Since launching the SAT Friday Youth Activist series in June 2020, just as the world was starting to figure out what the “new normal” during a global pandemic would look like, SAT has been honoured to showcase and share the stories of 33 amazingly inspirational young leaders and activists from across the continent. Working alongside many of these shining stars has been SAT’s own cohort of young leaders, who each in their own right have helped to shape organisation through direct input into strategy development, and programming and community-focused implementation. Young people are at the very heart and soul of SAT. So, this week’s Friday Youth Activist story will feature not just one young person, whose work creates much needed change, but four incredibly talented and passionate young leaders who we are lucky enough to work with everyday and whose impact is being felt across the communities. They are true examples of the multiplying effect of young voices in action that can change the trajectory of a continent. That is why they are our choice for Friday Youth Activist this week. Meet SAT country youth officers Foster Mafiala, from Malawi, Millicent Sethaile from Botswana, Ng’andwe Ng’andwe from Zambia and last but by no means least, Raymond Mazhambe from Zimbabwe.

**Meaningful Youth Participation is not just a phrase**

All four young activists started their journey with SAT as volunteers. Says, Foster Mafiala, “I was invited to join the SAT Youth Hub in Malawi in 2017 when it was just being established.” Foster had been working closely with his life-long mentor John Nyirenda who was part of the organisation at the time and believed that Foster could make a difference by working with the youth hub. He says what attracted him to SAT, was the organisation’s different approach to placing youth at the centre of the organisation. “It really is a youth-led organisation. Young people are taking up initiatives and leading from the front. Right from planning to implementation, we have colleagues and leaders that support our ideas and input.” Meaningful youth participation has been Ng’andwe’s experience since he joined SAT in 2017. Having obtained a degree in Journalism and working at the time at The Junior Reporter, the only youth run and youth managed magazine in the world, Ng’andwe says he thought he had a good understanding of advocacy, but he says this all changed when he met SAT’s Executive Director, who he says radically changed his perspective on youth advocacy. “I really believed it was about young people coming together and filling spaces as part of activities being directed by the organisation.” He always felt there was a disconnect between your participation and finding your voice to make a real and meaningful different in important spaces. He joined the SAT Zambia Youth hub where he volunteered whilst honing his advocacy and activism. His chance to step up came in 2018, when he was nominated to join the SAT Board as a full member representing the youth constituency. “Here I was a young person coming from the youth hub who was suddenly interacting with other board members who had years of experience, donors and leaders of other organisations. My network suddenly expanded big time.” He says that he challenged himself to apply his SRHR work and ensure that the voices of young people were included into the development of the organisation’s strategy which was being reviewed during his tenure.

For Millicent Sethaile, her experience in Botswana has been nothing short of serendipitous. “It was by chance really that I was introduced to SAT. A friend of mine had been invited to attend the annual SAT country office meeting, where they had invited a large contingent of young people to participate. She was unable to attend on the day, so I stepped in to represent her, and as they say the rest is history.” Millicent so impressed the organisation’s Executive Director that she was invited to attend a regional
SRHR event taking place in Johannesburg, South Africa the very next day. “That was 2016 and I have been fortunate to have my volunteering at SAT become a fulfilling and immensely satisfying full time job.” Millicent says that the organisational culture of creating safe spaces for young people to learn and push themselves to take their creative ideas from innovation to fully fledged programme has been exhilarating. “Don’t get me wrong it’s really hard work, but I am able to confidently say that I was able to contribute towards and build the TeenWyze brand, now YouthWzye, from its infancy into a regional programme that is literally touching thousands of lives across the region.” She says that this would not have been possible without the unrelenting support of her Country Director who motivated her all the way. That is a similar theme of support and challenge that all four youth officers have shared as their experience during their time with SAT. The stark realities of the lived realities of drug and alcohol abuse, early unwanted pregnancies, high HIV prevalence, and the death of a family member of HIV propelled Raymond Mazhambe from Zimbabwe towards an organisation where he felt his passion for SRHR and HIV prevention could make a difference. “For me my focus and attention has always been directed to finding ways in which I could ensure that we avoided unnecessary deaths due to HIV, just because people were not able to access life-saving information that an organisation like SAT provides.” Raymond says that since joining SAT he knows that he has made a difference in the lives of the young people who come to the many workshops and outreaches that he and his fellow youth colleagues have undertaken. This need to take care of others has also extended to his personal life, where he feels that with his role as youth officer, he has been able to support the livelihoods of his family and improve the welfare of his siblings. “I have also been blessed to have great colleagues and mentors, like Shakira Choonara who used her unique advocacy lens to bring SRHR issues to the community in innovative and creative ways.”

Covid-19 adapting to a new reality
At the start of 2020 all four youth officers believed that they were on an unstoppable train headed towards a bright and jam packed year filled with events and conferences that they were planning to attend and community outreach programmes designed for personal and face to face interaction. But with the WHO announcement of the Coronavirus global pandemic, their worlds upended and the trains literally stopped in their tracks. Says Foster, “We went from being super involved in planning events and then our country went into lockdown and were not allowed to leave our homes, we could not work, we could not visit friends or young people that we knew might need our help. We were helpless.” For Raymond it was particularly hard as he had just moved out of his family home and was totally isolated from all this loved ones and friends. “I experienced depression. It was a bad time, but I am really grateful for the mental health support that SAT provide to all the youth officers during this time.” Millicent and Ng’andwe agree and say that had it not been for the psycho-social support offered by the outsourced psychologist that they might have struggled much more had it not been for the necessary coping mechanisms that in turn were able to share with other young people in the broader SAT community who were not as fortunate. “These services are quite expensive, so to have the opportunity to have someone available to you when you really needed it most was a huge blessing and I know that I was able to use my experience and support to help others in our youth hub network.” As has been shared by many of the Friday Youth Activists and those who SAT engaged during this time have shared their personal feelings of depression, anxiety and uncertainty. To assist with helping others find coping mechanisms the four youth
Opportunities to Grow and Give Back

Although these four young leaders acknowledge that they have been blessed with many opportunities and have accomplished much towards their personal ambitions, they all feel a deep sense of responsibility towards the next generation. To find pathways for growth and development of the other young rising stars who are coming behind them. For Foster he has seen first-hand the power of youth involvement with his younger sister also joining the SAT family as a youth hubster. “She is forging her own path and I am really proud.” Adding that as youth leaders they each feel that they have a responsibility to the next cohort of young activists who are in the wings waiting for their moment to shine.” Raymond agrees and add that he believes that the strong bond that the foursome have developed over the years has been a big factor in their successes. Ng’andwe agrees and adds that innovation in the youth space will be a game changer but he says that young people have to work smarter not harder and constantly be looking at new horizons because you will discover things that no one even knew existed. “I am a believer that curiosity and innovation drives development and growth and with 65% of the global population made up of young people, we have a massive youth dividend that we can draw from to create a few that’s fit for purpose and looks forwards and not backwards for answers on our problems.”

A common thread amongst our Friday Youth Activists this week is the burning desire to create and build a future that brighter and better for the next generation. For Raymond he sees his future firmly rooted in creating new and inclusive systems where grassroots activism has a seat at the table of key UN bodies and young leaders like him are shaping policies that directly address the issues on the ground that impact the lives and livelihoods of young people. Foster has his sights set on a future that involves disrupting the ‘business as usual’ mold. Keenly aware of how much his country needs young talent and leaders like him, he has been assisting his long-time friend and mentor John, with the set up and launch of Youth Wave, a youth-focussed organisation that seeks to address issues like equal access to SRHR, the eradication of Gender Based Violence in communities across Malawi, as well as governance and finding pathways for Meaningful Youth Participation. In Zambia, for Ng’andwe it’s about young people understanding that they need to be prepared to ensure that they can seize any opportunity that comes their way. “I have always been driven to be prepared, learn and soak up everything that I can so that if the opportunity arises I am able to go with it and so far it has been a wonderful journey.” His first love, journalism, it seems has also been beckoning, as he’s been toying with the idea of writing a column on youth advocacy. “But, I am also interested in using my skills and experience on getting the development world to properly invest in the skills development of young people, because you cannot empower the majority of citizens if you are not investing in educating them. Without education there will be a huge gap and we that will mean no progress, no SDGs or other global commitments being met.” His ambitions don’t stop there, he’s also got his eye set on cleaning up the political system in Zambia too. “I believe it’s my responsibility as a young person to make it attractive again. By that I mean that people need to understand that politics needs to be a symbiotic relationship between those in power and those who place them in power. They both need each
other if the country is to progress. Equality equals good leadership.” The road to positions of power is also firmly on the horizon for Millicent. She has set her sights on becoming the future Executive Director of the WHO.

“I don’t have look far for inspiration. Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the current Regional Director of WHO at the Africa office, has been a mentor and is someone that I greatly admire. She has shown me that anything is possible. If you plan and work hard you can achieve anything. There are no limits.” Millicent says that she has been offered a clear and precise roadmap on how Dr. Moeti achieved her dreams and this knowledge has been passed down to young women like her who are on a path to greatness. A map which she plans to pay forward and pass onto the next generation of young women. “In my current environment I have been blessed to help make a difference in the lives of individual young men and women but if we want to achieve real change and create the Africa that we want, we have to think bigger. I want to expand my reach and impact, to not just change the live of one person, but to change the ecosystems of young people across the continent and for that I need to be at the apex in decision making.” She says that her future is bright. And she’s well on track to achieving her goals and ambitions. Just like our other inspiring youth activists who we have featured before, these four SAT youth officers show what is possible when young people are given a seat at the table, as equals. Where their voices and engagement matters and they take centre stage in creating a future that is inclusive, equitable and prosperous, for this generation and the next. One thing is clear, young people are an unstoppable force for change. The wave is coming so you had better be prepared!

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