EngageSDGs

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EngageSDGs

Developing the capacity of SADC higher education institutions to use participatory approaches for community-based engagement with selected SDGs.

EngageSDGs conference report (Deliverable 7.2)



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Summary

The EngageSDGs final conference connected project learning with a practical agenda for continuing participatory university–community engagement across SADC. It brought together project resources, transformation stories, regional and international perspectives, participant feedback and three thematic discussions on a continuing Community of Practice (CoP).

The registration record contains 275 unique registrants, including 204 from 13 SADC member states; 173 registrants were marked as having attended. Feedback emphasised community-defined challenges, trust, local knowledge and shared decision-making. Funding, staff time and the loss of partnerships after grants end were prominent constraints. The closing discussion favoured an informal CoP organised around substantive topics and rotating partner leadership, with an inaugural session proposed for February–March 2027.

The conference established a basis for continued collaboration. Implementation now requires confirmation of convenors, resource stewardship and voluntary commitments. This report distinguishes recorded participation, audience perceptions, reported conference decisions and proposals requiring further agreement.

See Section 6 for the consolidated follow-up register.

1 Context and objectives

EngageSDGs aims to strengthen the capacity of SADC higher education institutions to contribute to selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through participatory approaches. Its outputs include a state-of-play analysis, the Integrated Participatory Framework (IPF), the Digital Academic Ecosystem (DAE), pilot experiences and capacity development resources. The conference served as a dissemination and stakeholder-engagement event and a transition towards their continued use.

EngageSDGs reports to the SADC Technical Committee on Higher Education, Research and Training, which has expressed interest in full regional reach. Registration coverage and future outreach therefore need to be assessed alongside the substantive learning generated by the conference.

The conference objectives were to share project evidence, pilot experiences and tools; situate engaged higher education within sustainability priorities; support dialogue about equity, power and community ownership; introduce a continuing CoP; and develop a legacy agenda, pledge and follow-up process.

Objective	Result recorded in this report	Evidence and limitation
Share project learning and resources	Programme included project achievements, transformation stories and engagement resources.	Annexure A; presentation-specific delivery records remain to be consolidated.
Connect engagement with sustainability priorities	Regional, sustainability and regenerative education sessions were included.	Annexure A and Section 3; detailed keynote summaries are not available in the supplied report.
Support dialogue on participatory practice	Feedback and streams addressed trust, power, language, resources and reciprocity.	Sections 4–5; feedback represents respondents, not all participants.
Introduce the CoP	Three thematic streams discussed challenges and possible next steps.	Section 5; Streams 1 and 2 did not record a shared priority.
Develop continuity arrangements	Pledge support and a theme-based CoP approach were recorded.	Sections 6–7; institutional endorsement and operational responsibilities require confirmation.

2 Participation and regional reach

The participation record shows 275 unique registrants and 173 marked as attended, equivalent to approximately 63% of registrations. The graphic below derives from the registration and attendance workbook identified in the supplied report. Profile information relates to registrants rather than a separately verified profile of attendees. [E2]

Of the registrants, 204 were classified within SADC, 36 outside SADC and 35 had no country stated. Registrations covered 13 of the 16 SADC member states. No registrations were recorded from Comoros, Madagascar or Namibia. Ten SADC countries had at least one marked attendee; Malawi, Angola and Mozambique had registrations but no marked attendees. These measures describe different stages of reach and should be reported separately.

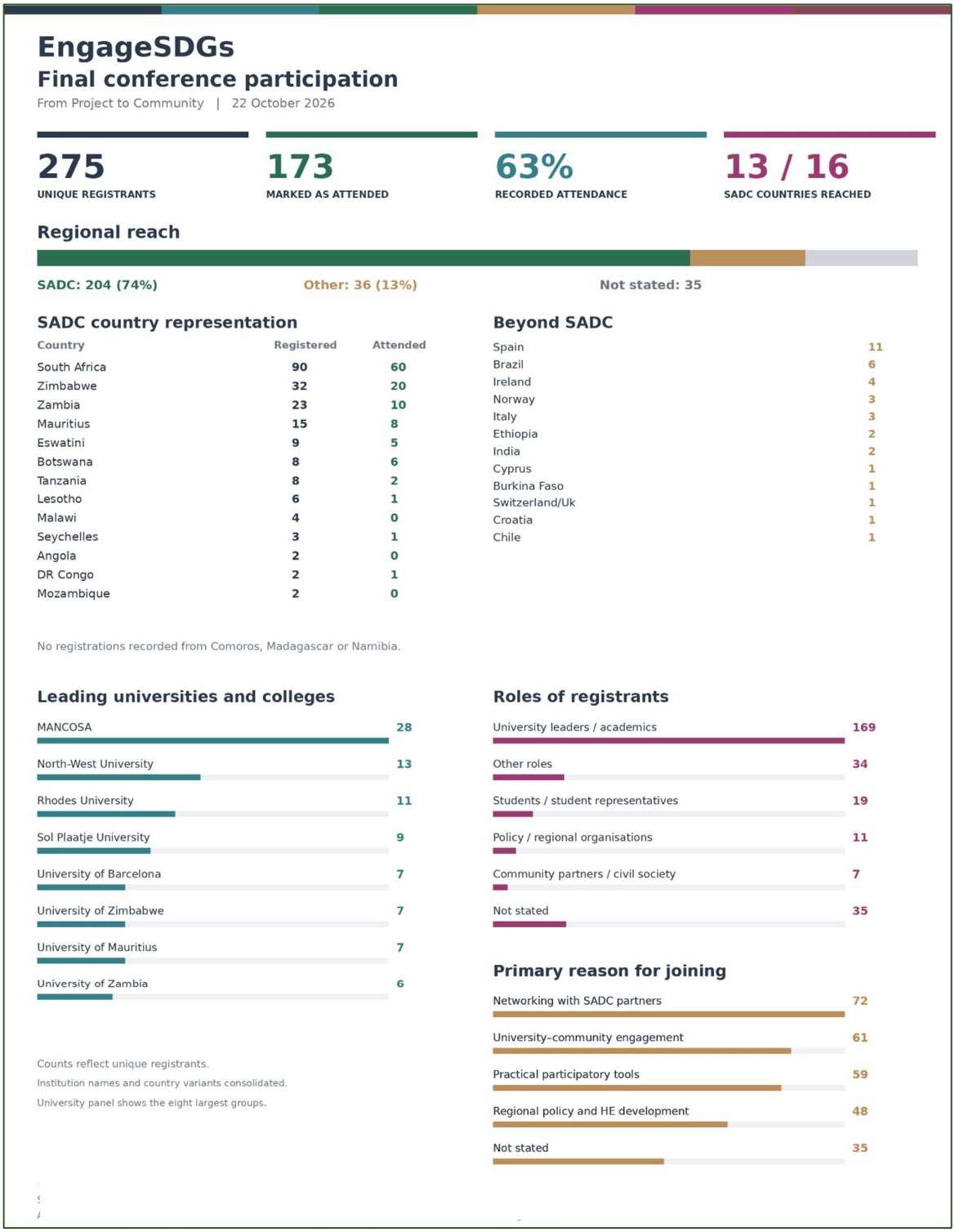


Figure 1. Registration profile and recorded attendance.

South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia contributed the largest registration groups. University leaders and academics accounted for 169 registrants, students for 19, policy and regional organisations for 11, and community partners or civil society for seven. Other roles accounted for 34 and 35 were unstated. The relatively small recorded community group warrants attention when designing an inclusive CoP; the available classification does not establish the full number of community contributors or speakers.

The main reasons for joining were networking with SADC partners (72), exploring university–community engagement (61), learning practical participatory tools (59) and engaging with regional policy and higher education development (48). A further 35 did not state a reason. These interests support a CoP combining practical learning, partnerships and institutional change. Outreach should address countries without registrations and countries with limited recorded participation, while improving country and stakeholder information.

See Section 6 for regional outreach and reporting actions.

3 Conference programme and learning

The programme combined morning dissemination and dialogue with afternoon network-building, thematic discussions and legacy planning. The complete schedule and listed speakers appear once in Annexure A. That schedule documents the planned programme; it does not independently verify delivery of every session or attendance by every listed speaker. [E1]

See Annexure A for the programme and speakers.

3.1 Regional positioning and sustainability

The opening regional perspective and sustainability keynote positioned participatory university engagement within SADC priorities and wider sustainability challenges. The report records the purpose of these sessions, but does not attribute detailed claims to individual speakers without presentation notes or verified recording summaries. The substantive regional implication is that project resources and future capacity development need routes to institutions across SADC, including those outside the original consortium.

3.2 Project achievements and practical resources

The project transition session highlighted the IPF, DAE and capacity development programme. These provide a practical foundation for the CoP: a framework for participatory work, a digital environment for access and exchange, and learning resources that institutions can use and adapt. The resources session and network discussions were intended to support wider application. Continued access depends on named custodians, hosting, maintenance and user support; these arrangements remain to be confirmed in the consolidated register.

3.3 Transformation stories and participatory relationships

The bilingual transformation session foregrounded university and community experience. Audience responses associated meaningful change with collaboration, participation, co-creation, empowerment and reciprocal partnerships. These are responses to the stories presented, rather than independently verified project impact measures. Detailed case accounts, including community testimony and evidence of change, would strengthen the record of application.

The scheduled presentation on power and emotions connected with concerns raised in feedback and streams about unequal influence, institutional constraints and communication. The learning carried into the CoP is that communities should help define problems and intended outcomes, participate in decisions and assess the value of results. Accessible language and sustained relationships are central to this approach.

3.4 Networks and international perspectives

The afternoon programme introduced network-building and regenerative education in public schools as perspectives on collaboration and sustainability. These sessions created space for interregional and cross-sector exchange. Specific keynote lessons require supporting presentation records before they can be attributed to speakers. The reported closing discussions, stream findings and participant feedback provide the firmer basis for the follow-up agenda documented below. [E3–E4]

4 Participant feedback

Mentimeter was used throughout the conference to gather views on barriers, enabling conditions, transformation, CoP interests and the collective pledge. This section consolidates the numerical and qualitative findings. Selected source screenshots are retained in Annexure B. Results reflect voluntary respondents and should not be generalised to all registrants or interpreted as institutional endorsement. [E3]

4.1 Barriers and enabling conditions

Table 1. Mean ratings reproduced from the supplied report.

Question	Item	Mean response out of 5
Barriers to engagement	Insufficient funding and staff time	4.1
	Partnerships that end when funding ends	4.0
	Limited recognition and rewards	3.5
	Unequal power	3.5
	Restrictive policies and procedures	3.4
Enablers of change	Communities helped define the challenge	4.3
	Trust through sustained relationships	4.3
	Local knowledge shaped the response	4.2
	Evidence and reflection informed decisions	4.0
	Shared power and decisions	3.9
	Institutional leadership and resources	3.7
CoP stream interest	Participatory practice and partnerships	3.3
	Capacity development and digital resources	3.3
	Engaged university, SDG impact and sustainability	3.9

Insufficient funding and staff time (4.1/5), followed by partnerships ending when grants end (4.0/5), were the strongest rated barriers. These findings support institutional resourcing, recognition of engagement and continuity planning. Community involvement in defining challenges and trust through sustained

relationships were the strongest rated enablers (both 4.3/5), followed by local knowledge shaping responses (4.2/5). Evidence and reflection, shared decisions and leadership support were also valued.

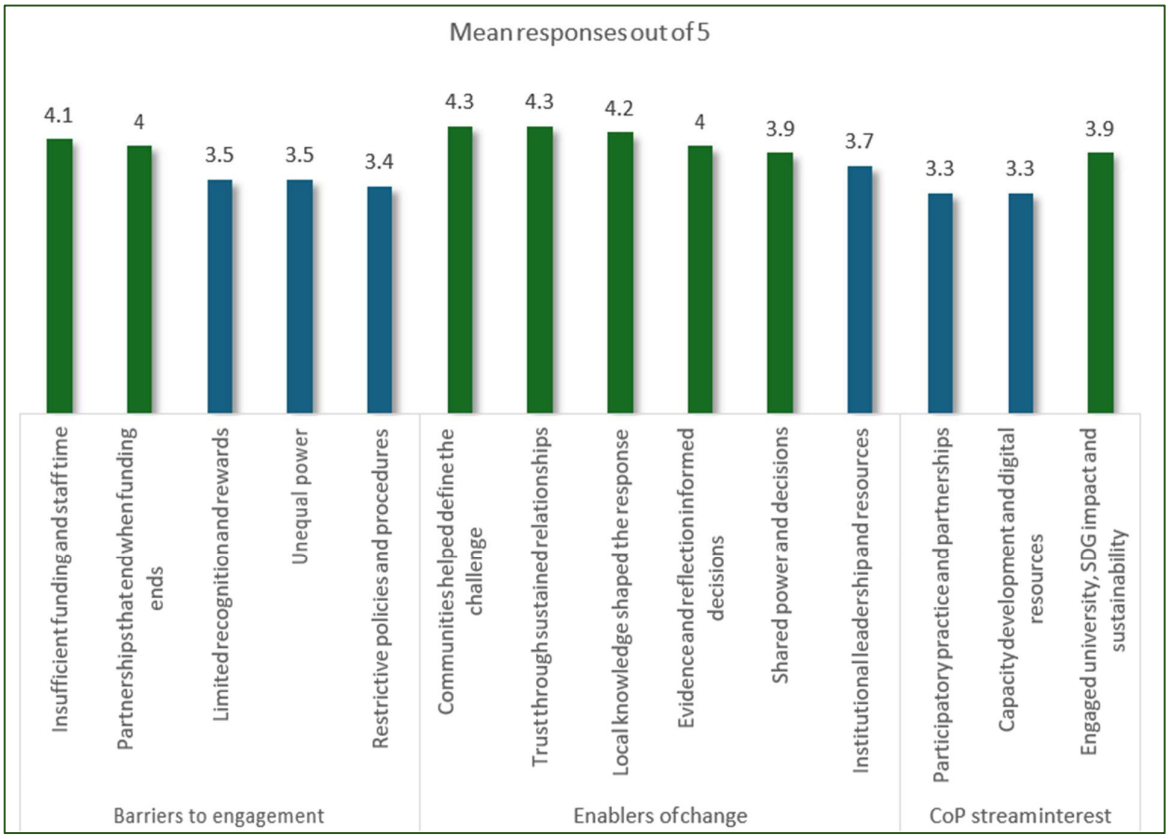


Figure 2. CoP issues identified

The CoP stream question used an agreement-style scale even though it asked which stream respondents would like to join. The means indicate relative interest, with the engaged university, SDG impact and sustainability stream rated highest; they are not counts of confirmed members.

4.2 Qualitative learning and proposed action

Responses about transformation emphasised collaboration, participation, co-creation, partnership, awareness and empowerment. References to behavioural change, community feedback, capability development and tangible benefits indicate what respondents regarded as persuasive signs of change. They do not establish audited outcomes or causal effects.

For the CoP, recurring ideas were trust, dialogue, listening, shared learning, humility, reflection and persistence. Participants envisaged collective work on policy influence, institutional culture, innovation and societal challenges. They proposed meetings, needs assessments, webinars, community-led testing, network-building and joint funding applications. These suggestions form an action pool for selection rather than an agreed workplan.

Community partners were envisaged as equal participants in identifying local needs, shaping responses, contributing indigenous and lived knowledge, implementing activities and evaluating relevance. These expectations should inform membership, topic selection and monitoring arrangements.

4.3 Support for the pledge and Legacy Book

The seven pledge statements attracted mean ratings between 4.5 and 4.8 out of five. Turning knowledge into meaningful action received the highest rating (4.8). On a separate affirmation slide, willingness to affirm and contribute averaged 4.5, while support with interest in exploring a contribution averaged 4.2. These are favourable intentions; they do not establish formal institutional commitments.

The source narrative gives conflicting respondent totals for the pledge ratings: 49 in one passage and 32 in another. The denominator is therefore unresolved and must be checked against the question-level export. The Legacy Book prompt separately recorded 49 submissions, including repeated entries and non-signature text. Submissions must not be represented as 49 verified signatories. Verification and publication consent are required before a public register is prepared.

See Section 7.2 for the full pledge and Annexure D for the Legacy Book outline.

5 Community of Practice discussions

Participants were invited to three thematic streams to share experience, discuss obstacles and identify a priority and possible first action. The accounts below integrate the stream reports and closing synthesis available in the supplied document. Proposed outputs are distinguished from priorities actually agreed. [E4]

5.1 Participatory practice and community partnerships

The stream considered what should improve first to make university–community partnerships more equitable and participatory. Familiarity with community-based research varied. Participants identified relational and communication barriers, limited resources, insufficient funding and inadequate institutional backing. They also noted the circular difficulty of needing funding to build partnerships while needing established partnerships to secure funding.

Suggested approaches included sustained relationship-building, ongoing reflection and accessible language when discussing action research and community-based research. No shared priority was agreed; participants needed further dialogue before selecting one. Potential future outputs include partnership principles, co-design methods, practical guidance on shared decisions and exchanges of experience. These remain proposals.

5.2 Capacity development learning and digital resources

This stream considered how to help people use and adapt the capacity programme, IPF, DAE and shared learning resources. Participants valued learning across institutions and balancing established engagement approaches with digital methods. Mobile devices and social media were suggested as accessible channels for active community initiatives, including participation by people outside formal learning environments.

Financial constraints, language barriers and ease of use were central concerns. No clear first priority was recorded. The project book was mentioned, but its role as a stream priority was not established. Possible outputs include resource onboarding, peer-learning webinars, local adaptation, feedback on tools and arrangements for continued stewardship.

5.3 The engaged university SDG impact and sustainability

This stream considered institutional change needed to sustain engagement and demonstrate SDG contributions. Participants identified insufficient funding, weak leadership support, fragmented engagement and difficulty translating policy into practice. They cautioned against academics prescribing community needs and solutions, favouring reciprocal partnerships that build on community knowledge and existing initiatives.

Emerging directions included integrating engagement into teaching, research, budgeting, promotion and performance review; translating commitments into measurable institutional responsibilities; and using classroom assignments and collaboration with communities and local authorities to strengthen practice. Participants stressed the interconnectedness of the SDGs. These are emerging directions rather than a single confirmed stream commitment. Potential outputs include institutional policy conversations, proposals for recognition and incentives, and approaches to documenting interconnected SDG contributions.

5.4 Shared implications

Across the streams, funding, institutional support, accessible communication, reciprocal partnerships and sustained learning were recurring concerns. The CoP should begin with achievable substantive work while allowing members to build relationships and select priorities. The reported closing approach and the actions needed to implement it are consolidated in Section 6.

6 Decisions and follow-up actions

The closing discussion favoured an informal, theme-based CoP, with partners taking turns to convene substantive topics. The first reported topic was community engagement involving distance-education students, targeted for February – March 2027 with MANCOSA approached as a prospective collaborator. Terms of reference were envisaged for mid-2027, after initial experience. These are conference-reported directions; institutional endorsement and operational appointments remain to be confirmed. [E4]

Facilitation, content curation, invitations and meeting management were identified as essential functions. The IPF and online training resources provide an initial content base. Preparatory contact and validation in late 2026 should be distinguished from the proposed public inaugural session in early 2027. The earlier generic 30/60/90-day suggestions have been incorporated below as proposed preparatory work rather than competing launch dates.

Table 2. Consolidated follow-up register[1].

Action	Responsibility	Timing	Status
Validate stream records and distinguish decisions from proposals.	SARUA and stream facilitators	November 2026	Proposed
Circulate report, recording and resource access information.	Project team / Sisipho	Approximately two weeks after 22 October	Reported follow-up; delivery to verify
Contact participants and confirm voluntary commitments and publication consent.	Project lead / project team	November–December 2026	Reported follow-up
Use the Vice-Chancellors' Dialogue to request SADC nominations.	Project lead / SARUA	24 November 2026	Reported opportunity
Approach MANCOSA; confirm topic convenors, date and first output.	Project lead / prospective collaborators	Before inaugural session	Reported follow-up; acceptance pending
Convene first thematic CoP session on distance-education students.	Convenor and co-leads to be confirmed	February–March 2027	Reported target
Confirm IPF, DAE and course custodians, hosting and user support.	SARUA and relevant resource partners	By 30 November 2026	Proposed; arrangements pending
Prepare an opt-in website Legacy Book.	Project team	November 2026 onwards	Reported intention; verification required
Develop terms of reference after initial CoP experience.	Consortium / CoP participants	By mid-2027	Reported intention
Contribute further cases and use participatory learning resources.	Existing partners / consortium	Ongoing	Continuing invitation
Extend outreach to underrepresented countries and community groups; report regional reach.	SARUA / CoP	2027; schedule to agree	Proposed
Agree indicators, baseline and review responsibilities.	SARUA / CoP and community partners	At initial planning meetings	Proposed

See Annexure C for the forward schedule derived from this register.

7 Legacy and sustainability

7.1 Resources partnerships and institutional embedding

The intended legacy comprises continuing use of knowledge and tools, university–community relationships, institutional capacity and a regional network of practitioners. The CoP offers a mechanism for sharing experience, adapting resources and developing joint activity. Its operating model is described in Section 6 and is not repeated here.

Resource stewardship requires confirmation of ownership, hosting, maintenance, updates and user support for the IPF, DAE and self-paced capacity programme. The project website is the available common access

[1] Dates beyond the project period depend on agreed post-project arrangements.

point: https://engagesdg.sarua.africa/. Resource-specific links, custodians and service arrangements were not confirmed in the source report and should be added when agreed.

Institutional continuity depends on engagement being reflected in teaching, research, leadership priorities, recognition systems and resources. Community accountability requires mechanisms through which partners influence priorities and evaluate results. Co-funding, institutional contributions and joint proposals are possible resourcing routes, but no secured post-project budget is documented.

The closing discussion associated the seven-generations principle and the metaphor of interconnected tree roots with reflections from the consortium's Cork visit. In the legacy agenda, these express attention to future generations and the interdependence of universities, communities and public institutions. [E4]

7.2 Collective pledge



See Section 4.3 for respondent support and evidence limitations.

7.3 Legacy Book and monitoring

The proposed website-based Legacy Book will document the pledge, selected stories and voluntary commitments. The Mentimeter link was to remain open for people who disconnected or wished to respond later. Before publication, names, organisational details and intended actions need verification and explicit permission. A pledge response alone does not authorise publication or bind an institution.

Monitoring should follow use and contribution as well as participation. Suggested indicators are confirmed opt-in commitments; active institutions, countries and community partners; CoP meetings and tangible outputs; additional cases; resource reuse; and documented institutional or community changes. Baselines,

reporting intervals and responsible people remain to be agreed. Community perspectives should inform what counts as a valuable outcome.

See Annexure D for the proposed Legacy Book outline.

8 Conclusions

The EngageSDGs conference provided a platform for connecting project learning with the wider challenge of strengthening the engaged university across SADC. Its registration reach and recorded participation demonstrate regional interest, while also identifying gaps in country coverage and community representation that future engagement should address.

Participant feedback and stream discussions emphasised trust, community-defined challenges, local knowledge and reciprocal partnerships. They also highlighted the institutional resources and recognition needed to sustain engagement. The resulting agenda connects practical tools and peer learning with changes in university systems and relationships with communities.

D7.2 records a transition from dissemination to continued application. The proposed CoP, collective pledge and Legacy Book provide mechanisms for carrying this work forward. Their value will depend on confirmed responsibilities, accessible resources, community participation and evidence of use. The conference provides a foundation; enduring contributions will be demonstrated through the partnerships, practices and collective action that follow.

9 Sources and evidence register

References below identify the evidence contained in the supplied report. They are documentary references, not a new external literature review. Where underlying datasets, recordings or notes were named but not supplied separately, they have not been independently re-analysed for this revision.

Reference	Source and coverage	Location or verification need
E1	EngageSDGs final conference programme, 22 October 2026.	Reproduced in Annexure A; scheduled delivery requires confirmation.
E2	Registration and attendance graphic embedded in the source report; attributed to the supplied registration and attendance workbook.	Figure 1 and Section 2; underlying workbook was not attached to this revision.
E3	Mentimeter results and screenshots reproduced in the source report.	Section 4 and Annexure B; question-level counts and pledge denominator require export verification.
E4	Stream accounts and closing discussion synthesis contained in the source report.	Sections 5–6; recording timestamps, rapporteur records and role acceptance are not supplied.
E5	Legacy proposals, action tables and Legacy Book outline in the source report.	Sections 6–7 and Annexures C–D; proposals remain subject to agreement.

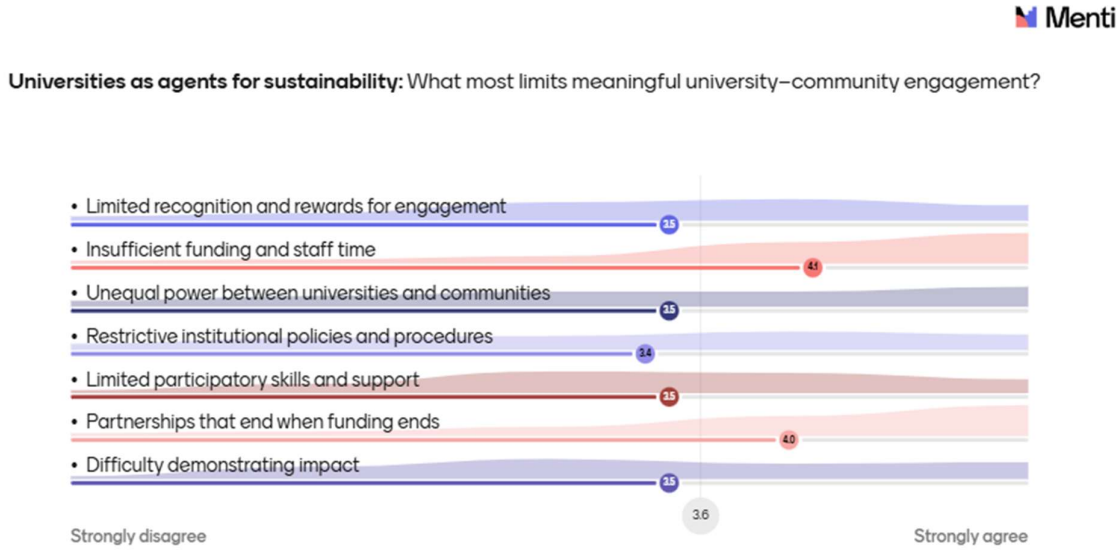
Annexure A Conference programme

Programme for 22 October 2026, 09:00–17:00 SAST. The following lists scheduled sessions and speakers; it is retained as the programme record rather than a verified delivery log. [E1]

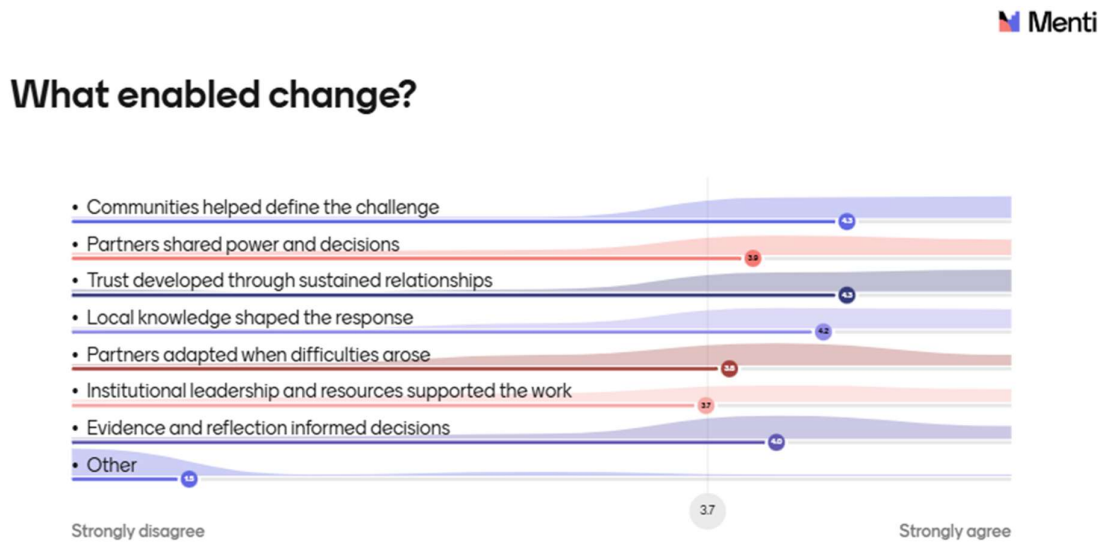
Time	Session	Presenter / format
09:00–09:10	Arrival and connection	Prof René Pellissier - SARUA
09:10–09:20	Opening and welcome	Prof R. Sannassee — SADC Human and Social Development & Prof Quinton Kanhukamwe - Chair of the SARUA Board
09:20–09:40	Setting the regional stage: Why does participatory and engaged higher education matter for SADC's future?	Dr Sawkut Ally Rojid — Pro Vice-Chancellor: Planning and Resources, University of Mauritius
09:40–10:10	Keynote: Universities as agents for sustainability	Prof Ramon Torrent — President, OBREAL GLOBAL
10:10–10:25	EngageSDGs LIVE: From Project to Community	Prof René Pellissier — SARUA; achievements, IPF, DAE and capacity development continuity
10:25–10:40	Tea/coffee break	
10:40–11:40	Stories of transformation (English and French)	Facilitator: Ms Bibi Bouwman, NWU. Discussants include Prof Leenta Grobler (innovation strategist & digital health), Prof Daya Goburdhun (UoM), Prof Vicki Koen (positive psychology), Dr Toshima Makoondlall-Chadee (UTM), Ms Kgomotso Metsuamere (Ikamva Youth), Prof Mahendra Gooroochurn (UoM), and community leaders.
11:40–12:10	Dealing with power and emotions in participatory processes	Prof Assumpta Aneas — University of Barcelona
12:10–12:45	Community engagement in action: Resources for community engagement in higher education	Thomas Farnell — Senior Education Policy Expert, Institute for the Development of Education, Croatia
12:45–13:30	Lunch	
13:30–13:50	The power of the network: Participation, partnerships and purpose in higher education	Dr Dudziro Nhengo — Research Fellow, Midlands State University Gender Institute
13:50–14:30	CoP keynote: Sustainability and regenerative education in public schools: exploring international synergies	Prof Rafael Nogueira Costa — Instituto de Biodiversidade e Sustentabilidade, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
14:30–14:40	Launching the Community of Practice: From shared interests to shared work	Prof René Pellissier — SARUA
14:40–16:00	CoP discussion streams: first working meetings and parallel thematic discussions	Facilitator: Prof José Frantz — SPU; participants choose a stream, develop a priority and first action, identify a convenor and support needs
16:00–16:15	Tea/coffee break	Rapporteurs consolidate stream outputs
16:15–16:35	CoP stream reports and shared agenda	Facilitator: Prof José Frantz — SPU; stream feedback
16:35–16:45	From discussion to action: The EngageSDGs Legacy Agenda	Kibrome Haile — OBREAL; priorities, responsibilities, support and follow-up meetings
16:45–16:50	Commitment ceremony: EngageSDGs Legacy Book	Prof René Pellissier - SARUA; next-12-month commitments
16:50–17:00	Closing: The community takes it forward	Prof René Pellissier -SARUA Synthesis and invitation to continue

Annexure B Mentimeter evidence

Selected source screenshots are retained as supporting evidence. Interpretation and limitations appear in Section 4. The unresolved pledge respondent count should be checked against the original export. [E3]



Evidence slide B2



Menti

Recognising transformation: What is the most significant change you heard in the transformation stories



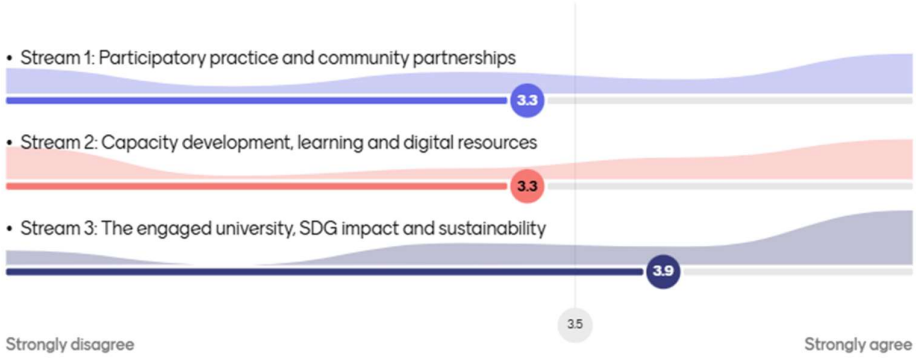
Menti

Evidence of change: What evidence in the stories convinced you that meaningful change had occurred?



Menti

Which **CoP stream** would you like to join?



Menti

The value of working together: What should we achieve together that would be difficult to achieve alone? Complete: **"Together, we could ...**

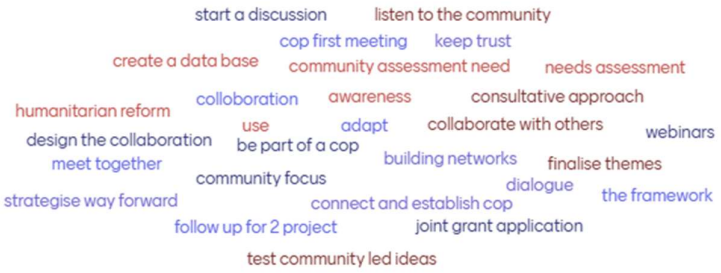


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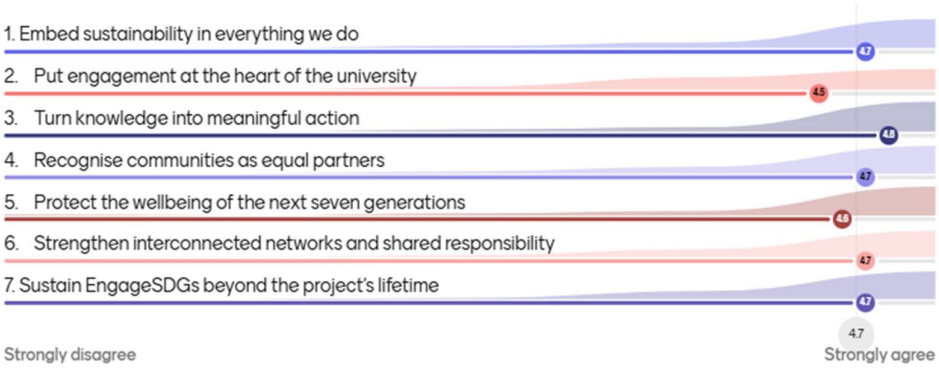
Menti

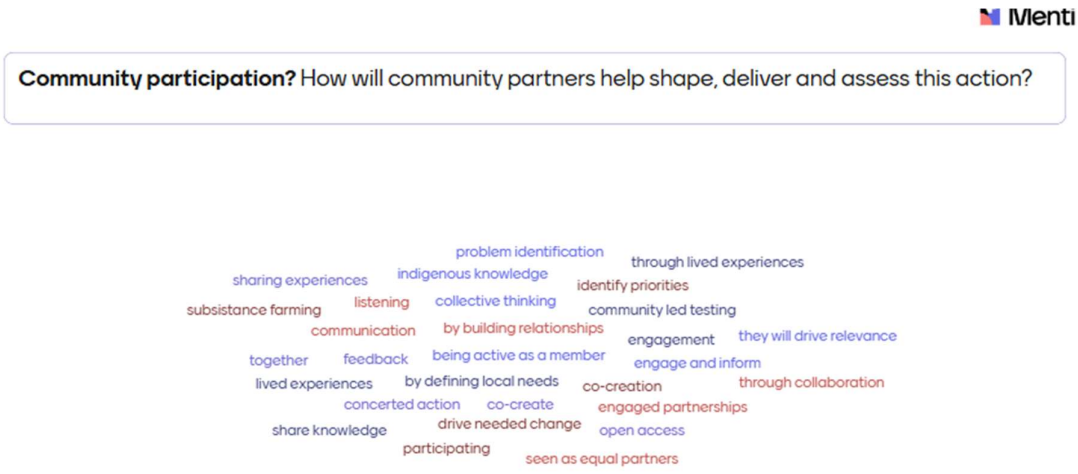
Our first 90-day action: What is one feasible joint action we can complete in the first 90 days?



Menti

Pledge: To what extent do you agree with the elements of the pledge?





Annexure C Forward schedule

This schedule summarises the timing in Table 2. It is a planning aid rather than an additional set of commitments. [E5]

Period	Planned focus	Reference
November 2026	Validate conference outputs; circulate report and recording; clarify resource stewardship; seek SADC nominations at the 24 November dialogue.	Table 2
November–December 2026	Contact participants; confirm voluntary commitments, consent and prospective convenors.	Table 2
February–March 2027	Target inaugural CoP session on community engagement involving distance-education students.	Section 6
By mid-2027	Develop CoP terms of reference after initial operating experience.	Table 2
Throughout 2027	Share cases, apply resources, expand regional participation and review emerging contributions at intervals to be agreed.	Sections 6–7

Annexure D Legacy Book outline

From Project to Community - From Commitment to Action

The proposed EngageSDGs Legacy Book will provide a public record of shared learning and voluntary action for 2026–2027. This outline defines its intended content; it is not a completed signatory register or an approved publication. [E5]

Purpose and content

The opening reflection should explain the regional value of sustaining participatory relationships and project resources. The book should then link to the collective pledge in Section 7.2, present verified university and community stories, and invite future participation. The first-year agenda should refer to the consolidated action register and forward schedule rather than introduce a separate timetable.

See Section 7.2 for the seven pledge commitments.

Proposed component	Content
Foreword	Why the legacy matters for SADC institutions and communities.
Collective pledge	The seven statements in Section 7.2, with their practical meaning.
Voices and stories	Verified reflections and case examples, including community perspectives and permission to publish.
Voluntary commitment register	Opt-in name, organisation or community, country, selected commitment, intended action and indicative timing.
First-year action agenda	Confirmed CoP topics, events, regional outreach and review arrangements, referring to Table 2.
Invitation to participate	Project website and a CoP joining contact or process once confirmed.

Before publication, the project team should remove duplicate and non-signature submissions, confirm names and intended contributions, obtain publication permission and distinguish individual commitments from institutional endorsement. Progress updates should record achievements, obstacles and adaptations without treating a pledge as evidence of impact.

Project resources and further information: https://engagesdg.sarua.africa/.

Annexure E: Gantt chart going forward

