SURCOD
Sustainable Rural Community Development Organisation

Youth Exchange Newsletter
Issue 01
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Co-Creating GREEN SAFE SPACES

Our Journey Through the CGSS Zimbabwe Youth Exchange

24-30 September 2026 Zimbabwe

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE
January Watchman Mvula



"Young people are not just passive beneficiaries of development; they are the architects of sustainable solutions. When we give youth the platform to collaborate across borders, they create green and safe spaces our world urgently needs."

Empowering Youth to Lead the Green and Safe Transition

On behalf of Sustainable Rural Community Development Organisation (SURCOD), it is my distinct pleasure to present this inaugural issue of our Youth Exchange Newsletter, highlighting the transformative journey of our delegation at the Co-Creating Green Safe Spaces (CGSS) Youth Exchange in Zimbabwe (24–30 September 2026).

Although I was unable to attend the exchange in person, following the updates, stories, and outcomes from Harare and beyond filled me with immense pride. Seeing our young leaders engage in parliamentary simulations, champion environmental sustainability, and collaborate with peers across national borders reinforces SURCOD's founding belief: when youth are equipped with knowledge, voice, and opportunity, community transformation is inevitable.

The theme ***"Co-Creating Green Safe Spaces"*** captures a vital priority for our work. Creating sustainable, environmentally resilient communities goes hand in hand with building safe, inclusive, and empowering spaces for young people to express themselves, innovate, and advocate for policy changes.

I extend our heartfelt appreciation to our regional organizations, sponsors, and community facilitators whose dedication made this youth exchange possible.

Most importantly, I congratulate our youth delegates for representing SURCOD with vision, leadership, and enthusiasm. As you read through the reflections, panel highlights, and stories within this edition, I encourage every reader, partners, youth, and stakeholders to support our young changemakers as they turn the lessons learned in Zimbabwe into tangible community projects across Malawi. Together, let us continue co-creating greener, safer, and more equitable futures.

Warm regards,

Executive Director
Sustainable Rural Community Development Organisation (SURCOD)



OUR YOUTH EXCHANGE JOURNEY

Co-creating Green Safe Spaces: A Week of Learning, Leadership & Connections

From Malawi to Zimbabwe, young people came together with a shared vision; to imagine and co-create greener, safer and more inclusive spaces for their communities.

The Co-creating Green Safe Spaces (CGSS) Youth Exchange brought together young people from different countries and backgrounds for a week of learning, dialogue, creativity and collaboration.

Hosted by Rural Enterprize Trust of Zimbabwe (RETZ) from 24-30 September 2026, the exchange created a space where young people could share experiences, explore environmental challenges, strengthen their leadership skills and develop ideas for positive change.

For the SURCOD delegation, the experience was more than a journey across borders. It was an opportunity to build friendships, exchange knowledge and return home with new perspectives on how people can contibute to Safer, Greener and more resilient communities.







ARRIVAL, WELCOME & CONNECTION

New Country, New Faces, Same Vision

The first day of our youth exchange started with excitement, anticipation and a warm welcome in Zimbabwe. After a long journey, the SURCOD delegation arrived safely and was received by our hosts and partner organszations.

It was a day of introductions, orientation, and ice-breaker activities that helped get to know each other, build trust and set the tone for a productive and enjoyable week.

We also had a brief introduction to the program, key objectives and the schedule for the week. By the end of the day, we felt more connected, motivated and ready to learn, share and create change together.





LEARNING &
GREEN SAFE SPACES



Learning from the Garden Sustainable Food Systems, Youth Participation (Mushandirapamwe)

Young people visited the RETZ Green Safe Space in Domboshava, engaging with more than 50 local community members to learn how a community garden can support sustainable food systems, youth participation and local livelihoods.

Participants explored how the garden is managed, how responsibilities are shared and how community members work together to maintain the space. The experience introduced the spirit of Mushandirapamwe (working together towards a common goal.)

The group also learned about the garden's income-generating activities, including marketing, value addition and food processing. Pickled beetroot provided a practical example of how locally produced food can be transformed into products that generate income and support livelihoods.

Discussions also focused on youth participation and gender balance, highlighting the importance of creating spaces where young people and community members can contribute ideas, take responsibility and participate in decisions.

> *"Many hands came together, planting more than just seeds in the soil. They planted hope, connection and a garden for the whole community."*
>
> ***Ellen***

The visit encouraged participants to reflect on what makes a green space safe and inclusive. Being welcomed, respected and given opportunities to participate can strengthen community ownership and make shared spaces more meaningful to the people who use them.



FARMING MEETS TECHNOLOGY
A VISIT TO GMRI ORGANICS FARM



Exploring how young people can use digital innovation to transform agriculture

As part of learning and exchange experience in Zimbabwe, participants visited GMRI Organics Farm in Harare, where they explored the connection between agriculture, technology, entrepreneurship and youth innovation.

The visit introduced the team to Gilbert Muponda, popularly known as “The Digital Farmer,” whose work demonstrates how modern farming can go beyond traditional production and embrace digital tools, innovation and business thinking.

GMRI Organics Farm demonstrates a diversified approach to agriculture, with activities spanning horticulture and livestock production. What makes the experience particularly interesting is the emphasis on digital agriculture and emerging technologies, including the use of smartphones, digital platforms and artificial intelligence to support farming and decision-making.

The experience provided practical ideas that can be adapted to the Malawian context. These include promoting youth-friendly agricultural enterprises, strengthening digital agricultural skills, supporting diversified farming and helping young farmers use technology to access information and markets.

It also demonstrated the importance of learning by doing. Practical demonstration farms can give young people the opportunity to experiment with new ideas while developing the skills needed to turn agriculture into sustainable livelihoods.

> *“The soil has always held the potential to feed humanity. Technolgy simply challenges us to unlock that potential more intelligently, sustainably and responsibly.”*
>
> ***Benjamin***





YOUTH VOICES IN ACTION
A VISITS TO THE PARLIAMENT OF ZIMBABWE

Exploring youth participation, representation and meaningful influence in decision-making

As part of the youth exchange and learning journey in Zimbabwe, participants had the opportunity to visit the Parliament of Zimbabwe and gain first-hand insight into the country's parliamentary system, representation and democratic decision-making processes.

The visit created an important space for young people to connect the ideas discussed during the exchange with the institutions where public decisions are debated, shaped and ultimately translated into policies and laws.

The Parliament visit encouraged participants to look beyond simply being present in decision-making spaces. It raised an important question for young people: How can youth move from being consulted or represented to having meaningful influence over decisions that affect their lives and communities?



> *"Meaningful youth particpation means more than having a seat at the table; It means having real voice in shaping the decisions that affect our lives and the green safe spaces we want to create*
>
> ***Allan***

For SURCOD, the visit provided valuable lessons for strengthening youth participation in Malawi. Young people need access to information, platforms for dialogue and practical opportunities to engage leaders and institutions.



CONNECTING WITH NATURE AND HERITAGE | DOMBOSHAWA CAVES

Exploring culture, nature, teamwork and the importance of protecting green spaces

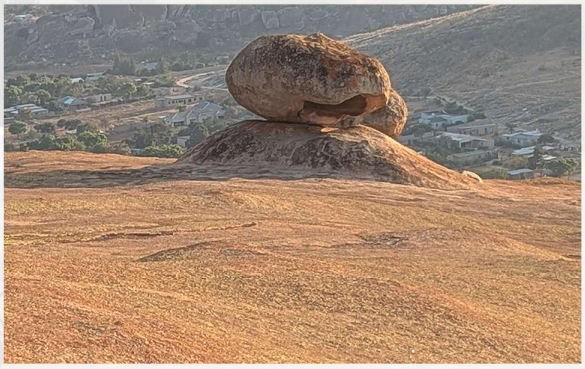
As part of the exchange experience in Zimbabwe, participants visited Domboshawa Caves, an important natural and cultural heritage site near Harare. The experience provided an opportunity to step outside the formal learning environment and connect with nature, history, culture and one another.

The visit brought together exploration, reflection and teamwork, while encouraging participants to think about the relationship between people, their environment and the spaces they share.

Domboshawa is known for its distinctive granite rock formations, natural landscape and rock art. The site offered participants an opportunity to appreciate how natural and cultural heritage can become valuable spaces for learning, recreation and community connection.

> *"The Domboshava Caves, with their ancient historical markings, offered a meaningful opportunity to share ideas while appreciating and learning about Zimbabwean history*
>
> ***Clifton***

the experience connected strongly with the exchange theme of co-creating green safe spaces. Green spaces are not only places for environmental conservation; they can also provide spaces where young people meet, reflect, build relationships and develop a stronger sense of responsibility towards their communities.





PANEL DISCUSSION
YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

From experiencing the crisis to shaping the solutions

Climate change is no longer a distant issue for young people. It is already affecting the communities they live in, the food they eat, the opportunities available to them and the future they are preparing for.

As part of the Co-Creating Green Safe Spaces youth exchange, young people came together for a panel discussion exploring what it means to grow up and live in a changing climate.

The conversation highlighted different experiences across different countries, including droughts, floods, changing rainfall patterns, environmental degradation, food insecurity and pressure on community resources. Despite differences in context, participants recognised a shared reality: young people are among those most affected by climate change, yet they are also among the strongest forces for change.

The panel moved beyond simply asking whether young people have a voice. It explored whether that voice actually influences decisions.

> *"Young people are not not just the leaders of tomorrow. We are leaders today, and we belong at the table where decisions are made*
>
> ***Daphny***

Participants discussed the importance of creating opportunities for young people to participate in environmental decision-making, community development and climate action. Meaningful participation means more than inviting young people to meetings. It means listening to their ideas, involving them in planning and giving them opportunities to turn those ideas into action.

Young people shared perspectives on community initiatives, environmental awareness, sustainable lifestyles and the importance of creating spaces where young people can collaborate, learn and take action.







INTERCULTURAL NIGHT | CELEBRATING CULTURE, DIVERSITY AND CONNECTION

Different Cultures, One Shared Celebration

Intercultural Night was one of the highlights of the youth exchange, bringing together participants from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Denmark, Ukraine, UK and Spain in a colourful celebration of cultural diversity.

The evening provided a space for each country to showcase its identity through traditional dances, music, food, clothing, language and cultural traditions. Participants had the opportunity to introduce aspects of their everyday lives and share stories that helped others understand their backgrounds and communities.

Beyond the performances and presentations, the evening encouraged meaningful interaction between participants. Young people discovered similarities across cultures while also appreciating the differences that make each community unique.

The event demonstrated that intercultural exchange is not simply about learning about other countries. It is about building understanding, challenging stereotypes, creating friendships and learning to see the world from different perspectives.

> *"We don't exchange cultures to become the same. We exchange to understand our differences, celebrate our uniqueness, and discover the beauty that diversity brings*
>
> ***Edith***





THE JOURNEY CONTINUES...

Seven Days. Different Countries.
One Shared Vision.

What started as a meeting of young people from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Denmark, Ukraine, UK and Spain became much more than an exchange.

It became a space to listen, learn, question, create and connect.

Together, we explored what it means to build green and safe spaces, strengthen youth participation, respond to climate change, protect our communities and create opportunities where every young person can have a voice.

We shared our cultures, our experiences and our different ways of seeing the world. We discovered that our differences do not divide us—they give us more reasons to learn from one another.

The friendships made, conversations shared and ideas developed during this exchange will travel far beyond the places where we met.

The real impact begins when we return home and turn inspiration into action.

To SURCOD, our partner organisations, facilitators, hosts, community members and every young person who contributed to this experience.., thank you for making this journey meaningful.

To every delegate who shared a story, asked a question, danced, laughed, listened or challenged an idea: you helped create this experience.

> *"We came as Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Spain, Denmark, Ukraine and the UK. We leave united as Co-Creators of Green Safe Spaces*
>
> ***Chisomo***

May the connections continue.
May the ideas grow.
May the friendships last.
And may the green safe spaces we imagined together become a reality in our communities.

Editorial Team

Newsletter Team

This newsletter is the result of the passion, creativity and teamwork of young people from SURCOD.

As the editorial team, we worked together to capture our experiences, share our stories and bring you this publication.

Our Editorial Commitment

We believe every young person's story matters. Through this publication, we celebrate diversity, encourage meaningful participation and inspire collective action towards greener, safer and more inclusive communities.

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere appreciation to the Rural Enterprise Trust of Zimbabwe (RETZ), Søholm 4H, Las Niñas del Tul, facilitators, host communities and all participating young people from Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Spain, Denmark, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. Your contributions, perspectives and shared experiences made this publication possible.

Design & Layout

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