



ADVANCING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION



SARSYC Gaborone Declaration

THE 5TH SOUTHERN AFRICAN REGIONAL STUDENTS & YOUTH CONFERENCE
ON SRH (SARSYC V)
17-19 JULY 2024, GABORONE, BOTSWANA

We, the participants of the 5th edition of the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SARSYC V), having convened in Gaborone, Botswana, from 17th to the 19th of July 2024, adopt this declaration.

1. TB and HIV

Acknowledging the various national, regional, and international policy guidelines, frameworks, and policies, constituting commitments to guide the strategic, programmatic and operational response to HIV and TB as public health concerns.

Concerned about new prevention crises in Southern Africa, particularly the increase in new HIV infections among young people and key populations.

We, the participants of SARSYC V, hereby:

Call upon SADC Member States to:

- ✔ 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.
- ✔ Meaningfully include the voices and lived experiences of people with disabilities in all aspects of the TB response strategy, including actively consulting with disability rights organizations, empowering persons with disabilities to participate in decision-making processes, and embedding accessibility and inclusion as core principles in TB strategies, guidelines, and service delivery models.
- ✔ Fully implement and allocate adequate resources for the national and regional strategies, frameworks, and commitments related to HIV and TB prevention, care, and treatment.
- ✔ Strengthen the integration of HIV and TB services, ensuring accessible and youth-friendly service delivery, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable communities.



Commit to:

- ✔ Create accountability frameworks to assist us as young people in budget tracking, monitoring implementation, and inclusion of young people in national and regional HIV and TB strategies and programs.
- ✔ Advocate for the allocation of resources and the prioritization of youth-focused HIV and TB interventions within national and regional budgets.
- ✔ Collaborate with parliaments at national and regional levels to leverage their constitutional mandate for effective youth engagement oversight on HIV and TB programmes across the region.

Call upon Development Partners, Civil Society, and Other Stakeholders to:

- ✔ 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.
- ✔ Ensure TB screening, diagnosis, treatment, and care services are physically, programmatically, and communicatively accessible to persons with a wide range of impairments.
- ✔ Support the funding of TB programs that are informed by research including needs assessment for budget allocations to be responsive to the realistic needs of communities.

2. Education, gender equality and public health

Acknowledging the SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030 which outlines strategic priorities and interventions for the SADC region related to expanding access to quality education and skills development.

Recognising the Sustainable Development Goals as a unifying global blueprint that integrates education, gender equality, and public health policies and interventions under SDG 4, SDG 5, and SDG 3;

Further recognising UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action and the various programs and interventions by SADC countries and their development partners.

We, the participants of SARSYC V, hereby:

Call upon SADC Member States to:

- ✔ Take immediate action to push for the continuation of Education as a critical component of the Pact for the Future. Removal of Education from the successor framework to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2030) is a threat to the future of young people.
- ✔ Allocate at least 20 % of the national budgets to education to ensure adequate, ring-fenced funding for targeted interventions to support marginalized learners in line with the Maputo Declaration
- ✔ 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, particularly those in rural and farming communities.

Commit to:

- ✔ Leverage our research skills, technological expertise, and creative power to pioneer innovative approaches to measuring and evaluating the relevance and applicability of the skills imparted

through the current education system.

- ✔ Actively collaborate with policymakers, legislatures, educators, and community stakeholders to co-create evidence-based solutions to address the challenges in the education sector across the region.
- ✔ Engage in data-driven advocacy, youth-led pilot projects, and the dissemination of best practices to ensure that education systems across the SADC region are responsive, inclusive, and truly empowering the next generation.

Calls upon Development Partners, Civil Society, and Other Stakeholders to:

- ✔ Close the disconnection between interests and expectations of communities and learners by implementing policies and programs to meaningfully engage parents, caregivers, and local communities as partners in education governance and improvement efforts.
- ✔ 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.

3. The ICPD 30

Recognizing the continued importance of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action in addressing youth health and wellbeing matters in the Southern African region.

Further recognising the potential of innovative technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) in addressing these challenges;

Concerned about the emerging public health challenges, such as mental health, drug abuse and negative impacts of climate change.

Appreciating the need to meaningfully engage youth in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of ICPD commitments at the national and regional levels.

We, the participants of SARSYC V, hereby:

Call upon SADC Member States to:

- ✔ Accelerate the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action commitments, especially those related to youth health and wellbeing.
- ✔ Institutionalize mechanisms for meaningful and inclusive youth participation and engagement in ICPD review processes.
- ✔ Leverage on emerging technologies, such as AI, to strengthen public health and education systems in the region.

Commit to:

- ✔ Actively engage in national and regional ICPD review processes to ensure that the voices and needs of young people are reflected.
- ✔ Advocate for increased investment in youth-led initiatives that address SRHR, climate change, and other public health priorities.

- ✔ Foster cross-border collaborations and knowledge-sharing among youth-led organizations working on SRHR, climate change, and innovative technology applications in the region.

Call upon development partners, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to:

- ✔ 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.

4. Emerging Issues in Public Health

Recognizing the critical intersections of climate change, drug abuse and technological advancements with youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR);

We, the participants of SARSYC V, hereby:

Call upon the SADC Member States to:

- ✔ Invest in infrastructure development including establishing affordable rehabilitation centres as part of the response strategy to drug abuse
- ✔ Adopt a **YES, WE CAN** approach to addressing the contemporary challenges young people confront; that is Youth Empowerment, Sustainability, Willingness, Engagement, Collaboration, Advocacy, and Networking.
- ✔ Establish platforms and mechanisms to meaningfully engage youth in policymaking, implementation, and monitoring processes related to public health.

Commit to

- ✔ Actively participate in national and regional processes, including voting and petitioning governments to ensure that our voices are heard, and our rights are protected in all matters related to young people's health.
- ✔ 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.
- ✔ Leverage on the existing AI revolution to develop sustainable solutions that address the fundamental issues affecting young people.

Call upon development partners, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to:

- ✔ Invest in research to generate data and evidence that informs effective drug abuse response strategies and priorities.
- ✔ Support the training of service providers to competently deliver inclusive and youth friendly health services to young people in their diversity including those with disabilities.
- ✔ 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.

5. Towards research focused public health response in Southern Africa

Recognising the strategic role of youth led research to provide sustainable solutions to the challenges that the youths confront.

Further recognising the need to prioritize locally driven solutions, valuing local knowledge, developing strategies that are culturally relevant, sustainable and realistic.

We, the participants of SARSYC V, hereby:

Call upon SADC Member States to:

- ✔ Recognize the power of storytelling and create platforms and opportunities for young people to share their lived experiences, perspectives, and ideas as part of evidence-building process to inform policies and programs.
- ✔ Dedicate funding and resources to support community-centred research initiatives led by young people that address pressing issues such as juvenile delinquency, mental health, and other social determinants of SRH.
- ✔ Prioritize the decolonization of research practices by ensuring that young people from the SADC region are at the forefront of generating evidence and driving the research agenda on matters that affect their lives.

Youths Commit to:

- ✔ Actively leverage the capabilities that youths possess in conducting rigorous, community-driven research to inform evidence-based policymaking and program design at local, national, and regional levels.
- ✔ Collaborate across the SADC region to undertake research on African-centric challenges and solutions, drawing on Indigenous knowledge and lived experiences to address the pressing public health needs of young people.
- ✔ Advocate for increased inclusivity in research processes, ensuring the meaningful participation of young people, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups as co-creators and equal partners.

Call upon development partners, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to:

- ✔ Provide sustainable funding, technical assistance, and capacity-building support to empower young researchers and Act on the recommendations that come from the researchers.
- ✔ Support youth driven research on socio-cultural factors, beliefs and religious systems that act as both barriers and enablers for the uptake of health services.
- ✔ Establish regulatory frameworks and guidelines that enable the safe and ethical incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in youth-led research and public health service delivery.

6. What the young people want

Reflecting on the various efforts by duty bearers, the existing policy frameworks to safeguard the interests of young people, the questions and answers discussed at #SARSYC2024 and the commitments and calls to action made during the conference.

We the youths at SARSYC 2024 are for the following:

1. 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.

- ✔ We ask for transparent mechanisms for policymakers to communicate with young researchers and advocates, acknowledging their contributions and outlining how their inputs have been incorporated into policy decisions.
- ✔ We ask for a Feedback Strategy that outlines government commitment to providing timely feedback to the youths.

2. 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.

- ✔ We want policy makers to move beyond traditional quality education metrics like literacy rates and instead track the real-world utility and applicability of the skills acquired by young people through the existing education system.
- ✔ We want a standardised education curriculum in Southern Africa for critical skills qualifications to be regionally valuable.

3. 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.

- ✔ We want policy frameworks that mandate the inclusion of youth representatives from diverse backgrounds, in all stages of the design, implementation, and evaluation of development programs.
- ✔ We want participatory approaches that empower young people to actively contribute their perspectives, experiences, and solutions to shape the decisions that impact their lives.

4. Policy makers to harness the demographic dividend through provision of economic empowerment opportunities to the youths.

- ✔ We want skills development programs that equip youth with the technical, digital, and entrepreneurial competencies needed to thrive in emerging industries. We request availability of dedicated youth entrepreneurship funds to provide young entrepreneurs with access to finance, mentorship, and technical assistance.
- ✔ We want public-private partnerships to drive job creation and facilitate school-to-work transitions for young graduates.

5. Health service providers to offer youth-friendly, gender-responsive services.

- ✔ We ask for a gender-responsive research that investigates the diverse SRH concerns, and barriers faced by young people in their diversity including the LGBTIQ+ community in their quest to access services.
- ✔ We want tailored health and wellbeing interventions that cater to the unique needs and lived experiences of young women, young men, and gender non-conforming youth.

Adopted on the 19th of July 2024