

SANAC NEWS



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12th SA AIDS Conference: Unite for Change – Empower Communities

- Karabo Makgato



SANAC Chairperson Deputy President Paul Mashatile delivering his keynote address at the opening plenary of the 12th SA AIDS Conference

EDITORS NOTE



Nelson Dlamini

We've just returned from the 12th SA AIDS Conference which was, for the first time, held in Gauteng at Emperors Palace in the City of Ekurhuleni, much to the delight of both the Executive Mayor Councillor Nkosindiphile Xhakaza and Gauteng Premier Panyaza Lesufi. There were various reasons provided by the conference custodians, Dira Sengwe, key among them being budget optimisation. There were mixed reactions to the change, however, the conference was, for all intents and purposes, a success – please check out the wrap-up article by Karabo on page 3.

At the beginning of this quarter, South Africa had the pleasure of hosting the launch of the annual Global AIDS Update, a publication by UNAIDS reflecting on the progress made by countries in HIV response. The launch rotates among UN member states every year and South Africa was hosting it for the second time – a huge honour might I add, and SANAC was at the centre of it all by leading the event coordination and stakeholder mobilisation. The first launch was in 2019 in Eshowe, King Cetshwayo District in KwaZulu-Natal when that district became the first in the country to meet the UNAIDS 90-90-90 targets, way ahead of the deadline of December 2020. More on this on page 6.

This quarter also saw the completion of the process to establish the Provincial Private Sector Forums in all nine provinces of South Africa – the provincial AIDS Councils are now complete structures,

paving the way for an effective implementation of the Provincial Implementation Plans (PIPs) for HIV, TB and STIs.

In July, I was delegated by the CEO to represent her at the launch of Prof. Mbulelo Dyasi's autobiography titled *'Dignity in the Darkness – A journey of resilience, resistance and redemption'* in Johannesburg CBD. What an emotionally charged affair where the vulnerabilities of a boy child and young men dominated the conversation. Prof. Dyasi really poured his heart out onto those pages and I would strongly encourage everyone to get a copy by ordering directly from him R350 (excl. courier fees) or from Takealot for just R299. The Prof. is a member of the SANAC Civil Society Forum. More on the launch on page 9 by Mangi (Simangaliso).

The second month of this quarter is Women's Month (August) and the Chairperson of the SANAC Civil Society Forum penned a beautiful tribute title, 'Honouring Women's Leadership in the Fight for Health, Equality, and Justice this Women's Month'. Read it on page 14.

Our Provincial Technical Officers continue to be "bright stars shining afar" (this is a biblical reference to the star of Bethlehem and it may elude you if you're not Christian, askies) – Colisile gives us yet another riveting piece in the Research Corner on page 17 and the Mmabatho Majuda from the Gauteng AID Council was a Speaker at the Global Youth Dialogue titled, 'Building Youth Communities that Drive 21st Century Development' in August and she describes it as one of the most inspiring global platforms she's ever experienced, but don't take my word for it, read it in her own words on page 10.

Enjoy!

Best,

Nelson



12th SA AIDS Conference: Unite for Change – Empower Communities

- Karabo Makgato

The Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Paul Mashatile, in his capacity as Chairperson of the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), officially opened the 12th South African AIDS Conference on Monday, 08 September 2025, at Emperor's Palace in the Gauteng Province.

This year's conference, hosted under the theme "Unite for Change – Empower Communities and Redefine Priorities for HIV/AIDS," brought together leaders, researchers, policy makers, academics, implementing partners, civil society organisations, and advocates from across South Africa, the continent, and the globe over four days to reflect on progress and chart the way forward in ending HIV and AIDS as a public health threat.

In his keynote address, Deputy President Mashatile emphasised the importance of shifting from a top-down approach to one that places communities at the centre of the HIV response. "To empower communities and redefine priorities for HIV/AIDS, our strategies must prioritise giving power and resources to those who are most affected," he said, underscoring the need for community ownership, accountability, and inclusive service delivery.

The Deputy President acknowledged South Africa's progress towards the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets but noted challenges in the "second 95," ensuring that people living with HIV remain on treatment. South Africa currently sits at 96-78-97. To address this gap, the Close the Gap – Start and Stay on HIV Treatment campaign was launched earlier this year, aiming to find 1.1 million people living with HIV who are not yet on treatment. He also highlighted SANAC's recently developed HIV Prevention Roadmap 2025–2028, which aligns with the National Strategic Plan



SANAC Chairperson Deputy President Paul Mashatile delivering his keynote address at the opening plenary of the 12th SA AIDS Conference

(NSP) 2023–2028 and prioritises evidence-based, community-led approaches.

Speaking at the opening plenary session, Dr Kate Rees and Dr Candice Chetty-Makkan, Co-Chairs of the 12th SA AIDS Conference, cautioned: "South Africa needs to be realistic about the HIV/AIDS situation it faces. Efforts to eradicate the epidemic must be more inclusive and transparent. One of the most pressing issues highlighted at this year's Conference is the risk to South Africa's world-leading HIV/AIDS programme, the largest globally, due to the sharp reduction in support from PEPFAR. While the programme previously relied on around R7.5 billion annually, the Treasury's pledge of R753 million in bridging funds remains insufficient to sustain epidemic control."

On day two of the conference, SANAC CEO, Dr Thembisile Xulu, joined a high-level plenary panel titled Re-imagining South Africa's HIV Programme, alongside Dr Sandile Buthelezi, Director General of the National Department of Health, and Dr Linda-Gail Bekker, CEO of the Desmond Tutu Health Foundation, moderated by renowned health journalist Mia Malan. Responding to some of the reasons why countries affected by Funding Cuts, the SANAC CEO shared with the delegates that she was the Chairperson of the HIV Leadership Forum which is made up of CEO's of National AIDS Councils (NACs) of over 40 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. She highlighted that many countries had become overly reliant on donor-driven systems that operated parallel to national structures.

"These systems, designed mainly to meet donor requirements, often duplicate efforts and weaken opportunities to strengthen existing national health, social, and economic systems. Countries also fail to effectively engage the private sector, whose technology, innovation, and expertise could support more sustainable HIV programmes," said Dr. Xulu.



Delegates at the 12th SA AIDS Conference



SANAC CEO Dr. Thembisile Xulu participating in a panel discussion at the Conference



SANAC CSF Chair, Mr. Solly Nduku at the Closing Plenary of the 12th SA AIDS Conference

Civil society's pivotal role in HIV response was reaffirmed at the Closing Plenary on Thursday, 11 September, where SANAC Civil Society Forum (CSF) Chairperson, Mr Solly Nduku, presented CSF priorities towards 2028. These include expanding access to HIV primary prevention tools, scaling up youth-led programmes, advancing legal and policy reforms to decriminalise sex work, and strengthening community-led monitoring to improve service delivery. "Service provision, at its core, is about our people. The beneficiaries are not abstract numbers; they are the mothers, fathers, young people, workers, and leaders who depend on accessible and quality health services to live healthy lives. We therefore make a clear and urgent call for increased financial support and consideration for full implementation of our programmes as Civil Society Forum," Mr Nduku urged.

The 12th SA AIDS Conference underscored both progress made and critical challenges ahead. Four key reflections emerged as guiding priorities for the next phase of South Africa's HIV response:

1. Improving surveillance to guide interventions – Delegates emphasised the need for accurate, granular, and timely data

that reflects the true status of the epidemic, especially as 2030 approaches.

2. Integrating service delivery models – There was strong consensus on rethinking health systems to cut costs and maximise efficiencies, particularly considering reduced financial support such as cuts in PEPFAR funding.
3. Building community capacity – Greater investment in peer-to-peer education and mobilisation is essential to increase uptake of prevention tools like PrEP and PEP. With innovations such as Lenacapavir on the horizon, the persistent challenge of low uptake must be addressed.
4. Advancing the triple elimination agenda – Opportunities and challenges for eliminating HIV, Syphilis, and Hepatitis B transmission from mother to child were discussed, reinforcing the global goal of ensuring that future generations are born free of these infections.

The conference reaffirmed that while challenges remain particularly funding gaps and persistent barriers to treatment, South Africa's path forward lies in unity, resilience, and empowering communities to lead the response.



Deputy Minister of Health Dr. Joe Phaahla speaking at SA AIDS Conference



12th SA AIDS Conference

IN PICTURES

Scenes for the 12th SA AIDS Conference



Ms. Colisile Mathonsi, SANAC Provincial Technical Officer for Adolescent and Young People (AYP), facilitating a dynamic and solution-oriented panel discussion at the 12th SA AIDS Conference.



SANAC Provincial Technical Officer for AYP Ms. Mmabatho Majuda (centre) presented her poster at the 12th SA AIDS Conference.



SANAC CEO Dr. Thembisile Xulu taking delegates through the SANAC and NDoH Exhibition Stand



SANAC CEO Dr. Thembisile Xulu (Left) and other senior conference delegation from NDoH, Desmond Tutu Foundation Health and other Thought Leaders

Global AIDS Update 2025 Launched in South Africa: A Call for Urgency, Unity, and Transformation

- Karabo Makgato



Minister of Health Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi Speaking at the UNAIDS Global AIDS Update 2025 Launch

On 10 July 2025, UNAIDS in partnership with the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), officially launched the UNAIDS Global AIDS Update 2025 at Bertha Gxowa Hospital in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng. Themed "AIDS, Crisis and the Power to Transform," the report presents both a sobering assessment of the current global HIV response and a powerful call to action to sustain progress amid deepening funding challenges.

The launch brought together global and national leaders, including UNAIDS Executive Director Ms Winnie Byanyima, Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, Deputy Minister for Women, Young People and Persons with Disabilities Ms Steve Letsike, Wits RHI Executive Director Professor Helen Rees, and SANARELA Executive Director Reverend Mbulelo Dyasi amongst others.

Speaking to the report at the launch, UNAIDS Executive Director Ms Winnie Byanyima who serves under the UN Secretary General António Guterres said, "the report celebrates hard-won progress particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where new HIV infections have dropped by 56% and HIV-related deaths by 54% since 2010, largely due to expanded access to treatment. South Africa's antiretroviral therapy (ART) programme, the largest in the world, has been central to these achievements.

Ms Byanyima further stated that the report warns that this progress is under threat. Abrupt funding cuts from major donors, especially the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), have disrupted health systems in countries that heavily rely on international support. In Mozambique, over 30,000 health workers have been affected; in Nigeria, new monthly PrEP initiations have plummeted from 40,000 to 6,000. Globally, 9.2 million people, among them 620,000 children, still lack access to treatment. UNAIDS estimates that without urgent intervention, the next five years could see an additional 6 million HIV infections and 4 million AIDS-related deaths.

Yet, amid the crisis, the report shares stories of resilience. South Africa



funds about 77% of its HIV response domestically, with the 2025 budget review including a 3.3% increase for HIV and TB programmes. Seven African countries, i.e., Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Rwanda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, have already achieved the ambitious 95-95-95 targets, proving that success is possible. The report also highlights breakthroughs like long-acting injectable PrEP, such as Lenacapavir, showing near-complete efficacy in trials. But affordability and equitable access remain pressing concerns, as does the urgent need to restore funding for community-led initiatives, especially women-led organisations, over 60% of which have reported funding losses or closures in 2025.

In his address, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi reaffirmed South Africa's vision to eliminate HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, and certain cancers by 2030. Celebrating progress towards the 95-95-95 targets, now at 96-79-94, the minister stressed the need to reach the 1.1 million people still not on treatment. He described the withdrawal of PEPFAR funding as a "wake-up call" and announced National Treasury's commitment of R753 million to fill immediate gaps, alongside R400 million over three years for research and essential services, supported by private sector partners.

Ms Winnie Byanyima called the funding crisis "a ticking time bomb," urging countries to move towards global public investment, shared responsibility, and inclusive decision-making. She emphasised that the fight to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 requires courage, commitment, and unwavering global solidarity.

The launch of the Global AIDS Update 2025 comes ahead of the International AIDS Society (IAS) Scientific Conference in Kigali, Rwanda (13–17 July 2025), where the findings will be further explored and serve as a rallying point for renewed commitments. The message from Ekurhuleni is clear: ending AIDS is still within reach, but only if the world acts decisively, invests wisely, and ensures no one is left behind.

“UNAIDS estimates that without urgent intervention, the next five years could see an additional 6 million HIV infections and 4 million AIDS-related deaths.”



Bertha Gxowa CEO Ms. Lebogang Khumalo, Minister of Health Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi, and UNAIDS Executive Director Ms. Winnie Byanyima doing a walk-about at the Hospital.



Deputy Minister of Women, Youth & Persons with Disabilities Ms. Steve Letsike at the Global AIDS Update 2025



Delegates at the Global AIDS Update 2025

Advancing HIV Care Outcomes for Private Clients - From Data to Impact

- Karabo Makgato

On Monday, 22 September 2025, the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) convened a CPD-accredited webinar titled "Advancing HIV Care Outcomes for Private Clients: From Data to Impact." The session brought together stakeholders from government, partners, private health providers, funders, and client forums to explore ways of closing HIV management gaps in the private healthcare sector.

The webinar sought to facilitate dialogue and collaborative engagement among stakeholders to advance HIV management within the private sector. Leveraging data-driven insights, established best practices, and client perspectives, the session endeavoured to identify innovative approaches to strengthen service delivery, improve the quality of care, and ensure that the voices of private sector clients are meaningfully represented in decision-making processes.

South Africa has made remarkable progress in HIV prevention, testing, and treatment. However, the private sector continues to face challenges such as weak linkage to care, disengagement from treatment, data integration gaps, and limited client involvement in decision-making. These blind spots hinder effective service delivery and make it difficult to design targeted, evidence-based interventions.

As Dr. Nkhensani Nkhwashu, SANAC Executive Manager, highlighted in her opening remarks, the webinar offered an opportunity to reflect on data, share best practices, and most importantly, "co-create practical solutions that put clients at the centre." She emphasized the power of evidence-driven decision-making and collaborative partnerships to close treatment gaps and strengthen health systems



SANAC Technical Lead for HIV & TB Treatment Literacy
Ms. Mandisa Dukashe moderated a panel discussion during the webinar

The first session featured expert insights on strategies to enhance HIV care outcomes. Dr Sibongile Ntshangase, Technical Officer for HIV treatment & care, Viral hepatitis and STIs from World Health Organisation (WHO) unpacked global progress towards the 95-95-95 targets and explored challenges in linkage to care, particularly in South Africa's private sector. She stressed the importance of



SANAC Strategic Information Manager Mr. Zwebuka Khumalo

differentiated service delivery, re-engagement of clients lost to follow-up, and innovative virtual interventions that expand access to stigma-free, people-centred HIV services.

Webinar CPD Accredited

Advancing HIV Care Outcomes for Private Clients

PANELLISTS

Mr. Zwebuka Khumalo
Position: SANAC SI Manager
Topic: From Data Gaps to Solutions

Ms. Zanele Cekiso
Position: PHCF Member
Topic: Involvement of Private Healthcare Clients in strengthening healthcare services and care pathways

Mr. Naidoo Thoneshan
Position: HFA CEO
Topic: Co-creating the Healthcare Clients Deserve

Target Audience: Healthcare Providers as well as Medical scheme POs, Hospital managers, Health economists, policy and decision makers

DATE
22 September 2025

TIME
18:00 - 19:30

Scan Here to Register

Mr. Zwebuka Khumalo, Strategic Information Manager at SANAC formed part of the second session which featured a panel discussion moderated by SANAC Technical Lead for HIV & TB Treatment Literacy Ms Mandisa Dukashe. In his remarks, he underscored the importance of standardising service provision across the public and private sectors, creating platforms for in-depth discussion of data needs, and ensuring alignment of indicators, including their definitions and disaggregation. He further highlighted the necessity of reviewing and harmonising data collection tools to promote alignment and to establish seamless, bi-directional data flow processes.

Other panel members included, Ms. Zanele Cekiso from the Private Healthcare Clients Forum who highlighted the need for meaningful client participation in shaping HIV care pathways, ensuring that private sector clients are not passive recipients but active contributors to solutions. Mr. Thoneshan Naidoo, CEO of Health Funders Association CEO underscored the importance of co-creation, calling for partnerships that align funders, providers, and clients in designing the healthcare system clients deserve.

The webinar achieved its objectives of creating a shared understanding of private sector HIV service gaps, identifying strategies for stronger data integration, and setting priorities for cost-effective, evidence-based solutions. Most importantly, it secured commitment to approaches that place clients at the heart of decision-making.

SANAC Celebrates the Launch of Prof. Mbulelo Dyasi's Inspiring Memoir, Dignity in the Darkness

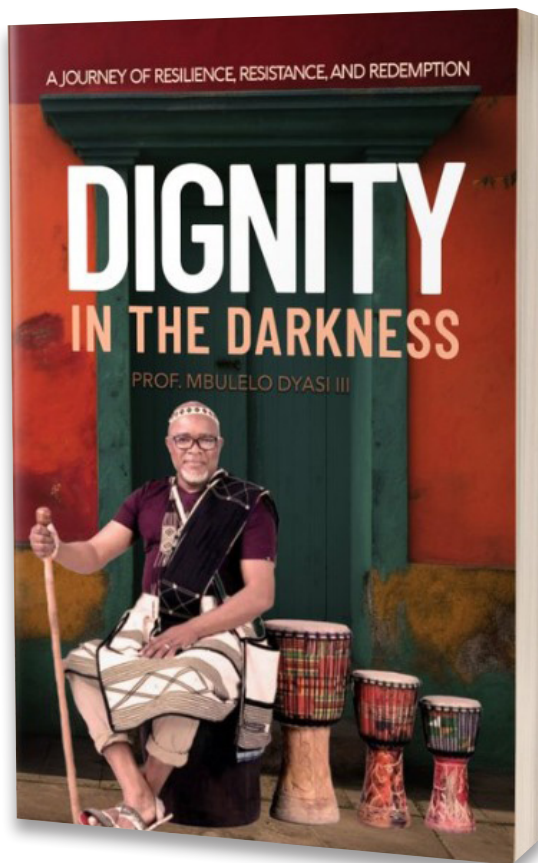
- Simangaliso Motsepe

In a day filled with heartfelt stories, powerful reflections, and a shared commitment for hope, Professor Mbulelo Dyasi, National Chairperson of SANERELA, part of SANAC's Civil Society Forum Faith-Based Sector, unveiled his memoir, *Dignity in the Darkness: A Journey of Resilience, Resistance, and Redemption: Divine Restoration: Embracing Healing and Faith*.

Hosted at the Gauteng Department of Economic Development in Johannesburg on 25 July 2025, the event drew an audience that included the Deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Ms. Steve Letsike, alongside a range of distinguished guests inclusive of Princess Ndileka Mandela, the granddaughter of Nelson Mandela. The programme blended celebration with substance, featuring the Peace and Humanitarian Awards Ceremony and an engaging dialogue session that sparked meaningful conversations.

Reflecting on the journey undertaken to bring to life this book, Prof. Dyasi shared that he intentionally wrote his memoir in simple, accessible English, so that anyone, from any walk of life, could connect with its message. His aim: to encourage boys and couples to talk openly about life's challenges without fear, shame, or stigma. The book, he explained, is deeply emotional and rooted in his own journey, proof that it is possible to overcome a difficult upbringing and still find success in life.

He recalled moments from the writing process, including a memorable and slightly nerve-wrecking incident on a flight from Cape Town when



he accidentally deleted the pages he'd been working on. Instead of despairing, he rewrote them from scratch, determined to preserve the essence of the original manuscript.

Speaking on behalf of SANAC CEO, Communications Manager Nelson Dlamini described the memoir as "more than just pages bound together, it is a legacy, a window into a life, and a gift to all those who've walked this journey with you." He praised Prof. Dyasi's gift for storytelling, noting that *Dignity in the Darkness* captures not just events but the very spirit that makes his life extraordinary.

Prof. Dyasi's memoir courageously explores his personal history, recounting the trauma of sexual abuse he experienced early in life and how those painful experiences shaped his mission to guide young people towards making safer choices. The book also addresses

the tragic loss of young boys in initiation schools. Through initiatives such as the BetterMen4Tomorrow campaign, he aims to foster open dialogue, raise awareness, and safeguard future generations

Beyond the book launch, the event honoured individuals who embody the spirit of Ubuntu, people who give selflessly, empower communities, and advance peace and humanitarian efforts. In sharing his story, Prof. Dyasi offers readers more than a personal testimony, he delivers a call to live with dignity, speak with honesty, and face life's shadows with unwavering courage.



Delegates attending Prof. Dyasi Book Launch



SANAC Comms Manager Mr. Nelson Dlamini (centre) receiving an award on behalf of the SANAC CEO

SPECIAL FEATURE

Raising the South African Flag at the Global Youth Dialogue

- Mmabatho Majuda



SANAC Provincial Technical Officer for AYP Ms. Mmabatho Majuda

When I received an unexpected message on LinkedIn, I had no idea it would open the door to one of the most inspiring global platforms I have yet experienced. The organiser of the Global Youth Dialogue had come across one of my posts on youth development and reached out to invite me as a speaker to the Global Youth Dialogue themed “Building Youth Communities that Drive 21st Century Development” on the 9th of August 2025. It was a reminder of how powerfully digital platforms can connect us and how authentic passion, when shared, can lead to opportunities to influence change on a global stage.

Youth across Africa face diverse yet interconnected challenges, from unemployment to outdated education systems, health inequalities and many others. The Global Youth Dialogue created a platform for young leaders to exchange solutions, highlight opportunities, and imagine a future where youth are central drivers of development. South Africa, while grappling with its own socio-economic hurdles, stands in a relatively stronger position than many of its continental peers. With a progressive Constitution, institutionalised youth structures, and government-led interventions such as the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI), the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), and the Integrated Youth Development Strategy (IYDS), South Africa continues to prioritise the role of young people in shaping development pathways.

Why Youth Development Matters for the HIV Response

In South Africa and across the world, the challenges of HIV, TB and STIs among young people cannot be addressed in isolation. Youth development must be approached holistically, integrating education, employment, health, psychosocial support, and opportunities for leadership. A young person who is empowered with skills, dignity, and community support is far more likely to access health services, make informed decisions, and become a peer champion in the HIV response. This was the lens I carried with me into the Dialogue: that empowering young people beyond the health sector is a critical pathway to stronger health outcomes.

A Well-Coordinated and Youth-Led Space

The Global Youth Dialogue was hosted by youth advocate and social entrepreneur Gracious Oluwagbemiga Opeyemi of the Young Global Leaders Network. His ability to convene over 160 young leaders from across Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, Chile, Cameroon, Pakistan, Kenya, Mexico, and Zimbabwe was nothing short of remarkable.

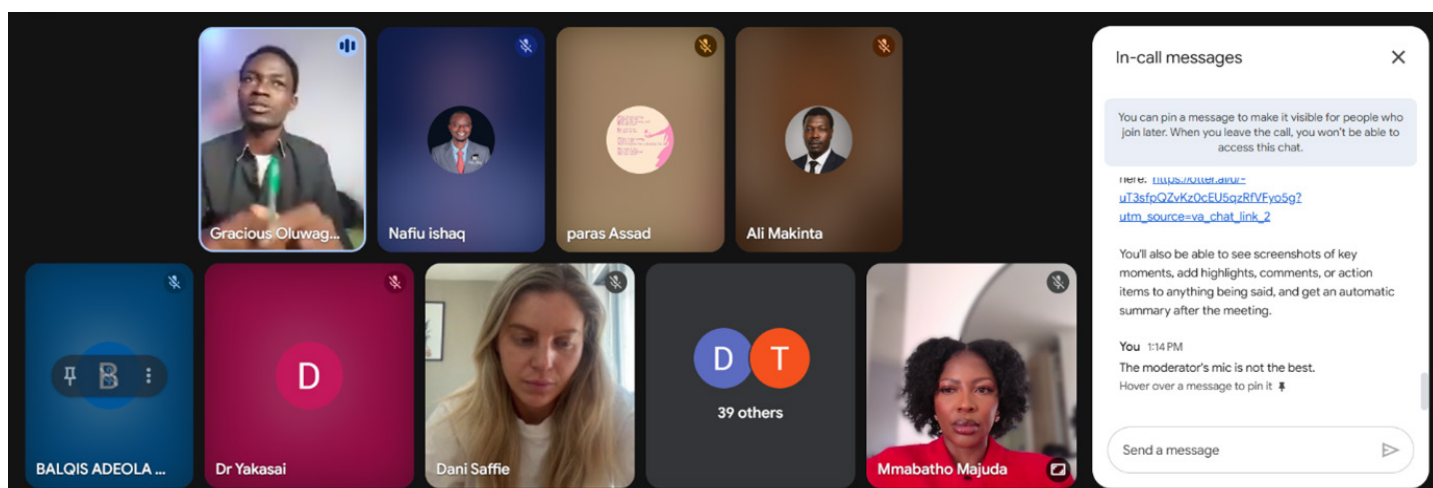
The event was seamlessly coordinated, with space for both panel discussions and breakout rooms. More importantly, it was youth-owned and youth-driven. The energy, commitment, and clarity of vision displayed by young leaders from across the globe left me humbled and inspired.

Themes that Resonate Across Borders

Discussions stretched far beyond employment statistics or education policies. They went to the heart of what it means to be young in the 21st century:

- The mismatch between education systems and labour market realities.
- The need to prepare youth for future skills such as AI literacy, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving.
- The urgency of making curricula more relevant to African realities.
- Calls for greater investment in youth-led innovations, digital access, and mental health support.
- Demands for meaningful, not tokenistic, participation in policymaking.

What struck me was the convergence of voices: whether from urban South Africa, rural Pakistan, or coastal Chile, young people are calling not just for reform but for transformation.



South Africa's Contribution to the Dialogue

As a panellist speaker, I had the honour of providing feedback to three of the breakout groups. I drew on our South African context, highlighting issues such as:

- **Skills Mismatch:** South Africa's unemployment crisis is exacerbated by misalignment between qualifications and employer needs, despite rising numbers of graduates.
- **Transferable Skills:** Initiatives like PYEI and NYDA training programmes are equipping youth with digital, problem-solving, and communication skills, though corruption and inequality remain barriers to access.
- **Holistic Development:** The IYDS highlights the need to integrate sport, arts, psychosocial support, and health into youth development.
- **Future of Work:** The Fourth Industrial Revolution presents opportunities and risks; equal access to connectivity and AI literacy is essential to avoid deepening inequalities.
- **Youth Leadership in Health:** The SANAC Youth Sector has been a model of youth-led advocacy, accountability, and programme design in the HIV, TB, and STI response, showing that when youth are trusted with leadership, results can follow.

I concluded that the future of our health and social outcomes rests in how we treat our young people today - not as passive beneficiaries, but as leaders and innovators

A Personal Reflection

For me, being part of this global exchange was both affirming and challenging. Affirming, because it showed that the struggles and hopes of young South Africans are shared globally. Challenging, because it reminded me that our pace of change must quicken, our youth cannot wait another generation for systems to catch up.

As I signed off from the virtual session, I felt proud to have represented South Africa, but even more determined to continue advocating for holistic youth development as a cornerstone of our fight against HIV, TB, and STIs.

The Dialogue was not just a conversation, it was a spark that if nurtured,

it could ignite a global movement of young leaders determined to build communities that drive the 21st-century development agenda.

Conclusion

The Global Youth Dialogue was more than a conversation; it was a call for action and solidarity. South Africa's participation highlighted both its comparative progress and its enduring challenges, while reinforcing the central truth: youth are not just the future, they are the present drivers of development.

For South Africa, this means leveraging government-led initiatives, strengthening collaboration across sectors, and ensuring youth leadership remains central in both health and socio-economic development. Globally, it means building a collective movement where African youth lead solutions for Africa and the world.



African Traditional Medicine Week: Honouring Heritage, Strengthening Health, Protecting Rights

- Message from Mr Solly Nduku, National Chairperson of the SANAC Civil Society Forum



SANAC Civil Society Forum Chairperson Mr. Solly Nduku

As we commemorate African Traditional Medicine Week, the 23rd African Traditional Medicine Day to be commemorated on 31st August 2025: under the theme “Strengthen the evidence base for traditional medicine”. The theme of the 23rd African Traditional Medicine is aligned with the first strategic objective of the new WHO Global Traditional Medicine strategy 2025-2034 endorsed by member States at the 78th World Health Assembly.

We pause to recognize the deep and enduring role that traditional medicine continues to play in the lives of millions of South Africans. Long before hospitals and clinics were built, Traditional Health

Practitioners (THP's) were the custodians of wellness, spirituality, and healing in our communities. Today, traditional medicine remains not only a cultural inheritance but also a vital part of the broader health landscape providing care, comfort, and trust where formal systems sometimes fall short. “Up to 80% of the population in Africa uses traditional medicine as primary health care,” this is attributed to WHO Factsheet No. 134, May 2003,

The South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) Civil Society Forum joins the continent in reflecting on the importance of traditional medicine while also calling for its integration into the national health response in a way that is safe, evidence informed, rights based, and inclusive of all communities.

Reflections Across SANAC Sectors

Women's Sector

Women are often the keepers of indigenous knowledge and play a central role as caregivers in families and communities. Yet, women also face vulnerabilities including exposure to harmful practices, limited decision-making power, and stigma when seeking care. We call for the inclusion of women's voices in research, regulation, and policy on traditional medicine, ensuring their rights and safety are prioritized.

People Living with HIV (PLHIV) Sector

Many PLHIV find support in traditional healing practices that provide spiritual and emotional strength. However,

Continue on p.13

misinformation and false promises of “cures” can endanger lives when they discourage adherence to antiretroviral therapy. We reaffirm that traditional medicine and biomedical treatment must work hand in hand complementing, not competing with the aim of sustaining life and wellness.

Key Populations (Sex Workers, LGBTQI+ People, People Who Use Drugs etc)

Traditional medicine can offer discreet, community-based avenues for care, especially where stigma exists in formal health facilities. However, some harmful practices and moral judgments within both systems still exclude sex workers, LGBTQI+ people, and people who use drugs. We emphasise the right of all key populations to non-discriminatory, stigma-free, and dignified healthcare in both traditional and biomedical spaces.

Youth Sector

Young people are often caught between tradition and modernity. Many rely on traditional medicine as their first line of care, especially in rural areas. At the same time, they face high risks from misinformation spread via peers and unregulated healers. We call for accurate, age-appropriate education and dialogue on the safe use of traditional medicine, alongside HIV prevention and treatment literacy.

Religious Sector

Faith and traditional healing often intersect in communities. Many religious leaders work alongside Traditional Health Practitioners (THP's) in providing comfort and hope. However, harmful teachings that discourage medical treatment persist. We call for interfaith and intercultural collaboration with Traditional Health Practitioners (THP's) & traditional leaders to ensure that spirituality supports is provided rather than undermining the fight against HIV, TB, and STIs.

Labour Sector

Workers frequently rely on traditional medicine for affordable and accessible care. However, workplace policies rarely recognize traditional, leading to discrimination or exclusion. We urge for workplace policies that respect traditional healing practices while aligning with occupational health and safety standards.

Disability Sector

People with disabilities often turn to traditional medicine for pain management and cultural belonging. Sadly, harmful myths such as the belief that disability can be “cured” through certain rituals persist, fuelling stigma and abuse. We call for protection,

awareness, and inclusion to ensure traditional practices respect the dignity and rights of people with disabilities.

Business Sector

The private sector has a role in supporting research, commercialization, and regulation of traditional medicines in ways that protect intellectual property and benefit communities. We call for investment in research and ethical business models that prevent exploitation while promoting access to safe, tested traditional remedies.

A Unified Call for Collaboration

From these reflections, one truth emerges clearly: African traditional medicine is here to stay, and it must be part of our collective health response. But its role must be guided by scientific research, community involvement, human rights, and regulatory frameworks that protect people from harm while honouring indigenous wisdom.

We further call for:

- Stronger partnerships between traditional healers and biomedical practitioners.
- Expanded research and regulation to ensure safety and efficacy.
- Continuous dialogue and education to combat stigma and misinformation.
- Centering the voices of all SANAC sectors in shaping policies and practices.

Conclusion

African Traditional Medicine Week is not only a celebration of heritage it is a commitment to building a health system that values tradition, respects rights, and protects life. As the SANAC Civil Society Forum, we reaffirm our role in bridging communities, government, and Traditional Health Practitioners (THP's) so that our collective fight against HIV, TB, and STIs leaves no one behind.

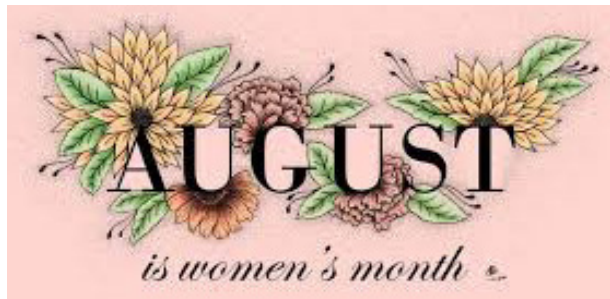
“Strengthen the evidence base for traditional medicine”



Honouring Women's Leadership in the Fight for Health, Equality, and Justice this Women's Month

- Message from Mr Solly Nduku, National Chairperson of the SANAC Civil Society Forum

August in South Africa is more than a month on the calendar, it is a living archive of bravery, vision, and sacrifice. It is a reminder that the freedoms we cherish and the rights we defend today were forged, in no small part, by the courage of women who stood firm against systems designed to break them.



In 1956, 20,000 women; mothers, workers, teachers, nurses, farmers, and community leaders, united across race, class, and geography, marched to the Union Buildings, their voices echoing with the cry: "Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokodo"—you strike a woman, you strike a rock. They did not just reject pass laws; they rejected a vision of South Africa that excluded their dignity, their rights, and their humanity.

Today, the struggle continues, though its forms have evolved. The fight against HIV, TB, STIs, gender-based violence, and social injustice remains one of the defining challenges of our generation, and women are still leading from the frontlines. The South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) Civil Society Forum, representing 18 diverse sectors, stands united with the Women's Sector and all our partners to keep women's rights, health, and dignity at the heart of South Africa's national response.

The Reality We Face

While we have made important strides in expanding access to treatment, prevention, and support, the truth is stark, women particularly young women and adolescent girls, remain disproportionately affected by HIV and gender-based violence.

Statistics tell a sobering story:

- Every week in South Africa, over 1,000 young women aged 15–24 are newly infected with HIV.
- Gender based violence claims lives, destroys families, and undermines public health, with 1 in 3 women experiencing some form of violence in their lifetime.
- Poverty, unemployment, and harmful gender norms continue to deepen women's vulnerability.

This is not a problem for women to solve alone it is a societal crisis that demands collective action. Ending these injustices is not only a moral duty; it is essential to the health and prosperity of our entire nation.

Women at the Heart of the Response

Across our country, in villages, townships, cities, and informal settlements, women are the backbone of community life. They are the caregivers ensuring that children, the elderly, and the sick are not left behind. They are activists challenging harmful traditions and speaking out against abuse. They are educators spreading knowledge about

HIV prevention and treatment. They are organisers mobilising communities for better healthcare services.

Within SANAC CSF, the Women's Sector is not simply a stakeholder it is a driving force shaping our policies, monitoring accountability, and ensuring that programmes respond to women's lived realities. This means

listening to the experiences of women from diverse walks of life and translating those voices into concrete action at national, provincial, and community levels.

Our Commitment as SANAC Civil Society Forum

This Women's Month, we reaffirm our commitment to building a South Africa where women's health, safety, and rights are non-negotiable. Our priorities include:

- Strengthening women-led and women-focused programmes in the HIV, TB, and STIs response, ensuring that women have the tools, resources, and leadership opportunities they need to drive change.
- Addressing gender-based violence as a public health emergency, recognising that no meaningful progress on health can be achieved without tackling the violence and trauma that undermine women's well-being.
- Advocating for economic empowerment and social protection, because economic independence is a critical shield against vulnerability.
- Supporting intersectional approaches that address the needs of women from all backgrounds including LGBTQI+ women, women with disabilities, rural women, migrant women, and young women ensuring that no one is excluded from progress.

A Call to Action

Women's Month must be more than a celebration of past victories it must be a moment of renewal, reflection, and accountability. We must ask ourselves: what will future generations say about the choices we made and the action we took today?

Every sector, every leader, every citizen has a role to play in dismantling barriers to women's health, safety, and opportunity. We must invest in women not just because it is just, but because women's empowerment is the key to ending HIV, TB, and inequality in our lifetime.

As we honour the courage of the women of 1956, let us inherit not just their memory but their mission. Let us confront the injustices of our time with the same defiance, unity, and vision. Let us build a South Africa where women are not merely surviving but thriving—healthy, empowered, and free to shape their own destinies.

Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokodo!

Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders: A Career Fair for Limpopo Youth

- Simangaliso Motsepe



Dr. Masindi Mashapha-Assistant Director HIV and AIDS speaking at the Career Fair

Hope and possibility filled the air in Limpopo on 28–29 August 2025, as young people gathered for a career fair designed to empower young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly orphaned and vulnerable children. The initiative was hosted in collaboration with the Department of Social Development (DSD) and the Education Sector.

Hosted under the theme “Bridging the Gap Between Childhood, Youth, and Early Adulthood,” the initiative focused on equipping young people with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to step into their futures as responsible and self-reliant adults. It forms part of the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children and Youth (OVCY) project coordinated by SANAC and Funded through a bilateral agreement between the governments of South Africa and Germany, and is implemented across three provinces, namely KwaZulu-Natal, North



Learners attending the Career Fair

West, and Limpopo, through 17 Community Care Centres (CCCs).

The Limpopo leg of the project was held in Mamvuka in Makhado and Bonn situated in Tzaneen, where government officials, NGOs, educators, community leaders, and the youth came together to explore solutions to the unique challenges faced by orphaned and vulnerable children.

In Mamvuka Community Centre, more than 100 eager learners from two high schools attended the fair, while in Bonn Community Centre over 150 Grade 12 learners from four schools took part, many of them standing at the threshold of higher education or career pathways.

The energy was infectious: stalls buzzed with conversation, presenters shared pathways into higher education, and students engaged deeply with mentors and professionals. “We are bringing social services directly to the youth, making sure they are equipped in agriculture, soft skills, and life orientation. This project connects young people with higher education institutions to help them make informed choices about their future.” said Ms. Masindi Mashapha, Assistant Director for HIV Coordination and Programme Support at the Department of Social Development.

Representatives from universities and colleges highlighted the variety of courses and training opportunities available, while also guiding learners through the practical steps needed to pursue further education. Beyond academics, the Fair emphasized soft skills, career readiness, and personal empowerment, with workshops on networking, self-awareness, and life orientation. For many participants, it was a rare and inspiring chance to picture their lives beyond the classroom. The sessions sparked confidence, built connections, and opened doors to opportunities that might otherwise have felt out of reach.



Learners and Delegates at the Career Fair

Four Provinces Establish their Private Sector Forums

- Karabo Makgato



KWAZULU-NATAL
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



FREE STATE PROVINCE
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Between August and September 2025, the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) Private Sector Forum (PSF) established Provincial Private Sector Forums (PPSFs) in the Eastern Cape, Free State, Northern Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal. With these four provinces now on board, all nine provinces across the country have officially established their forums, marking a significant milestone in strengthening private sector participation in the national HIV, TB, and STIs response.

The establishment of the PPSFs aligns with SANAC's strategic objective to strengthen multi-sectoral partnerships and ensure that the private sector plays an active role in addressing health challenges in South Africa. The Forums will serve as key platforms for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and coordinated action in response to HIV and related health issues in provinces.

The grand launch to mark the full establishment of the PPSF in all nine forums will be announced in due course. The event is expected to be led by the PSF Chairperson Ms Nompumelelo Zikalala and, subject to availability, the Deputy President of South Africa, His Excellency Paul Mashatile, in his capacity as SANAC Chairperson. They will be joined by Mr. Solly Nduku, Chairperson of the SANAC Civil Society Forum, underscoring the power of partnership between government, civil society and the private sector.



The Research Corner with *Colisile Mathonsi*

Bridging the Gap



Ms. Colisile Mathonsi, SANAC Provincial Technical Officer for Adolescent Girls & Young Women

The 12th South African AIDS Conference took place under the theme: “Unite for Change – Empower Communities and Redefine Priorities for HIV/AIDS.” Few themes could be more fitting to remind us that progress toward the 2030 goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat depends on one thing: how well we bridge the gap between communities, research, government, and programme implementers.

A panel convened by SANAC and the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Council on AIDS (PCA) focused squarely on this challenge. A multi-stakeholder panel comprising civil society leaders, programme implementers, donors, government representatives, and academia shared candid insights. The discussion highlighted both persistent barriers and promising pathways forward.

Community-Centred Research and Action

Community voices underscored that interventions often miss the youngest adolescents, despite high pregnancy rates among girls aged 10–14. Ethical challenges were acknowledged, but leaving this group out of prevention research creates blind spots in the response.

Equally important is the need for accessible communication of research findings. “Research reports are written in technical language that most people cannot understand. If communities cannot access or use the information, how can it improve their lives?”

A recent example demonstrated the urgency of this point. When results from an HIV cure trial were released, myths circulated widely on social media, creating confusion and unrealistic expectations. However, when scientists later sat down with civil society and other stakeholders to explain what the results actually meant, the dialogue brought much-needed clarity.

The call to action was for more of these interactive sessions that demystify science. Communities, and especially civil society, must be capacitated to understand research terminology so they can share accurate information, counter misinformation, and engage with policymakers from an informed perspective.

Communities therefore stressed the need to be involved throughout the research cycle from design to dissemination and for results to be translated into plain, actionable formats that can guide real-world practice.

Implementers on the Ground: Models that Work

Implementation representative highlighted the value of peer-led, cluster models that integrate schools, clinics, and community “hubs of hope.” These models place young people in leadership roles as peer educators and service navigators.

“Preliminary evidence shows that when services meet youth where they are in schools, clinics, and communities we see fewer pregnancies, reduced dropouts, and improved health outcomes.”

The challenge now is sustainability, as donor-funded programmes phase out. The call is for government adoption and scale-up of models already showing results.

Donor Transitions: From External Support to Domestic Ownership

With major funders such as PEPFAR transitioning, sustainability has become the “elephant in the room.” Donors stressed that programmes must be domestically owned and financially sustained by South Africa.

“Countries must own their programmes because they are life-saving. Donors can seed innovations, but long-term survival depends on domestic investment.”

Best practices like the Family Matters Programme, now fully led by the Department of Social Development, show that successful transitions are possible.

Government Priorities: Aligning Policy and Practice

Government representatives pointed to important progress but also recognised barriers. Policy contradictions for example, between child protection laws, the age of consent, and sexual and reproductive health guidelines create practical challenges in service delivery.

At the same time, research and evaluation are not yet consistently embedded in policymaking.

“We need to strengthen evaluation to understand whether our programmes are achieving their objectives, why they are or are not working, and how we can improve in the next phase.”

Government leaders called for academia, implementing partners, and civil society to work alongside them in building a more evidence-informed, community-driven response.

Strengthening the Role of Academia

The academic sector acknowledged that while progress has been

made, there is still work to do to ensure that research drives change on the ground.

“If research doesn’t involve communities, then whose gaps are we filling? Knowledge must be packaged in ways that nourish people, not just journals.”

This recognition links directly to government’s call for stronger evaluation and practical use of evidence. Academia highlighted encouraging shifts:

“At the Early and Unintended Pregnancy Conference, young people were leading the conversation, government was present, and researchers were listening. That model, where no one is the sole expert, is how we bridge the gap.”

The message was that academia cannot bridge the gap alone but must continue to work hand in hand with civil society, implementers, and government to ensure evidence is translated into sustainable, community-centred solutions.

society, implementers, and donors co-creating solutions rather than working in silos.

- Capacitate civil society and communities to understand scientific findings, ensuring they can interpret, use, and communicate evidence effectively.

Civil Society’s Call to Action

“Community must remain at the centre of research. Bridging the gap cannot be a one-off activity it must be a culture.”

Advisory boards and consultations were seen as valuable but insufficient. Stronger platforms are needed for findings to flow back to communities through District AIDS Councils, civil society forums, and other structures enabling them to use evidence for advocacy and accountability.

The call was clear: research institutions and government must capacitate communities with knowledge, ensuring they are empowered to hold all stakeholders accountable for delivering on the 2030 promise. Only when communities are informed and equipped can they claim their role as equal partners in the HIV response.

Building the Bridge: Shared Recommendations

The discussion converged on several practical steps to bridge gaps and build durable linkages:

- Institutionalise peer-led models within government systems to sustain proven approaches.
- Align policy frameworks to resolve contradictions that hinder effective service delivery.
- Increase domestic investment in successful programmes, reducing reliance on external donors.
- Translate research into formats that are accessible for both policymakers and communities.
- Embed collaboration as culture with government, academia, civil

Conclusion

This was not simply another panel discussion. It was a blueprint for collective action. The insights showed that bridging the gap between communities, research, and programmes is not about assigning blame but about building stronger linkages across all actors in the HIV response.

“We have the evidence. We have the people. Now we need connection, collaboration, and courage.”

If South Africa is to reach its 2030 goal, bridging the gap between communities, research, and programmes must move from aspiration to practice.