webinars, conferences, and partnerships with health organizations to promote men's health awareness.**

- **Mentorship programs and physical centers or meetups to create safe spaces for connection and learning.**

The coordinator concluded by emphasizing the need for young men to:

- **Prioritize their well-being,**

- **Foster a culture of openness and support,**

- **Contribute to research and innovation in men's health awareness.**

The speech underscored the significance of the MUGOTA movement in empowering young men to take responsibility for their health, well-being, and roles in society, and its potential to drive positive change in the region and beyond. The speech was well-received by the audience, comprising young men from various Southern African countries, who showed enthusiasm for the MUGOTA movement's vision and objectives.

Catching Up Men to Men: Addressing the Challenges Faced by Young Men in Southern Africa

This was done in the form of a panel discussion and the panellists were:

1. University of Namibia
2. Emmanuel John Kachakwale (Copperose)
3. Chrispin Kapepula (Zambia)
4. Godwill Zulu (Zimbabwe)
5. Madikwa Marule (South Africa)
6. Charm Mavimbela (Botswana)
7. Desmond Lunga (MBGE Botswana)

From this panel discussion, below are the major issues which were presented by the panellists:

- **Cultural Barriers to Healthcare:** Young men in Southern Africa often avoid seeking health services due to cultural beliefs that equate masculinity with strength and invincibility. This mindset must be challenged to encourage men to prioritize their health.

- **Fear of Vulnerability:** Men may hesitate to seek health services due to fear of discovering underlying health issues, which can lead to mental health challenges. This fear stems from societal expectations that men should be strong and stoic.

- **Socialization and Upbringing:** The way boys are socialized from a young age contributes to these challenges. Society often discourages men from expressing emotions or seeking help, perpetuating harmful gender stereotypes.

  masculinity can lead to mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. Men must be encouraged to express emotions and seek help without fear of judgment.

- **Responsibility and Respect:** Men must take responsibility for their actions and treat others with respect, particularly women. This includes recognizing the impact of their actions on others and creating a safe and supportive environment.

- **Addressing Ignorance and Unwillingness to Listen:** The panel emphasized the need to address the alarming rate of ignorance and unwillingness to listen, which has devastating consequences. Men must be willing to listen, learn, and act.

- **Leading by Example:** Men must lead by example, demonstrating approachability, empathy, and understanding. This includes being open to feedback and willing to change their negative behaviors.

- **Education and Awareness:** Promoting education and awareness on sexual and reproductive health is crucial for creating a more inclusive and supportive community. Men must be encouraged to take an active role in promoting gender equality and challenging harmful gender stereotypes.

By addressing these challenges and promoting positive change, young men in Southern Africa can create a safer and more supportive, healthy environment for themselves and everyone.

Motivational Talk – Luc Armand Bodea - ICASA Director

Luc Armand Bodea, the Director of the International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa (ICASA), delivered a rousing address to young men at the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference (SARSYC) Mugota Symposium. In his remarks, Bodea commended the participating youth, recognizing them as the driving force behind Africa's development.



He emphasized that the agenda to eliminate HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) would be unachievable without the involvement of young people, who constitute most delegates at ICASA conferences. He highlighted that the youth of today have access to a wealth of tools and information to protect themselves, such as PrEP, PEP, and condoms, and urged them to leverage on these resources to access essential sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services and commodities.

As a testament to ICASA's commitment to youth engagement, Bodea announced that the organization will be offering special registration incentives for young people to participate as delegates in the upcoming 2025 ICASA conference. He revealed that the host country for the next conference is yet to be determined, with Ghana and South Africa currently being assessed as potential venues.

Mr Bodea commended SAYWHAT, the organizers of SARSYC, for providing a platform that empowers young people to share knowledge and solutions to address pressing health, education, and emerging issues, such as climate change. He expressed his desire to see SAYWHAT host the conference at a Pan-African level soon, bringing together youth from across the continent to address the multifaceted challenges they face.

In closing, Mr Bodea urged the young men in attendance to embrace their responsibility as change-makers. He encouraged them to consistently use condoms, seek SRHR services when needed, and be proud of their role in driving local solutions to contemporary problems. He emphasized that it is the African youth who hold the power to rewrite the narrative, and challenged them to be innovative, research-driven, and committed to creating lasting, community-based change.

Young Africa Programme – Jephiter Tsamwi

Young Africa International, represented by their Communications Officer, Mr Jephiter Tsamwi, shared a presentation that highlighted the economic opportunities for young men and young entrepreneurs. Jephiter Tsamwi highlighted that Young Africa (YA) aims to collaborate with young Africans to provide training and skills development, enabling them to become entrepreneurs and job creators. He noted that the YA program`s goal is to empower 500,000 young people in Africa by 2025 with skills and knowledge through:

- **Expansion capacities for the centres**
- **Expansion of mobile training services**
- **Extensively sharing of the YA model**

He invited entrepreneurs to partner with the organisation by adopting the organisation's model through the Franchise approach which has been developed by the organisation in the quest to share its evidence-based models to empower youths.

Why become a Young Africa Partner

Mr Tsamwi highlighted that by being a partner of Young Africa, young entrepreneurs and youth organisations have a strategic opportunity to be change makers within their communities. He highlighted that:

- The YA model targets the society's periphery including those that have been rejected by the society
- Every young person has the capacity to be productive. All they need is a skill and YA has invested in perfecting the approaches to be sustainable and holistically empowering
- Collaboration with young African entrepreneurs for skills development and job creation will help address other health related challenges that the youths in the region confront today, including risky sexual behaviours
- The YA model has yielded many success stories with examples of drug addicts who enrolled with YA and became successful business owners.
- The model is mostly critical in developing young Africans to have the skills to be employable and create employment opportunities for fellow young people.

Mr Tsamwi concluded by announcing that the organisation has now developed a digital platform that will enable young people to train in a skill of their choice in the comfort of their homes. He noted that the platform will be launched in 2024 and encouraged the delegates to follow the Young Africa Digital Platforms for more updates on this.

Powering Post SARSYC Conference Action

The young men at the SARSYC V ended their symposium with an 8-point plan to address challenges they face as well as to advance the mission of the platform.

Commitments

- **Intergenerational Knowledge Sharing:** The men's movement committed to learn from other successful social movements, such as the feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements, to adopt effective strategies and tactics for advocacy and stakeholder engagement.
- **Male-Friendly Service Provision:** Committed to establish peer-to-peer dialogues to increase health seeking behaviour among men.
- **Self-Care Promotion:** Committed to prioritize self-care by taking ownership of their health, practicing healthy habits, and sharing their challenges with someone to avoid suicidal thoughts.
- **Cultural Transformation:** Committed to challenge negative socio-cultural belief systems that perpetuate inequality and help to shape a positive culture in Southern Africa by promoting positive masculinity, challenging harmful norms, and embracing inclusive values.

Advocacy

- **Promoting Economic Empowerment Opportunities:** The young men advocated for the development of economic empowerment initiatives that provide them with access to skills training and development, entrepreneurship support, and job opportunities. These may help address the intersection of SRHR and empower young men to become self-sufficient and positively contribute to their communities.

- **Decentralized Health Services:** The need to bring health services closer to young men by decentralizing them to community levels, ensuring ease of accessibility and convenience.

- **Research:** The need for more support towards research on men's health and well-being, including the impact of societal expectations and cultural norms, to inform evidence-based advocacy and programming.

Addressing the Intersection of SRHR, Education, and Climate Change: The young men advocated for integrating SRHR, education, and climate change mitigation strategies, recognizing the interconnected nature of these issues. This includes the need for curriculum reforms that incorporate comprehensive SRHR education and climate change awareness, as well as advocating for community-based solutions that address the impact of climate change on SRHR and education outcomes.

Conclusion

The Mugota Symposium served as a valuable component of the SARSYC conference, providing a platform for young men's voices to be heard and their perspectives to be integrated into the larger discourse on advancing equitable access to public health and education. The insights and action plans that emerged from the symposium contributed to the SARSYC movement's goals of promoting the health and wellbeing of young people in the Southern African region. The discussions also influenced the key resolutions that were compiled into the broader SARSYC Gaborone Declaration which was handed over to H.E Ms Boemo M. SEKGOMA, the Secretary General of the SADC Parliamentary Forum.





Reflection Action Meeting 1: Emerging Issues in Public Health

The track session, led by Munashe Tofa, a dedicated SADC PF SRHR Researcher, delved into the crucial intersection of SRHR with emerging public health challenges, notably climate change. Drawing on insights from the Guttmacher Institute, Tofa underscored the profound impact of existing gaps in SRHR, which disproportionately affect individuals and communities globally. He highlighted the scarcity of evidence on the connections between sexual reproductive health and climate change, stressing the urgent need for strategies addressing its indirect effects on youth health.

Tofa identified several critical challenges posed by climate change:

- **Severe strains on healthcare systems during natural disasters, often side-lining SRHR priorities.**
- **Increased vulnerability of communities, particularly adolescent girls and young women.**
- **Forced displacements leading to mental health crises exacerbated by limited access to SRH services and products.**

In response, he advocated for regional and national action plans that prioritize good governance to bridge the gap between poverty and prosperity. Tofa proposed enhancing education and awareness campaigns to educate communities about the adverse effects of climate change. He also emphasized the importance of committing adequate financial resources, reinforced by effective legislation and evidence-based policies, to improve the welfare of those affected.

In conclusion, Tofa called for collaborative efforts across sectors to mitigate the impacts of climate change on SRHR, ensuring inclusive and sustainable solutions that safeguard the health and rights of young people in the SADC region.

Strategies for Youth Success in Public Health

Tofa presented the **"YES WE CAN"** framework, outlining essential strategies for youth success in public health:

1. **Y** -Youth
2. **E** - Empowerment
3. **S** -Sustainability
4. **W** -Willingness
5. **E** -Engagement
6. **C** -Collaboration
7. **A** - Advocacy
8. **N** – Networking

> Young people should take ownership and responsibility for their rights and refrain from unnecessary complaints without playing their part.
>
> **Munashe Tofa, SADC PF researcher**

Questions	Responses
• **Governments lack the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies; therefore, how can young people meaningfully advocate and hold the governing authorities accountable?**	• **Young people should leverage on constitutional provisions and acquaint themselves with the legal parameters of holding duty bearers to account. For instance, in Zimbabwe, sections 116 and 147 provide for the right to participation and the right to petition the parliament. Familiarity with these will ensure young people's advocacy efforts are fruitful.**
• **Considering the youth are the largest demographic in the population, what are they doing in their respective countries to advance their rights, and do they also exercise their right to vote?**	• **There is high voter apathy amongst youths across Africa, hence there is need for encouraging young people to participate in national processes.**
• **How can young people strike a balance between advocacy efforts and maintaining rapport with government officials and other stakeholders?**	• **Advocacy work is not confrontational, it is about being strategic and persistent. Young people should strive to build relations with duty bearers and appreciate that negotiations and collaborations ensure that young people achieve their goals.**

In the discussion, participants also raised concerns about voter apathy in the region. It was noted that voter apathy may hinder young people to influence and shape the future they desire. The electoral processes provide a platform for young people to actively engage in policy formulation and implementation. It was also essential for young people to understand that advocacy is hinged on negotiations to ensure a mutually desired outcome rather than perpetuating confrontations. The comprehension of legislative provisions ensures young people hold the government accountable.

Reflecting on this discussion, the delegates in this meeting expressed their commitment to actively participate in national and regional processes, including voting and petitioning governments to ensure that their voices are heard. They also called upon the duty bearers to immediately establish a clear roadmap to address drug abuse as an urgent public health and socio-economic challenge affecting communities.

Engaging the youth in climate action: interrogating the role of young people in climate action on campus

The track session was composed of technical and vocational teachers' colleges and university students drawn from Namibia and Zimbabwe. It primarily focused on the central role of young people in climate action on campus. The significance of young people in climate action was emphasized, highlighting their potential to drive change as the largest demographic proportion of population in Africa making their collective voice a powerful force for climate action. With their numbers, they can demand attention from policymakers and leaders, pushing for urgent action to address the climate crisis.

It was further highlighted that young people be disproportionately affected by climate change, making their involvement in climate action essential. Thus, the innovation and creativity of young people strategically position them to effect positive change in societies. They bring fresh perspectives, new ideas, and a willingness to challenge the status quo, making them well-suited to develop innovative solutions to the climate crisis. The young people in this meeting committed to leverage on social media and other platforms to raise awareness, advocate for change, and mobilize our peers to engage in climate action and SRHR initiatives. They further committed to leverage on the existing AI revolution to develop sustainable solutions that address the fundamental issues affecting young people.

Climate Financing

The moderator inquired on funding prospects for climate action on university campuses. The panellists concurred that securing funding is challenging but recommended that:

- **Collaborations between climate activists and CSOs working on climate action to unlock funds. Through joint efforts, they can pool resources, share expertise, and amplify their impact, making them more attractive to funders.**

- **Leveraging on social media to advocate for climate action and raise awareness on climate change i.e., its causes, and impact on communities. Social media platforms provide a powerful tool for young people to mobilize support, share information, and build a movement for climate action.**

Artificial Intelligence: Preparedness and significance to public health and education in SADC

The session explored the opportunities and challenges presented by Artificial Intelligence (AI) in public health and education in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. It was composed of innovative youth leaders in the digital and technological space. The following were their insights;

- **Asonele Rachel Kotu shared a personal experience using AI to self-diagnose and treat an illness, highlighting AI's potential in healthcare. She demonstrated how AI can provide access to medical information, enable remote diagnosis, and support personalized treatment plans.**

- **Stephane Sam Masikini discussed AI's role in addressing climate-induced challenges, such as developing software to map affected areas during floods in Malawi. He showed how AI can help predict and prepare for extreme weather events, reducing the impact on communities.**

- **However, Masikini cautioned that AI is not 100% accurate and should not be relied upon for self-diagnosis and treatment. He emphasized the need for human oversight, validation, and interpretation of AI-generated results to ensure accuracy and effectiveness.**

Reality On The Ground: Identifying Challenges And Solutions For Drug And Substance Abuse Among Young People

The track session sought to proffer recommendations to the incessant spike of drug and substance abuse challenges plaguing young people in the region. The panellists were representatives of youths' social movements that seek the empowerment of young people i.e., Politics4her Africa, YETT/ZINASU and the University of Eswatini.
Katso Lizarene Ramodia outlined the challenges brought about by substance abuse to young people and proffered attendant solutions as follows:

- **Lack of employment opportunities, mental health challenges, and peer pressure as primary causes of drug and substance abuse. She emphasized that these factors exacerbate feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, and desires of escapism through substance use.**

- **She underscored the need for comprehensive solutions addressing these underlying factors, including job creation and skills training programs to provide young people with economic opportunities and a sense of purpose.**

- **These would be complemented by mental health support services such as counselling and therapy sessions, to help young people cope stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges.**

- **Peer support groups and community-based initiatives are also essential in providing young people with social support and a sense of belonging.**

Emmanuel Sitima emphasized the critical necessity to enhance the development and execution of policies and strategies concerning drug use. He emphasized the subsequent essential recommendations.:

- **Inclusion of CSOs and young people in the policy formulation and review process ensures diverse perspectives are considered, and policies are more effective and responsive to the needs of young people.**

- **Prioritizing Mitigative Interventions:** Sitima emphasized the need to prioritize mitigative interventions over responsive interventions. This means focusing on preventing drug and substance abuse before it occurs, rather than only responding to it after it has become a problem.

- **Building Affordable Rehabilitation Centres:** Sitima stressed the need for affordable rehabilitation centres that provide accessible and effective treatment options for young people struggling with drug and substance abuse. This includes ensuring that rehabilitation centres are geographically accessible, financially affordable, and culturally sensitive to the needs of young people.

Delegates also called for Investment in research to generate data and evidence that informs effective drug abuse response strategies and priorities. They also called for the authorities to immediately establish a clear roadmap to address drug abuse as an urgent public health and socio-economic challenge affecting young people in the region.

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Reflection Action Meeting 2: Intersecting Quality Education, Gender Equality, and Public Health: Advancing SDG 3, 4 and 5

The thrust of the track session was hinged on exploring the interconnectedness of quality education and how it resonates with gender equality and linked to public health. In this regard, it was guided by the following objectives:

- **To identify challenges and threats to young people equitable access to education in the region**
- **To examine the intersectionality of education, health and gender in the SADC region**
- **To develop advocacy asks and recommendations that informs policymakers and post- conference activities.**

> All southern African countries are not offering free education with the exception of Botswana, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania in spite a of them attaining political and economic independence
>
> **Dr Aaron Chansa, GEAR**

Dr. Aaron Chansa, representing Girls Education in the Region (GEAR), emphasized that the primary challenge facing African countries is not a lack of good policies but rather the failure to implement these policies effectively for the benefit of young people, who constitute a significant demographic in SADC countries. Reflecting on the historical events of 1976, he recalled how young people in South Africa demanded quality education, which led the OAU to declare June 15th as the International Day of Education of the Child. He argued that the existence of GEAR and SARSYC is crucial for advocating for quality education in the region. As an education expert, he summarized his contributions with the following points:

- **SADC member governments should enact and enforce child protection policies that are responsive to the specific needs of children. Public policies and programs must be youth-centric, considering that 60% of Africa's population is composed of young people.**

- **Governments in the Southern Region should allocate at least 20% of their total national budgets to the education sector, as access to education must be recognized as a fundamental human right.**

Dr. Chansa's sentiments were further supported by a plenary discussion, which focused on key requests aimed at tracking progress in accessing education. Some of the key demands from young people are highlighted on the next page Key Asks and recommendations.

In summing up the plenary discussion, panellists outlined the following recommendation as efforts that may advance the accessibility of quality education coupled by enmeshing gender equality with regards to public health.

Recommendations

- **The need for advocacy for Education to remain part of the Pact for the Future as removal of Education from the framework to replace the SDGs would pull back the gains attained so far.**

- **School curriculums should be expansive and incorporate knowledge that allows for critical thinking and skills development.**

- **Remove the tax burdens on all materials used to manufacture sanitary products to ensure sanitary wear is affordable and accessible for the most vulnerable girls.**

- **Support the assimilation of low-cost and disability friendly education technologies into the curriculum and invest in closing accessibility challenges by bridging the digital divide and addressing language barriers.**

- **Support programs to promote safeguarding against sexual harassment and gender-based violence in higher and tertiary institutions, with clear accountability measures**

- **Education facilities must develop and incorporate sexual harassment policies within their curricular to promote a safe learning environment for young people and it is imperative to adopt global and regional ideas that resonate with the current dynamic generation within the SADC region.**

Questions	Responses
• What is the state of access to education in Zimbabwe? • What initiatives have you promoted related to gender equality? • What demographic group is left out in accessing quality education in South Africa? • Is gender a key consideration in Zambia?	• In Zimbabwe there is quality education, however, unemployment is rife amongst young people. There are some young girls who have been to school but cannot read, this it is inconclusive to measure the quality of education by policies being implemented • Rudo Mudzingwa as a young person created an online education platform during the advent of COVID-19 to ensure that dissemination of sexuality education information is not distorted. • In South Africa, education facilities cater to predominantly urban dwellers than those in the rural areas and employment opportunities are heavily skewed in favour of the white minority • In Zambia, gender disparity is not practical as the educational system is inclusive. This has prompted initiatives such as pads donations to learners, however permission is required from governing authorities.







Reflection Action Meeting3: Meeting on TB and HIV

The meeting was convened to raise awareness of the contemporary challenges that young people and communities face regarding TB and HIV. It acknowledged that despite dwindling support for these public health concerns, they remain significant burdens requiring multi-sectoral discussions to find lasting solutions.

The meeting was solution-oriented while highlighting the challenges young people face within the region.

Challenges faced by people living with HIV

- **Lack of economic empowerment through skills training and development.**
- **High unemployment rates, with specific instances such as Botswana, where individuals living with HIV are segregated from joining the civil service, including the army. Draconian policies in Botswana, and similar policies in countries like Canada, deny entry to HIV-positive individuals.**
- **Stigma and discrimination: Tlhalefo Phele, an HIV activist in Botswana, cited that the army restricts employment of individuals with HIV or non-communicable diseases like TB, arguing they must be healthy.**
- **Shortage of condoms: Wankumbu Simukonda, SARSYC Coordinator for Zambia, highlighted a stark shortage of condoms for school-going children, leading to reports of semen found in ice pop plastics by cleaners.**

Panellists concurred that a high level of stigma and discrimination is displayed by healthcare providers towards young people seeking family planning services and emergency contraceptives. The disdain exhibited by service providers was noted as a significant barrier.

Proposed Solutions

- **Young people must take centre stage in changing and reshaping the narrative through evidence-based advocacy for policies and strategies relevant to their needs.**
- **Comprehensive sexuality education should be mandatory, and policies that restrict school-going children from accessing SRH services and products should be repealed as they are unresponsive to the needs of young people.**
- **Create safe spaces where young people can openly and freely engage in conversations about their sexuality.**

Tuberculosis Challenges

TB also significantly impacts young people, posing the following challenges:

- **Migration of TB patients who default on treatment and return seeking medical attention only after developing multi-drug resistant TB, threatening progress in disease management.**
- **Inadequate infrastructural support for young people to engage in the fight against TB.**
- **Cumbersome procurement systems delay acquiring essential medicines for TB management, and the mistreatment of persons with disabilities by healthcare providers hinders efforts to end TB.**

Sinatra Nyathi from the National AIDS Council suggested implementing community-led monitoring systems for TB to minimize its spread and improve management.

- **Take urgent action to close the tap of new HIV infections among young people and key populations through strengthened domestic funding and expansion of comprehensive, youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, including HIV testing, treatment, and prevention commodities such as condoms and PrEP.**
- **Fully implement and allocate adequate resources for the national and regional strategies, frameworks, and commitments related to HIV and TB prevention, care, and treatment.**
- **Expedite procurement processes and budgeting to achieve the goals of ending TB by 2030 by removing cumbersome bureaucratic processes in the procurement and supply of essential TB commodities, including diagnostics, medicines, and other health products.**
- **Increase funding for to procure essential medicines required for TB treatment. This should be complemented by financial discipline, working within predetermined budgets to achieve the goal of ending TB by 2030.**

The session concluded with key inquiries from young people eager to learn more about the progress toward ending TB by 2030 and strategies to educate policymakers and ensure their involvement in the fight against TB.



Reflection Action Meeting 4: ICPD 30

In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development took place. This conference shaped the strategic direction and priorities for global nations to tackle the emerging challenges in as far as population and development are concerned. As we draw closer to 2030, it is critical for stakeholders to reflect on the journey and identify key areas that need to be strengthened to achieve the objectives of this framework.

One of the key sessions in this meeting was a plenary session designed focused on a discussion that tracked progress made by SADC countries in fulfilling their ICPD commitments. A panel discussion titled 'Moving beyond optics: State of meaningful youth involvement in ICPDs was moderated by Brian Mafuso (UNFPA) with the following panelists:

1. **Dianarose Leonce Lyima AFRIYAN Tanzania**
2. **Lilian Wambul Youth Power Hub-Kenya**
3. **Trevor Oyahile SARSYC Regional Coordinator-Botswana**

The panel raised the following key issues that were regarded as a hinderance in fulfilling the goals of ICPD 30 as follows;

- **Lack of Policy Implementation:** Lilian Wambul emphasized that African countries possess good policies but lack effective implementation, underscoring the need to hold policymakers accountable.

- **Patriarchy:** The persistence of patriarchal structures was argued to hinder the full participation of young women in society and high-level engagement meetings, where they are often regarded as second-class citizens.
.
- **Barriers to Information and Education:** Access to information and education, particularly for students in rural areas, remains a significant concern requiring substantial effort.
.
- **Limited Access to Healthcare:** There is a critical need to improve access to healthcare facilities and services.

Key asks from young people

- **How can we hold our leaders accountable when it comes to such matters? Who do we approach?**

- **The state of the world population report has frightening statistics. How best can we ensure that young people get into these spaces for meaningful engagements? (Godwill, Zimbabwe)**

- **A lot of financial investments were made to develop the TuneMe application. This was a positive step since the world is going digital, but the retention numbers of subscribers remain significantly low. Where are we missing it?**

Cognizant of the issues raised regarding meeting the ICPD goals the panelists came up with a set of recommendations.

Recommendations by Panelists

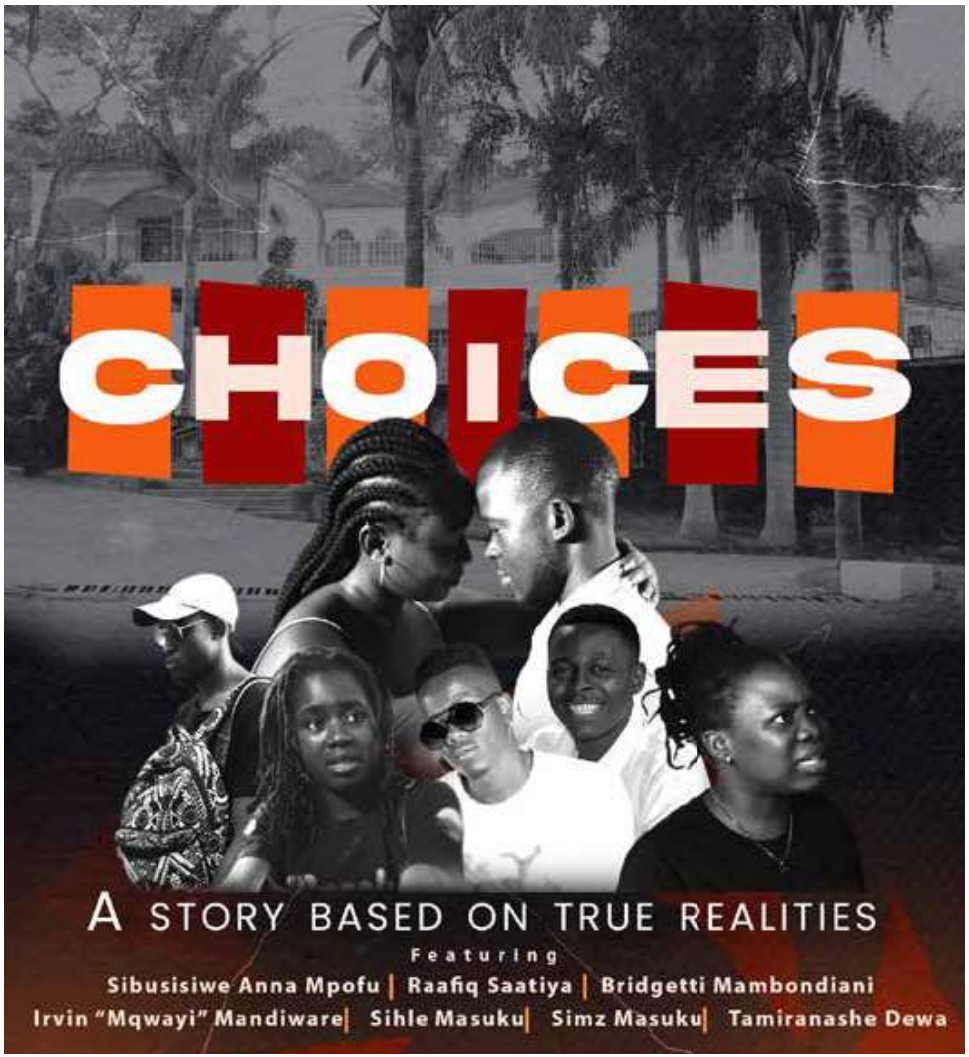
- **Promote meaningful youth engagement and inclusion in decision-making processes and policy formulation. More so, young people should be active in their own spaces to bring about the change they desire with regards to fulfilling ICPD30.**
- **Leverage on emerging technologies, such as AI, to strengthen public health and education systems in the region.**
- **Strengthen the provision of integrated youth friendly services including family planning information and services.**
- **Provide technical and financial support to strengthen youth-led initiatives and organizations working on SRHR, climate change, and innovative technology applications in the region.**
- **Collaborate with national governments and parliaments to create enabling environments for meaningful youth engagement in ICPD review processes and other policy dialogues.**
- **Ensure that policies are implemented through social accountability.**
- **Community engagements with local leaders such as religious leaders as they bear influence within their respective communities.**

Movie Night- Streaming of CHOICES 1

The first day of the conference concluded with a Movie Night event featuring a film produced by SAYWHAT titled Choices. As the SAYWHAT Advocacy and Communications Lead, Isabella Michael, provided a brief background on the Choices movie, she noted that it was the first of its kind. The film was inspired by the COVID-19 pandemic, which showcased the creativity of young people on various social media platforms. This led to the creation of the CRAFT initiative by SAYWHAT, harnessing the creativity of young people from Zimbabwe to develop key messages and solutions addressing the challenges they face.

These talented young people participated in a five-day intensive bootcamp mentorship program led by international artists. At the end of the bootcamp, the young talents were given two days with minimal resources to produce Choices, capturing the struggles of young people in a campus setting and how they navigate relationships. The movie serves as a tool to amplify young people's voices through art. In 2024, SAYWHAT will release the sequel to the first Choices movie.

> The artistic value of the movie is good. It is oftentimes difficult to come up with something creative that engages young people and gets them talking.
>
> **Lekodi Magombo from Global Health Informatics, Malawi.**




DAY 2

Official Opening Ceremony



"Economies are now powered by intellectual capabilities as countries can no longer rely solely on depleting natural resources," stated Dr. David Norris, Vice Chancellor of the University of Botswana.

Dr. Norris officially opened the 5th Edition of SARSYC, acknowledging the various partners who supported SAYWHAT in making this event a reality. He recognized the young people present, emphasizing that they are not only the future but also the present. He viewed the conference as an opportunity to develop innovative solutions to the unique challenges faced by young people, who constitute the largest proportion of the population in the Southern African region.

The conference platform also serves as an avenue to engage with development partners and policymakers. Dr. Norris encouraged young people to actively participate, noting that the discussions directly impact their future. The presence of members of parliament from various countries illustrated a commitment to effecting lasting change for young people. He stressed the importance of prioritizing locally driven research to benefit the region, advocating for inclusivity in driving innovation and promoting research.

Dr. Norris called on government representatives and policymakers to listen to the needs of young people and to facilitate investments in quality education. He emphasized that economies can no longer rely solely on natural resources. He concluded his remarks by challenging youth to contribute to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals agenda and to ensure their discussions foster commitments and meaningful collaborations.

Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges: Navigating the Future of Public Health and Education- Professor Dr Choolwe Muzyamba, University of Amsterdam

"Europe is ageing. Africa will dominate the labour force and shape global conversations as its population is mostly youths who by 2050 will be the largest demographic in the world" Professor Dr Choolwe Muzyamba, University of Amsterdam.

The learned professor spoke passionately about breaking barriers in education and public health, emphasizing that sharing knowledge and fostering collaborations can bridge gaps exacerbated by pandemics that weaken health systems. He lamented the economic hardships faced by African youth, with 72% living on less than $2 USD per day, translating to 72 million young people who are unemployed and lacking skills, yet actively seeking employment.

The professor stressed the urgent need to address socio-economic disparities and political issues, particularly highlighting the marginalization of people with disabilities.



Highlighting the power of unity among youth, the associate professor cited examples such as the RhodesMustFall movement and Kenyan youth demonstrations as catalysts for societal change. He proposed a transformative framework for young people, advocating:

- **Decolonizing thinking by critically analyzing the lingering effects of colonialism and valuing local solutions.**
- **Embracing innovation and leveraging emerging technologies to address societal challenges.**
- **Mobilizing communities to actively participate in solving local issues.**
- **Promoting research that provides insights into youth struggles and encourages meaningful engagement with policymakers.**

To conclude his speech, the professor encouraged young people to embrace incremental change, emphasizing that small steps contribute to broader future advancements. He viewed SARSYC as an opportunity for young leaders to rethink strategies and ignite revolutionary change, amplifying youth voices to shape a more inclusive Africa.

SARSYC Overview and Strategic Direction- Jimmy Wilford

"The concept of being young at heart is a fallacy; young people must not squander the opportunities they currently have. As they get older, they cannot effect meaningful change," Jimmy Wilford, SARSYC convener.

The SARSYC convener reiterated that the platform facilitates knowledge exchange with the overarching goal of bringing experts, policymakers, students, activists, and development partners together to address pertinent SRHR issues facing young people. He underscored the importance of leveraging young people's potential in offering solutions to their development needs on critical issues such as health, education, and climate change. The SAYWHAT ED further emphasized that SARSYC exists to ensure young people reflect on responsible citizenship while studying in various fields.

Mr. Wilford briefly outlined the journey of SARSYC:

- **1st Edition (2015): Hosted in Harare, Zimbabwe, during the International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa (ICASA).**

- **2nd Edition (2017): In partnership with the University of Johannesburg, South Africa.**
- **3rd Edition (2019): In conjunction with the University of Zambia (UNZA), Lusaka, Zambia.**
- **4th Edition (2022): Hosted by Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), Malawi, after the COVID-19 pandemic receded. This edition featured the inaugural regional research indaba, resulting in three published books by SAYWHAT.**
- **5th Edition (2024): Held at the University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana.**

Regarding the strategic direction of SARSYC, he highlighted that there are considerations to host the regional research indaba annually instead of biennially to produce more effective outcomes. He attributed this to the vital role of research in SAYWHAT's work, enabling young people to provide policymakers with evidence-based solutions to contemporary challenges. He also emphasized SARSYC's role in holding policymakers accountable, allowing young people to engage with and scrutinize development goals and national commitments.

He encouraged young people to continue leveraging the SARSYC platform and to understand the difference between global and local agendas as they navigate towards inclusion in the 2030 agenda on sustainable development. He concluded by recognizing the need to strengthen relationships between SARSYC and regional and continental bodies such as the SADC Parliamentary Forum and the African Union to address the concerns of young people.

What Students and Young People want!!! Counting Students in as we move towards 2030

The panel discussion featured young activists, researchers, and students who participated in various track sessions held the previous day. Their discussions cantered on reflections and key contributions made by young people during these sessions. The following key issues were raised:

Climate Change and Natural Disasters: Natalie Gwatirisa, a climate advocate from Zimbabwe, highlighted those natural disasters such as floods in South Africa and Malawi, and droughts in Zimbabwe and Zambia, severely impact young people's access to education. The destruction of infrastructure hinders access to SRHR services, and these challenges are further compounded by disease outbreaks such as cholera.

- **Technology and Accessibility: Gwatirisa noted that the rapid advancement of technology, particularly AI, does not benefit all young people due to the lack of internet availability in some communities.**
- **Educational Access and Infrastructure: Major issues affecting access to education include inadequate infrastructure that does not accommodate students with disabilities, lack of investment in such infrastructure, prevalent sexual harassment in tertiary institutions, and insufficient menstrual products in schools, which affect girls' participation.**
- **Policy Inclusion: Alexa, an emerging researcher, noted that young people desire to be included in policymaking. There is a concern in which policy makers seem not take research and contributions from young people seriously. This is worsened by the fact that there are no feedback mechanisms for duty bearers to give updates to young people if their requests would have been actioned or not**
- **Health and Masculinities: The track session on Mugota/Young Men's Forum raised concerns about young men's poor health-seeking behavior and negative masculinities that deter them from self-care, as highlighted by Mntofo Tfwala, a student at the University of Eswatini.**
- **HIV/AIDS Stigma and Economic Empowerment: There is a high level of stigma and discrimination from service providers towards young people with HIV/AIDS, and a neglect of those with disabilities. This situation is exacerbated by limited economic empowerment programs, rendering young people vulnerable.**

Drawing from some of the concerns raised by young people, they noted some recommendations that may be adopted in redressing these concerns.

Recommendations from young people

- **The need for policymakers to provide timely and meaningful feedback to young people on the submissions, recommendations, and solutions they would have proposed through research and advocacy efforts. There should be a Feedback Strategy that outlines government commitment to providing timely feedback to the youths.**
- **Removal of obstacles that prevent young people, especially those from marginalized communities, from fully leveraging their education to improve their lives and contribute to society.**
- **Meaningful and inclusive participation of young people, including those with disabilities and marginalized communities, in decision-making processes related to public health programs, and policies.**
- **The need for skills development programs that equip young people with the technical, digital, and entrepreneurial competencies needed to thrive in emerging industries. This includes ensuring availability of dedicated youth entrepreneurship funds to provide young entrepreneurs with access**
- **The need for health service providers to offer youth-friendly, gender-responsive services. This includes a gender-responsive research that investigates the various SRH concerns, and barriers faced by young people in their diversity including the LGBTIQ+ community in their quest to access services.**

Keynote Address - Perm Sec Professor Oathokwa Nkomazana

"The voice of young people should be heard in all policies across the ministerial departments," Professor Oathokwa Nkomazana, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health and Wellness for Botswana.

Professor Nkomazana engaged sentimentally with young people during the conference, reflecting on her interactions with youth through socio-religious groups in her personal time. She highlighted her keen interest in the issues faced by young people, recognizing their potential to challenge the status quo and drive societal progress. Professor Nkomazana emphasized that policymakers, duty bearers, young people, and the community must all be accountable to the needs of young people.

She underlined that the SARSYC conference was a promising indication of a brighter future, providing young people with a platform to initiate and implement interventions. The Perm Sec strongly criticized harmful cultural norms, such as female genital mutilation, perpetuated by older women, deeming them irrelevant in the 21st century. She encouraged young people to continuously advocate for their issues, noting that contemporary lawmakers are more sympathetic and receptive to their needs.

In concluding her address, Professor Nkomazana challenged governments to level the playing field for young people, ensuring they can thrive, challenge socio-economic trends, and reach their full potential.

Vote of Thanks

As Chairperson of the SAYWHAT Board of Directors, I am honored to reflect on the profound commitments made at this conference towards addressing SRHR and climate change challenges. Throughout this event, we have witnessed remarkable innovations, transforming SARSYC into not just an information-sharing platform, but a beacon of solutions shaping the future of young people.

I urge all young participants to embrace research and seek answers to why certain interventions succeed while others falter. Research holds the key to understanding and improving our approaches.

I extend heartfelt appreciation to the SAYWHAT secretariat for their dedication in making SARSYC a resounding success. My gratitude also goes to all delegates, including development partners, CSOs, members of parliament, government officials, and students whose participation enriched this conference.

Thank you all for your unwavering commitment and contributions. Together, we continue to pave the way for a brighter future for young people everywhere.



Inclusive And Responsive Education System: Making Education Accessible For All

"You can be learned but not educated" Harry Ambonyi, Zambia MP
"Without education, we are doomed to fail" Richard Olong, OXFAM Denmark, Project Coordinator

This panel discussion brought together experts in the education sector to explore how education can be made accessible for all young people. The panelists were drawn from several organizations and included:

1. **Harry Ambonyi:** Member of Parliament in Zambia and Chairperson of the Education Committee in Parliament, passionate about spearheading innovations and creating an education system that is responsive to the needs of young people.
2. **Francesca Masamba:** Member of Parliament in Malawi and a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Women.
3. **Vincent Nacidze:** Project Coordinator at UNESCO Zambia, implementing the 03 project to ensure campuses are safe for young people and contribute to the growth of their community and the region.
4. **Richard Olong:** Regional and Program Manager for East and Southern Africa at OXFAM Denmark, implementing the Education Out Loud project in 21 African countries.
5. **Rudo Mudzingwa:** Student and intern at USAID Zimbabwe.
6. **Gabisile Ndikuya:** Member of the students' union from the Kingdom of Eswatini.

The panellists addressed questions raised by the moderator as follows:

Round 1: How do you balance the interests of children, parents, and the community?

- **Honourable Ambonyi:** He advocated for an education system that produces entrepreneurs, enabling the community and parents to recognize the value of education. He emphasized the need for sensitization efforts to parents about the benefits of education and their responsibility to instill this value in their children. He also called for a curriculum review to focus on producing problem solvers rather than employees and the inclusion of young people in budgetary discussions and decision-making.

- **Richard Olong:** He stressed that education is a human right, and it is the state's role to safeguard this right. The education curriculum should mold children into productive individuals who add value to their communities, making parents more likely to see the worth of sending their children to school. He emphasized that education must be rewarding
- **Gabisile Ndikuya:** She highlighted the importance of inclusivity and community engagement, expressing her desire for a curriculum that imparts practical skills.

Round 2: Are we not exerting undue pressures on educationists to fulfil lofty policy goals?

- **Honourable Masamba:** She lamented the limited funding from budgetary allocations, which constrains the work of parliamentarians who need to refer to their communities. This has created a gap between policymakers and implementers.
- **Richard Olong:** He mentioned that OXFAM is engaged in capacity-building initiatives for Malawi's Members of Parliament and encouraged young people to lobby for funding and participate in budgetary discussions.
- **Vincent Nacidze:** He pointed out that policy development and implementation are complementary. Often, teachers are left out during policy development but are expected to diligently implement government policies on education. For education policies to be effectively implemented, teachers should be involved in policy development.
- **Rudo Mudzingwa:** She agreed that undue pressures are being exerted on educationists, who are overwhelmed with implementing various educational programs with limited resources. For example, teaching Information Communication Technology (ICT) without adequate infrastructure such as electricity, computers, and internet connectivity.
- **Gabisile Ndikuya:** She noted that teachers are poorly remunerated while playing multiple roles, including facilitating education, counseling, coaching sports, and managing their domestic responsibilities. She advocated for extensive human capital development and retraining of teachers to accommodate emerging trends and impart contemporary skills. She also emphasized the need to employ digital tools to deliver better learning outcomes.

Commitments and conclusions to educational outcomes

These were the closing remarks from the panellists, who emphasized the following points:

- **Multi-Sectoral Approach and Sustainable Financing: It is crucial to develop an education financing strategy that is sustainable. National budgets must allocate funds for research that assesses the developmental needs of the African continent.**
- **Collaborative Research and Infrastructure Development: There is a need for Africa to collaborate on research to avert energy crises and invest more in infrastructure development for the benefit of communities.**
- **Proactive Youth Participation: Parliamentarians urged youths to be proactive, to implement and practice what they advocate for, and to spearhead impactful change.**
- **Engagement with Policymakers: The UNESCO representative encouraged young people to use the correct structures when engaging with policymakers to ensure the desired results are obtained. They must actively solicit feedback from policymakers rather than waiting for it.**
- **Richard Olong's Caution on SDGs: Richard Olong cautioned that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are ending in 2030, and discussions are already underway for their successors through the Summit of the Future, to be held on September 22-23, 2024, termed the PACT of the Future. This new agenda currently leaves out education as a developmental priority.**
- **Mobilizing for Education: Olong encouraged young people to recognize their power to change the world due to their energy and large numbers. It is imperative to mobilize and collaborate to ensure success in education.**
- **Unity and Identity: Rudo highlighted the power in numbers and having a collective identity. She emphasized that young people are not idle and urged the region to resolve conflicts, such as those in Mozambique, to foster a progressive region.**

Harmony in Action: Amplifying Regional voices on HIV, TB & other communicable diseases

The plenary discussion was anchored on providing a regional perspective in raising awareness and providing recommendations that amplify the voice of advocacy in HIV, TB and communicable diseases in programming. The session accommodated the following panellists.

1. **Ashley Nyathi**- a SAYWHAT SRHR Defender and TB Champion advocate
2. **Senator Angeline Tongogara**- MP of Zimbabwe
3. **Mr Andrew Nyambo**- Ministry of Health and Child Care, Zimbabwe (National TB Program)
4. **Martha Tholanah**-Amplify Change
5. **Ngaatendwe Murombedzi**- Aids Healthcare Foundation, South Africa
6. **Honourable S Mtetwa**-an Eswatini Member of Parliament (TB Caucus)

The following are highlights from the plenary.

- **It is imperative to have flexible procurement systems that facilitate timeous procurement of health products essential to manage diseases and the national budgets must be reflective of the will of the people, in particular young people's developmental priorities**
- **In implementing policies, differences of opinion may arise particularly with religious leaders, however, consultation and seeking harmony amongst competing interests produce mutually desired outcomes highlighted honourable Mtetwa**
- **Mr Nyambo invited young people to take part in research that can help governments to develop evidence-based programs and solutions. He noted that in the case of Zimbabwe, there is a body that is mandated to support such work- the Medical Research Council of Zimbabwe. He noted that this institution screens proposals of medical research prior to its initiation to ensure that there are quality controls.**





Sexual and Reproductive Health and Emerging issues: Making young people thrive in an evolving era.

Panellists:

1. **Hon. A. Chakukura,** Member of Parliament - Youth Development (Zimbabwe)
2. **Hon. Joseph Munsanje,** Member of Parliament - SRH Caucus (Zambia)
3. **Ifoma Hamabele,** Researcher - SADC PF
4. **Natalie Gwatirisa,** Young Person and Climate Change Activist

Question 1: How do you link Climate Activism and Public Health?

Natalie Gwatirisa highlighted the intricate relationship between climate change and public health. She emphasized that climate change-induced emergencies, such as floods, directly impact public health services provision, leading to a range of challenges. These include disruption of healthcare services due to damaged infrastructure, increased risk of water-borne diseases, mental health concerns, sexual exploitation and abuse by some aid volunteers, and an increase in teen pregnancies and child marriages due to the vulnerability of young people perpetuated by natural disasters. She underscored the need to address climate change and public health issues simultaneously, as they are intertwined.

Question 2: What efforts are you making as policymakers to reach marginalized areas?

Hon. Chakukura outlined outreach programs specifically targeted for youth engagement at the community level in Zimbabwe. She highlighted the introduction of the Youth Quarter in Parliament, which aims to spearhead the needs of young people at the national level. Additionally, public hearings are conducted to solicit community-level perspectives and needs. Workshops are also organized by MPs to educate young people on parliamentary processes, ensuring they understand how to engage with policymakers effectively.

Question 3: What is SADC PF's Role in Benefiting Young People in Policy Making?

Ifoma Hamabele emphasized that SADC PF must collectively respond to contemporary challenges and aspirations, engaging in and resolving cross-cutting issues such as climate change and SRHR. She believes that MPs ensure accountability in resource allocation for public health, education, and other critical sectors. As a researcher in the SADC PF, Ifoma implored young people to utilize parliamentary structures, such as Committees and Departments, to deliver concerns or proposed solutions when MPs are unreachable. Young people may also engage their parliaments on social media to solicit feedback on various interventions.

Question 4: What is the state of public health as a continent, and how ready are we for pandemics?

Hon. Joseph Munsanje recognized that pandemics such as COVID-19 brought about a new way of living and working with minimal contact and the availability of hand sanitizers to ensure good hygiene. It led to parliaments engaging virtually, and in Zambia, the country enacted the Public Health Act to facilitate health surveys and inform the president directly. To augment the Act, an Epidemic Preparedness Fund was established for use in emergencies. These efforts are complemented by sensitization programs for citizens on public health emergencies. Other panellists noted that government preparedness for future disasters must entail investments in healthcare infrastructure, financial readiness to respond to public health emergencies, development of contingency plans, and system readiness.

Question 5: How can we leverage technology to bring civic engagement to the youths?

Ms. B Taguta, SAYWHAT Board Chairperson, stated, “Young people may be heard if they make noise on the right platform with respectful and meaningful contributions on professional platforms such as LinkedIn.” The panel agreed that young people should comprehend what meaningful participation entails, which is strategic and not haphazard. They must make use of the laid-out processes. Zimbabwe introduced a Youth Quota system, though at elementary stages, it exists to benefit young people and advance their needs. It is imperative to make use of parliamentary administrative structures as parliamentary business is complex.

Hon. Joseph Munsanje cautioned young people regarding what they share with the world, as data protection Acts may be enforced if they violate it. He noted that while Zambia is yet to implement a youth quota system, it has already established a women's quota and has excelled in comprehensive sexuality education and youth policies. Ifoma Hamabele concluded the discussion by cautioning young people to be responsible for what they post and communicate. While AI has taken the world by storm and is difficult to regulate, young people should be wary of data wars.



Our Vision for ICPD30: Amplifying Southern African students and youths' voices

This session focused on the aspirations of young people in amplifying their voices across the continent, with a panel comprised of:

1. **Hon. E. Phale** - Former Health Minister and current member of Population Caucus - Malawi
2. **Hon. J. Makombe** (Zimbabwe)
3. **Mammehela Matamane** - SADC PF, Lesotho
4. **Trevor Oahile** – Youth activist, Botswana
5.

The following key contributions and remarks were raised by the panellists:

Integration of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE): The panel emphasized the importance of integrating CSE into local languages to ensure cultural relevance. Utilizing local engagement platforms to interact meaningfully with communities was deemed crucial for effective implementation.

- **Engagement with Parliamentarians:** Creating environments where parliamentarians can interface directly with stakeholders was highlighted to bridge gaps and make parliamentary institutions more accessible to the public.
- **Youth-Centric Policies and Budgetary Allocations:** The panel stressed that parliamentarians have a duty to promote youth-centric policies and ensure appropriate budgetary allocations. The SADC PF's initiatives in sexual reproductive health and governance have already yielded positive outcomes in countries like Lesotho.
- **Enhancing Primary Health Care:** Improvements in primary health care were discussed, with a focus on collaborating with local governance structures, volunteers, and village health care workers to enhance health delivery outcomes.
- **Investment in Research:** Prioritizing investments in research that aligns with the needs of young people, particularly in life-skills and emerging issues, was recommended to better address their challenges.

The session on ICPD30 marked the end of the second day of the conference


DAY 3
SAYWHAT
ADVANCING EQUITABLE
ADVANCING EQUITABLE

Civil Society Engagement Platform

The last day of the SARSYC conference began with breakaway sessions involving regional organizations that champion and advocate for the sexual reproductive health rights of young people. These are, Youth Empowerment, Education and Transformation Trust (YETT), Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender (CSA& G) and Girls Education Advocacy in the Region (GEAR Alliance). The following highlights depict the deliberations made during the breakaway sessions.

Center for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender (CSA& G) Session



Hosted at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, the Centre for Sexualities, AIDS, and Gender (CSA&G) conducted a session focusing on social justice issues related to HIV/AIDS, supported by the Norwegian Students' and Academics International Assistance Fund. The session aimed to educate participants about HIV/AIDS and preventive measures.

Key Highlights

Knowledge Quiz: Participants' knowledge levels on HIV/AIDS were assessed, which provided a baseline for further education.

Educational Insights

- **Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP):** The session provided insights into these medications used for HIV prevention. PEP is taken after potential exposure to HIV, while PrEP is used to prevent infection before potential exposure. Both are part of a broader anti-retroviral therapy regimen that includes three drugs.
- **Comprehensive Fact Sheet:** An elaborative fact sheet was distributed, offering detailed information on sexual consent and essential HIV facts to guide and inform young people.
- **Condom Use Education:** Emphasis was placed on the correct and consistent use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV and sexually transmitted infections. The importance of incorporating condom use during foreplay was highlighted.
- **Practical Demonstrations:** The session included demonstrations of male and female condoms, which were well-received by the participants and aimed to promote practical understanding of condom use.

This informative session aimed to empower young people with knowledge and practical skills to better protect themselves and their partners from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Girls Education Advocacy in the Region (GEAR Alliance)

During the Covid-19 pandemic, which severely disrupted education access for marginalized girls in rural and farming communities, the GEAR Alliance was formed. Comprising four organizations—Girls Activists Youth Organization (Malawi), National Alliance for Quality Education (Zambia), Farming Communities Educational Trust (Zimbabwe), and SAYWHAT as the lead organization—the Alliance aims to ensure education access for girls in these communities across Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Key Highlights

- **Malawi:** There is a call to update the education curriculum to better meet 21st-century needs and foster innovation among students. The proposed update will focus on assessing talents to promote skills development.
.
- **Zambia:** While there is a policy for free education and provision of school uniforms for the underprivileged, concerns were raised about the quality of education. The increased teacher-student ratio due to free education has compromised educational quality.

- **Zimbabwe:** Currently, Zimbabwe faces challenges with both the accessibility and quality of education.

- **Mental Health Programs:** Governments are making efforts to integrate mental health into school systems through initiatives like the school-based mental health strategy. However, these efforts are hindered by overloaded curricula, leaving little room for mental health issues.

The GEAR Alliance remains committed to addressing these challenges and advocating for equitable and quality education for girls in rural and farming communities across the region.



Youth Empowerment and Transformation Trust (YETT)

The Zimbabwean based organisation had an interesting and empowering session that stimulated a new culture for students to be open on their issues. Through a Varsity Confessions session, YETT gave students a chance to share some of the intimate stories that happens in universities and open the discussion for students to deliberate on solution. The organisation encouraged students to always seek support services whenever they are confronted with issues. This was emphasised as a key avenue to deal with mental health challenges that have become a topical issue in most colleges in the region.

Closing Ceremony

UNFPA Statement on ICPD 30



Ms. Tlangelani Shilubane, UNFPA Country Representative for Botswana, emphasized the organization's commitment to implementing youth-friendly interventions. She highlighted the strides made in prioritizing human rights, women's empowerment, and achieving gender parity, but noted persistent inequalities across African countries. Ms. Shilubane underscored concerns such as harmful practices, child marriages affecting approximately 50 million girls, and rising cases of sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancies.

Acknowledging the significance of the ICPD agenda, Ms. Shilubane stressed that young people must act urgently and with agility based on acquired knowledge. She affirmed UNFPA's ongoing commitment to rolling out youth-friendly services and supporting the ICPD agenda. In conclusion, she urged youth to organize themselves, persevere in advocacy efforts, and adapt their strategies to effectively address ongoing challenges.





Keynote Address - H.E Ms Boemo Sekgoma SADC PF Secretary General



Her Excellency Ms. Boemo Sekgoma appreciated delegates and young people gathered for the 5th Edition of SARSYC, emphasizing that youth movements are pivotal in shaping social justice within communities. She highlighted the transformative power of youth engagement, noting its contribution to expanding knowledge and identity formation. Her Excellency stressed the importance of shifting from youth engagement to genuine youth inclusion in democratic agendas.

Reflecting on her own experience co-founding the Month of Youth Against AIDS in Botswana, Ms. Sekgoma challenged young people to actively participate in budget consultations and engage with parliamentarians to advocate for improved youth health and education access. She underscored the critical role of research in guiding policy decisions and recommended countries invest in data-driven approaches to identify areas needing improvement.

Addressing Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Ms. Sekgoma urged youths to understand issues such as maternal health, family planning, maternal mortality, and rising HIV infections. She called for innovative approaches within platforms like Mugota/Young Men's Forum and Web for Life to combat gender-based violence and stigma, emphasizing the need for effective outreach campaigns.

To conclude her speech, Ms. Sekgoma encouraged young people to create platforms for engaging with SADC, critiquing discussions, and highlighting exclusions of youth perspectives. She assured them of SADC PF's openness and availability to support their aspirations for shaping the future of Africa.

> “Young people should consider themselves custodians of the present and the future while they endeavour to create social movements that wear the face of social justice in their communities”
>
> **H.E Ms B Sekgoma**

SARSYC Gaborone Declaration: Hand Over

Young people presented the conference communique, dubbed the SARSYC Gaborone Declaration to Her Excellency, Ms Boemo Sekgoma SADC PF Secretary General. The declaration was developed by young people, supported by the conference rapporteur. It captures the voices of young people in key thematic areas covered during the conference. In the declaration, the young people expressed their appreciation to the various efforts being led by governments in the SADC region and their development partners. The young people also documented their commitments to ensure that the various challenges they face are addressed. Most importantly, they stated their advocacy messages to the governments in Southern Africa and the development partners. This declaration represents the voice of youths in SADC and will serve as the tracking tool to hold the youths, governments and partners accountable to the commitments made during the conference



Closing Remarks and the road to SARSYC VI

Mr. Jimmy Wilford, as the convener of SARSYC, expressed gratitude to Her Excellency Ms. B Sekgoma for embracing the commitments made by young people and the SADC Parliamentary Forum. He thanked Members of Parliament from various countries for their invaluable contributions and dedication to addressing youth issues. Mr. Wilford emphasized the importance of constructive engagement among young people, highlighting their role in shaping future editions of SARSYC through an upcoming online poll.

Culture Night Celebration at SARSYC

As the SARSYC conference concluded, preparations began for a vibrant culture night celebrating the rich diversity of cultures across the SADC region. This event provided an opportunity for delegates and young people to unwind and enjoy the cultural tapestry that unites them.

The culture night marked the 10-year anniversary of SARSYC with a vibrant celebration of African diversity across the region. Young people showcased their traditional attire, celebrating their heritage through music, dance, and networking with development partners and CSOs.



Guest of Honour Remarks by Mr. Tebogo Etsile Matebesi

Mr. Tebogo Etsile Matebesi, Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Youth, Gender, Sport and Culture, emphasized the role of young people as custodians of cultural heritage. He highlighted their power to blend tradition with innovation, ensuring that African stories, languages, and ways of life thrive in a globalized world. Mr. Matebesi commended young people for cherishing and celebrating their culture, ensuring its continuity and vitality.

Award Ceremony

Volunteers from the University of Botswana received certificates of recognition for their outstanding contributions during the conference. Their dedicated support in assisting delegates with stationery, food, directions, and other tasks ensured the smooth operation of the conference.







CULTURE NIGHT



Highlights Of The Night

The evening concluded with a captivating performance by the UB Diphala dance group, delighting attendees with cultural dances that beautifully showcased the richness of African culture, particularly from Botswana









Special Thanks to Our Partners

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