



Observer

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When the girl child returns home from school

From the onset, they delegated domestic chores calculated to prepare me to be a good wife to please a man. The toys they threw at me when I was crawling, were telling. A wooden cooking stick, among other kitchen utensils condemned and conditioned me to become a woman of repute in African terms. They want me to be docile. It breaks my heart to see women in my community having their rights trodden in the dust by their male counterparts. I want to be different. I do not want to be a victim.

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When I am at school, I reflect on my chores and the teachings I get. I start to think about how my brother is treated. One, he completes his school homework; he enjoys all kinds of South African soapies on television. Sometimes he is on dad's sofa playing video games while I am doing dishes in the kitchen. The girl child does kitchen chores when she returns from school. Auntie always whispers to me when she realizes my wrinkling face.

At the end of every term, we bring our school reports home. Despite all the hurting duties that leave me tired almost every evening, I performed better than my brother. He does not take his schoolwork seriously and that he is betraying the family as a trusted heir apparent. For me, the acknowledgement is not motivating. They are counting lobola dividends from an aspiring medical doctor. Hence, the focus is on me preparing delicious meals, keeping the kitchen tidy and rehearsing on how to talk to in-laws.

I do not want to be a child bride. I want to be a doctor. I do not want to live to please a man. I want to serve my community as a health practitioner. Do not get me wrong, I want to get married too, but in my own terms. I want to marry a man who loves and respects me. I do not want to be parceled out to an old man, and have a group of men negotiate my worth and questioning my purity or lack of it. It is degrading and it takes away my dignity.

I am an intelligent human being with dreams and aspirations. Dreams to make my world a better place. Give me access to education. Give me a chance to reach my full potential.

I want protection in a world that is increasingly becoming dangerous to the girl child. Everywhere, there are stories of child sexual abuse and assault, child marriages, child labor and misogyny. I want those in authority to protect me from all these vices. I want to feel safe in my home. I want to be safe in my community, at school at work and even at church.

I am an adolescent, facing changes in my body, changes I do not understand. Educate me on how to deal with my body, make sanitary pads available to me. Most importantly make it criminal for pedophiles to take advantage of me. A 16-year-old is too young to consent to sex!



About the Author

Tandie Sarah Sibanda is a 13-year-old form 1 female student at Cowdray Park Secondary School in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. She is passionate about the empowerment of girls and women. She is a member of Amplifying girls' voices through digital art (A fun, exciting & educative hub which helps empower young girls & women against any form of abuse through the creation of content) and she is a peer educator under GOLD (Generation of leaders Discovered) a peer education programme for adolescents in schools. She is reachable on 0773565083 or 0786078771 email address sibandatj@gmail.com or tandiessibanda@gmail.com

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The new marriages act gives young girls a fighting chance.

The Marriages Bill which was signed into law by President Emmerson Mnangagwa gives the girl child another fighting chance in life.

Girls from poor backgrounds especially those from rural areas have largely been victims of child marriages, a development which has prevented them from reaching full potential.

During the first two months of Covid-19 more than 5 000 girls reportedly went into marriage before they attained the age of 18 years, while a similar number was impregnated.

Several other girls from the apostolic sects have also been missing on opportunities in life as they are forced into marriage before from a younger age and barred from attending school.

However, the Marriages Act makes it illegal for anyone under the age of 18 years to enter marriage, whether willingly or under duress.

The law is so serious to the extent it imposes custodial sentence to guardians or parents who give their minor children into marriage before they reach 18 years.

Just recently, girls got another cover of protection when the Constitutional Court raised the age of consent to 18 years from 16 years.

Age of consent is the age at which a person is considered to be legally competent to make decisions on sexual acts.

However, Mbizo legislator Settlement Chikwinya said there is need for a law to actualise the Constitutional Court judgment.

“Mr Speaker Sir today is 16th of June and it is a day recognised as the Day of the African Child. I join the nation and fellow citizens of Zimbabwe in celebrating this day.

“As I do so, I take cognisance of the fact that the Constitutional Court recently passed the landmark judgement in which it moved the age of sexual consent from 16 to 18 years.



“I therefore call upon the Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs to come to Parliament with a Bill that actualises the provisions but also criminalises the involvement of sexual activities for children under the age of 18 years so that at least we make it a reality for us to protect these children who are below the age of 18,” he said.

Harare East legislator Tendai Biti who argued the age of consent case at the Constitutional Court said there is need for a comprehensive Bill that will protect children.

He said children are not only suffering because of the age of consent, but there are also issues of child labour in farms and inheritance issues that need to be addressed as well.

“Also, children still face discrimination from the inheritance point of view. So, I have a daughter called Zoey, she cannot inherit from my estate, which is why the Constitutional Court says the government must come up with a comprehensive Bill protecting children in their entirety, including child labour.

“Children are working in farms, on tobacco and cotton in Gokwe and so forth. This bill must protect children,” he said.

Besides the Marriages Act and the Constitutional Court judgement, girls are also being protected by the Cyber and Data Protection Act which criminalises issues of child pornography among others.

The Act in Section 165A(2) imposes a level 14 fine or imprisonment for a period not exceeding 10 years or both to people who baits a child into the production or distribution of child sexual abuse.

There are various other child related laws that are in the pipeline which will also help protect the girl child from abuse, directly and indirectly.



SARSYC Conference:

Time for Honest Introspection

As the 4th edition of the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Consortium (SARSYC) conference preparations gather steam, young people are geared to take the bull by its horns and call a spade a spade.

The conference is running under the theme: “Re-shaping, Re-planning and Re-committing to the Youth Agenda in the Southern African Region.”

The young people want to engage in honest dialogue at interpersonal level with highly esteemed stakeholders on the successive violations of their sexual and reproductive health and rights on the back of numerous pledges and commitments governments and stakeholders made towards the protection of the same.

Alongside sexual and reproductive health, young people also see the conference as an opportunity to remind governments and high level stakeholders of their responsibility to provide affordable basic educational services to all young people.

Development partners universally agree that there is a correlation between sexual and reproductive health and education as the latter informs young people’s SRHR consciousness and better ways to manage reproductive health issues.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Defender

Them bani Khumalo said young people’s SRHR(s) continue to be violated despite the pledge and commitments by high level stakeholders.

“We live in a region where young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights are violated on daily basis. The girl child has been at many instances on the receiving end of reproductive health rights violations. This has been witnessed through numerous cases of child marriages, teenage pregnancies, and sexual abuse among others.

“Is this being caused by the absence of any particular legislation? What do we say about the will to enforce existing laws that are meant to protect young people’s sexual and reproductive health and rights? These are some of the questions the SARSYC conference will need to answer.

“We are geared to rationally tell the powers that be the true state of our sexual and reproductive health and rights. It is high time we confront the truth and persuade governments and stakeholders to hear our case,” said Khumalo.

Among a cocktail of outcomes, the SADC Regional Strategy on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (2019 – 2030) is to see strengthened health systems that are responsive to the evolving SRH needs. This is in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.6 which dwells on the universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. While

there is still time to see this through, there is need to revisit strategic outcomes like this in the context of the advent of Covid19.

The United Nations (UN) has it that the outbreak of Covid19 potentially reversed some progress that had been made towards gender equality and women's rights. Hence, the SARSYC conference is hinged on revisiting the young people's agenda to persuade governments, development partners, and civil society organizations among other stakeholders, to re-shape, re-plan and re-commit to serve young people's emerging health needs in a broader spectrum.

Dorcus Chishumba, the SARSYC Conference coordinator said: "Young people's sexual and reproductive health needs are evolving and there is need to pay attention to that.

"This also means that policies and strategies that have been formulated a couple of years back may need to be revisited. The purpose is to see if they are still speaking to today's health needs for the young people. The introspection has to be honest as this will inform the next steps."

Chishumba added the conference deliberately hinges its theme on "re-shaping, re-planning and re-committing to the young agenda," for a reason. She said the advent of Covid19 has left a trail of unpleasant scenes in the health sector, an experience shared across countries in Southern Africa.

"The 4th edition of this conference comes after the deadly Covid19 virus dealt a blow to some of the progress that had been made towards gender equality as noted by the United Nations in 2020. Continuous Covid19 induced lockdowns that were introduced to curb the spread of the pandemic had a bearing on many young women who remained trapped at homes and ultimately gender-based violence and domestic violence cases started to rise.

"Young people's access to public health services was also shattered by stiff travel restrictions. Health delivery systems have been strained with shortages ranging from medical supplies and the staff itself due to death and resignations.

"The educational sector was not spared. A lot has been happening. So, this conference is a mirror for all the concerned parties to have a re-look into themselves to find lasting solutions to improving the well-being of young people."



4th Edition

**24th – 26th AUGUST 2022
LUANAR), Malawi**

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

College girls fall prey to blessers



SITHOKOZILE MABHENA (not her real name) (21), turned to blessers or older men to see a better life and escape poverty when she came to University.

Growing up in a rural village in Matebeleland North -Jotsholo which is one of the least developed areas in the country in terms of infrastructure and the general standards of living. Copying up with urban life was difficult for Sithokozile. Also due to economic hardships resulting to poverty the college life was not friendly to her.

She failed securing school accommodation and resorted to renting outside campus with the little money her parents. Despite renting outside campus she could not afford to buy food for herself and let alone finance other academic needs. Therefore, the need to secure accommodation, her basic needs (including food and clothes) and printing assignments pushed her to engage with rich old man as a solution to her financial woes.

Sithokozile met 'sugar daddies' in her first year at university, through a male friend who said he had a solution to her financial problems.

"I come from a poor background, my parents even struggle to pay school fees. So through this network of connecting with Sugar daddies which brings me more money I am now able to provide for my needs and lessen my parents from the burden of struggling to pay my fees as I am not the only child in my family", she said.

She said she could earn up to US\$500 a month as a 'sugar baby'.

Sithokozile said she knew there were dangers in sleeping with older men and one particular experience made her reconsider her 'sugar baby' lifestyle.

Sithokozile highlighted that the scarce accommodation facilities in tertiary institutions makes students search for alternative accommodation.

"Our colleges and universities do not have enough accommodation and we must look for alternative accommodation which is expensive," she said.

Hence it is evident that due to economic hardships as well as pressure to obtain good grades and look presentable exposes these young women to predators.

Many landlords are currently charging rentals beyond the reach of the students who may even be struggling to make ends meet during that semester.

These difficulties have forced young women and girls in tertiary institutions to engage in risky sexual relationships with sugar daddies who would financially care for them in exchange for sexual favours.

In most cases, these older men are married and secretly engage in extramarital affairs with these young women. Blessers provide 'refuge' for the young women through meeting their basic needs and, in the process, the young women are disempowered as their lives are completely controlled by the blessers.

The power of the perpetrator is vested in verbal threats, intimidation and force. Sexual violence, therefore, becomes a way to enforce these favours.

Women Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) challenges government to put in place measures that safeguard young women in tertiary institutions from the harsh economic conditions.

"The young women are failing to obtain loans from the Zimbabwe Women's Microfinance Bank and Government must intervene in order for the young women to access loans to start projects to sustain themselves while in school," said Pamela Mhlanga from WCoZ speaking at the Learning Event for Young Women Empowerment workshop held on the 6th of May 2022.

Also, Professor Isheunesu Mpeperekwi of the University of Zimbabwe said: "Blesser relationship is a taboo and it is against African culture."

Although Zimbabwe has a well-established legal and regulatory framework to protect children and women from sexual violence and abuse, sexual violence still persists.

UN Women estimates that 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexually intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)'s research of 2017-2018 shows that one in four women in Zimbabwe have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.



The SRH dilemma and the realities of online education for the rural learner.

The advent of Covid-19 in March 2020 poked holes in Zimbabwe's education system. The introduction of online education system as a response to the disrupted physical classes was exclusionary.

Learners in the rural areas did not benefit from online based delivered classes due to poor infrastructure and the high costs of gadgets and regular data subscriptions required for one to tap into internet services. This is contrary to urban learners who enjoy the benefits of online education through free WiFi provision found at different corners in urban centres.

Students in the rural areas face challenges which ranges from access to resources such as books, Internet, sanitary wear among many other things.

According to the World Bank 2020 statistics 68% of the Zimbabwean population lives in the rural areas while 33% lives in the urban areas. These statistics are telling.

Although some schools might have computers in place to support online learning there is still challenges such as poor network coverage and access to electricity. There is poor electricity supply in majority of Zimbabwe rural schools. This impact on the availability of internet services.

The Zimbabwean constitution gives every child a right to access basic education. This right, however, especially during the time when Covid19 reached hurting stages, was deprived. The government of Zimbabwe need to pay attention poor educational services rural learners are experiencing.

The rural electrification program should prioritise schools to enable learners to access internet services. Internet infrastructure should be also provided adequately. Depriving young people of their right to education has far reaching consequences. Over the years, development partners have established a correlation between failure to access education and teen pregnancies as well as child marriages.

Both child marriages and teenage pregnancies are vices that fuel the spread of HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).

Last year, over 5000 teenagers were impregnated in the three (3) months. This is happened at the height of the Covid19 induced lock down.

There has been a lot of reports of unwanted teen pregnancies in rural schools resulting to early marriages. The pandemic might also have triggered an increase in early marriages as many rural families were left vulnerable thereby exposing the girl child.

According to the National Adolescent Fertility Study technical report released by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reviewed that almost a quarter of women aged 15-19 years (24%) have started childbearing.

The early pregnancies can be avoided through the use of contraceptives but many rural schools lack adequate supplies of contraceptives.

Access to sanitary product for the girl child in rural schools has been also a nightmare with some girls being forced to skip school during the menstruation period. Reports of girls using cow dung as an alternative to sanitary pads are not making a good reading.

The student to teacher ratio in rural areas is also a problem as compared to urban areas

The Learner to Teacher Ratio (LTR) for primary trended upwards from 35 in 2015 to 38 in 2019 which is double the recommended threshold of 20 pupils.

The high ratio has a direct impact on learning outcomes for children as stated in the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Zimbabwe 2021 Primary and Secondary Education Budget Brief.



THE CHASE

Competition

Season 1

The new talent discovery show in town

With the support from the Embassy of Sweden in Zimbabwe, SAYWHAT has introduced a new talent discovery show called The CHASE targeting young people from 10 to 24 years. This is a provincial based artistic talent show which seeks to strengthen young people's voices against violations of their sexual reproductive health and rights as well as Gender-Based Violence in their communities.

The first edition has seen over 300 young people taking part from across provinces in Zimbabwe. This is an all-inclusive competition that also saw young people with disabilities participating. "The CHASE" is inspired by the urgent need to support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to chase their dreams and capitalize on their talents to influence positive behaviour outcomes among young people through edutainment.

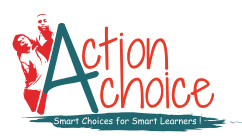
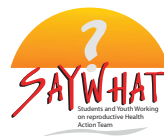
The first edition of The CHASE competition was running under the theme: "Amplifying Young People's Voices on Sexual Reproductive Health and Gender Based Violence through Art". The competition is aiming at strengthening young people's access to SRHR and GBV information, increase access and utilisation of SRH and gender responsive services by young people, and increase young people's participation and representation in SRH and GBV advocacy by July 2023.

36 winners of The CHASE competition from four (4) categories, poetry, music, drama and public speaking from all provinces in Zimbabwe are currently going through a mentorship program ahead of the Creative Reproductive health Arts Festival for Transformation (CRAFT) scheduled on 17 September 2020 in Harare.



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Baba Tendekai deceived me

“I love you Nothando, you are the one for me. I will protect, love, and provide for you all the days of my life if you say yes to me!” How naive I was Baba Tendekai, my husband, to believe your words.

You said you will protect me? I now pray daily unto God asking him to protect me and my children from you. You said you love me? I do not know if the love you confessed to me is shown through the slaps, punches, kicks, and thorough beatings. Baba Tendekai, you said you will provide for me. When I ask you to fend for your family, you scold me. This is against your promise. You promised to take good care of me. You promised to treat me like a queen.

My beauty is gone. I remember my long hair that was plaited into a neat braid, where is it now? I wake up with bruises on my body. The body that you cherished in the first days was lovely and fine in texture. What a lovely and fair face I had. I remember back in the university when I was crowned Miss University of Zimbabwe and with all the mood lights during the pageant. A couple of years in marriage, all is gone. I gave you children and in return I got cars, the new features of my body as a prize. I regret falling for you.

In my communities I have earned a name. They call me a ‘slay queen’ because of the kind of the make-up that I put not to look

good but to cover facial bruises. You took advantage of me because my biological parents passed on. You had promised to be a pillar of my strength. But you have turned into a different person. I have endured this for a long time.

I was working as a banker when I married you. Your insecurities then showed up. You told me to stop going to work and I obliged. I no longer have a source of income. I have to ask you to do everything. When it is pay-day, you come home drunk and when I ask you to give me some money you beat me up because I am a woman. I am living in fear. I do not know what awaits me tomorrow.

To my fellow women reading this, to that young lady following my train of thoughts, do not fall into this trap. Even before marriage Baba Tendekai used to be possessive and he used to slap me once in a while. I thought it was love! I urge you not to entertain such behaviour, if he beats you, end the relationship. Do not date a person who frequently scolds you, your mental health is important. No one has the right to stop you from going to work, learn to stand up for yourself even. Please learn from my life story!

My first time on period



I heard the loud growl that emerged from the pit of the stomach and looked around to see if anyone else had heard it. Everyone seemed engaged in the assembly, so I leaned back and tried to relax. I had taken my ibucet and ibuprofen before I had left home to come to work so there was no reason for me to be worried. "It is just a matter of minutes before the pills kick in," I told myself, but, if only I knew that the day was going to end in such a disaster, I swear I would have called in sick or just not shown up at work at all.

I felt yet another sharp pain in my stomach and I jerked forward. I was convinced now that this pain was out to ruin

me. "You are a strong black woman and you were born to endure pain" I recited to myself over and over again trying not to focus on the pain so that I could get through assembly and rush to my stockroom to google yet another pill. What seemed like years later, assembly ended and I literally sprinted to my stockroom to overdose myself and regain composure before my 8 am lesson.

I was expecting my lecturer from College to come and assess me while I teach so I really had no time to be focusing on pain. I managed to get to my class in time and halfway through I felt another sharp stab of pain in my stomach. It took me every ounce of energy not to yell in pain. I threw myself onto my chair and pretended to be checking something on my laptop so that my students wouldn't be alarmed. Seconds later, I felt a bit better and so I stood up to continue with my lesson and that's when I felt it. Blood oozing and gushing out from my vagina and trickling down my tights into my high heel boots. I froze mid-sentence and looked down, I had not spoiled but I could feel the dampness inside my boots. I quietly whispered instructions to my learners and walked out in search of the nearest toilet.

In the small cubicle of form 1's toilet, I sat as huge droplets crept their way from my eyes and down my cheeks. Is this what it means to be a woman? To soak me on the one day I had gone above and beyond to look professional? Are these the joys of womanhood that they said I would enjoy when I first had my periods at 12? Have to wear a certain brand of pads or tampons or else you will land yourself in a disaster and even when you do - as I had - you are still at risk of messing yourself. Is this what every woman has to bare, pain in silence because spoiling yourself is embarrassing and being on your periods is shameful? I couldn't even afford to rush home because if my lecturers came and I wasn't there, I was going to automatically fail. I pride myself on being a distinctive student. What was I to do now?



Enough is enough, *Female Genital Mutilation must be stopped.*

It is so sad that traditional practice which involves the partial or total of female genitalia has caused over 20 million deaths and sexual problems to the girl and women world wide. The female genital mutilation (FGM) which is one of the typical health problems which has led nations and globe to take responsible measures towards the practice which has been classified as the form of violence since 1990's. The Landmark established in 1990's has led to the adoption of General Recommendation number 14 on the female circumcision of 1990 and General Recommendation number 19 on the violence women in 1992 by the Committee on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Hence the elimination of FGM continued till date through United Nations agencies like United National Human Rights Council (HRC) through a resolution of July 2016.

FGM violates number of recognized human rights treaties which include African Charter on the Rights and Welfare and African Youth Charter. The practice also violates other rights which include the right to the sexual and reproductive health. On health, the FGM causes immediate (acute) complications and later (chronic) genito-urinary problems. One of the short term problems of practice include bleeding called haemorrhage which occurs due to laceration or severing of the branches of the pudendal or clitoral arteries. Other immediate complications include shock, fever, genital house swelling and delay in wound healing. Long term problems of FGM include genital tissue damage, vaginal discharge, itching, urological complications infection and that according to the studies. One should not cast a blind eye on the fact that the practice also causes death. It also allow women and girls to be exposed to the risk of maternal mortality and modality, and contraction of sexual transmitted diseases like HIV.

Due to high rational FGM prevalence in West Africa countries like Gambia, Mali and Guinea have taken measures to eradicate the harmful practice. Burkina Faso being is one of the nation which has received global recognition like Future Council's Silver Future Policy award for its implications of laws towards eliminating FGM. According to the research the Burkina sentences which includes one month and five months in prison for serious offense has yield positive results as it prevented about 240,000 girls and women from the harmful practice in 2014. The Burkina Faso's implementation of laws and government approach towards FGM has been unique and exemplary to an extent that some countries are adopting its strategies like the use of telephone helpline to report cases. Hence the implementation of legislation and application of strategies by nations and globe are playing a critical role in the elimination of FGM.

The rights of women and women empowerment are very vital in the societies. There must be curative and preventive measures towards girl child and women from the harmful practice and awareness must be escalated to socio-community level. Raising awareness the results of FGM on health may help in the early identification and management of the practice before complications on girls and women. In review of literature, this article on FGM aims to inform society, policy makers, development partners, health practitioners and other key stakeholders the understanding of consequences of FGM on health of an individual so that key measures may be taken.



The Speak And Solve Initiative (SASI) debate and the National Universities Quiz Challenge which have been since inception contested at the national stage by state universities have been devolved to all provinces around Zimbabwe for the first time giving an opportunity to every higher learning institution to take part.

The decentralization of the two flagship events was SAYWHAT's response to young people's recommendation that the two competitions should open doors to all higher learning institutions to participate for inclusivity's sake.

A total of 47 higher learning institutions including universities, polytechnics, Teacher training colleges, Agricultural colleges and Vocational Training Centers around Zimbabwe took part in the provincial based debate and quiz competitions which were hosted at provincial level by SAYWHAT for the first time since its inception in 2003.

Tertiary institutions that participated in the two events were distributed as follows: Manicaland, Midlands and Masvingo provinces had six (6) each, Bulawayo province had 11, Harare province had 10 and Mashonaland province had eight (8).

Mutare Polytechnic emerged winners for the Manicaland provincial quiz with Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences (MSUAS) as a runner up.

In Masvingo province, Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) took the first position while Masvingo Polytechnic came second.

In Bulawayo province, Gwanda State University, the national quiz defending champions, took the first position and National University of Science and Technology (NUST) came second.

Harare Polytechnic defied the odds and came first after defeating the most adored University of Zimbabwe followed by Harare Institute of Technology which came second.

Mashonaland province was dominated by universities alone as Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) took the first position followed by Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT).

Midlands State University (MSU), the champions of the second edition of the national quiz competitions took the first position followed by Gweru Polytechnic.

The SASI debate winner for Harare province is the defending champion of the national debate competitions, the University of Zimbabwe, followed by Women's University in Africa.

In Mashonaland, Chibero Agricultural College scooped the provincial winner of the debate competition followed by Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT).

Bulawayo Polytechnic and Lupane State University (LSU) will progress to the national debate competitions after drawing a shocker against National University of Science and Technology (NUST) and Gwanda State University (GSU).

Masvingo province will see Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) and Morganstar Teachers' College (MTC) proceeding to the nationals after the duo came first and second respectively.

Midlands province will be represented at the national stage by the Midlands State University (MSU) and Gweru Polytechnic as two elbowed out their competitors at provincial level.

For the first time in the SASI debate competitions, Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences will not be participating at the national stage after bowing down to Africa University (AU) and Mutare Polytechnic.

The winners from the provincial debate and quiz competitions and their respective second runner ups are progressing to the national finals in Harare at the SAYWHAT Studio of Choice scheduled to run from 31 July to 4 August 2022.

The final quiz and debate competitions will see a total of 48 young people from different tertiary institutions taking part in the competitions. A range of prizes have been lined up for the winners.

The Girl Child

is a gem to

humankind

“The integrity of the nation lies in the girl child.”

The above statement does not only shed light on how important the girl child is to a nation but it also brings out the sad reality of how the statement itself has been overlooked and underrated. Now the question arises: What is the connection between the girl child and the nation’s integrity?

The girl child symbolizes grace, strength, empathy and hard work. One can definitely not mention the girl child without thinking of a nurturing spirit, perseverance and sensitivity. When all these characteristics are put together, each piece on its place in the jigsaw puzzle of creating an inclusive place in the country, can we not root the integrity of the nation in HER?

The girl child is a future game changer. Bringham Young once said, “If you educate a man, you educate a man, you educate a woman, you educate a generation. Educating the girl child is absolutely educating a generation for (as it has been observed from most girl who have influenced other girls to work hard) the impact she will have on the people around her and the nation as a whole. When one girl child makes it in life, she becomes a role model to millions of girl children out there, igniting the fire in them to strive to get to their greatest potential. It is therefore guaranteed that the girl child is the future game changer and pillar for the development of the nation.

Some say, “The future is female” and indeed, the future is in the hands of the girl child- future leaders, mothers of the nation and builders of the country. The girl child may fall hard but she always falls forward so that she gets up, dusts herself a little and move on. A lot of responsibilities fall on her but she shoulders them all with a graceful air and no complaint.

The girl child is a great multi-tasker – she can do it all at one go and nothing can stop her from being a mother, a leader and a girl with her own dream. She is an epitome of success, an iconic image and a fighter who can jump any barrier without thinking twice. A brighter future can clearly be seen through the lens of the girl child.

It can be seen without a shadow of doubt that the girl child is a treasure to mankind, to any family and the nation at large. If well protected, well-educated and given enough appreciation, we have the integrity of the nation in safe hands.

TURN

YOUR BACK TO DRUGS AND FACE YOUR FUTURE

ZRP BULAWAYO

Police in Bulawayo have warned the youth on the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

Addressing a large number of local youths along with church congregants under the theme 'Turn your back to drugs and face your future', at a youth outreach organised by churches in Bulawayo last month, Bulawayo Provincial Spokesperson Inspector Abednico Ncube urged young people to desist from drugs.

Ncube said that young people have become slaves to drugs as they have an addictive nature.

Ncube warned young people against turning to drugs to solve their social and academic problems.

"Taking drugs does not solve academic problems, the best thing is to study hard and excel in your studies. Drugs alter one's mental performance."

Ncube advised the youths to be alert and vigilant when attending parties and local gatherings as these were hotspots for drug abuse.

"Some of our young people in our communities were introduced to drugs unaware through laced food and drinks. Most drug dealers sponsor drugs for free to first time users as a strategy to hook them. I therefore advise

you to avoid taking open drinks from strangers."

Ncube emphasised that drugs should be taken through a health professional's guide.

Deputy Spokesperson for Bulawayo Province Assistant Inspector Nomalanga Msebele weighed in: "The most commonly abused drugs are (mbanje) Marijuana also known as skunk, crystalmeth. Some are also taking substances to enhance their sexual desires."

Msebele also tipped parents to be vigilant against unusual substances their children might be carrying from and to school which could give them leads.

"I would like to urge parents to always go through the bags of their children when they are leaving and returning from school. If you come across items like an empty barrel, energy saver light bulbs, matches, among other unrelated school gadgets, you should raise eyebrows and act accordingly. It is most likely that your child is into drug and substance abuse.

"Another sign of substance and drug abuse is also the change of language use. Substance and drug abusers do not like formal language in most of their conversations. They prefer slang."

Drug and substance abuse also lead young people to commit crime.

A number of criminal activities are done by people who would be under the influence of drugs and substances. The police assured parents and their children that law enforcement agents will do their best to protect communities against drugs and substance abuse to ensure the safety of the young people.



International Day of

The African Child

Theme

Eliminating Harmful Practices Affecting Children: Progress on Policy and Practice since 2013.

16 June



Students and Youth Working on reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT) joins the rest of the world in commemorating the International Day of the African Child celebrated under the theme: Eliminating Harmful Practices Affecting Children: Progress on Policy and Practice since 2013. The theme seeks to take a stock on policies and measures that have been instituted to ensure that every child fully enjoys sacrosanct constitutional rights. While the 16 June day has its history biased towards accessing and enjoying educational rights, there has been a significant complimentary advocacy by developmental partners who took an opportunity presented by this day to also speak against child marriages, Female Genital Mutilation, sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse among other harmful practices.

As we celebrate this day, we acknowledge efforts that have been made by various governments in Southern Africa and beyond to ensure that children live in safe environments through the enactment and enforcement of laws.

Recently, a Zimbabwean Constitutional Court ruled 18 years as the rightful age of consent to sex. While such rulings are welcome, we would like to reiterate that age should not be a restriction for young people to access sexual and reproductive health services. The latest age of consent to sex ruling should be strictly enforced to eliminate sexual abuse and child marriages which are harmful to children.

Barely two months after the Constitutional Court increased the age of consent to sex from 16 to 18 years, the National AIDS Council (NAC) recently established that 33 children between the ages of 10 and 14 were impregnated in the first three months of 2022 in Manicaland. What makes this matter a sad reading even more is the involvement of pedophiles. This is detrimental to children's rights to access educational services and the right to personal development.

Child pregnancy also has implications on the spread of HIV among other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) especially when older men are pursuing children for sexual relationships. Children also face delivery challenges which may lead to death in some circumstances. We urge law enforcement institutions and authorities to see to the bottom of this matter and bring perpetrators to face the full wrath of the law.

For the past six months, through its toll-free Contact Centre number 577, SAYWHAT has recorded 18 cases of child neglect in Mashonaland East and Mashonaland Central Provinces. The two provinces also recorded 31 cases of sexual abuse children encountered. At least eight (8) child marriage cases were also recorded from different parts of the country with girls as young as 14 reportedly having entered into marriage. This level of child abuse has an effect on the children's personal growth and development. This again, goes against the spirit of the International Day of the African Child which must be celebrated with milestones made towards safe and supportive environments for children. The government of Zimbabwe and law enforcement institutions should do their best to arrest perpetrators of child abuse in all forms. Development partners and civil society organizations should up their call for safe environments for children.

As part of its efforts to protect the African Child from harmful practices and to see to it that children from farming rural communities in Southern Africa enjoy their rights to access educational services, SAYWHAT has entered into a partnership with Girls Activist Youth Organization (GAYO) in Malawi and the National Action for Quality Education in Zambia (NAQUEZ) as well as the Farming Communities Educational Trust (FACET) in Zimbabwe under the Girls Education Advocacy in the Region (GEAR) alliance project. This is a collaborative advocacy work by community-based organizations to persuade respective governments to provide educational services to children in rural communities as well as creating safe environments for their personal growth.

Added to the GEAR alliance program, SAYWHAT also coordinates the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Consortium (SARSYC), a platform where young people in the SADC region meet to take stock on health and educational services.

Since its inaugural edition in 2015, the bi-annual SARSYC program has been evolving to encompass the aspirations of the African Child. This is one of the platforms SAYWHAT brings together various stakeholders from different countries including government officials to reflect on some commitments made at the international stage on health and education. The pledge made towards fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number four (4) (SDG), whose aim is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," binds together various stakeholders and governments to live to this billing.

In pursuit of a gender equality and gender responsive society, it is important for every child to access educational services. In the same vein, SAYWHAT implores African governments to provide infrastructure that allows children to access educational services on digital platforms as witnessed in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. In doing so, learning environments must be friendly to children living with disabilities.

Some rural learners in Southern Africa have been disadvantaged from enjoying online education services due to factors like poor internet infrastructure and high poverty levels. According to a report by South Africa's National Income Dynamics Study - Coronavirus Rapid Mobile (NIDS-CRAM), an estimated 750,000 school children in the country may have dropped out of school because of the pandemic.

SAYWHAT would like to remind the government of Zimbabwe and development partners that children who are deprived of their right to education ultimately become vulnerable to harmful practices like child marriages, sexual exploitation, drug, and substance abuse as well as mental health. To safeguard the future of our generation and to save the humankind, children must be protected against all harmful practices. Children must be allowed to enjoy their right to education indiscriminately and fees must be affordable to all. Rural learners must also be provided with basic skills and equipment for them to tap into the online education system that became so popular in the wake of Covid19. Law enforcement institutions need to enforce laws without fear or favor against perpetrators of sexual harassment and abuse, child marriages and child trafficking.

Call Toll-free 577

for psycho-social support, SRHR and Child protection Solutions.



EDUCATIONOUTLOUD
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SARSYC IV

Unpacking the theme

The 4th edition of the Southern African Region Students' Youth Consortium (SARSYC) conference slated for the 24th to the 26th of August 2022 will be held in Malawi under the theme: "Re-shaping, Re-planning, Re-committing to the Youth Agenda in Southern Africa.

This year's theme calls for governments, development partners and all stakeholders to seriously introspect on commitments made towards safeguarding the aspirations of the young people in their respective countries. There are several regional and international commitments that members' states pledged to safeguard young people socio-economic interests including access to basic education under the Sustainable Development Goal number four (4) as well as health services for the youths. In the wake of Covid-19, among other emerging health challenges, young people's access to educational and health services has been negatively impacted on a large scale. Schools were at one point closed forcing authorities to introduce the online education system which was by and large discriminatory especially for rural learners.

Accessing public health services have been a difficult experience for the young people due to the advent of Covid-19 hence, the call for re-shaping, re-planning, and re-committing to young people's interests.

The economic hardships young people experience in the SADC region continues to impact their access to both education and health services. The conference is therefore aiming to persuade governments and development partners to take stock of the commitments

they made towards safeguarding the interests of the young people and revise strategies and mechanism to suit 21st century demands.

The conference further aims to evaluate the regional policy frameworks for purposes of advocating for refined and revised policies to meet young people's today aspirations. The conference is providing a chance for governments, UN agencies, youth-serving civil society organizations, and other development partners to raise awareness about current provisions, strategies, and action plans concentrating on young people's health, education, and well-being in Southern Africa.

The Consortium noticed a decline in meaningful engagement with regional policy frameworks aimed at addressing the SRHR and educational requirements of young people, hence the platform addressed this gap. A decline in engagement has a negative impact on SADC SRHR Strategy, SADC Youth Protocol, East and Southern Africa Ministerial Commitment on Education, Health, and Wellbeing of Adolescents and Young People, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Therefore, there is need to re-plan and reorient stakeholders and governments to take on board young people's aspirations particularly in health and education. SARSYC has grown beyond being just a young people's platform of engagement alone but to a movement of think tanks rationally holding governments to account. SARSYC therefore aims to build result oriented and responsive networks that serve young people's agenda.

For the period between 1 April 2022 to 30 June 2022, we reached to 120 450 young people through the below listed programs.



Radio listening sessions



Peer educators trainings



Health Fairs



Provincial Quiz and Debate 2022



The CHASE Competition Season 1



Up Coming Events



National Universities debate and quiz competitions 31 July – 4 August 2022 in Harare at the Studio of Choice.



SARSYC conference in Lilongwe Malawi from 24–26 August 2022.



Creative Reproductive health Arts Festival for Transformation (CRAFT) 17 September 2022 in Harare.

Our Partners



United Nations
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Cultural Organization



Call 577 to report Child Abuse.

Children's safety is everyone's responsibility.

What are you doing to protect them?

