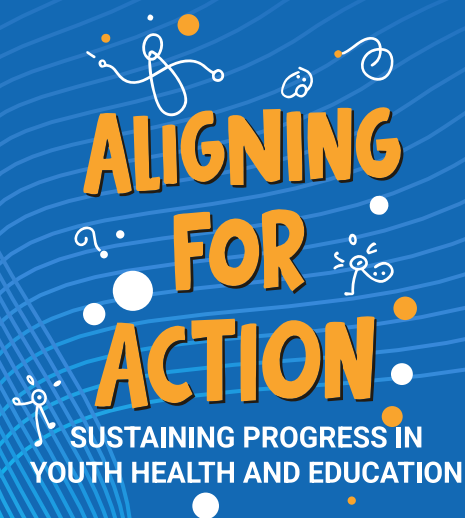




The Windhoek Youth Declaration on Health and Education

Adopted at the Sixth Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SARSYC VI)

Windhoek, Namibia,

5 - 7 August 2026

Theme: Align for Action: Sustaining Progress in Youth Health and Education.

1. The Windhoek Call: Our Future Requires Action Now

We, the young people, students, researchers, advocates and youth-led organisations gathered in Windhoek for SARSYC VI, affirm that decisions about young people's health, education and wellbeing must be shaped with young people.

Across Southern Africa, young people face persistent barriers to education and health services, alongside growing mental-health challenges, substance use, digital harm, gender inequality and inadequate financing. These challenges disproportionately affect girls and young women, boys and young men, young people with disabilities, those living with HIV, out-of-school adolescents and other underserved groups.

Southern Africa does not lack evidence, talent or youth-led solutions. What is needed is coordinated, adequately financed and measurable action. Young people must therefore be recognised as researchers, innovators, partners and co-creators.



Guided by the theme “Align for Action: Sustaining Progress in Youth Health and Education,” we call for a shift:

- From consultation to shared decision-making.
- From evidence generation to policy and implementation.
- From isolated projects to coordinated regional action.
- From donor dependence to sustainable domestic financing.
- From repeated promises to measurable accountability.

This Declaration presents our shared priorities, commitments and calls to action.

2. About SARSYC VI

The conference brought together young people, youth-led organisations, researchers, civil society, policymakers, parliamentarians, government representatives, academic institutions and development partners from across Southern Africa and beyond – Botswana, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. SARSYC VI focused on five thematic areas:

- a) Education Rights and Equity.
- b) HIV, STIs and Sexual Health.
- c) NCD Prevention and Healthy Lifestyles.
- d) Digital Health and Safety.
- e) Mental Health and Substance use.

3. How This Declaration Was Developed

This Declaration reflects evidence, lived experiences and recommendations gathered through a participatory, youth-led process involving:

- Generation and analysis of youth-led evidence across the five thematic areas.
- Gender-responsive and intergenerational dialogue on young people’s priorities.
- Engagement among young people, policymakers, parliamentarians and partners.
- Alliance building and consolidation of commitments for regional action.
- Validation of shared priorities and accountability measures.

4. What the Evidence Told Us

Youth-led research, presentations and lived experiences shared during SARSYC VI highlighted that:

- Unequal access to education, weak learner retention, and gaps in comprehensive sexuality education continue to affect young people.
- HIV, STI and sexual-health services remain inaccessible to many adolescents, particularly those out of school or requiring parental consent.
- Mental-health challenges, suicide and substance use are increasing, while appropriate support services remain limited.
- Boys and young men are often discouraged from expressing vulnerability or seeking help.
- Girls and young women continue to experience violence, exclusion, stigma and neglected

health conditions, including endometriosis.

- Online gambling, digital violence, privacy violations and misinformation are emerging threats to young people's wellbeing.
- Youth health and education programmes remain heavily dependent on declining donor funding. Youth-led research is growing, but it is not adequately funded or consistently used in policymaking.

Southern Africa does not lack evidence or youth-led solutions. The urgent task is to translate them into policy, financing, services and measurable action.

5. What We Affirm

We affirm that:

- Health and education are fundamental and interconnected rights.
- Young people are researchers, innovators, advocates and partners in development.
- Meaningful youth participation must extend from design to implementation and accountability.
- Every young person must have equitable access to information, education and youth-friendly health services.
- Culture must promote dignity and protection and must never be used to justify harm.
- Governments must progressively increase and protect domestic financing for youth health, education, mental health, SRHR, digital safety and youth-led research, including during periods of fiscal constraint or declining external assistance
- Regional challenges require coordinated regional solutions and strong alliances.
- Evidence must inform policy, budgets and service delivery.
- No young person should be excluded because of gender, disability, HIV status, location, schooling status or economic circumstances.

6. Our Five Frontlines for Action

6.1. Education Rights and Equity

We call for inclusive, safe and adequately financed education systems that support learner enrolment, retention and re-entry. Governments must strengthen comprehensive sexuality education, teacher capacity, digital access and meaningful student participation in education policy.

6.2. HIV, STIs and Sexual Health

Young people must have access to accurate information and confidential, stigma-free and youth-friendly services. Governments should address inconsistencies between consent laws and access to services, protect essential SRHR commodities, and integrate mental-health support into HIV programmes.

6.3. NCD Prevention and Healthy Lifestyles

Governments and partners must invest in prevention, early diagnosis and affordable treatment of NCDs and neglected conditions such as endometriosis. Policies should promote healthy environments and address harmful exposure to alcohol, tobacco and unhealthy products.

6.4. Digital Health, Rights and Safety

Young people must be protected from online violence, privacy violations, misinformation and gambling-related harm. Governments should strengthen digital literacy, data protection, equitable technology access and support for youth-led digital innovation.



6.5. Mental Health and Substance Use

Mental-health and substance-use services must be accessible in schools, universities, health facilities and communities. Governments should invest in suicide prevention, qualified counsellors, early intervention, peer-support systems and culturally relevant mental-health communication.

7. Voices That Must Shape the Response

7.1. Girls and Young Women: Safe, Seen, Supported and Heard

Girls and young women must have the power to influence decisions affecting their health, education and future. Priority must be given to:

- Protection from violence, exploitation and digital harm.
- Access to education and youth-friendly SRHR services.
- Economic empowerment and leadership opportunities.
- Support for out-of-school and marginalised girls.
- Removal of discriminatory legal, policy and social barriers.

7.2. Boys and Young Men: Breaking the Silence

Boys and young men require safe spaces to discuss mental health, suicide, substance use, gambling and sexual health without judgement. Families, governments and communities must promote positive masculinities, normalise help-seeking and strengthen peer and professional support.

7.3. Young People Facing Multiple Exclusions

Responses must deliberately include young people with disabilities, those living with HIV, rural youth, out-of-school adolescents, youth-led households and young people affected by poverty, violence or displacement. Progress cannot be claimed while the most excluded remain unreached.

8. Our Commitments as Young People

Young people and youth-led organisations commit to:

- i. Consolidate youth-generated evidence into concise and accessible policy briefs.
- ii. Engage policymakers constructively and provide credible, country-specific evidence.
- iii. Mobilise young people and communities around the Windhoek Declaration priorities.
- iv. Monitor implementation and communicate progress in youth-friendly formats.
- v. Hold institutions accountable while also reporting on commitments made by young people and youth organisations.

9. Our Calls to Institutions, Decision-Makers and Partners

9.1. SADC and Regional Institutions

Integrate the priorities of the Windhoek Declaration into regional health, education, youth and digital-governance frameworks; facilitate cross-country learning; support harmonised accountability; and regularly review progress through appropriate regional structures.

9.2. Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Institutions

Table SARSYC VI priorities before relevant parliamentary committees; strengthen legislative and budget oversight; convene youth–parliamentarian dialogues; and report progress through the SADC Parliamentary Forum and SARSYC Secretariat.

9.3. Governments and Public Institutions

Designate focal persons, institutionalise youth participation and strengthen coordination across relevant institutions. Ensure youth-generated evidence informs policies, programmes and budgets, and support community sensitisation on CSE, mental health, substance use, digital safety and other youth wellbeing issues.

9.4. Academic Institutions and Development Partners

Provide technical assistance, research, capacity strengthening and resources for implementation. Strengthen platforms connecting young researchers with policymakers and facilitate regional learning.

9.5. Private Sector

Invest responsibly in youth health, education, digital safety and skills development. Business practices, particularly in gambling and digital services, must protect young people's health, dignity, safety and financial wellbeing.

9.6. Community and Traditional Leaders

Promote culturally grounded dialogue, challenge stigma and harmful practices, and support community-based protection, peer support and referral pathways for young people.

10. Implementing the Windhoek Accountability Compact

We therefore call for the full implementation of the Accountability Compact as the principal mechanism for translating this Declaration into measurable action.

Young people, parliamentarians, governments, public institutions, civil society, academic institutions, development partners, the private sector and community leaders must:

- Undertake the actions assigned to them under the Compact.
- Nominate country and institutional focal persons.
- Provide adequate resources for implementation.
- Submit timely, evidence-based progress reports.
- Participate in national and regional accountability reviews.
- Address implementation gaps identified through the traffic-light scorecard.

The SARSYC Secretariat and SARSYC VI Youth Steering Committee will coordinate the youth-led monitoring, consolidation of progress reports and regional accountability processes during the two-year period between SARSYC VI and SARSYC VII.

11. From Windhoek to Action

The commitments made at SARSYC VI will be advanced through coordinated national and regional action over the period leading to SARSYC VII. Implementation will focus on:

- Integrating the conference priorities into national policies, programmes and budgets.
- Strengthening collaboration among young people, governments, parliaments, civil society,

academic institutions and partners.

- Mobilising adequate domestic and partner resources for agreed actions.
- Supporting country-level implementation, advocacy and accountability.
- Maintaining youth leadership in monitoring and reviewing progress.
- Facilitating regional learning and exchange of effective approaches.
- Reporting progress and addressing implementation gaps through the mechanisms established in the Accountability Compact.

The detailed responsibilities, milestones, indicators and reporting arrangements are set out in the SARSYC VI Youth Health and Education Accountability Compact.

12. The Windhoek Promise

We leave Windhoek united by a shared commitment to advance the health, education and wellbeing of every young person in Southern Africa.

We will carry the evidence, priorities and commitments of SARSYC VI into our schools, universities, communities, parliaments and regional institutions. We will organise, innovate, collaborate and hold ourselves and our leaders accountable.

We will not allow this Declaration to remain only a statement of intention. We will work together to translate it into policies, financing, services and measurable improvements in young people's lives.

13. Adoption and Presentation

This Declaration was adopted by delegates to SARSYC VI and formally presented to the SADC Parliamentary Forum and participating institutions for consideration, endorsement and implementation.

It represents the collective priorities, commitments and calls to action emerging from SARSYC VI and is presented to governments, parliaments, regional institutions, civil society, development partners, the private sector, academic institutions and communities for endorsement and implementation.

Adopted by: *Delegates to SARSYC VI*

Presented to: *The SADC Parliamentary Forum and participating national, regional and development partners.*

Place: *Windhoek, Namibia*

Date: *7 August 2026*