



Conference Newsletter

2022



SARSYC goes continental as SAA open doors

By Staff Reporter

Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA) opened doors to the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Consortium (SARSYC) to join other continental bodies in the fight against the spread of HIV and AIDS among other Sexual Transmitted Infections (STIs).

The Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA) is an African-led and owned organization that collaborates with other national, sub-regional, regional, continental and international organizations and partners, to promote and institute policies that support governments' national responses and approaches to fight HIV and co-morbidities as well as emerging viral infections and strengthen the Health Systems in Africa towards a Universal Coverage.

Addressing delegates at the oversubscribed 4th edition of the SARSYC conference in Malawi in August, former Health Minister David Parirenyatwa and SAA President said young people convening for SARSYC are key in the fight against HIV and AIDS in Africa.

Parirenyatwa was speaking in Lilongwe-Malawi before hundreds of young people and youths who came from the Southern African region including Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Malawi as a hosting country.

"It is time for an organization like SARSYC to come on board so that we work together. This should be

immediate. There should no other reason to postpone. We want SARSYC on board as SAA now. We want the youths to contribute towards the efforts to curb the spread of HIV in Africa," Parirenyatwa said.

"We have the highest HIV prevalence amongst the young people in Africa and we need to do a thorough research to establish the reasons behind the spread of this epidemic. This is the time to act. I am convinced that whatever that we have been doing, there is something missing..."

The SARSYC Conference guest of honour, Malawian Youth and Sports Minister Richard Chimwendo Banda weighed in saying SARSYC is an important platform as it brings together young people from across the region.

"It is an important conference because it brings together SADC countries to discuss mutually shared problems that young people face in our respective countries.

"Issues like drug and substance abuse, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions, Parliament is involved in these conversations because they are tied to policies and laws in our respective countries in Southern Africa."



Youth challenge SADC governments over rhetorical promises

By Jairosi Saunyama

Hundreds of youths who participated in the fourth edition of the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Consortium (SARSYC) conference, challenged SADC governments, development partners and civil society organisations to stop politicking and provide decent health and educational services in the region.

The conference was held recently in Lilongwe, Malawi under theme: Re-planning, re-shaping and recommitting to the youth agenda in Southern African region.

The youths came up with a communique laden with a number of recommendations to be handed over to various leaders.

“Move from rhetoric to action and implement the commitments and policies signed at national, regional, and global and further increase financial investment and political commitment to the youth development agenda,” reads the communique at the end of the conference.

The youths also recommended that there was need to support the economic empowerment of youths by availing entrepreneurial opportunities and developing economic policies that create jobs and opportunities for them.

“Be pro-active in adopting protective initiatives that shield young people from the adverse

effects of emergencies like Covid-19 and recommit and strengthen collaborations between governments and young people in addressing challenges affecting youths by not only consulting them in policy and programme development, but involving them across the cycle of the policy and programme implementation,” wrote the youths.

The youths also pleaded with civil society organisations, development partners and private players including tertiary institutions, to design interventions that relate with the prevailing social and economic dynamics like unemployment.

“Design interventions that reflect the prevailing socio-economic dynamics such as unemployment, labour migration and crisis related displacement, within broader frameworks and programmatic intervention to promote SRHR of young persons,” read the communique.

“Increase investment towards research to inform learning and evidence based advocacy, programming and policy formulation.”

Malawi’s Youth and Sports minister Richard Chimwendo Banda emphasised the urgent need for stakeholders to action so that young people can realise their full potential and their dreams. The conference universally acknowledged challenges young people encounter with regards to the access of SRHR services.



Wankumbu Simukonda-Zambia

My name is Wankumbu Simukonda, and I am the Southern Africa Regional Students and Youth Consortium (SARSYC) Country Coordinator for Zambia. The fourth edition of the conference was my second conference, having attended the first at the University of Zambia in 2019.

It's noteworthy to note that my active engagement in the 2019 conference helped me get selected to attend the ICASA conference in Kigali, Rwanda, where I got to meet over 8500 attendees and serve as the Youth Conference rapporteur.

The 4th edition of the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Consortium (SARSYC) Conference was an honour for me. It was a heartening experience as I got the opportunity to exchange ideas with other young people in the region. Interpersonal conversations with public duty bearers like government representatives and parliamentarians from all the Southern African countries were even more enriching and enlightening. Above all, I salute my fellow young people who demonstrated courage to speak truth to power vis-à-vis our health and educational rights.

I hope that Southern African governments are taking on board our recommendations in the communique.

When it comes to the 2022 conference, I would say I was privileged to lead a team of students from 10 Zambian public institutions to Lilongwe, Malawi. The more reason I enjoyed every moment of the preparation, knowing that I have advanced in life to the point where I must prepare others for the conference and ensure that they enjoy the experience.

It was also heart-warming to interact with honorable members of Parliament from my country and the region at large and understand what their respective governments were doing in the health and education sectors. At the 2019 meeting, we had a lengthy discussion about the SADC SRHR strategy, which most of us hadn't known about. But after the conference, I personally took time to read and understand the strategy.

This is what culminates in what stood out for me at the conference, where the SAYWHAT research department conducted a survey to understand young people's and students' understanding of the SADC strategy and recommendations. This clearly shows that SARSYC keeps on growing and takes action on the resolutions and recommendations made by young people who attend a particular edition. I truly believe that all those who have attended the conference more than once can attest to the growth in terms of attendance and influence in the advocacy for a healthy generation in the region and beyond.



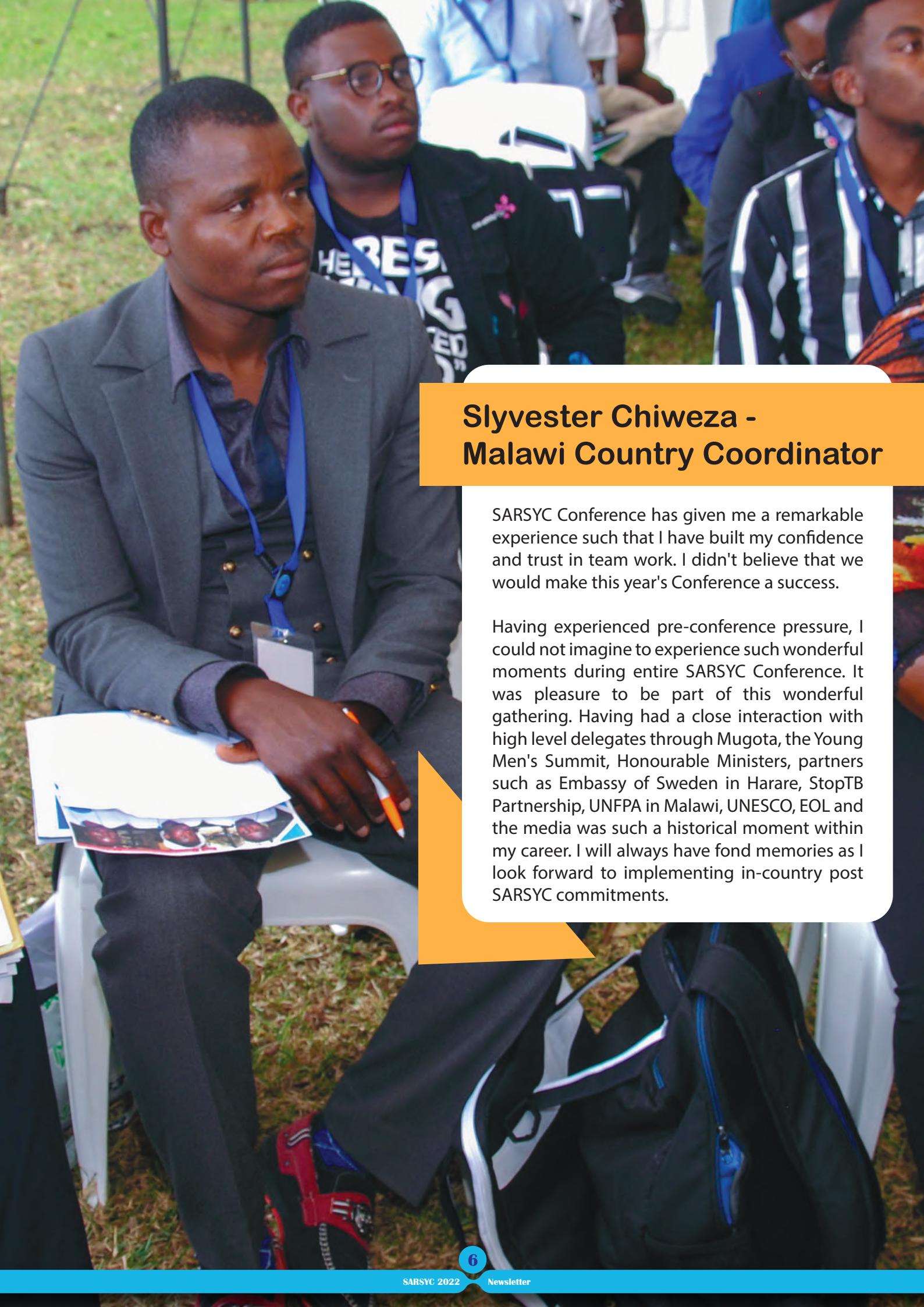
Hazel Jojo - Zimbabwe

The SARSYC conference was an excellent opportunity for young people to interface with policymakers, interact, learn and network. My best session was the Web for life summit, where young women got the opportunity to interact at an interpersonal level and discuss issues affecting them. The flagship session within this summit was medical pregnancy prevention methods presented by Cleopatra from PZAT. The upcoming methods include the vaginal ring, a small soft, plastic ring that you place inside your vagina. It releases a continuous dose of estrogen and progesterone hormones into the bloodstream to prevent pregnancy. This is an exciting moment for most young women as it will ease the pill burden and promote the Choice of sexual engagement without worrying about pregnancy. But the question remains when this will be a reality and available, particularly to young women in the Global South. At the next conference, I would like to see “genuine conversations” of tracing the gains and the wins regarding young women rights, naming and shaming and dealing with policy and program fatigues.



Tapiwa Lukuta –Zambia

The 4th edition of the SARSYC Conference was a life-changing experience for me. For the first time I witnessed the actualization of “bringing young people to the table”. We were given a platform to critically analyze the progress of our duty bearers with regards to the commitments they have continued to make to prioritize the health of young people. Furthermore, practical homegrown solutions were offered to ensure that a concerted effort is placed to put young people first. With more spaces and engagements like the ones SARSYC is offering, victory is certain.



Slyvester Chiweza - Malawi Country Coordinator

SARSYC Conference has given me a remarkable experience such that I have built my confidence and trust in team work. I didn't believe that we would make this year's Conference a success.

Having experienced pre-conference pressure, I could not imagine to experience such wonderful moments during entire SARSYC Conference. It was pleasure to be part of this wonderful gathering. Having had a close interaction with high level delegates through Mugota, the Young Men's Summit, Honourable Ministers, partners such as Embassy of Sweden in Harare, StopTB Partnership, UNFPA in Malawi, UNESCO, EOL and the media was such a historical moment within my career. I will always have fond memories as I look forward to implementing in-country post SARSYC commitments.



Shantel Wilford -Zimbabwe

Effects of Covid19 on education:

There has been an adverse effect on students' psychological well-being due to Covid19. They had no-one to talk to as the Covid19 induced successive lock downs became the order of the day. They remained stuck at home. Domestic and Gender Based Violence cases were on the rise. It was a difficult period to cope with. For students it was extremely sad. Their right to quality education was deprived and this was reflected in most of the examination results.

I was an A-level student when the World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic and spent my first year without even going for lectures. Online learning was very hard for a lot of people due to limitations of the technological infrastructures in the region.

There were also increased rates of suicidal case and depression among the young people. The focus has been largely on curbing the spread of the deadly virus without paying attention to effects that were created by the same measures. For example, mental health became a forgotten subject. I would like to recommend tertiary institutions in Southern Africa to introduce a deliberate program that provides psychosocial support services to students post Covid19. Mental health is very key to for cognitive development of every young person in Southern Africa.



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



SAIH



EDUCATIONOUTLOUD
advocacy & social accountability



GEAR Alliance



Government of the Republic of Malawi



**#SARSYC2022
Communique**

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

PREAMBLE



Article 1

1. Introduction and Background

Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference (SARSYC) is a platform that was established by the Students And Youth Working on reproductive Health Action Team (SAYWHAT) in 2015 as a strategic forum that brings together all actors in the region to find common solutions to the region's shared health and education challenges that young people face. SARSYC harnesses the potential of young people and other stakeholders to come up with one voice in matters related to young people's health and education rights.

The conference is a biennial event which the inaugural edition was held in Zimbabwe in 2015. The second edition was then hosted in South Africa in partnership with the University of Johannesburg in 2017 with the third edition being held in Zambia in partnership with the University of Zambia in 2019. Ultimately the 4th edition of the conference was then convened by SAYWHAT in partnership with Lilongwe University of Agriculture Natural Resources and the Girls Activist Youth Organisation (GAYO) under the theme Reshaping, Re-planning and Re-Committing to the Youth Agenda in the Southern African Region on the 24th and 25th of August 2022.

Article 2

2. SARSYC 2022 Contextual Note

The students and youth delegation to the 4th Edition of the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference (SARSYC) from 9 countries, namely Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe;

RECOGNIZING the intersectionality of health and education challenges that young people face in Southern Africa and the need for collective approaches, learning and sharing in the quest to develop sustainable solutions to address them,

COMMITTED to inclusively design and implement community driven solutions that youths identify with, and leaving no one behind,

CONSCIOUS of the emerging health and education challenges, especially in the wake of repeated emergencies and disasters affecting not only young people but other vulnerable communities in our societies,

AWARE of the visionary pursuit to harness the demographic dividend as a strategic fit that responds to the reality of a youthful population across not only Southern Africa but the continent at large,

RECALLING the commitments made at the 3rd edition of the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference in Lusaka, Zambia and the predecessor conferences, notably the need for,

i. College Authorities to Prioritise provision of inclusive and comprehensive youth friendly SRH services (including rape kits, safe abortion, sanitary products, sensitivity training for staff and HIV and TB testing and treatment services. The services should also cater for marginalised groups like students with disabilities, students living with HIV and TB, the LGBTIQ+ among others.

ii. Donor Community and Civil Society Organisations to Plan and implement quality and sustainable programs and prioritize and increase resource allocation towards health and education youth focussed interventions as part of efforts to achieve SDG targets in Southern Africa.

iii. And the need for Governments to Plan, recognise, and institute platforms or structures that support youth participation in decision making. Review relevant laws and policies and prioritise increase in resource allocation towards youth centred programs, particularly those that address the socio-economic challenges of young people including sexual and reproductive health challenges in line with the Abuja Declaration

FURTHER RECALLING other commitments made by governments, Donors and Private actors including the ESA Commitments, the SDGS and other strategic guidelines being operationalised to champion the development agenda

ACKNOWLEDGING the various policy frameworks, laws, and guidelines operating at National and Regional Level to address various health and education challenges, including but not limited to;

- ▶ Regional Strategy for HIV and AIDS Prevention, Treatment and Care, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights among Key Populations adopted in November 2017
- ▶ SADC Protocol on Education and Training, East and Southern Africa Ministerial Protocol on Education (ESA)
- ▶ UN High Level Meeting on TB targets and commitments,
- ▶ Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063
- ▶ Maputo Plan of Action.
- ▶ SADC Declaration on Youth Development and Empowerment (2015)
- ▶ SADC Youth Empowerment Policy Framework (2021-2030)
- ▶ African Youth Charter (2006)
- ▶ Many national programs, promises

DESIRING to Act,

- ▶ to end AIDS by 2030
- ▶ to End Global TB epidemic by 2035
- ▶ to inclusively address health and education challenges with a special focus on young people's sexual and reproductive health rights and comprehensive sexuality education.
- ▶ to curb illicit financial flows as they relate to health and education financing
- ▶ to strengthen youth driven researches and innovations on health and education responses
- ▶ to address young people's underlying concerns that include their vulnerability to Sexual and Reproductive health challenges such as economic empowerment and equal participation in entrepreneurial opportunities
- ▶ to sustain young people owned mechanisms and platforms which can actively and independently inform policy makers and development partners on young people's health and education priorities



Article 3

3. Contemporary health and education Challenges Affecting Young People in the SADC Region

- a) Disempowerment of youths, linked to the poor performance of economies which has increased poverty and unemployment amongst youths. This is leading to several undesired consequences including drug abuse, depression and negative behavioural SRH practices
- b) Young people's access to SRH services continues to be limited due to lack of financial and bodily autonomy.
- c) Gender challenges in which young women bear the brunt of weak policy implementation to sustainably address the challenges of young women including sexual harassment, poor access to menstrual health services, sexual abuse, child marriages, and exclusion from accessing quality education that addresses their unique needs
- d) The worsening sexual and reproductive health challenges in the wake of emergencies like COVID-19 (mental health, child marriages, drug abuse, menstrual health and management etc)
- e) The systematic exclusion, absence of supportive policies and weak policy implementation in matters that relate to safeguarding the rights of the minority, the LGBTIQ, persons with disabilities as well as young people from rural and resource limited communities.
- f) Limited adoption of intersectional and holistic approaches to SRHR service delivery that meaningfully integrate services that address previously neglected issues including TB, mental health and wellness, drug and substance abuse, unsafe abortions and cyberbullying.
- g) Lack of gender responsive and age appropriate policies and programs that cater for the specific health and wellbeing needs of young men and adolescents.

Article 4

4. Health and Education Related Policy Gaps

- a) Limited youth participation and consultation in policy frameworks in which participation of youths in policy development and implementation remains tokenistic, limiting possibilities of youths to meaningfully inform strategies and practices in the development agenda
- b) Weak policy implementation-policy fatigue in which the region repeatedly formulates policies that are hardly followed up and insufficiently funded by respective governments and development players
- c) Exclusion of marginalised and key populations like the LGBTIQ community in key policies and frameworks threatening the global vision of leaving no one behind, especially in matters related to young people's sexual and reproductive health
- d) Prohibitive pricing models and user fees for healthcare services deterring the already financially stressed youths from accessing essential SRH services
- e) Limited knowledge of young people on a broad range of health and education policies, compounding the challenge of young people's capacity to articulate on and influence any of these policies.

Article 5

5. Program and Practices Related Gaps

- a) While young people are the key stakeholders in health and education matters, they are less involved in developing evidence-based approaches that are youth driven
- b) Despite the centrality of health and education to the wellbeing of young people, there has been dwindling funding and resource allocation towards health and education responses especially in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- c) Programs are not informed by the true realities of young people, including utilising locally available resources and indigenous knowledge systems and the lost opportunities to harness the young people’s voices via the digital ecosystem.
- d) Interventions and response strategies are not sufficiently integrated to ensure sustainability and resilience of health and education systems for accessibility, acceptability and affordability of the services particularly within the increasing emergencies and humanitarian settings facing Africa

Article 6

6. Roles and Responsibilities of Young People in Improving health and education Outcomes in the Region

- a) Meaningfully engage and participate in spaces of influence
- b) Adopting responsible sexual and reproductive health practices and behaviours
- c) Support data and evidence generation by conducting research that inform policy and programs targeting them
- d) Organize, collaborate and coordinate an intersectional and diverse regional young person’s advocacy movement to advance the health, education and broader human rights of young people in the region.



Article 7

7. Recommendations to Governments of Southern African Countries

- a) Move from rhetoric to action and implement the commitments and policies signed at national, regional, and global level, and further increase financial investment and political commitment to the youth development agenda.
- b) Support the economic empowerment of youths by availing entrepreneurial opportunities and developing economic policies that create jobs and opportunities for the young people

- c) Be pro-active in adopting protective initiatives that shield young people from the adverse effects of emergencies like COVID-19
- d) Recommit and strengthen collaboration between governments and young people in addressing challenges affecting youths by not only consulting them in policy and program development but involving them across the cycle of policy and program implementation
- e) Ensure the effective representation of diverse groups of young people in all government processes and products that relate to youth development with a particular emphasis on young people's health and education.
- f) Implement transparency and accountability mechanisms that will show government's efforts in alleviating the plight of young people

Article 8

8. Recommendations to Civil Society and Colleges Authorities

- a) The need to design interventions that reflect the prevailing socio-economic dynamics such as unemployment, labour migration and crisis-related displacement, within broader frameworks to promote the health and education of young people
- b) To invest in the designing and implementation of projects with and for young people. Meaningful youth participation should be a key component of all projects with young people taking active roles in the project life cycle including monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning.
- c) Support emerging youth led and youth serving organisations to develop programming and professional systems with the express intention of bringing down ownership of all health and education advocacy to the actual young people. The actual action here can be intentional professional mentorship of youth led and youth serving organisations, creative and innovative partnerships with youth led organisations including in strategic consortium
- d) The need to increase investment towards research to inform learning and evidence-based advocacy, programming and policy formulation. Specific steps may include:
 - i. Investing in research skills transfer to ensure young persons are capacitated to conduct research.
 - ii. Decolonising research and academia around health and education developmental concerns of young people in Africa to include harnessing the power of indigenous knowledge systems and other learning alternatives responsive to the unique sociocultural, economic and political context in the respective countries

Article 9

9. Recommendations to Donors Private and Players

- a) Intentionally support flexible and long term funding projects that are designed with and for young people.
- b) Closed project proposal calls suffocate the creativity of youths and communities to design effective programs
- c) Strengthen funding and implementation of programs that address contemporary and previously neglected health and education issues relevant to youths including TB and mental health.
- d) Support technically and financially promising innovations by young people who are traditionally excluded from mainstream funding

Article 10.

10. Plans for the Next Conference

- a) The 5th edition of the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference to be held in 2024 in Botswana
- b) The next conference will allocate sufficient space to reflect on progress made since the 4th edition of the conference
- c) The next conference will allocate sufficient space for engagement between policymakers and young people in horizontal deliberations that give young people a voice and not passive listeners of speeches and remarks
- d) That the next conference will be guided by the vision to create transformational programming and advocacy which migrates from representation to ownership.
- e) The next conference shall have a robust pre conference mentorship programme for young people for them to actively engage with policy makers across sessions



SARSYC 2022 in pictures







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