



SECOND EDITION REGIONAL RESEARCH INDABA REPORT



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i. Introduction

On the 17th of July 2024, the second edition of the Regional Research Indaba was held in Gaborone, Botswana. The event was held as part of the 5th edition of the Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference on sexual and reproductive health (SARSYC). This conference serves as a regional platform, which brings together students, young people, policymakers, program implementers, civic groups, governments, the UN Family, donors and other stakeholders to engage in solution focussed dialogues on all matters related to young people's health and wellbeing. The conference convener, SAYWHAT, utilises this regional gathering to create a platform for young people to share knowledge and evidence generated by the youths in their quest to be solution bearers to the various challenges that young people in the region confront.

This report captures the key highlights of this Research Indaba, summarising the key topics covered and discussions that took place during the event.

ii. About SAYWHAT

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

SAYWHAT envisions “A generation of healthy young people in Southern Africa” driven by the mission “To promote students’ and young people’s access to Health Rights, Services and Commodities. SAYWHAT’s programmatic approach is rooted in the health rights movement which is sustained through its strategic pillars of capacity building, research, documentation as well as advocacy and engagement.

Key amongst SAYWHAT’s Programing Focus areas include;

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

iii. About SARSYC V

The 5th Edition of the Southern Africa Regional Students and Youth Conference (SARSYC V) was held



from the 17-19 July 2024 in Gaborone, Botswana. This year's conference was held under the theme Advancing Equitable Access to Public Health and Education reinforcing the critical role of strengthening education system in the region as a strategic necessity to address the intersecting socio-economic, political and public health concerns confronted by young people. This year's conference primarily focussed on 5 thematic areas which are:

- a) ICPD30: As we approach the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 30th anniversary, it is a time for celebration and introspection. SARSYC presented an opportunity for the youths to examine the ICPD's impact and relevance in today's context, ensuring that their voices contribute to shaping the future trajectory of population and development discourse.
- b) HIV, TB, and other communicable diseases: Southern Africa continues to face a high burden of HIV and tuberculosis (TB). These not only strain healthcare systems but also cast shadows over economic productivity and social stability. SARSYC is an opportunity for students and young leaders converge to dissect policies, evaluate the intersections of communicable diseases with other aspects of life, and forge actionable plans.
- c) Emerging Issues in Public Health: The Southern African Regional Students and Youth Conference (SARSYC) is a strategic opportunity to address critical emerging public health concerns. In this edition, the focus areas were climate change, the AI revolution and its negative and positive implications in the youth's wellbeing.
- d) Intersecting Quality Education, Gender Equality, and Public Health: Advancing SDGs 3, 4, and 5 The African Union's proclamation of 2023 as the Year of Education comes at a critical time when millions of girls drop out of school in Sub-Saharan Africa due to constraints such as vulnerability to sexual harassment, menstrual health challenges, and early marriage. These barriers not only disrupt individual lives but also impede the region's progress. SARSYC ignited dialogue on these matters and foster partnerships to develop educational interventions that are responsive to the emerging challenges within the region.
- e) Research: SAYWHAT recognises the power of research to address the contemporary challenges that young people confront. As part of the SARSYC V, SAYWHAT conducted the 2nd Edition of the Regional Research Indaba with the aim to contribute to evidence-based programming in the organization and offer research proposals that address contemporary challenges faced by young people. The regional indaba promotes and strengthens the linkages of research, training, policy and practice to achieve universal access to health services in Southern Africa

iv. The 2nd Edition of the Regional Research Indaba:



Background

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

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

The Rationale of the 2nd Edition of the Research Indaba

The 2nd Edition of the Regional Research Indaba was an opportunity for the youths to present research-based abstracts that address contemporary challenges faced by young people aligning with the commitment to bridge the gap between research and society. In the build up towards the indaba, a call for original abstracts which attracted over 50 abstract submissions. Presided over by a panel of seasoned academics, this was followed by a rigorous selection process which led to the selection of seven young people. Among the selected researchers, five were selected to deliver presentations while the other two had the privilege of participating in a panel discussion.

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

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

Objectives of the Research Indaba

The key objectives of the research indaba were:

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

v. Program Proceedings



1. Opening Remarks and Overview of the Research Indaba



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

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

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

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

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

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



2. Official Book Launch

Following the overview of the Regional Research Indaba, 3 books with articles researched and written by the researchers with the assistance of seasoned academics were officially launched. These books were a product of SAYWHAT Research Unit's. The books were described as “a must read as they capture the intellectual capabilities of young people.” The books were officially launched and signed by the following delegates;

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

The following are the titles of the books launched;



»» ***A SADC Regional Perspective by Young People on COVID 19***

This book aptly captures the peculiar challenges that young people faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was brought to life by the work of 5 authors drawn from Malawi, Zimbabwe and Zambia. It has several articles that relate to the struggles of young people during the pandemic including in their attempt to access sexual and reproductive health services



»» **Breaking The Cycle: Overcoming Drug and Substance Abuse Among Young People in Zimbabwe**

At present, drug and substance abuse is prevalent and at its peak in Zimbabwe. This book comprises of 8 articles written by the recruited and dedicated cohort of young people through the Young Peoples Research Programme that tackles the scourge of DSA within universities. The programme is a six-month intensive training of young people by academics.

»» **Empowering Young Voices: Unveiling the hidden realities of young people in Zimbabwe**

This book captures various thematic issues around drug and substance abuse and mental health. Its' publication was a concerted effort of the 2022 research cohort of students who engaged in research and shared their findings as articles in the book.





3. Students and Young People Research Abstract Presentations and Discussions

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

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

The research was premised on the backdrop of an increase of children in conflict with the law in Zimbabwe. The study defined a child in conflict with the law as: When a child breach the legal and social norms by committing minor to serious offences.

In this regard, the research investigated the causes that are driving the cases of children to be in conflict with the law in Zimbabwe and applied a qualitative methodology using a case study as the research design. Data was gathered through key informant interviews and in-depth interviews analysed through thematic analysis. The study was done under the following objectives

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

Key research findings

- » Children were found to be in conflict with the law because of poverty. The research revealed that the children break the law as they attempt to fend for themselves and their families. This is also complemented by poor parenting skills as inadequate emotional, and physical support from families negatively affect their state of well-being
- » The study further revealed that supernatural phenomena i.e. evil spirits and spirits of dead family members have an influence in juvenile delinquency
- » Offences committed by juveniles were observed to range from minor to serious offences i.e., theft and sexual offences and the children in conflict with the law were primarily from poor backgrounds. The research also proved that these children are more likely to engage in drugs and substance abuse.
- » The study also highlighted that children in conflict with the law are placed in rehabilitation centres and counselling services

In mitigating some of the challenges from the research findings, the study recommended that social workers and other professionals in childcare must engage communities and train them in positive parenting skills. There was also a need for governments to increase funding for community-based rehabilitation support services such as counselling and family therapy.

Question and Answer segment

Below are some of the issues raised during the question-and-answer session



Question	Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On socio-economic factors, did you consider dual or single parenting styles? Luthando, University of Botswana ▪ What policy initiative do you propose to mitigate the supernatural phenomenon? Prof Choolwe Muzyamba ▪ Do you have an age group or age of debut for these children in conflict with the law? Dr Chilindi Maloiso ▪ On rehabilitative centres, do young people give their consent? Dr Maloiso ▪ What determines that the child has been successfully rehabilitated? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The study focused in a high-density area where children are economically disadvantaged and oftentimes are orphans or live with guardians ▪ Presently, there is no policy in place to address the spiritual phenomenon, however, recommendations are welcome ▪ The age of debut was between the 13-16 years age group ▪ The young researcher pointed out that the needs of the child are prioritized after having a conversation with them to understand what is taking place ▪ It is dependent upon the nature of the crime committed and follow up visits, however due to financial constraints it is not always possible

Quick reactions-Insights from the floor

- »» Tapiwanashe, a SAYWHAT research alumni weighed in and acknowledged that supernatural factors are a reality that may influence juvenile delinquency thus, he argued the need to recognize and appreciate indigenous knowledge that may be complemented by scientific research.
- »» The research fellow emphasized the need to have child-centric approaches to interventions and solutions that may be informed from the perspectives of the young people themselves.
- »» Prof Muzyamba shared similar sentiments on indigenous knowledge with the research fellow and stressed that there was need to decolonise research and knowledge for sustainable development
- »» Prof Bontle Mbongwe bemoaned the lack of engagement with youths in understanding the phenomenon of spirituality. She encouraged researchers and delegates to understand and unpack this phenomenon.

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

“I love story-telling, it gets my attention and I strongly feel it is an approach that should form an integral part of the policy making processes” Sheuneni Kurasha, Programme Manager Democracy and Human Rights SADC Parliamentary Forum

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

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

The project aims to empower women and families to share their childbirth and newborn care experiences, fostering collaborative, culturally sensitive care pathways between mothers, families, and healthcare providers to ensure Neotree is family oriented. A total of 20 mothers, 10 each from Malawi and Zimbabwe,



participated in the project, with babies admitted to the targeted hospitals between December 2020 and July 2021. The following is the manner in which the process took place.

- Mothers returned to their communities and independently captured stories using smartphones and they kept in touch with each other and the team via a WhatsApp group
- They were able to collect stories around different issues some depicting community myths around childbirth and other stories surrounding health care provision and community involvement in raising children.

The following were the findings from the project;

- Participatory approach: The Neotree process needs to be collaborative and participatory. This allows the mothers to be free to share their experiences and further helps to break barriers.
- Open channels of communication help to ensure that things ran smoothly. The use of WhatsApp as a medium of communication helped the team to guide mothers at different stages.
- Participants took ownership of the project. The women were both the source of the story and storyteller

The researcher concluded that creative storytelling is an effective method to break down barriers and enable patient-centered quality improvement, resulting in an action plan and the development of support groups for mothers in the hospital.

Delegates were content with the presentation and did not quiz the researcher except offer acknowledgements and insights.

Quick reactions-Insights from the floor

- » Professor Choolwe Muzyamba appreciated the paradigm shift from traditional methods. He noted that Neotree approach is African grown, and this makes it sustainable. He also appreciated how it incorporates the voices of the marginalized communities.
- » Innovation is key in formulating interventions and adapt them to communities
- » The SADC PF delegate Sheuneni Kurashe commended the innovative project and recommended linking their findings in broader MNCH components relevant in various countries.
- » Dean of Students for the Harare Institute of Technology noted that, in the digital era, African countries struggle with maternal health issues, thus it is imperative to explore how storytelling may be adopted in this public health area.

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

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

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

The research was qualitative in nature, utilizing interviews with family members and healthcare professionals. It was implemented in a rural area with a high prevalence of TB, drawing participants from the 15-25 years age group who had been infected with TB within the past year.

Key findings:

- » Social isolation of infected young people due to a lack of belonging in their communities
- » Stigma associated with TB, with some community members linking it to HIV/AIDS
- » Financial burden on families struggling to afford TB treatment
- » Strained relationships in families leading to further isolation due to fear of TB transmission



Based on these findings, the research recommended the following coping mechanisms:

- »» Establishment of support groups for young people infected with TB
- »» Provision of psychosocial support from peers and families
- »» Scaling up of support and awareness-raising efforts to debunk myths and misconceptions about TB, while also educating communities on caring for those infected

Recommendations from the floor:

- »» Sheuneni Kurasha (SADC PF) emphasized the importance of providing opportunities for young people, as their voices echo those of their peers.
- »» Dr. Moses Mugadza (SADC PF) stressed the need for the research to be underpinned by theoretical frameworks and for the recommendations to be revisited.
- »» Prof. Choolwe Muzyamba suggested including community leaders, such as religious leaders, in the research.
- »» Dr. Maloise critiqued the focus on symptomatic TB, suggesting the research topic required refinement.
- »» Tapiwa (SAYWHAT) encouraged refining the terminology and capturing individual experiences, as well as investigating measures to improve TB screening and positive health-seeking behavior.
- »» Mrs. Mudavanhu emphasized the need to consider corporate social responsibility in reducing TB infections.
- »» Prof. Mbongwe challenged university authorities to formulate TB policies at the college level, aligning with the broader national TB response strategy.

3.4. Unhealthy Habits in Youths and the rise of non-communicable diseases in Gaborone, Botswana-Moipone Selepe, University of Botswana

Non-communicable diseases such as heart attacks, strokes, and diabetes are a leading cause of death globally and have been typically associated with older adults. However, there has been a shift in this trend as they are becoming more prevalent in young people, hence it triggered the undertaking of this research. Unhealthy habits formed in young people significantly increase the risk of chronic diseases in the future, hence the study sought to investigate how social and environmental factors influence the adoption and maintenance of unhealthy habits amongst young people aged 15-35 years. It also aimed at exploring participants' perceptions on risks associated with unhealthy habits through the qualitative research methodology at the University of Botswana. The researcher gathered data through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and online platforms, and analyzed it through thematic analysis.

The findings revealed:

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

Due to these unhealthy habits, the study found that:

- »» Obesity becomes inevitable as young people experience weight gain, and feeling conscious about these changes, they struggle to manage their weight.
- »» There is an increase in chronic heart diseases due to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.

In conclusion, the study recommended a multi-faceted approach to address the social and environmental factors, focusing on empowering young people and creating supportive environments for healthy lifestyles. This should be complemented by public health initiatives like educational programs, awareness campaigns, and increased access to affordable healthy foods.



During the discussion:

- » Prof Bontle Mbongwe critiqued the research, stating that it should have shown the characteristics of the population under study, such as urban and rural students, and on-campus and off-campus students. She also stressed the need for a literature review to improve the research.
- » Dr T Sengerai highlighted the importance of addressing the question of choice, as young people may seemingly enjoy unhealthy but delicious food.
- » Ngaatendwe Murombedzi from the AIDS Healthcare Foundation in South Africa emphasized the need for young people to advocate for policy makers to subsidize healthy food due to constrained economic growth challenges.
- » Wankumbu Simukonda, the SARSYC Coordinator in Zambia, suggested that college authorities should take over the operation of university/college cafeterias to ensure access to nutritious, affordable, and healthy food.

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

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

The provision of education services in Zimbabwe is marred by a plethora of challenges particularly in areas with high student to teacher ratios. Conventional ways of relying on human monitoring i.e. the teacher being the facilitator oftentimes fail to accurately identify students' areas of improvement. This research sought to address these attendant challenges with the development of "Tech4Education". It is a digital platform designed by three students from the Centre of High-Performance Computing that integrates Generative Artificial Intelligence and Learning Analytics to automate student performance monitoring and provide personalized data.

The research used qualitative methodology to identify key areas of need within the education sector drawing from the National Development Strategy 1, reports from the Ministry of Education and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. The system development took over one year and it aims to solve the following challenges in education;

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

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

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

The following were the results from the research

- » Improved teacher efficiency through automated performance monitoring and the system generates personalized educational content to individual student needs. The system automatically learns the requirements of the student based on his performance and produces relevant content through analysis of engagement metrics and statistics

- »» Insights drawn from collected data may be to develop and implement targeted strategies and in guiding evidence-based policy making

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

The screenshot displays a digital learning platform interface. At the top, it says "Hello Rufaro" and "Mathematics || trigonometry". The main content area is titled "SUMMARY" and contains "Trigonometry Summary Notes". The notes are organized into three sections:

- 1. Basics**
 - Sum of angles in a triangle: 180°
 - Pythagoras' theorem: $c^2 = a^2 + b^2$
 - Triangle rule for rearranging formulas
- 2. Labelling Right-Angled Triangles**
 - Hypotenuse: longest side (opposite right angle)
 - Opposite and adjacent sides (with respect to a chosen angle)
- 3. Trigonometric Ratios**

The interface also features a sidebar with navigation options: Learning Area, Notes, Summarization (highlighted), Videos, Quiz, Assignments, Practice Exam, Stats, and ChartRoom. A "Work Time" indicator at the bottom left shows 29:32.

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

Question and Answer segment

“Young African people should be proud of their innovations and own their intelligence particularly when they are capable. The concept of the borrowed meekness of an African should not be identified with them”
Sheuneni Kurasha SADC PF





Question	Responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How can we scale up this pilot project to national and regional level given the context that the SADC Region has limited resources? <i>Munashe Tofa SADC PF Researcher</i>▪ To what extent is the platform secure from data breaches and how do you ensure data protection and privacy particularly in marginalized communities? <i>Prof Muzyamba</i>▪ How do you ensure the system does not compromise the quality of education and how does it cater for those with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The system was deployed to a local school i.e. Mount Pleasant High School and it is web based requiring internet connectivity. Most schools in Harare have computer labs thus rolling it out is manageable. However, for marginalized areas there is need for equipment and data as connectivity challenges are severe in those communities▪ In terms of data privacy, only the administrators of the system have access to it and external attacks are irrelevant as the system is localized at particular schools▪ The system does not compromise the quality of learning as it used retrieval models through artificial intelligence where source documents are used to provide accurate information that is uploaded by the teacher or facilitator.▪ for students with disabilities, the researcher noted that they are still working on other models. However, for those with visual impairments, they use Chat GPT 40- an artificial intelligence chatbot that uses voice commands.

The question-and-answer segment marked the end of presentations of research abstracts by young people. The engaging session afforded these blossoming researchers' invaluable insights and key pointers that may be adopted to further buttress and improve their research capabilities to spearhead evidence-based solutions that inform policy and advocacy initiatives.





4. Panel Discussion

Navigating Contemporary Challenges in Southern Africa- A Research Perspective

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

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

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

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



5. Research Indaba Award Ceremony

Young people who participated in the Regional Research Indaba were recognized for their hard work and contributions. To this end, they received certificates of recognition handed over to them by the SADC Parliamentary Forum representatives and Professor Bontle Mbongwe, a renowned academic from the University of Botswana. The awards served as a reminder to young people that their efforts make a difference in shaping a progressive SADC future.





6. Closing Remarks

As the Regional Research Indaba ended, Dorcas Chikorova, the Head of Programs at SAYWHAT, applauded the young people who had shared their research abstracts during the event. She acknowledged that some individuals can be evasive and unexcited about research. However, Chikorova expressed optimism, noting that the current generation of young people is embracing research, which she deemed a positive step towards ensuring sustainable development.

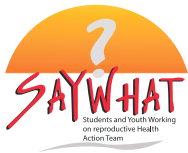
Mrs Chikorova emphasized that for SAYWHAT, research remains a critical component that contributes to knowledge-based advocacy. The organization is committed to strengthening research initiatives and continuously engage with the academic community to leverage their expertise. She further noted that such collaborations are essential to ensure meaningful change in the lives of young people through evidence-based interventions that directly address their needs.



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Special Thanks to Our Partners



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