



Access to Sanitary Pads

Limited access to sanitary wear negatively impacts girls' lives as it hinders the education of young girls. It is the norm in Zimbabwe for girls to miss school when they are menstruating due to the lack of sanitary pads. But a new gender-responsive approach to budgeting could change this. A gender responsive budget is sensitive to the distinctive needs of men and women, while allocating and spending public funds. This approach will ensure that gender inequalities in all facets of society are addressed which will result in bridging the development gap between men and women.

Menstruation is an issue of human rights and dignity; and section 51 of the Constitution compels all to respect and protect citizens' dignity. Menstruation consequently is inextricably linked to girls' ability to access their other rights. For example, apart from pushing girls into selling sex for pads, lack of affordable sanitary wear also makes it difficult for schoolgirls to attend classes whenever they get their periods. According to SNV, Dutch development agency, in Zimbabwe, about 72 percent of rural primary school girls that menstruate do not use sanitary pads. Furthermore, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), estimates that one in 10 girls in Africa will miss school during their period and eventually drop out of school. The World Bank statistics highlight absences of approximately 4 days every 4 weeks. When girls miss days of school, because they do not have decent sanitary wear, their grades are negatively affected due to the absenteeism.

Although girls and women sometimes find resourceful ways to improvise sanitary pads, some of the materials they use offer limited absorbency, making it challenging for girls to participate in school. Sometimes young women and girls are forced to use rags, newspapers and cow dung; and these may pose health risks like vaginal infections.

Call to Action

Menstruation cannot continue being an experience resulting in structural discrimination. We recommend that the National budget is sensitive to the inextricable realities of women taking into cognizance the fact that menstruation is a natural experience for any woman and girl, which cannot be wished away, and should not disadvantage the girl child when it comes to her ability to acquire an education. We are looking forward to a budget that among other gender responsive budgetary allocations will:

- Make it compulsory and avail quality free sanitary wear in schools - as a basic necessity.
- Scrap off tax associated with sanitary wear.
- Amend the Education Act in Section 4: add an insertion that says: 'To ensure none discrimination on the basis of gender, schools shall provide free, sufficient, and quality sanitary wear to every girl child enrolled in a public basic education institution who has reached puberty, and provide a safe and environmentally sound mechanism for disposal or hygiene management of the sanitary wear.'

"Young Women's Pachoto Panel discussion with the President of Zimbabwe"

A Seat at the Table:
Young Women's Pachoto Panel Discussion with the President of Zimbabwe,



Background

Pachoto is a Shona word meaning the fireplace. The Pachoto space is understood to be the place for women, where women meet to prepare meals that nourish families, share daily updates and recipes. Although this notion (that the woman's place is in the kitchen) has been largely used to disempower girls and women; by keeping them out of the public domain where they can find their voice, speak out, challenge and participate in decision making; we are reclaiming the Pachoto space to make it a centre for women's empowerment. Here, we share not only recipes, but also tell stories (research) and create strategies for collective action. Major revolutions are born in these spaces.

Time and again, we invite duty bearers into our sacred space to share our wisdom, concerns, recommendations, and so that they can account to us.

Context

Zimbabwe is signatory to many national, regional and international Instruments on the rights of women and girls. One such agreements is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Further, the Government of Zimbabwe prioritised, and is driving towards attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, agreements are not self-implementing. Young women continue to face various forms of discrimination and other unique challenges which render them more vulnerable to disease as compared to their male counterparts.



Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages



Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



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What Young Women and Adolescent are saying

Close the Tap of New Infections among Young Women

We applaud the government for all the efforts made towards HIV prevention, treatment and management; which has resulted in the decline in HIV prevalence from 15.7 in 2011, to 13.8 in 2015 amongst the general population. Of concern, however, is the increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS faced by adolescents and young women and the resulting increasing rates of infection within these groups. Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in particular are experiencing dramatically disproportionate burden and risk factors. For example, young women (20-24) have HIV prevalence 2.78 times greater than their male peers, according to the National AIDS Council.

There needs to be renewed commitment to eliminate gender inequalities and gender-based violence, and increase the capacity of women and girls to protect themselves from HIV.

Call to Action

Tackling Gender Based Violence; including DATE RAPE in order to 'Close the tap of new HIV infections'

Sexual Violence

In 2015, the Zimbabwe Republic Police reported 325 cases of juvenile rape cases, which is 81+ a week. The National Baseline Survey on the Life Experiences of Adolescents (NBSLEA-ZimStat) 41% of girls reported that their sexual debut before 18 years was unwanted. 18-24 years who had forced debut sex, 31% of them reported that the sex occurred at the perpetrators house showing the intimacy of the relationship between perpetrator and victim. 78% of the females who experienced sexual violence identified their boyfriend as the perpetrator.

Limited access to services: the NBSLEA further highlights that only 2.7% received assistance medical services, legal aid or help from NGOs. This means that 93% of women who experienced sexual violence did not report the matter to the police and did not receive any Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) or emergency contraception. PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) means taking antiretroviral medicines (ART) after being potentially exposed to HIV to prevent becoming infected. Due to stigmatization and misunderstanding in our societies the victims are re-victimized by unsympathetic family members and a discriminatory society resulting in an increase in numbers of unreported rape cases thereby the need to make PEP accessible upon demand to everyone who feel they have been exposed to HIV in order to reduce its spread.

Therefore, the state must take relevant measures to ensure that the above provision is adhered to by:

Providing PEP on DEMAND. Review the current Policy that limits PEP provision only to survivors of Rape that is proven, and

The current PEP policy is in contravention with section 76 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013; which provides that every citizen and permanent resident in Zimbabwe has the right to health. It further states that no person may be refused emergency medical treatment in any health-care institution and that the state must take reasonable legislation and other measures within the limits of the resources available to it to achieve the progressive realization of this right.

This call is directed to the Ministry of Health and Child Care; and calls on the need for government to avail PEP on demand rather than limit it to victims of rape and nurses. The current policy also fails to highlight the major challenge on the issue of consensual sexual intercourse and an increase in unreported rape cases which also includes date rapes.

Our Call: NO CHILD SHOULD EVER HAVE TO SELL THEIR BODIES FOR SURVIVAL. Not now, Not ever!!

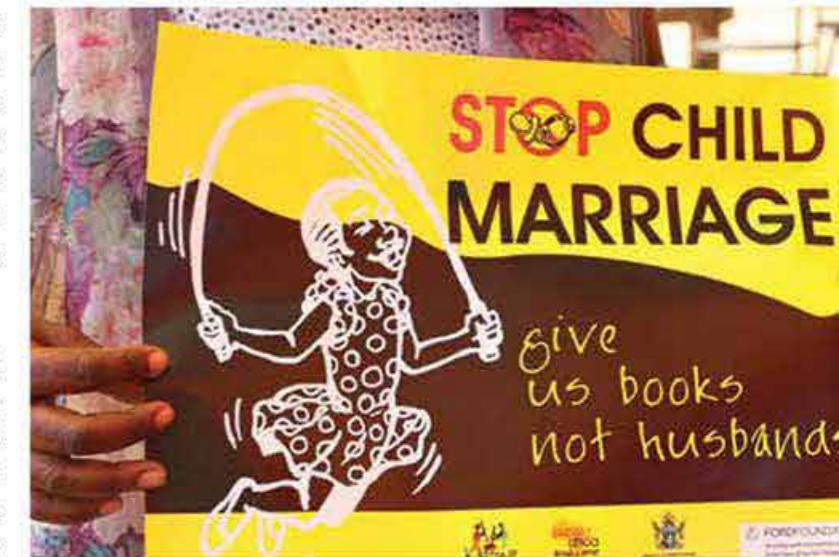
Urban Poverty has pushed many young girls mostly from child headed households and low-income communities to sell their bodies for survival, due to lack of support and viable alternatives. The children mostly have no food to eat, and struggle to raise their rentals let alone money for school fees. This makes girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation. This problem has reached alarming levels especially in most informal settlements around Harare, and farm compounds. In 2017, as part of the Staying Negative Campaign, Katswe Sistahood profiled stories of the some of the children. The children explained that most pedophiles who target them will not use protection, and this deepens the girls' vulnerabilities to STIs, HIV, and teenage pregnancy. The government rescued about 73 children and placed them into homes. However, more children still remain unsupported, and the prospects of them realizing their dreams and aspirations are very limited.

End Child Marriage

The Headline in the Herald dated 22 November 2016 which read, '4500 pupils in early marriage drop out,' is unnerving. The article stated that over 4500 minors dropped out of school countrywide because of early marriage. Girls who marry before age 18 are denied an education and are at risk of complications related to premature childbearing, and more vulnerable to intimate partner violence.

The importance of education to the girl child cannot be over-emphasised. Studies have repeatedly shown that investment in educating girls and women raises every index of progress towards economic growth and development. Educating girls helps to make communities and societies healthier, wealthier and safer, and can also help to reduce child deaths, improve maternal health and tackle the spread of HIV and AIDS.

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW); Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) Act 2013 Section 81 (1) state that every boy or a GIRL under the age of 18 years is a child. Therefore, child marriage or early marriage is any marriage carried out below the age of 18. The Marriage Act sets the minimum age of marriage for the girl child at the age of 16 years and the Customary Marriage Act does not provide for the minimum age of marriage. This gap alone has continued to fuel the high prevalence of child marriages.



Call to Action

We strongly call for the harmonization of the definition of the child in all laws in line with article 2 of the African Children's Charter to which Zimbabwe has ratified and acceded to.

We have been informed in various platforms that this issue has been on the Legislative Calendar of the 8th Parliament. We are concerned that Parliament will soon adjourn for the election before this important and urgent issue is addressed and finalized.

We therefore urgently call on the responsible Ministry- the Ministry of Justice to table the Child Justice Bill and the Marriages Bill in Parliament as a matter of urgency, so that this process is finalized; for the benefit of the girl child in Zimbabwe.