



MENENGAGE AFRICA SRHR LEARNING AND EXCHANGE SYMPOSIUM



CONCEPT NOTE:

MENENGAGE AFRICA

SRHR (SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE
HEALTH AND RIGHTS)

LEARNING AND EXCHANGE SYMPOSIUM

PROGRESS 2026:

Reclaiming Autonomy: Advancing Sexual and
Reproductive Justice in the Face of Resistance



Kenya MenEngage
Alliance
working with men and boys for gender equality

10-14 AUG 2026
Mombasa, Kenya

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND



Following the success of the **MenEngage Africa (MEA) SRHR PROGRESS 24 Symposium** hosted in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2024, MEA will host a follow-on Learning and Exchange Symposium for SRHR in August 2026. The focus of this symposium will be to build on the conversations from PROGRESS 24 and create an accountability framework to counter the shrinking SRHR civic space.

PROGRESS 26 SRHR Symposium will expand on collaboration to create a movement and plan of action to improve SRHR outcomes in Africa, considering the growth of right-wing governments,

which has resulted in the limited availability of SRHR funding and a diminishing operating environment at the national level. In alignment with the MEA SRHR Strategic Plan (2023-2027) and its focus on the LINK, LEARN, IMPROVE, and INFLUENCE strategies, the PROGRESS 26 Symposium will provide an opportunity for MEA Africa partners working on SRHR to strategise on how to close progress gaps in the last five years of the SDGs, AU Agenda 2063, and Agenda 50:50.

CONTEXT



Recent geopolitical developments have seen the emergence of conservative governments, resulting in a backlash against progressive gender policies. SRHR advances are facing a serious threat of a rollback as conservative policies embedded in hegemonic masculinities rise. These developments are likely to reverse some of the gains that we experienced in the last decades. **PROGRESS 2026** will need to engage with these developments and explore counter strategies.

The realisation of SRHR for all is an integral and key outcome for the Sustainable Development Goals

agenda that should be achieved by all states by 2030. **PROGRESS 26** comes four years before the close of the SDGs and several other international frameworks that have a deadline for 2030. However, there remain institutional and practice barriers that make it more difficult for other groups of people to access the much-needed information and services.

The symposium will address how emerging global crises such as Climate Justice and Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence intersect with SRHR. Focus will be brought on to ecofeminism, the impact of environmental crises on gender norms, digital rights and how AI and digital tools can be leveraged to counter misinformation and improve the safety of marginalised groups.



CHALLENGES



The landscape has seen significant pushback against SRHR and gender equality. The pushback has resulted in regression on access to contraceptives. Inconsistent and under-implementation of CSE leads to low contraceptive awareness and uptake. Over 62% of African adolescents have an unmet need for modern contraception, which results in them either using no contraceptives or resorting to traditional methods that are highly ineffective. This results in high rates of unintended pregnancies and up to 80% of unsafe abortions. An estimated 6.2 million abortions¹ occur in Sub-Saharan Africa annually, with a further estimated 1.6 million women treated for complications².

1. <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/universal-health-coverage-access-to-srh-services-subsaharan-africa?>

2. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8567620/?>



It is therefore urgent to address gaps and inconsistencies in the implementation and rollout of CSE as one of the foundational blocks for access to information and informed choice for adolescent girls, young women and women³.

In Africa, **Bodily autonomy** continues to be perceived as a Western concept, thereby undermining access to SRH services for AGYW and women and even more so for persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ persons whose bodies are often policed and controlled by others.

Persons with disabilities often lack access to SRHR services and information due to social norms that asexualise them, perceptions of service providers and lack of supportive infrastructure⁴. Addressing the issue of bodily autonomy to create sensitive policies and responsive service delivery is critical for the realisation of SRHR for all. Social norms are being further strengthened by the pushback on SRHR,

which is framed through religious and cultural lenses to moralise curtailing of human rights and access to SRH, especially for persons of diverse sexual orientations and identities.

Young People, more so, young persons with disabilities, often lack access to comprehensive sexuality education, contraceptives, and screening for STIs, including HIV⁵.

It is concerning that in some areas SRHR language is under threat as authorities push narratives that undermine the goals and intent of the ICPD. This makes it critical for us to begin to envision how policy, practice, and service delivery factors affect different bodies to meet the outcome of the realisation of SRHR for all.

In this PROGRESS 26 Symposium, there will be an attempt to unpack, suggest solutions and measure progress in addressing this maze of barriers.

3. <https://www.walshmedicalmedia.com/open-access/african-womenrsquo-s-diminished-reproductive-autonomy-as-an-issue-of-publichealth-ethics-112635>.

4. <https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1742-4755-11-59>

5. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33044966/>



RATIONALE FOR THE SYMPOSIUM



As a space of mutual accountability, the PROGRESS 26 symposium will bring together policy makers, SRHR advocates and practitioners, community leaders, young people, community development practitioners, religious and traditional leaders, the private sector, development cooperation partners and philanthropists to share perspectives, experiences and promising practices as a place for learning, sharing and linking to close gaps ahead of the close of SDGs and Agenda 50:50, which aim for improved SRHR and health outcomes. PROGRESS 26 Symposium will prioritise young voices, specifically voices of young people with disabilities, while creating the necessary intergenerational links to foster continuity of activism, programming and policy making.

PROGRESS 26 symposium will distinguish itself by offering an interactive, intersectional, and action-oriented experience. To ensure the event is not isolated from lived realities, the symposium will shift from "roadshow" style advocacy to deep community engagement. It serves as a launchpad for tangible action, requiring regional delegations to design Local Impact Projects—such as engaging men in GBV prevention or establishing youth-friendly clinics, which will be supported by micro-grants and mentorship to ensure continuity beyond the event.

YOUTH CONFERENCE



A pre-symposium youth conference will take the format of an intensive, two-day training titled "**The Lobbyist Playbook**". The training is designed to move beyond standard capacity building to preparing young participants for strategic, high-level advocacy engagements. This experiential workshop will focus on building practical skills in comportment, relationship-building, and resilience, utilising Advocacy Simulation Labs and role-play where participants practice negotiation with decision-makers.

The training will employ the structured **FRAME Method** (Facts, Reduce, Anecdotes, Map strategy, Evaluate results) to develop strong messaging, ultimately requiring each participant to design a tangible advocacy action plan for post-symposium implementation.

The Lobbyist Playbook training will strengthen skills for young people's meaningful engagement in advocacy spaces. Sonke and MEA will invite conveners with skills in advocacy to give practical sessions on presentation, comportment and speaking.

A youth in media awards session that will recognise young people that are successfully making use of media as an advocacy tool across the continent will close the youth conference.



SYMPOSIUM APPROACH

Reproductive justice goes beyond access to services, it centres the rights of all people to bodily autonomy, to have or not have children to parent in safe environments. This framework will guide PROGRESS 26's design and outcomes. While a reproductive justice lens will be employed, special attention will be made to intersectionality to ensure no groups of people are left behind in the discourse.

This symposium also intends to create spaces for intergenerational conversations and network building. The symposium will be curated to be consistent with the principles of inclusivity, respect for diversity, safeguarding and equal opportunity for all.

The symposium agenda will be segmented across the three days to give focus to the different thematic areas:

- Interrogating development funding for SRHR and exploring domestic resourcing models
- Examining working innovations to emerging global challenges and the intersections to SRHR– climate justice and TFGBV
- Sustained approaches to work with men and boys towards access to SRHR for all.



OBJECTIVES



The primary objectives of the symposium are as follows:

1. **Advancing Reproductive Justice in Restrictive Contexts:** Discuss strategies to maintain and promote reproductive justice to ensure improved access to services, bodily autonomy, and equity for marginalised communities with intersecting vulnerabilities in the face of evolving global challenges.
2. **Explore working funding models** (domestic and global) proffered to close emerging funding gaps for SRHR Shift norms via men & masculinities: spotlight allyship, fatherhood, and dismantling harmful masculinities with accountability mechanisms.
3. **Promote Regional Innovations and Global Solidarity to mitigate global funding deficits and constraints on SRHR:** Develop innovative, inclusive, and locally driven strategies and alternative financing models for the achievement of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by 2030 by sharing experiences and best practices within the region and beyond.
4. **Facilitate Transformative Action for 2030:** Redefine and expedite advancement towards the SDGs through a reproductive justice perspective, highlighting intersectional strategies to tackle systemic inequities, uphold human rights, and establish robust SRHR systems that cater to the needs of varied communities, especially women, youth, and marginalised groups.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

The outcomes of the MenEngage Africa SRHR Learning and Exchange Symposium are as follows:

1. **Enhanced knowledge and capacity for action:** Participants will gain a deeper understanding of SRHR from a reproductive justice perspective to enhance policy advocacy, practice, and service delivery for all, especially marginalised populations.
2. **Increased collaboration and accountability** in the face of the pushback on SRHR and gender equality towards crafting sustainable funding models that secure access to rights, information, and services, especially for marginalised populations.
3. **Innovative approaches shared for adoption and scalability:** Through small groups from diverse learning sessions, the symposium will encourage sharing of working models and promising practices for adoption and scalability.



TARGET AUDIENCE:

300 participants are expected to attend the symposium. The primary target audience includes:



1. **Youth Leaders:** Youth-led organizations, activists, and advocates working on SRHR issues and SRHR rights of persons with disabilities



2. **Civil Society Organisations:** Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) actively involved in promoting SRHR and advocating for policy reforms.



3. **Policymakers:** representatives of SRHR champion policy makers involved in policy design and improvement of access to SRHR and GBV information and services.



4. **Government Representatives:** Representatives from relevant government ministries responsible for SRHR, education, and health policies.



5. **Healthcare Providers:** Medical professionals, counsellors, and service providers involved in delivering youth-friendly, disability-responsive services.



6. **Academia and Researchers:** Scholars, researchers, and educators contributing to the evidence-based understanding of SRHR in Africa.



7. **International and Regional Partners:** Regional bodies, United Nations agencies, and international organisations supporting SRHR initiatives in Africa.



8. **Religious and Traditional leaders:** Representatives from relevant structures responsible for promoting gender equality and SRHR.

METHODOLOGY

While the symposium will continue to feature high-level panel discussions to unpack regional frameworks and strategies, it will uniquely distinguish itself by prioritising innovative, experiential session formats designed to build practical skills and foster co-creation. Complementing the plenary sessions, the program will feature:

- **Advocacy Simulation Labs (Policy Labs):** Moving beyond passive listening, participants will engage in role-play exercises as legislators, advocates, and civil society actors. These labs will utilise the FRAME method (Facts, Reduce, Anecdotes, Map strategy, Evaluate) to provide youth with hands-on experience in negotiating SRHR policies.
- **Innovate Campaign Sprints:** Cross-disciplinary teams of activists, developers, and researchers will compete to develop multi-media communication campaigns addressing SRHR challenges.

The symposium will be delivered through interactive engagements, including panels, small learning sessions, abstract presentations, live podcasts and question and answer sessions. Theatre and film screenings will be utilised to explore complex themes such as consent, masculinity and TFGBV.

Each session will be jointly hosted by an established organisation from small to growing CSOs. This strategy fosters reproductive justice by tackling systematic disparities in access to information, resources, and opportunities, guaranteeing that smaller, under-resourced organisations possess an equitable platform to participate alongside more established entities. Grounded in feminist ideals, it promotes collaboration and reciprocal learning, deconstructing conventional hierarchies and appreciating the distinct contributions of all participants.

Furthermore, it adheres to the Doing Development Differently concept by advocating for locally driven, context-specific solutions and recognising smaller organisations as co-creators of change rather than simple recipients. This methodology establishes collaborations that augment capacities and stimulate innovation, thereby cultivating a dynamic, inclusive, and equitable SRHR movement. Through live podcasts and live streaming of symposium sessions, reach will be expanded to non-physical attendees. This has the advantage of increasing reach and inclusion for participants that are unable to attend in person.

KEY CONTRIBUTION FROM PARTNERS:



The success of the MenEngage Africa SRHR Learning and Exchange Symposium relies on meaningful contributions from partners. Therefore, partners are expected to:

1. **Contribute Expertise and Knowledge:** Partners will share their expertise, experiences, and research findings in policy and programming on issues of bodily autonomy and access to SRHR for persons with disabilities.
2. **Engage in Collaborative Program Planning:** Partners will actively collaborate in designing the symposium's program, identifying relevant topics, and proposing speakers and facilitators. This collaborative effort will ensure the symposium addresses the specific needs and challenges faced by various regions and demographics in Africa.
3. **Advocate for bodily autonomy and SRHR rights for persons with disabilities:** Partners are encouraged to leverage their networks and platforms to advocate for SRHR and rights of persons with disabilities in the lead-up to the symposium and beyond. This collective advocacy will promote the symposium's objectives and highlight the importance of SRHR on the regional and international stage.

By uniting diverse stakeholders and fostering collaboration, the MenEngage Africa SRHR Learning and Exchange Symposium endeavours to contribute significantly to the advancement of SRHR in Africa. Partners can expect an elevated level of exposure to scalable working models in combating SRHR challenges and solutions from other countries, high-level engagements on the roadmap to attaining SRHR for all African people, particularly young

