

Masithethe - Let's Talk

SRHR and Interfaith: Intergenerational Dialogue



Supported by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

ACT UBUMBANO

Brot
für die Welt



Masithethe Initiative Service Contractors/ Partners



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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AWET	Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust
ASRHR	AdolescentSexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
BftW	Brot für die Welt
CCAP	Church Of Central Africa Presbyterian Blantyre Synod
CCM	Council of Churches of Mozambique
CSC	Council of Swaziland Churches
ELCSA	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa
F2A	Faith to Action Network
FZWO	Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation
IAM	Inclusive and Affirming Ministries
MCSA	Methodist Church of Southern Africa
SANERELA+	South Africa network of Religious leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS+
SOLDEV	Synod of Livingstonia Development Department
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

1. Executive Summary

“SRHR is not new, what is new is the fact that we have to introduce the themes in our congregations. It is uncomfortable to talk about SRHR.”

Ms Eulalia Rosa Armando Chivite Cossa

The importance of intergenerational dialogue on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) within faith communities was identified as a critical process of bridging the knowledge gap on SRHR between adults and youth. This was highlighted during a two-day interfaith workshop hosted by ACT Ubumbano, Faith to Action Network and Brot für die Welt.

The Masithethe - Let's Talk! Interfaith and Intergenerational Dialogue on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights was held on the 14th and 15th June 2022, in Johannesburg, South Africa. Participants included 25 male and female clergy and youth from partners implementing the SRHR Masithethe initiative. The two-day session enabled partners to engage in critical conversations on how faith has enabled or undermined the advancement of SRHR within the faith communities. It was an opportunity to reflect on the practices and learnings in the Masithethe Initiative and to explore other ways in which the spaces could be made safer for all hierarchies within the congregations. A key focus was on the importance of centering youth voices when engaging on existing societal understandings of the intersectionality of culture, faith and SRHR.

The dialogue highlighted some key achievements of the work that has been implemented and included brunch conversations with young couples on positive sexuality; DARE, a men's group tackling gender-based violence; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI+) and faith dialogues, initiatives led by young girls; interfaith dialogues, menstrual health campaigns, youth camps; and courageous conversations.

The dialogue reiterated the collective duty held by the faith community to use their leadership influence to educate and advocate for greater access to age- and context-appropriate SRHR information and services. The regular and receptive audiences that form part of all faith communities was highlighted as the starting point of raising SRHR issues and addressing societal challenges.

Faith leaders clarified their involvement in responding to SRHR issues at various levels, although they had selected SRHR themes and topics that they felt more “comfortable” with. During the group discussions, the participants identified “blindspots” that would require engagement as the project continued. The meeting confirmed that there is more that could be done. This includes the need to gain more knowledge on SRHR, so as to make informed decisions regarding uncomfortable and taboo themes.

Some of the notable themes raised as being of importance during the sessions included child protection, teenage pregnancy, mental health, trauma management, LGBTIQ+ inclusiveness, digital and online sex, human sexuality, gender-based violence (GBV), trafficking and slavery, child marriage, menstrual health, family planning and health and hygiene.

Safeguarding within the spaces that we work in was viewed as a theme that should be prioritised. Partners shared how there is a need to go beyond the policy to start living the safeguarding principles. Participants also shared the creative strategies they used when faced with increased reporting of GBV and sexual assault cases. The reporting was a result of the intervention, as community members addressed facilitators with requests for support after their engagements. Reporting is essential in order to address the culture of silence and shaming around such cases.

2. Introduction

On the 14th and 15th June 2022, ACT Ubumbano, Faith to Action Network and Brot für die Welt hosted a two-day Dialogue as part of the Masithethe - Let's Talk! intergenerational, interfaith project to reflect on faith actors' experiences in promoting adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Participants included 25 female and male clergy and youth drawn from partners implementing the Masithethe Initiative, as well as participants drawn from faith actors in Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The Masithethe Initiative is a call to engage in inter-generational and interfaith partnerships to advance adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights and how they are addressed in the Southern Africa region.

The aim of the Masithethe Initiative is to achieve a more effective youth-led, coordinated response to support adolescent and young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights needs within faith communities. This will be done through engagement with youth to spearhead action on SRHR as they interact with faith leaders in their faith organisations and communities. With this project, the intention is to contribute to turning congregations into safe and healing spaces for adolescent and young people (18-24 years old) and ensuring that faith leaders / institutions are responsive and open to the SRHR needs of young people.

The participatory meeting and dialogue was facilitated by a young person and clergy, and they utilised the See-Judge-Act methodology. The following components formed part of the meeting approach:

- **Setting the scene:** In setting the scene, participants shared expectations for the session. In this session, a speaker was able to locate the importance of intergenerational dialogues, faith and SRHR. Zamantshali Dlamini from the UJaama Centre and the Gender & Religion Unit of the University of KwaZulu-Natal was able to speak to issues of Gender, Religion and Culture.
- **Reflections:** A session was held with male clergy, youth and women separately in respective groups. This was to enable reflections and sharing on the experiences during the implementation of the Masithethe Initiative in their different localities. This was also a space to unearth commonalities, challenges and successes across the initiatives.
- **Intergenerational Dialogue:** The main session was the intergenerational dialogue which opened up space for youth leaders and faith leaders to interact, and to discuss SRHR, teenage pregnancy, GBV, and family planning from different perspectives. They engaged in conversation on elements that enabled and hindered their discussions on SRHR, and how they could make the faith spaces safe and inclusive for all.
- **Showcasing our work:** Partners were able to showcase their work from the Masithethe Initiative. They explained how they have engaged in advocacy and social and behaviour change communication, clarifying the observed pathways of change, while describing the challenges and resistance they have encountered. Failures to achieve change were presented, and what insights these have generated for their continued practice.
- **Co-creation of the @How To Guide:** Recommendations were developed collectively on "how to" enhance intergenerational collaboration within faith spaces. Recommendations were drawn from their lived experiences, sacred texts & faith scriptures, as well as the lessons learnt and existing initiatives.

3. Safe Space for Dialogue

Underpinning the participatory and honest dialogue is the need to create safe spaces for conversation ideas, experiences and action. In setting up a safe space, it consisted of the acknowledgment of differences in religion, gender, age, geography, experiences and hierarchical position. The following “community agreements’ were put forward as elements that guided the dialogue:

Open-mindedness	Question of curiosity and learning	Non-judgmental - Be a safe space for others to have brave conversations	Measure our words, speak with love, be conscious about what we say.
Check your own power, positionality and privilege	Internal conversations and self-reflection are always critical	Consciousness to individual and personal blind spots	Use own language if you want to express yourself
Language matters, who says something matters, and how it is said matters	Finding comfort in being uncomfortable	Respectfully disagree and be sensitive to diverse beliefs and values	Be willing to be vulnerable by sharing your own experiences, beliefs and convictions

4. Welcome Message

4.1. Faith to Action Network



Judy Amoke-Ekasi, Head of Programmes, Faith to Action Network

Judy Amoke-Ekasi, Faith to Action Network (F2A) Programme Manager introduced Faith to Action Network as a global interfaith movement, formed in 2011, that has 110 members from diverse faith backgrounds including Bahai, Buddhist, Confucian, Christian and Muslim communities. As an interfaith network it promotes dialogue, builds the technical and financial capacity of faith organisations and religious institutions and facilitates sustained joint advocacy and programming in support of family health and wellbeing.

She emphasised that Faith to Action Network believes in peaceful, just and inclusive communities where everybody can live healthy and happy lives. To achieve this vision, every voice needs to be heard. Faith to Action Network has partnered with Brot für die Welt and ACT Ubumbano to leverage existing and new faith platforms in order to generate faith consensus, commitment and action for SRHR in the SADC region.

Faith to Action Network and ACT Ubumbano commenced these conversations in a previous partnership and collaboratively developed the Interfaith briefs in the "Because We Can" project with partners in this room.

Judy welcomed all partners to the intergenerational dialogue, highlighting that intergenerational dialogues are not a new concept but a practice in all communities. It is a mandatory practice if communities wish to survive and especially to have a young generation that is empowered with knowledge that helps to grow, protect and sustain generations.

In this safe space, it was recognised that religious leaders are rightfully placed to positively influence SRHR in Southern Africa and the importance of engagement with youth on SRHR. Judy encouraged the meeting to foster honest and respectful deliberations to provide compassionate and solidary interpretations of scripture.

4.2. ACT Ubumbano



An introduction and overview from Ashley Green-Thompson, ACT Ubumbano

Ashley Green-Thompson, Director of ACT Ubumbano, welcomed participants and acknowledged that there is a third partner in the Masithethe Initiative collaboration which is Brot für die Welt. He elaborated on the role of ACT Ubumbano and their role in the Masithethe Initiative. ACT Ubumbano is a network of Southern African and European partner organisations whose ethos is premised on a 'bottom-up' approach that emphasises local decision-making, community participation and grassroots mobilisation. The organisation seeks to challenge power and traditional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) practices that are often 'top-down' through concentrated efforts in lobbying and bargaining engagements with decision-making authorities such as government agencies in order to exert influence through various campaign mechanisms and advocacy activities. Empowering communities and adopting a 'bottom-up' approach allows for participation and enables marginalised people to use their voices to articulate and own their issues and struggles.

ACT Ubumbano facilitates critical reflection on its social justice praxis, listening to the voices of those who are most affected by injustice, and supporting innovative and collaborative solidarity initiatives that address unjust power relations globally.

The ACT Ubumbano meetings are not workshops but spaces for reflection based on everyone's lived experiences and how they see their role in changing the realities they are confronted with. The spaces for reflection are aimed at interrogating individual

practice, beliefs, and norms and examining the power that each individual holds, and how to use it to uphold the humanity and dignity of the communities that are served.

Participants were called upon to be honest and critical of their own views and to challenge themselves and colleagues in a respectful way. More importantly, questions could be raised even where there may not be answers readily available, but ensuring that a space exists for such discussions. The invitation was offered to bring a critical voice, and to feel comfortable to discuss failures in order to improve and deepen practice. It was important to listen with intent, listen to understand and move towards a common understanding of issues.

5. Presentation on SRHR discourses in Southern Africa

5.1. Repositioning into SRHR agenda



Zamantshali Dlamini made a presentation on Faith, SRHR and Culture

Self-location: Zamantshali Dlamini introduced the session by first sharing information about herself and her identity. She was able to “locate” herself based on gender, values, beliefs, socialisation and her journey in life.

In seeking to reposition into the SRHR agenda, the importance of “self-location” was highlighted as it has a bearing on how such issues are discussed and how they relate to the context.

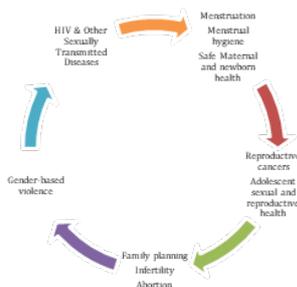
Our knowledge (or our practice) comes from our individual lived experiences, that has been gained through insider knowledge – being true to self which allows us to disrupt Western approaches and instead be able to recognize the communal nature of knowledge development and application with regard to:

- The importance of gender equality, and
- Power, positionality and privilege
- Recognising human rights
- Acknowledging right to life
- Right to health
- Non-discrimination

5.2. Our World In Crisis

Poverty (Feminisation of poverty)	Human rights violations	Mental health challenges
Gender inequality	stigma	suicide
Gender-based violence	discrimination	teenage pregnancy
Subsistence and drug abuse	Illiteracy – a continued challenge	Child/ Early marriages
	High school drop-outs -	

These issues cause continuous cycles for example, some of the continuing priority areas to focus on especially amongst women and girls



5.3. Covid 19 and its ramifications

- A spotlight shone on existing inequalities.
- Challenges within SRHR context.
- Increased rates of teenage pregnancies, in part due to the difficulty of accessing contraceptives during the COVID-19 lockdown.
- Violence against women and girls that increased during lock-down.
- Unreported statistics.
- Deficiencies in the health system also contribute to teenage pregnancies.
- Public health services are not always youth-friendly.
- Education about contraception for adolescents is often inadequate.

Life denying theologies	Life-giving theology
<p>Traditional, cultural ideologies, religious values and convictions often collide with rights-based agenda.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problematic religious beliefs • The culture of silence and secrecy • Spiritual foundation or basis in religious texts • The theology of purity • Damaging beliefs about sexual purity, physical punishment as an essential for education or parental discipline • Sexuality seen as a delicate subject • Topic considered too taboo and high degree of stigma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • De-colonise ideas on “gender”, particularly the persistence of stereotypes and of the simplistic dichotomy between “women as victims/poor” and “women’s empowerment” (individual level). • Shift the narratives • Shift the perception of “women as victims” versus “women as agents of change” • Cultivate seeds where there is women’s “agency” and “empowerment”. • Create visibility, defining the role of communication in social change, and for gender equality and reproductive health • Be clear on who is targeted with media campaigns and programmes

5.4. Envisioning and reconceiving ongoing justice work on SRHR

- What about the marginalised? Are they part of the conversations?
- Story-telling: stories of adoption, infertility, womb (defining a blessing versus a choice to reproduce)
- How we speak and/or do not speak about certain things within faith spaces – the narrative and counternarrative
- Fostering agency and choice
- Shifting the binaries and the gender dichotomies to enrich and empower
- Reauthoring conversations = Empowering Agency

5.5. Communicative strategies as faith organisations

Engaging media in SRHR (through the power of words and pictures)

Eradicating stigma and misunderstanding around women’s bodies and women’s sexual and reproductive choices

The use of media such as websites, where media platforms must promote SRHR as being the ability of women and girls to make choices for themselves.

Non-stigmatising messaging means that the messages and images being communicated must be inclusive.

Communication campaigns on SRHR need to move beyond messages which seek to change individual behaviour, providing merely individual solutions whilst sidelining deep-seated structural gender inequalities.

- SRHR messages also need to be sensitive to cultural and social contexts, taking into consideration differences of communities in order to understand why there is resistance, in an effort to undermine “gender ideology” myths.

Deconstructing the role of women within development, as well as the whole rhetoric around SRHR, in a move towards a new agenda on women’s rights.

Engaging media in SRHR (through the power of words and pictures)



Panel Feedback on Group Session

Eradicating stigma and misunderstanding around women’s bodies and women’s sexual and reproductive choices

It was important to locate the intersectionality between culture and religion in order to have the necessary conversations in every community. One participant posed the question for reflection: “Is this the point that we have to take a step back and redefine SRHR in our contexts to have meaningful conversations on ASRHR?”

Participants were split into three groups: Group 1: Male Clergy and other male participants; Group 2: Female clergy and other female participants; and Group 3: Youth. This safe space provided an opportunity for people to reflect and discuss their achievements, challenges, and commonalities and struggles in ASHR programming and working within their communities. The sessions sought to capture and document participants’ lived realities and experiences and lessons from the Masithethe Initiative. Summaries from these group discussions informed the next session’s panel feedback discussions.

5.6. Female faith leaders

“As a female clergy, we still need to get permission to even discuss issues like menstrual health in the church”

Rev Wezi Pande, Soldev

Female clergy described the context in which they find themselves in relation to support for SRHR within their faith institution. They saw their role as being that of ensuring that there is adequate information on SRHR and SRHR themes, supporting access to services and being the space for information from other members, particularly women and girls. They highlighted that the plight of the girl child is significant as they have been constantly policed and controlled. Abstinence and purity had been expected, which was contrary to the realities that were being seen in the community. Challenges includes a high rate of teenage pregnancies, illegal or backyard abortions, and poor access to services in health centres. Young people were reportedly not engaging in faith activities as they have viewed the congregations as not being responsive to them.

There was a mention of struggle at the individual level by the clergy on how to address these challenges and not lose moral focus around what could be done to be responsive to the reality in their communities. The rights of youth had been undermined due to expectations of the church. To begin to address this, community dialogues were conducted with leaders and youth.

What insights have you gained from working in the Masithethe Initiative?

- **Recognition of women & girls in the church:** The deliberate call by the Masithethe Initiative to have women clergy or women as part of the discussions on Masithethe increased their visibility in the congregation. They are part of the discussions and can approach faith leaders and also challenge doctrine through various engagements.
- **SRHR is not only a women’s and girls’ issue:** SRHR was historically viewed as a women’s and girls’ issue. These discussions have since been challenged and attention drawn to the fact that it is every human’s issue. We should no longer be silent on issues that affect us. Even where an issue is predominantly an issue related to women, they would nonetheless be discussed in the congregations, since women make up most of the congregants.

- **Men and boys are also vulnerable:** The learning from their own work and practice has shown how men and boys are seen as powerful but nonetheless there are many men and boys who are highly vulnerable. Boys and men are violated in communities and even though the numbers are lower than that of women and girls, there is a call to address such violations with urgency. Positive masculinities should be foregrounded and the inaccurate narrative related to boys and men should begin to shift
- **New knowledge and skills set:** This has empowered individuals to help other people, especially children in faith spaces. It has been possible to create safe spaces in communities where children have the necessary information to understand when they are under threat and will know where and how to obtain help.
- **New approaches and strategies:** With the platform created, SRHR can be discussed within the congregations using the identified strategies to deal with issues brought forward to the church as improved policies are also developed to guide the work. For instance, a review of SRHR policies should be done in order to align these more closely with community needs.
- **Contextual Bible studies** have helped to challenge taboos and the silence around issues, such as those related to women who are pregnant or menstruating.
- **The increasing abuse of women and children within the places of worship,** as well as in the homes of senior faith leaders has become foregrounded, even as churches speak out against gender-based violence in the church.

Challenges /What made us uncomfortable

- **Resisting Change:** People do not easily accept change There is still discomfort with regard to many issues in the church being discussed openly, including SRHR, contraceptives and access to SRHR services for young people.
- **Women gatekeepers:** Due to lack of knowledge and sometimes generational gaps, women may be the gatekeepers of patriarchy. Menstrual hygiene issues must be raised with the leadership of churches, especially male faith leaders who feel this is a “women issue” and cannot be spoken about with men. The outcome is that often the same women who are meant to raise these issues are quick to point out the need to be silent and not make the church “unclean”.
- **Understanding of SRHR:** There is an assumption that all people know about SRHR. SRHR is a relatively new topic within the church space, and it can be a challenge for people to speak frankly. More accessible and simplified information needs to be shared. There is a tendency to use highly technical language yet it is a simple thing that is already being done in the church.
- **Selection of comfortable SRHR themes:** Male leadership is keen to take control of SRHR issues and what can and cannot be spoken of in the congregations. The idea that knowledge resides with one person is maintained and further discussion may be stifled if the congregation is not very knowledgeable about it.
- **Female clergy in the congregations:** The issue of being female and clergy in the church is a challenge. Female clergy encounter challenges in being heard and taken seriously. They are then not able to support other women as needed, particularly girls.

What could be done differently?

- **Bridging the gap:** The question was about people who have been left behind. The response was that mothers, mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, and elderly women need to be part of the conversation so as to engage the different age groups to bridge the intergenerational gap. This was proposed as a way of stopping the gatekeeping syndrome displayed by certain women.
- **Courageous conversations:** There is a need to identify groups within the church who are willing to have difficult discussions on SRHR. These groups will have courageous conversations with the different groups in the church including church councils, faith leaders, women leaders, youth groups and other faith structures.
- **Contextual Bible study:** There is a need to use sacred texts to show the positives within the society. The interpretation of sacred texts has been identified as a source that may contribute to people experiencing shame, stigma and mental health challenges for women and girls. Sacred texts have been used to promote specific negative narratives and contextual Bible study and scriptures should instead be used for positive representation and a means of engagement to address social issues with positive outcomes.
- **Theological colleges and SRHR:** Content around SRHR should be included in the curriculum used at theological schools and other training centres. This will help build a mass of faith leaders with an understanding of the SRHR themes in a contextualised manner.
- **Vulnerability reflections** are needed at the beginning of each session. This will assist in understanding the different vulnerabilities and the required focus on actions in order to be most responsive. For instance, there should be conversations

with boys from a young age on SRHR and the importance of being accountable for one's actions. Similarly, such conversations will assist in empowering girls with appropriate information.

5.7. Youth Group

“Young people have a lot of wisdom that adults do not recognise”

Zanthea Hendrik Archdeaconry of Maitland- Anglican church (Good Shepard Parish)

Much was shared and learnt during the session with young people. The discussions focused on how the project emphasised the importance of young people taking the lead. This was viewed positively as it enabled them to formulate ideas and actions on SRHR.

Young people emphasised how their faith is important to them in their decision-making on a day-to-day basis. They explained that they do not know any other faith as they have been brought up within these faith settings, and emulated their parents with regard to the role of their faith in their daily lives.

However, it was indicated that being involved with church activities is no longer considered “fashionable” amongst young people, especially with regard to SRHR. Faith scripture, sacred texts and doctrines were seen as inhibiting SRHR actions, especially those targeting adolescents and the youth because churches insist on only talking about abstinence to unmarried adolescents and youth. This was seen as being contrary to the realities of the communities where young people are engaged in sexual activities, girls become pregnant, high levels of violence are common, and transactional sex, child marriages and mental health crises are on the increase.

Young people observed how faith leaders and faith communities, once they have had information shared, have become more positive regarding SRHR. This has enabled the youth to find safe space to encourage each other, to find allies within the church, seek out peer support them and to speak up for themselves. They have called for faith institutions to be more innovative in reaching out to young people, including using social media and digital spaces to work with young people.

What insights have you gained from working in the Masithethe Initiative

- **Space created for discussion:** The project opened up space to discuss SRHR issues more openly where important matters for young people are not always openly discussed in the faith-based spaces, such as early marriages, teenage pregnancy, and access to contraceptives.
- **Change in places of worship and embracing new knowledge:** It was often the case that women and girls were not allowed to attend church services when menstruating. There had been changes in how menstrual hygiene is viewed and a growing acceptance of women attending church while menstruating, although there are still cases where they would not receive holy communion. Young women and girls were encouraged to take a more positive approach to natural bodily functions and not considered menstruation as a problem.
- **Increased confidence to discuss SRHR:** The Masithethe Initiative improved confidence and young people felt empowered to begin to address issues, ask questions and speak about things like teenage pregnancy, contraception, puberty, GBV, and menstrual hygiene (both boys and girls) as well as more general issues on growth and development. Furthermore, these matters, in particular menstruation and family planning, could be discussed outside of marriage, where they were previously considered as sensitive matters.
- **Recognition of faith sector as a key player in SRHR discussions:** Following on from discussions within the different congregations and faith spaces, young faith leaders have been called upon to join committees such as child protection committees, child marriage working groups, and menstrual hygiene campaign steering groups, amongst others. Such linkages with government structures and other stakeholders have assisted when engaging with legislative and policy processes.

Challenges /What made us uncomfortable

- **Young women and girls club:** The concentration and emphasis are focused on girls and SRHR and there is a sense that boys are too often overlooked. Questions may arise regarding what girls are being taught? Why is the burden of teenage pregnancy and GBV being placed on girls only? In addition, termination of pregnancy is often discussed through the lens of “morality” and faith is introduced which increases the stigma around abortions.
- **Discomfort of faith leaders:** Faith leaders are silent in their discomfort but at least are hearing views even if they do not

engage. Some faith leaders are still uncomfortable talking about sexuality issues and the myths around sex and sexuality. How can this information gap be bridged in order to discuss some of these issues freely in the church?

- **Mental awareness:** This has become a growing challenge within communities and more so following the Covid-19 period. There is a lack of awareness about abuse, depression, and mental challenges. There is a need to start naming the issues and helping young people to acknowledge and reduce pressure and expectations on young people by the society.
- **Youth leading the youth:** There are challenges in terms of leading the SRHR discussions. Faith leaders still lead and want to influence discussions. However, faith leaders need to hear the youth and allow them to lead in some spaces. Youth need to feel they can approach church leaders without being judged or ostracised.

What could be done differently?

- **Train the Trainer for both youth and faith leaders:** A training session on SRHR with both groups could be a helpful space. This will enable discussion on the information that young people receive on a shared platform and avoid misinterpretation of information as it is cascaded.
- **Parents, community, faith community:** Dialogues should include more than just the faith leaders, but also different structures within the faith community and parents and community members. The aim is to deal with the information gaps.
- **Internet and social media as teacher:** Internet and social media sites have become the main source of information for young people. How can the faith institutions be agile and change their approaches to start sharing information on these sites? The congregations seem to be left behind in waiting for the services, and sometimes seen unaware that young people spend more time online.
- **Wi-fi as a strategy to get youth into the church:** Young people are finding faith communities do not fully meet their needs. Wi-fi access can be a drawcard and sessions can be run innovatively with online Apps.
- **Being relevant and responsive to youth:** Faith spaces have too many rules and they restrict the youth from feeling free to be themselves, often reminding them that they break these rules. Explore ways of “doing church” differently and draw young people to congregations.
- **Long-term and ongoing projects needed:** Young people need to focus on their needs as youth but also not overlook the needs of other communities. The overall aim should be to create sustainability, and a broader social movement that will impact positively on communities beyond the faith space.

5.8. Male faith leaders

The male clergy in their deliberations acknowledged their power and privilege. They recognised the importance of their leadership role of providing information to their congregants, approving policies and developing ways of being guided by their sacred writings, teachings, and traditions.

Faith leaders noted that even though they occupy this position there is more they could do to be responsive to the needs of young people. There are various obstacles to access to SRHR services and information, related mainly to gender norms and values that are strongly entrenched in their communities. These have been identified as being responsible for negative health-seeking attitudes among men and boys, as well as negative attitudes by SRHR service providers towards adolescents and youths that seek such services because they regard them as immoral to be doing so.

The issue of teenage pregnancy was cited as a major concern for the whole group. There are high numbers of young people falling pregnant and yet the church has been largely silent on the matter and the leaders questioned what they were doing wrong.

There was a discussion on how, as male clergy, they can learn from each other so as to identify and draw on innovative and more relevant approaches to increase their knowledge and make informed decisions in the best interests of young people. This included taking accountability with regard to their own binary expectation of women/mothers to be responsible for the girl child and their menstrual needs which is located within their own traditional socialization.

What insights have you gained from working in the Masithethe Initiative?

- **Safe Space discussions:** Faith leaders noted that they had an opportunity to be in safe spaces to discuss SRHR without being prejudiced. In some spaces they noted that the youth may be made to feel uncomfortable with regard to certain topics

of discussion. The Masithethe Initiative did not assume that people had all the necessary information but was able to build on SRHR terms and issues that people experienced daily.

- **Openness to discussions:** Increased dialogue influenced the culture around SRHR. There is a greater sense of openness regarding SRHR issues than before.
- **Listening to the Youth:** Youth-led approaches provided the opportunity for the youth to lead the conversations around their challenges and faith leaders come into these spaces as listeners and observers and are then engaged directly by the youth, which allows for the opportunity share views.
- **Discussing taboo topics:** Taboo topics have been engaged as and when possible and appropriate. This has included discussion around menstrual health, contraceptives and sexual orientation. Engaging on these issues that are often considered taboo has provided opportunities for proper information to be shared so that people are empowered to make an informed decision for themselves on a particular matter. In addition, people felt positive that the information was underpinned by sacred texts and scripture.
- **Engagement with parents on SRHR:** The conversations went beyond the church which provided an opportunity to discuss important matters with parents and community members. This was seen by many as a ground-breaking experience. The faith leaders found it helpful to have these dialogues that included the broader community.
- **Collaborating with other church denominations and faiths:** The fact that a range of church denominations and different faiths collaborated was highlighted as a positive approach. This ensured that the different stakeholders held a shared view of the issues as they jointly wanted positive outcomes for young people.
- **Contextual Bible study and grounding in sacred texts and scripture:** The theological approach worked well on this project as it allowed for building on discussions that are in the sacred texts and scriptures while also providing space to incorporate the lived experiences of participants.

Challenges / What has caused you discomfort in the process?

- **Participation of health workers and other stakeholders:** Engaging of health workers sometimes made it difficult because they demand for money that the project cannot afford. How do we bring in other role players to participate in these processes.
- There is need to deconstruct patriarchy that has continued perpetuating harmful cultural practices.
- Engagement of health facilities and help provided to the youth to understand SRHR issues has changed the understanding with communities being serviced

What could be done differently

- **Collaborations and Allies:** There should be more allies to support SRHR work in the community. Obtain commitment from health workers, teachers, and traditional authorities. This will build a reliable group to support the SRHR discussions and improve access to information and services.
- **Address root causes of societal struggles:** There is a need to deal with the underlying causes of societal challenges. This may include how to strengthen family structures to better support the children and youth, and address issues of exclusion of individuals from the congregations and other elements.
- **Contextual Bible study:** Conduct contextual Bible studies that begin to break down stereotypes and challenge blind spots. This includes access to materials to support contextual Bible study and training in relation to the many aspects of SRHR and gender.
- **Budget allocation:** Limitation of resources has sometimes affected project implementation. Increasing the budget to accommodate issues of transportation, communication, communication and follow-ups will assist and provide an opportunity to expand geographically on this work and access more regions.

6. Masithethe Partner Initiatives

6.1. Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust (AWET)

Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Adolescent SRHR

The Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust (AWET) is an Inter-Apostolic faith-based organisation with a mandate to advance the rights of adolescents and women issues and mainstream gender in Apostolic Church activities. AWET held a meeting with apostolic leaders, parents, and guardians of the youth as well as youth leaders to sensitise them about the project. AWET has extensive experience in implementing programmes that promote the right of adolescent girls and boys to sexual reproductive health.

Knowledge about sexual reproductive health and access to SRHR services is necessary for young girls and boys. The provision of comprehensive sexual education and free access to tools that protect youth sexual health allows the youth to control their sexual health and to make informed decisions about their lives. The Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust (AWET) has embarked on a project to educate young girls and boys about SRHR and improve access to quality SRHR care through social accountability. Having access to sexual reproductive health services can be a challenge, especially for youth in disadvantaged communities. These challenges include, but are not limited to, early and unwanted marriages, teenage pregnancies and other sexually transmitted infections that include STIs and HIV/AIDS.

The youth in the Apostolic Faith and other religious traditions face barriers to sexual rights, where parents may consider the conversations taboo with their own children. Sex education conversations are forbidden for young boys and girls, with a more significant struggle in accessing protective sexual materials, such as condoms. Young girls and boys may encounter judgemental attitudes at home and in health facilities when they try to access SRHR services. As such, barriers are reinforced and conversations end, leading to the planned AWET Planned Youth Engagement in April 2022.

In this project, more youth actively participated as change agents through peer-to-peer outreach to encourage access to SRHR services and ushered in the social accountability approach. Sexual and reproductive health matters have been neglected in the apostolic community, and this has led to many teenage pregnancies that result in school dropouts. To address this, AWET has undertaken to ensure that comprehensive sexual education is accessible amongst the youth in the apostolic community and to eliminate the stigma and lack of social accountability. AWET presently has 150 youth who are working as peer educators in the communities.

“We are not only calling them peer educators but we are also creating Information Kiosks as they have been trained to disseminate information within the communities and share it with their peers,”

Hope Dunira, Head of Programmes AWET.

In addition there is a growing momentum for the training of trainers (TOTs) educators who work to raise awareness of the importance of accessing SRHR services, as explained by Hope Dunira.

“These youth have also managed to create safe spaces where they share issues and it has been made more convenient with the community feedback mechanisms we have managed to establish in the communities”

The AWET accountability approach is informed by the principle that it would be impactful to empower the women and adolescents with sustainable projects that will bring them together in established safe spaces. According to a WHO 2020 report, adolescents face barriers to accessing contraception, including restrictive laws and policies regarding provision of contraception that is

influenced by age or marital status, health worker bias and/or lack of willingness to acknowledge adolescents' sexual health needs.¹ The intergenerational approach introduced by AWET through the social accountability channels involves dialogue among the generational divides of elderly, adults and the youth. The Masithethe Initiative facilitates such an opportunity.

The project has reached 50 apostolic faith leaders and convened a co-creation session with over 150 youth. The youth took the lead in this project and spoke about how they would like the project to evolve. They also provided a list of activities they felt would help them. Religious leaders gave their overall approval to the project and committed to providing their support whenever needed. When there is a change in social norms and community awareness of SRHR within apostolic communities, adolescent girls can exercise their sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and it would be correct to state that the access to SRHR by adolescent girls has been strengthened while not overlooking that boys remain a central factor in the process.

Dare Guru: Men and boys' Involvement

Dare in the traditional setting is community court, which is a space where local issues are discussed and sentences imposed. If used appropriately, these Dare Guru settings can help to uphold agreed community standards, norms, values and ways of living in a particular setting. The Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust supported the establishment of DARE Guru. Drawing on gender transformative tools, the DARE GURU was established by apostolic men in Hurungwe and implemented in cooperation with the district. The approach aims to achieve behaviour transformation at the individual level, drawing on evidence-based results. The approach targets both women and men, with a special emphasis on men to enable them to identify their role in preventing violence against women and to become women's allies. This intervention is guided by the voices of women and girls. Their testimony regarding the types of violence experienced informs the discussion used with men. Integral to this implementation is communicating that activities are not intended to diminish traditional or belief systems, but to encourage practices and beliefs that promote respect for women and non-violence. Three other districts have adopted the DARE GURU concept and the Mashonaland central province has taken this up for replication.

The DARE GURU was also a way of engaging Men in Accountable Practices where men have an important role to play in preventing SGBV, and where gender transformative tools are central to challenging deep-seated beliefs held by men, as well as power structures which facilitate men's abuse of women. In practice, the men identify each other based on a commitment to fight for gender equality and they create and hold dialogues around issues of SRHR, GBV, sexual violence, child marriage and similar. They then engage other men from different apostolic communities and challenge them to also adopt positive actions.

Further work and opportunities

The project aims to support and educate 500 adolescents from apostolic communities concerning right to education, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health services. The project will support the mentoring of 250 adolescents from apostolic communities in advocacy and leadership skills so that they can become advocates, leaders and change agents. The project to date has managed to put the youth at the forefront to ensure that their voices are heard.

“The youth accept and participate, saying this is the first any project has focused on them and encourages youth leadership. They also spoke of how it would be a good initiative to have the youth access sexual reproductive health services without judgement.”

6.2. Malawi Blantyre Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synod

Sensitization of young people and faith leaders on SRHR in an inter-faith dialogue

The CCAP Synod in Blantyre focuses on, among other projects, improving adolescent boys and girls SRHR challenges by educating them on sexual reproductive health and rights. Increasingly in their teenage pregnancies, early and unwanted marriages, and sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS and other STIs are on the increase.

The Masithethe - CCAP project has embarked on eliminating the social behaviour barriers that lead to harmful practices. In the early stages of the project, CCAP conducted an inception meeting with the Blantyre Synod Senior management together with

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>

youth and adolescents in the local community. The meeting took place at the Grace Bandawe Conference Centre in the city of Blantyre. The meeting introduced the faith-based approach to promoting SRHR with reference to the interfaith briefs and Synod Adolescent and Youth SRHR policy. Faith organisations represent strong pillars of Africa's health systems, where 30% to 70% of the African health infrastructure is owned by faith organisations (WHO, 2021). Faith-based health facilities are specialised in providing access to health services for poor, rural or marginalised communities making their involvement extremely important.



Religious beliefs often affect individuals' behaviours and decision-making, which influence health choices as well as age at marriage, family structure and preventative family practice methods. Culturally, it is still considered taboo in marginalised rural communities to discuss SRHR issues, and in particular conversations between adults and the youth and vice versa. The management leaders were open to the discussion, realising the impact they have on young people and their role in potentially shifting hearts and minds in relation to SRHR. In particular, it was noted that religious leaders play a central role in shaping SRHR in Southern Africa.

Presentations around sensitising leaders in SRHR using the interfaith briefs included the approved project concept note, interfaith briefs and the Synod Adolescent/Youth SRHR policy with the topical thematic content of the Synod adolescent SRHR policy. The faith-based approach to SRHR was seen as an acceptable entry point and the meeting was attended by 15 participants including six senior management members and the Synod General Secretary, Moderator and Synod administrator. In addition, other stakeholders included the ministry of health, educators and youth in support of access to free technical support and youth-friendly family planning services combined with sporting activities. SRHR entails not only the absence of sexual transmitted illnesses but also the full enjoyment and well-being of sexual and reproductive health. Access to SRHR is a fundamental human right and should be approached from that perspective. Youth must be educated in accessing safe healthy ways of exploring their sexuality while also espousing their religious interests.

Council of Churches of Mozambique (CCM)

The Christian Council of Mozambique (CCM) is a religious institution of a humanitarian nature, with representation in all provinces of Mozambique through Provincial Delegations that were established in June 1948 as an association of 26 churches and 2 religious organizations. The CCM is guided by the promotion of values based on ecumenism, or collaboration with other Christian traditions in a proactive way in order to make known the values of love for others, holiness and dignity for human life, unity in diversity around gospel values, peace, freedom, constructive dialogue in society and social justice.



Dialogue on human sexuality with faith leaders, youth, including LGBTIQ+ community

Through the Masithethe Initiative, CCM has been able to convene workshops on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), prevention of early marriage and teenage pregnancy. At an initial meeting of 65 participants, it was agreed by faith leaders, youth and adolescent groups that themes related to sexuality would be discussed in the presence of leaders to enable prompt responses to the questions and concerns of young people.

In addition, there were debates in the youth society of the CCM about sexuality and violence based on gender and early marriages where people shared their own experiences. There was also participation in a congress that included African delegates on the themes of justice, safety, trafficking of minors and early marriage.

The following story was reported by a teenage girl from Chókwè, Gaza Province, who preferred to remain anonymous:

“There are situations of parents who practically deliver their daughters, especially those considered more beautiful or better behaved in the house, to successful men in the area (who have a car, a better house, cattle, land and so on), in exchange for goods, this with greater incidence in rural areas, because in the city people already have more knowledge and encourage girls to go to school, although there are some cases.”

CCM has a project as part of the Human Sexuality dialogues where they engage LGBTIQ+ communities, faith leaders and the general community. There are different groups who discuss issues independently and then join for further discussion. This project has seen the CCM gain community trust and become a recognised entity that people approach for information and greater understanding on LGBTIQ+.

6.3. Council of Swaziland Churches (CSC)

Sensitizing Religious Leaders and Youth on Sexual Reproductive Health for Adolescent girls and boys

The Council of Swaziland Churches (CSC) conducted a sensitization workshop with religious leaders about Sexual Reproductive Rights for adolescent girls and boys. The meeting discussed how each community member including the religious leader all play a role and influence health-seeking behaviour to improve SRH rights among adolescents from a faith perspective.

The workshop focused particularly on church and religious leaders conversing with young people in a frank discussion. This took place at St. George's Anglican Church in Manzini, Eswatini with 27 church leaders within the CSC member churches attended (12 females and 15 males). The project is being implemented in selected schools in the four regions of Eswatini. The workshop included training of trainers that equipped 26 adolescent SRHR representatives with both religious leaders and young people forming part of the trainer group.

Why this project?

Faith leaders have a responsibility in ensuring the improvement of sexual reproductive health for young girls and boys by encouraging responsible behaviour that addresses stigma that exists in church communities about this matter. Providing a safe space for discussion between adolescents and leaders will assist in improving health outcomes while providing preventative tools against STIs and HIV. The project works towards achieving the capacity-building obligation among the consortium of member churches consortium to enable advocacy for social justice issues. The roles religious leaders need to that seek to bridge the youth divide through encouragement, advisory support, regulating and addressing restricting cultural practices that affect adolescents by formulating and encouraging laws that protect adolescents.

Most religious leaders showed a low level of knowledge about adolescent SRHR but nonetheless indicated great interest in the project and committed to participation in their different communities. Church leaders were very responsive and accommodating of the project. Progressively, within its structure CSC has a women's wing as well as Youth Leadership wing that are constitutional and can assume this project mandate. The workshops are inter-generational in that young people from all the member churches may be trained on youth SRHR and become advocates for change among their peers.

Further work and opportunities

To make this project a success CSC decided to collaborate with other organisations such as the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in the Kingdom (Career Guidance department), as well as UNESCO and Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA) Southern Africa regional office. In addition, the Council of Swaziland Churches partnered with the Swaziland Network of Young Positives (SNYP) to implement the project in the Manzini and Shiselweni regions of Eswatini. The Swaziland Network for Young Positives is an affiliate of the Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations in Eswatini (CANGO), an umbrella body for civil society organizations in the Kingdom of Eswatini. These organisations are implementing multi-country projects in line with SRHR knowledge facilitation as with this project. Planned activities include two intergenerational dialogues held in two regions, namely Shiselweni and Lubombo respectively.

6.4. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA)



ELCSA Western Diocese Youth Leaders Conference

The ELCSA was formed in 1975, bringing together five regional Lutheran Churches that represented the different Mission Societies in South Africa. ELCSA has seven dioceses in eSwatini, Botswana and South Africa, with about 580,000 followers. It is a member of the Lutheran Communion (Lutheran World Federation) and the World Council of Churches.

ELCSA has been involved in GBV response through the training of young pastors in GBV trauma accompaniment. Cases of GBV are not reported in the church because there are no existing processes and structures to enable this to be done safely. In a male-dominated system, women very often choose to not report GBV. Pastors who are alleged to be perpetrators themselves are not held accountable, but merely transferred from one parish to another. The church is often more concerned about its reputation than about the welfare of women and survivors of GBV in general. Discriminatory practices against women and girls are evident in the church, such as, for example, enforcing of dress codes for women and girls, women being the ones who clean and cook at church, and discrimination against unmarried women who become pregnant.

ELCSA participants highlighted that more programmes and conversations on faith and gender must be held with the youth and broader church community to further deepen awareness of GBV and related ills in the church. ELCSA Development Services (ELCSA-DS), the development and diaconic arm of the church, presented the Masithethe Initiative to the confirmation class parents in the Witbank Parish, Mpumalanga Province. The meeting was intended to brief the parents about the project and to partner with them as key role-players.

ELCSA Western Diocese Youth Leaders Conference

6.5. Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation (FZWO)

Fatima Zahra Foundation hosts intergenerational dialogue between youth and religious leaders, interfaith dialogue, SRHR, Adolescents

Fatima Zahra, a women-led organisation in Zimbabwe, aims to eliminate SRHR issues for youth and adolescent boys and girls. They recently convened an interfaith dialogue between adolescents and faith leaders that discussed SRHR issues encountered by adolescents and proposed solutions to mitigate the challenges. In total 155 people attended, with 139 youth and adolescents to provide an inter-generational perspective as well as 16 religious leaders.

Adolescents led the meeting, making presentations after brainstorming on the challenges they are facing as youth in issues of SRHR as they are the most affected. The creative arts and drama performances, poetry and songs were used as tools in expressing the impact of SRHR challenges. Drama was used as a language tool where it could be applied "to any activity which asks the student to portray herself or himself in an imaginary situation; or to portray another person in an imaginary situation". Religious leaders were observers, participants and advisors at the meeting, providing a listening ear to young people. Religious leaders took note of the challenges faced by the youth while also learning about the new techniques and lifestyle choices that exist in the younger generation.

Tsitsi Junior Mabveni, Secretary for Fatima Zahra said that through this dialogue they wanted to create a safe space for the youth to speak out and be comfortable to talk about SRHR issues. "We gave youth the high table and the chance to talk about what they know about SRHR, teenage pregnancies, gender-based violence and family planning." Youth had the opportunity to talk about the challenges they face in their communities, schools and churches. "We have learned that young people like entertainment and it is a good means of communication as they learn while having fun" noted Ms Mabveni. They carry this form of communication forward as it allows them to obtain facts from adolescents as they express themselves freely.

"We engaged health practitioners from Population Services of Zimbabwe to come and educate youth on issues on the agenda. Learning materials were also provided to increase the knowledge they already had," Mabveni explained. The dialogue was highly interactive and provided a safe space for both youth and religious leaders to share without judgement and interference. Religious leaders presented last after listening to the concerns and challenges of the youth.

The leaders learned and appreciated new ways of helping the youth cope with SRHR issues as well as teenage pregnancies, early child marriages and gender-based violence. They also came up with solutions to these challenges. At the end of the presentations, there was discussion between the youth and religious leaders to bridge the intergenerational gap. Mabveni noted that even though this dialogue was a success, there is still extensive work to do in order to reach as many youth and adolescents as they can, especially in the marginalised and rural communities.

6.6. Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM)

Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) was founded in 1995 and was the first faith-based CSO on the African continent to work in the space where spirituality and sexuality overlap. IAM's office is in Cape Town and it works nationally and regionally. IAM's aim is to eradicate religious instigated homo, trans and biphobia so that LGBTIQ+ and PLHIV are recognized, celebrated and participate fully within faith communities. IAM's strategy is to work intersectionally, looking at how race, class, gender, sexuality, health and socio-economic status all play a role in marginalisation and oppression, rather than focusing on any one of the dimensions. This intersectional approach is embedded in a transformative dialogue process with LGBTIQ+ people, faith leaders and community partners.



Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) Youth Leaders

IAM has been hosting the youth-led "Youth Hopping Events", where the youth groups from each parish travelled from parish to parish, visiting each other and having collective events. Each parish visit will be linked to an SRHR theme and used for collective youth engagements. "Youth Hopping" is an opportunity for cross-learning between young people on SRHR as they interact across parishes. Faith leaders are part of the "hopping events". Participatory engagement is used at the events in the form of skits, games and group discussions. The debriefing session after activity leads to a deepened dialogue on the SRHR themes. One of the main themes that has consistently been raised is mental health and suicide ideation. The socio-economic status of the communities post-covid and the covid regulations led to heightened anxiety, depression and substance abuse. The youth spaces offer alternative positive spaces for growth and free expression as opposed to the tensions in homes and gang violence and gang recruitment within their communities.

The religious leaders play a supportive role as the youth leadership team has been given the space to lead the Masithethe Initiative as a youth-led, youth-centric initiative.

6.7. Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA)

Menstrual Hygiene Campaign: Pads and sanitary wear redistribution

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) serves six countries: Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique and South Africa, where it has over three million adherents. Methodist theology focuses on sanctification and the transforming effect of faith on the character of a Christian. Scripture is considered as a primary authority, but Methodists also look to Christian tradition, including the historic creeds. Methodists teach that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for all of humanity and that salvation is available to everyone.

Religious leaders played an active role in making this project a success by mobilising and liaising with stakeholders in all the targeted communities in Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape. They engaged with youth from different schools, educating them on menstrual hygiene and distributing sanitary towels to identified youth groups. They also took a lead in all the engagements and dialogues with the youth. The youth showed much interest in the engagement and participated fully during the dialogues. Both youth and elderly leaders took part in all the conversations and committed to take part in the project by collecting and distributing sanitary towels to young girls and deodorant to young boys in their communities.

This project seeks to ensure that girls stay in schools even during their periods, and it also ensures that period poverty is not the reason less privileged girls are deprived of their right to education. The ongoing initiative ensures that girls live their lives fully by educating them about menstrual hygiene, practical menstrual health and skills to deal with GBV. It also teaches both the elderly and the youth that mental health through public engagement and dialogues about SRHR is essential. Over 1200 learners from the rural communities of Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape have been reached.

The stigma around menstrual hygiene, especially in rural communities, remains a concerning challenge. It is seen as a taboo for

parents to have conversations with their children about menstrual health. Young girls are forced to learn and get information from their peers, which is not accurate most, times leading them to a risk of getting infections.

Reverend Phezile Koekoe mentioned the significance of ensuring that every girl child is healthy and has normal menstruation during their engagements. The Reverend also emphasised the inclusion of the boy children, stating that, "boys have an obligation to protect girls from any form of harassment, be it emotional, physical, sexual, mental and social". Reverend Koekoe observed that this project would not be a success if boys were not included in the engagement, noting that boys play a vital role and need to be educated.

6.8. South Africa network of Religious leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (SANERELA+)

South Africa's Network of Religious Leaders Living with or Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS+ (SANERELA+) is an interfaith network of over 600 religious leaders – lay and ordained, women and men – who are living with or personally affected by HIV. SANERELA+ empowers its members to use their positions within their faith communities in a way that breaks the silence, challenges stigma and provides delivery of evidenced-based HIV prevention, care and treatment services. It embraces a positive approach towards human sexuality. Instead of avoiding the topic of sexuality, SANERELA+ seeks to promote dialogue on SRHR within faith communities as part of its commitment towards HIV prevention. It is also committed to the promotion of "sexuality competent" faith communities. These are communities that are able to address sexuality in general and enable their members to enjoy SRHR.

SANERELA held a roundtable and youth bootcamp with 104 young people, who discussed issues on access to family planning services and barriers to access services in the public health sector, as well as discussion on teenage pregnancy and GBV. Human sexuality was a topic of great interest where young people were saying more sensitization should be conducted in faith communities. LGBTI+ persons were highlighted as being particularly stigmatized and discriminated against, as well as being compelled to often live a false life of pretending to be who they are not because of gender stereotypes. A recommendation was made that adults should be invited to have similar discussions so as to make the space safe and inclusive.

6.9. Synod of Livingstonia Development Department (SOLDEV)

Youth for Change, Sexual Reproductive Health Rights

The Synod of Livingstonia Development Department (SOLDEV) is implementing a Masithethe - Let's Talk SRHR advocacy campaign in Southern Africa, including in Kande - TA Fukamapiri district in Nkhatabay district Malawi. The objective of the project is to ensure that faith organisations and institutions create a safe space for adolescent girls and boys where youth can freely discuss SRHR issues without judgement.

The SOLDEV project will work not only with youth groups but will also ensure that faith leaders are responsive and open to the SRHR needs of young people, while also addressing the taboos that exist in faith institutions regarding SRHR issues. This will assist in the youth being provided with correct information to take better care of themselves. The project focuses on adolescents between 18 and 24 years of age and addresses topics of SRHR, prevention of teenage pregnancy, GBV and promotion of family planning.

Intergenerational Partnerships: These are collaborations centred on an understanding of the interdependent symbiotic nature between groups of people within a society who are from different age groups. The different groups have diverse generation-based perspectives yet remain useful to one another. The Masithethe Initiative promotes intergenerational dialogue and partnerships for young and older generations to co-create change. The initiative commenced with a call from Pastor Phiri, chairperson of the Kande Pastors group to engage stakeholders that included Kande Youth Network Secretary, Child Protection Worker, Mazembe Pastor's Fraternal Chair, and District Council Leadership. Pastor Kande explained that, "the area is challenged with issues of teenage pregnancies, rising cases of gender-based violence, school dropouts and high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, hence as people of faith, we have most often neglected taking part in addressing these challenges, subjecting the majority of our young people to some noticeable challenges emanating from such negligence".

Pastor Phiri further observed that equipping young people and adolescents in the area of SRHR provides confidence and knowledge to live a productive life.

During the discussions, the child protection worker and the project officer noted disparities in SRHR among religious circles, coupled with a number of myths that translate as barriers. Religious leaders and institutions are still not free to have frank discussions with adolescents in order to tackle behaviours that perpetuate teenage pregnancy and child marriages. SOLDEV discussed advocacy campaigns, showing that with influence from faith institutions, young people can be empowered to resist risky behaviour when youth are given information and access to SRHR.

The world is shifting rapidly and every action for change is important. The global population comprises a majority of young people and their inclusion is thus necessary. The youth engaged in this project recommended full involvement in the project since they are the direct beneficiaries. For this project to fully succeed and achieve its intended outcomes, it is important to involve young people from the outset.

The discussions focused on the provision of youth-friendly SRHR services in clinics, health centres and communities. The District Council welcomed the project as duty bearers, and it was encouraging to note that the youth felt comfortable to express their views in the presence of senior government officials. The success of the project has seen traditional leaders, pastors, fraternity representatives; youth groups, mother groups and government officials take ownership of the work in a collaborative manner.

7. Co-Creation of the “How to Guide”

A framework of the “How To Guide” on intergenerational dialogue was presented and discussed during the meeting. The faith leaders highlighted the information that was needed in the guide. Case studies were identified during the discussions, and these will be further documented and provided in the guide.

7.1. Why the “How to Guide”?

Developed through intergenerational dialogue with faith leaders, the “How to Guide” is a youth-led, collaborative, coordinated and formulated “how to” guidance tool to deliver SRHR services in faith spaces. The “How To Guide” is a living document and tool based on shared values, local knowledge, context and experiences jointly agreed upon by the youth, community leaders and faith leaders.

The purpose of the “How To Guide” is to move from just “knowledge” and “awareness” on adolescent and youth SRHR to trigger transformational reflections and action. The guide is written mainly for faith groups who want to start conversations with adolescents and youth on SRHR but do not have a clear starting point. The guide will also be used by youth, already involved in faith communities, who tend to have their attitudes, beliefs and practices shaped by the doctrines and messages shared within that space. The guide is not limited to faith communities but can be used by any other groups, who wish to support young people to access SRHR information and services. The guide provides a starting point on conversations within communities and builds on a trust relationship that the youth have with their faith community and where they expect that the information they get from the faith community is appropriate for their needs. The guide reinforces the message that faith communities therefore have a responsibility to provide quality information and examples of practice that are relevant to the lived realities of the youth.

7.2. Contained within the Guide:

The Guide provides an overview of SRHR including definitions, international frameworks, policies and approaches; information on the SRHR challenges currently facing youth in faith communities; practical examples of intergenerational activities that have improved the capacity to advance and sustain effective faith programming to provide for the SRHR needs of the youth within sampled communities; and the ability to create a safe and supportive environment for the youth in trusted faith spaces through negotiated practices and information which acknowledges their evolving capacity to develop positive behaviour and skills in relation to SRHR.

Through intergenerational engagement and dialogues, consultations, participation, contributions and finally consensus and ownership, the Guide can be adapted according to context so that it becomes a community-owned tool to address youth SRHR needs in faith spaces. Adapting the Guide will also make it more relevant to the faith and culture making it more responsive to identified priorities.

Faith communities addressing SRHR needs of Adolescents and Youth

Faith communities are well placed to address the SRHR needs of adolescents and youth. In order to be successful in doing this, they need to develop the following qualities and approaches:

Have genuine and sustained interest in the health and wellbeing of adolescents and youth

- Faith communities must not simply declare themselves to be “youth-friendly.”
- They must be welcoming, loving, and take young people seriously.
- They must believe in and give opportunities for youth leadership.
- As adolescents and youth engage with issues of identity and the pressures of growing up, they must experience faith communities as hospitable safe spaces that allow them to thrive.

Providing age-appropriate sexuality education

- This equips adolescents and young people with the relevant knowledge and skills to successfully negotiate the challenges that they may encounter during the demanding stages of their lives.

- Although some faith leaders have been opposed to sexuality education, there are many examples that show that it can be effectively delivered, while adhering to the teachings of the different religions.

Invest in youth-led SRHR initiatives

- It is important to build on young people's energy and vibrancy and give them responsibility to lead SRHR programmes in their faith communities.
- When young people are actively involved in programme planning and implementation, there is a higher likelihood of success.
- This can be achieved by ensuring that from the onset, young people have a seat at the table. Nowadays, young people are talking of even bringing their own tables if the adults will not allow them to sit with them.

Strive to address young people in school and out of school, as well as young people who are married

- Most initiatives focus on young people within educational settings, where they can be found in large numbers.
- However, it is important to include young people who are out of school. They too need SRHR information and services.
- Cultural demands often place individuals in new categories, overlooking their age/developmental stage.
- For example, young people who are married are mostly classified and grouped among adults, when in reality, they would still be very young.
- Faith communities need to be more discerning and recognise the SRHR needs of young married people.

Holding intergenerational conversations where adults and young people can engage in open, safe and respectful dialogue

- There should be regular intergenerational conversation to deal with changing needs and environment.
- SRHR issues require open and honest engagement between the elders and young people.
- In safe spaces, underlying trauma and experiences may emerge. In such spaces, it is important to consider trauma counselling, referral pathways for access to information and support.

Use of Digital Media

- Most faith communities are hesitant to utilise the mass media to reach out to young people with SRHR messages. They regard the mass media as "worldly."
- Yet, mass media have been effective in reaching large numbers of people simultaneously. During this the 4th Industrial Revolution, faith communities need to reach the youth where they are, such as Instagram, Twitter, Tik-tok.
- Having young people's voices in the mass media using tools they can identify with also contributes towards greater acceptance of SRHR messages.

Partnerships & Collaboration

- There is a need for increased collaboration and partnerships between and among FBOs and inter-religious communities across the SADC region to identify areas of common engagement and development, as well as common advocacy points to be implemented in the different countries across the region.

There is value in partnerships and collaboration with private sector and non-faith actors such as higher learning institutions

8. Development of Action Plans

In-country teams developed action plans based on lessons learnt from dialogue and feedback to share with their institutions / organizations as agreed. The immediate feedback within the short term and long-term actions included:

- Consolidation of the work that was delivered was the main action that was to be completed in the short term.
- Replication and scaling to other areas with adjustments based on lessons learnt and new information gained was for long-term conversations.
- The organisations highlighted that the plans have been mainstreamed into their institutions.
- The “how to guide” had outlined several themes and the various country teams agreed to select a few to begin with and expand as they gained knowledge and views of the congregation.

9. Key discussions and recommendations

Listed below are some of the central discussions that emerged from the dialogue:

- **Understanding the complexities of different groupings in the faith spaces:** There are multi-layered complexities with regard to women leaders in the faith setting, and it would be important to identify ways to simplify these spaces and make them more inclusive.
- **Importance of youth voices:** Young people's voices are critical for reshaping the approaches and practice of delivering and accessing SRHR services.
- **SRHR knowledge and information:** Broadening the understanding within faith communities of SRHR is necessary. SRHR discussions should include sharing of new information and demystifying terms, contributing to greater knowledge capacities for faith communities. The development and distribution of SRHR material is a central component of this approach that can be adapted and contextualised so that it reaches and resonates with people at the grassroots.
- **SRHR material rooted in sacred texts and scriptures:** Sacred texts and theological reflections on SRHR themes enable the grounding of faith leaders' approaches. The sacred texts are considered "gospel" or final word; therefore, the development of interventions should be underpinned by these.
- **Multi-stakeholder approach:** There should be a deliberate inclusion of other stakeholders, governments, local councillors and various NGOs in the approaches that are developed as this provides better linkages and referral pathways to collectively seek solutions on SRHR
- **Work with men and boys:** Men and boys should be included in the discussions including addressing and/or reframing masculinities, positive parenting, and fatherhood. This could include distribution of health kits, male role models and positive masculinities.
- **ICT, social media & digital media:** These platforms should form a central and critical component of any contemporary SRHR initiatives including advocacy campaigns. This will also draw in the older generation and ensure they are part of the conversations, even when targeting specialist or older demographics.
- **Language and language usage:** The language often used in faith settings tends to be "black and white", and overlooks the extensive grey areas in between different positions that constitute the lived realities of most people. Examples are words like "unholy" for menstruating women and fornication. There is a need to re-author conversations in a more inclusionary way.
- **Documenting and creating visibility:** Defining the role of communication in social change is a critical component as this will serve to document the work that faith leaders are involved in, amplifying the good practices and sharing experiences and lessons learnt not only amongst ourselves but with the broader society.

Annexures

9.1. Annexure 1: Dialogue Programme

Time	Description	Responsible	Process Notes
Day One: Tuesday, 14 June 2022			
8:00 – 8:30	Registration	Thabo Chaba Beth Gathoni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration station at the venue Programme or any other equipment Slide show of activities delivered by participants
08:30-08:40	Opening Devotion	Rev. Phezile Koekoe Methodist Church of Southern Africa	<p>Space of spiritual connection and reflection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> interfaith Readings
8:40- 09:15	Introductions	Facilitators	Participants will have the opportunity to introduce themselves to each other Interactive way and easy flow approach
9:15 – 09:30	Expectations and Community Agreements	Facilitators	<p>Creating safe space for dialogue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> what is expected of participants Questions participants are sitting with in being part of the process Conscious acknowledgement of power Level of engagement
9:30 – 10:00	<p>Welcome Message and messages from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACT Ubumbano Brot für die Welt Faith to Action Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ashley Green-Thompson Act Ubumbano Coordinator TBC Judy Judy Amoke-Ekasi F2A- Programme Manager 	Setting the Scene
10:00- 10:15	Introducing the workshop, objective, purpose	Zanele Makombe	<p>A common understanding of framing and the anticipated outcomes of the workshop</p> <p>“How-to” guide as a main output of the process</p>
10:15 – 10:45	Tea Break		
10:45 -11:30	<p>Presentation on SRHR discourses in Southern Africa</p> <p>Q&A</p>	Zamantshali Dlamini	<p>The session will provide opportunity for the group build a shared understanding of the context in which Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) issues are being considered.</p> <p>A discussion on faith, Culture and SRHR</p>

11:30 – 13:00	<p>Breakaway Sessions: Deepening our understanding</p> <p>Three groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female faith leaders • Male Faith leaders • Youth Group 	Facilitators	<p>Participants will have the opportunity to share and hear from their peers/other institutions/ organizations on the work they have been doing in the Masithethe Initiative.</p> <p>The Safe space principles will also be considered and endorsed by the different groups</p> <p>A learning reflective approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SRHR situation in their context. How it affects the youth and community • How are they intervening through “Masithethe Project” • Have they been uncomfortable at any point, what caused the discomfort? • What worked and what did not work? Have there been light bulb moments, what are these moments • What could be done differently?
13:00- 14:00	Lunch		
14:00 – 15:30	Panel Discussion: Reflecting on SRHR action and processes implemented by the different organisations	Facilitators	<p>This will take the form of a facilitated panel discussion. the conversation will be through a discussion of the feedback from the groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two representatives per group will form part of the panel feedback session • Guiding questions to be developed by the listening team from the sessions as a guide
15:00-15:30	Tea-break		Facilitator Check-in
15:30 – 16:00	Mixed Groups : Breakaway Session	Facilitators	Working in, participants will reflect on the discussions. Facilitators role: to guide participants to deepen issues that have arisen from the plenary.
16:00 -16:30	Plenary	Group Feedback Sessions	<p>Feedback on the group feedback and discussions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitators to identify an interesting feedback presentation style. • Q & A Reflection on our realities • What stood out in the presentations? What was common? What was different? • Identify interfaith and intergenerational opportunities and link to various faith and sacred texts.
16:30- 16:45	Summary of the day and closure	Facilitators	Bringing everything together
16:45 – 16:55	Closing Devotion	Ms Tsitsi Junior Mabveni Fatima Zahra Women's Empowerment Organisation	Space of spiritual connection and reflection (interfaith Readings)
17:00	End of Day One		

Day Two: Wednesday, 15 June 2022			
08:30-08:40	Devotion:	Rev. Agustao Zitha Council of Churches in Mozambique	Space of spiritual connection and reflection interfaith Readings
8:40- 9:00	Overnight Reflections	Facilitators	Check- in and sharing any insights that may have emerged overnight
9:00-10:30	Presentation of Draft "How to Guide"	Bongi and Ezra	Bongi and Ezra
10:30 – 11:00	Tea-break		
11:00-13:00	Discussions and input into the "How to Guide"		Bongi and Ezra
13:00- 14:00	Lunch		Poster Presentation
14:00-15:30	Development of Action Plans	Facilitators	Teams develop action plans based on lessons learnt from the Dialogue and feedback to share back with their institutions/ organizations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the next big things that can be done • How will the "how to Guide" be implemented • How can we continue this outside a funding arrangements ? • How can this work be integrated into regular institutional work?
15:30-16:00	Call to Action	Judy Amoke -Kasi	Landing the Workshop and looking ahead
16:00-16:15	Vote of Thanks	Zanele Makombe	
16:15-16:30	Closing devotions	Rev. Chikondi Banda	Space of spiritual connection and reflection (Interfaith Readings)
		Blantyre Synod Youth Director	
End of meeting			

9.2. Annexure 2: See-Judge -Act Methodology

This regional dialogue will offer participants a safe space for thinking, reflection and action, using the See – Judge – Act (Paulo Freire) method of social analysis and enquiry and this will be used for the SRHR meeting with faith leaders.

SEE: During the meeting participants explore SRHR facts, situations and experiences based on lived experience to gain a greater understanding and to assess the causes and consequences of what is currently taking place in the SADC region. Young people will also discuss their lived experience and the support they will need.

JUDGE: Participants reflect and discuss the rights and wrongs relevant to the situations and experiences shared, taking note of what has been discovered in the "See" part. They will explore this also based on their specific faiths and sacred texts. Questions will include: Should this situation be happening? Do you think this is right? What makes it right or wrong? Is there anything that we can do to change the situation? What are our sacred texts saying?

ACT: Participants will discuss how they have responded to the SRHR situations described in the "See" part. They will reflect on their achievements, their challenges, and lessons. Questions to be answered include: What have we done, no matter how small, to improve the situation? Is there anything more we could have done? Have we faced any challenges? How did we respond to these challenges? What recommendations can we give to others, drawing on our experience?

9.3. Annexure 3: Attendance Register/ Participants List

I consent to ACT Ubumbano, F2A and Brot vir die Welt using pictures and any media taken here for the purposes that advance its work and not for commercial purpose

Masithethe Intergenerational Dialogue Meeting in Sandton, Held at the Protea Hotel Balalaika 14-15 June 2022			
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