

RUHUSIWA

GirlsAllowed

**DEMOCRACY TOWARDS WOMEN
AND GIRLS' EDUCATION IN AFRICA
- A FEMINIST APPROACH**

**NINE-YEAR-OLDS BELONG IN CLASS,
NOT MATERNITY WARDS**

**ARE CONTRACEPTIVES A KEY TO
SOLVING UNPLANNED
PREGNANCIES?**

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FOR EQUAL POWER?**

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PROMOTING RE-ENTRY AND RE-SUBMISSION OF PREGNANT GIRLS IN SCHOOLS IN ZIMBABWE

GREEN LEARNING AND TACKLING GENDER EQUALITY



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Watching the Celebration from the Classroom

Photo: [Goeff Livingston](#)

Editorial Team

Editor: Theresa Takafuma

Assistant Editors: Sinikiwe Mardoza & Sebongile Kolobe

Design & Layout: Kelvin T Mutize

Contributing Writers: Sebongile Kolobe, Chinga Govhati, Lintle Makutoane, Nyasha Blessing Dube, Lipuo Mokhesi, Danai Daisy Chirawu, Mazvita Sabondo, Sinikiwe Marodza, Kelly Muzariri - Tavaziva,

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Names of children have been altered to keep confidentiality

EDITORIAL NOTE

Greetings!

It is with deep gratitude we bring you the third edition of the Ruhusiwa-Girls Allowed Magazine, which is a great milestone for us at The Usawa Institute.

We are especially grateful to our valued contributors who took their time to research and put pen to paper on critical issues affecting girls' education. Bringing this edition as we conclude Women's Month makes it all the more significant, as we highlight the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as well as digital innovations in education. Our dream is that we are able to 'build back better' for our girls, who were immensely affected in various ways by the Covid pandemic.

The Ruhusiwa Girls Allowed Magazine has ignited critical conversations on equality as a whole, and girls' education in particular. With great pride, I acknowledge everyone who has made efforts in making these conversations trend, and indeed, these conversations go a long way in influencing action towards getting our girls back to school. What also makes this edition all the more exciting is the quality of articles, most of which brought the human side of the issues that affect girls' education—ranging from Gender Based Violence (GBV), adolescents' sexual and reproductive health, menstrual health, child labour, retention in schools as well as policy.

My promise is that indeed, girls' education is a topical issue, and it is my sincere hope that we keep the conversation going on every platform, stemming from the Ruhusiwa Girls Allowed Magazine.

Let me take this opportunity again to express my gratitude to the team of contributors from all over Africa, the editorial team at Ruhusiwa as well as the staff at The Usawa Institute for yet another great milestone. We did it again!

Happy reading.

Theresa Takafuma



Nine-Year-olds Belong in Class, Not Maternity Wards

By Nyasha B Dube
Photo: The Advocacy Project

In October last year, a shocking headline took Zimbabwe by storm. It read “Nine year old Tsholotsho girl 33 weeks pregnant”.

The story trended on social media as people questioned the events that led to this sad and unfortunate incident. There were many versions of the story, and it is believed that the young girl was raped multiple times by different people. The DNA results showed that the girl’s 13-year-old cousin brother was responsible for the pregnancy.

A few weeks later, another story broke: “Bindura girl (9) about to give birth”. Both girls gave birth last year, and since then several similar stories have been reported, of young girls falling pregnant, giving birth, being forced into marriage and some even dying during childbirth.

The physical, emotional and psychological trauma that these girls go through is unimaginable, as they are still children themselves. What makes it worse is that these abuses are perpetrated by people close to the victims. Family, which should be a safe space for these young girls, is now a place of violation and trauma.

What is glaring is how all these cases of child sexual abuse are worsening the gender education gap that has always been a challenge in Zimbabwe and

beyond borders. Chances of these girls returning to school after giving birth are always slim as they face stigma and discrimination from their peers, and sometimes even teachers. Religion and culture frowns upon young single mothers, and they end up opting to stay at home or get married.

Whilst education is the solution to gender equality, the gender gap in education is getting worse instead of getting better. Education is a basic human right, internationally recognized since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. However according to a 2022 study by the Center for Global Development, globally, 129 million school-aged girls are not enrolled in school. These statistics can be attributed to the shadow pandemic that is becoming a menace in Zimbabwean communities, child sexual abuse which leads to early forced pregnancies and child marriages. Medical experts say there are irreversible dangers that come with girls as young as nine carrying a pregnancy full term.

“Children nowadays menstruate at an early stage, but it doesn’t change the fact that they are still considered paediatrics.

They still want to play with dolls and play children’s games and that they are not ready to be mothers and this increasing trend of nine-year-olds getting pregnant is worrying. Pregnancy comes with a lot of changes and this can affect these young girls psychologically, emotionally and physically because their mind and body is not ready. According to the development of different structures of the body, even brain development, it can go on until one is 20/21 years so imagine a nine-year-old going through pregnancy,” said Doctor Wallace Hlambelo, a medical practitioner.

He adds that girls who go through pregnancy at such a young age need professional help. “These children need psychosocial support and they need to change the environment they are staying in to deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This may help them forget that trauma and start afresh in a new environment,” Dr Hlambelo said.

Such disruption in the girl child’s development has an impact on their communication and social skills and hence can affect the way they engage with other children at school, therefore, affecting their behavioural patterns. This undoubtedly affects their studies as well.

Women and girls’ rights advocacy groups also believe that the only way to protect the girl child is to shield her from harm and keep her in school. “It is worrisome that in this day and age we hear of girls as young as nine giving birth when we know very well that their bodies are not fully developed to carry a pregnancy full term. We have a crisis in society and we need serious engagements and interventions to deal with this cancer.

There's a need for organisations, government and all responsible authorities to collectively come together and protect the girl child. We also need stiffer penalties for perpetrators of child sexual abuse, especially within families. These girls need to play and attend school like other children," said women and girls' rights activist Millicent Nhutsve. Keeping girls in school, and protecting them from all forms of violation is key in closing gender gaps in education and promoting gender equality in Zimbabwe and Africa.

He adds that girls who go through pregnancy at such a young age need professional help. "These children need psychosocial support and they need to change the environment they are staying in to deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.



Does the law in Zimbabwe allow for equal power?

By Chinga Govhati

Photo: World Fish

The right to basic education has its basis on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which provides for compulsory education as a universal entitlement. Stemming from this, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) further affirms this right through article 28 which provides for free and compulsory primary education. Supporting these two is the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Rights, which in Article 11, provides for what can be termed as developmental and holistic education.

In particular, it calls for “special measures in respect of female, gifted and disadvantaged children, to ensure equal access to education for all sections of the community.” The state, the government, is further called upon to “take all appropriate measures to ensure that children who become pregnant before completing their education shall have an opportunity to continue their education on the basis of their individual ability.” It is important to point out that Zimbabwe is bound by all these laws as a member of both the United Nations and the African Union and has signed and ratified all these legal instruments.

In Zimbabwe, the intention to provide for the right to education and special education for disadvantaged groups is clear through the Constitution, the Education Act, in particular,

the recent amendment to it and the National Non-Formal Education Policy for Zimbabwe: promoting alternative pathways to increase access and quality education in Zimbabwe. I will explain each of these in turn.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe The right to education is provided for in Section 75 of the Constitution. The right to education applies to all citizens. What is particularly important is the right to ‘basic state funded education’ and ‘further education which the state...must make progressively available and accessible.’ In addition, the Constitution provides that “the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within the limits of the resources available to it, to achieve the progressive realization of the right” to education. In practice, this provision has the undesired effect of giving the state an excuse not to meet its obligation.

The Education Act [Chapter 25:04]

The Education Act was recently amended to include important provisions on pupil discipline which no longer allows harmful practices in Section 68A, advancing the rights of pupils with disabilities in Section 68B, non-inclusion of pupils for non-payment of fees and non-inclusion of girls on basis of falling pregnant in Section 68C.

What the new amendment has done is to allow for what is now being termed as second chance education, which has resulted in a policy by the relevant Ministry on this aspect.

The National Non-Formal Education Policy for Zimbabwe (2015)

The Non-Formal Education Policy provides for four guiding principles; one of which indicates that non-formal education should be “gender sensitive, of good quality and relevant in the socio-economic context of Zimbabwe,” which resonates with the second chance education practice. Addlight Badza and others in *Second chance education in Zimbabwe: An inclusive model to achieve education for all*, indicate that by November 2022, the second chance programme had been implemented in 593 formal schools and 20 community learning sites. It had reached 28 607 learners and had successfully reintegrated 1 379 children into mainstream schools.

Challenges affecting girls’ road to equal power
The challenges that girls face as they navigate the empowerment ladder are many and well-documented. These include gender prejudices, poverty, inadequate sanitation and harmful religious and cultural practices such as sexual exploitation, child or early marriage, and sexual and gender based violence.

According to Roselyn Sachiti (2016), these “are keeping girls from completing school in Zimbabwe, and this has lasting effects on women’s and families’ health.” The biggest sufferers of these challenges are girls who end up dropping out of school because of the harmful practices, girls living with disabilities and those living in vulnerable communities.

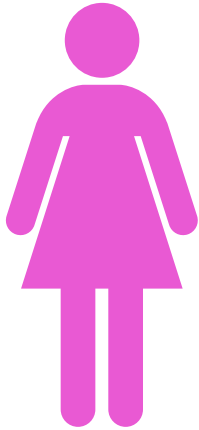
A report by UNICEF in 2022 found that nearly half the country of young people were not in school due to chronic poverty which was worsened by the Covid 19 pandemic. It says that “before the pandemic, 21% of Zimbabwean youth were not in school. Now the number stands at 47%.” This is worrisome.

A call to action

Whilst Zimbabwe has made some long strides in revamping the legal framework around aligning laws to the Constitution and policy development, a lot more needs doing by duty bearers on providing an enabling implementation framework that provides for adequate resources. Policies on their own, without adequate resources, remain papers that sound only academic to a girl in the rural areas but will not mean anything to her if she remains out of school or if no efforts are made to pick her up once she drops out of school. We need policies backed by resources, through for example, budgetary allocations that are in line with need on the ground.



Population In Africa



718 million



718 million

34% of African women aged 15-24 are illiterate, compared to 19% of men in the same age group. UNESCO

In sub-Saharan Africa, the literacy rate for women is 65%, compared to 75% for men.

On average, women earn only 67 cents for every \$1 earned by men in Africa, women in Africa are concentrated in low-paying jobs and sectors, such as agriculture and domestic work, and are underrepresented in higher-paying positions such as management and leadership positions

Women in Africa are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. In Rwanda, for example, women make up only 25% of students in STEM fields

These statistics demonstrate the need for continued efforts to improve gender equality and empower women in Africa and an increased need for the girl-child to access quality education



Democracy towards women and girls' education in Africa- A feminist Approach

By Lintle Makutoane
Photo: USAID In Africa

Many have fought, and some achieved but the gap in access to education for women is up to this day still a concern. Democracy is meant to provide freedom to everyone in all spheres but women and girls' right to access education is up to this day still a constraint in most areas of Africa such as Somalia, Niger, Liberia, Pakistan and Kenya to say the least. **Human Rights Watch (2022)** reports that Afghanistan has become the world's only country where girls are forbidden from attending secondary schools solely because of their gender. But the question remains whether Africa is a democratic continent as is perceived or it believes to be?

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC, 1991) article 11 section 1 clearly states that “

Every child shall have the right to an education” and continues further in section 6 that “States Parties to the present Charter shall have all appropriate measures to ensure that children who become pregnant before completing their education shall have an opportunity to continue with their education on the basis of their individual ability”. However, this charter in reality is challenged in some African countries such as Lesotho where teenage pregnancy remains a stigma as students get expelled from school against their choice or the environment is too unsafe and inconducive for them to participate that they decide not to hence are unable to pursue their studies as a result.

On that very note, let us all beware that the person in this chaos is a “child” under the age of 18 years as most laws including the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (1990) and Lesotho Children’s Protection and Welfare Act (2011) stipulates, instead of being protected and all measures taken in their best interest as obliged to, they are convicted to the disparity. The right and responsibility of children to enroll in an educational facility at least for basic education has to be mandatory and compulsory in writing and in practice.

Extensive punishments should be provided for any person disobeying the law in order to protect our girl child and to ensure they develop to the best of their capacities; physically, intellectually and economically. Child marriage and teenage pregnancies do not only deprive girls of their self-esteem and dignity but they hinder their access to education and prohibit their development. Looking at today, there is no growth without education economically, socially and intellectually therefore as a democratic world why can’t we let women and girls have the freedom to study to an extent and modules of their choice if it means securing their future as part of the planet? Is democracy still fair even in this instance? Is Africa even democratic to say the least?

According to the International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA), feminism is about all genders having equal rights and opportunities. It is about enabling equal access to resources for all genders and ensuring that both women and girls have the same life opportunities available to boys and men. International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2019)

conducted research on gender equality to investigate more gender gaps in the world of work hence, these kinds of studies were done with the recognition that women are undermined and denied access to resources including access to education on the basis of their gender and complications they face in life.

Some authors such as Cavanaugh (2015), define feminism as a theory focusing on gender inequality issues that impact women and is used to show support to women’s equality and to address the number of gender discrepancies women face daily. However, feminism aims to address the minor gender which in this case is females in order for them to be equal to the males as democracy is “supposed” to advocate. Most civil society organizations such as The Usawa Institute have been formed, registered and established in order to advocate for women’s and girls’ rights while others are equalists and humanists seeking peace, justice and fairness between both genders.

However, the problem of gender inequality in Africa has been reported the same from Zimbabwe to Lesotho including the Republic of South Africa. United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2020) discovered that in Zimbabwe 34% of girls are married before the age of 18 and 5% before the age of 15. Furthermore, only 14% of girls in Zimbabwe complete upper secondary school and among the poorest children, this falls to 1% (UNICEF, 2021). In Lesotho, more males than females complete their post-secondary and high school education than females since most females especially those residing in the rural areas drop out of school to get married. Marriage is said to be universal and the median age for females to get married is 19 years (Mturi, 2003).

The issue of poverty and child marriage has been reported to be some of the leading barriers of girls and women's access to education in Africa. In the Republic of South Africa, girls are at a disadvantage of attaining quality education and occupy a lower social status than men. This is because they are socialized to work in the home providing care to the rest of the family hence it deemphasizes the importance of receiving an education. Girls' and young women's likelihood to contract HIV/AIDS has also contributed as most girls are forced to drop out of school to care for their sick family members and children (Turner, 2018).

In addition to that, weighing out between both males and females, women and girls are going through the most, their inability to access resources such as the economy, health centres and education has contributed massively to their underdevelopment and caused an increase in their mortality rates all over the globe in Africa.

Through non-governmental organizations; some power has been restored back to society and opportunities have been offered for women and girls to actively participate in their own advocacy. On the other hand, the minimal involvement of the states has delayed the advocacy for laws, reforms and regulations to be evaluated in regard to addressing women and girls' rights that are violated, their inferiority in society and possible solutions as well as recommendations to protect them.

Non-governmental organizations such as CAMFED Zimbabwe were launched to tackle girls' exclusion from education and with their partnership with rural schools across the 29

districts through their holistic program of financial and psycho-social support, providing the most marginalized girls with the tools they need to thrive in school and beyond, they have made a statistically remarkable difference in their advocacy. Hence, it has supported 378, 761 students to go to primary and secondary school using donor funds and provides essential items for them to prevent them from dropping out (CAMFED Zimbabwe, 2022).

Furthermore, the issue of accountability has been the major cause of delay for change in Africa. Accountability is construed as the state of being responsible for one's actions and being able to give satisfactory reasons for them when asked (UNESCO, 2017). Despite the deployment of laws, legislations and conventions such as the 1965 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Zimbabwean National Gender Policy (2004) and the Lesotho Children and Protection Welfare Act (2011) by countries, lack of supervision to ensure and foresee enforcement has led to other problems emanating and worst the perpetual struggle for women and girls to access education as they are supposed to within their own rights.

More efforts need to be done in securing girls' rights including the revision of punishments for violating the right to education in spite of cultural or economic means. It should be a priority for the government to avail education for all especially minorities including women.

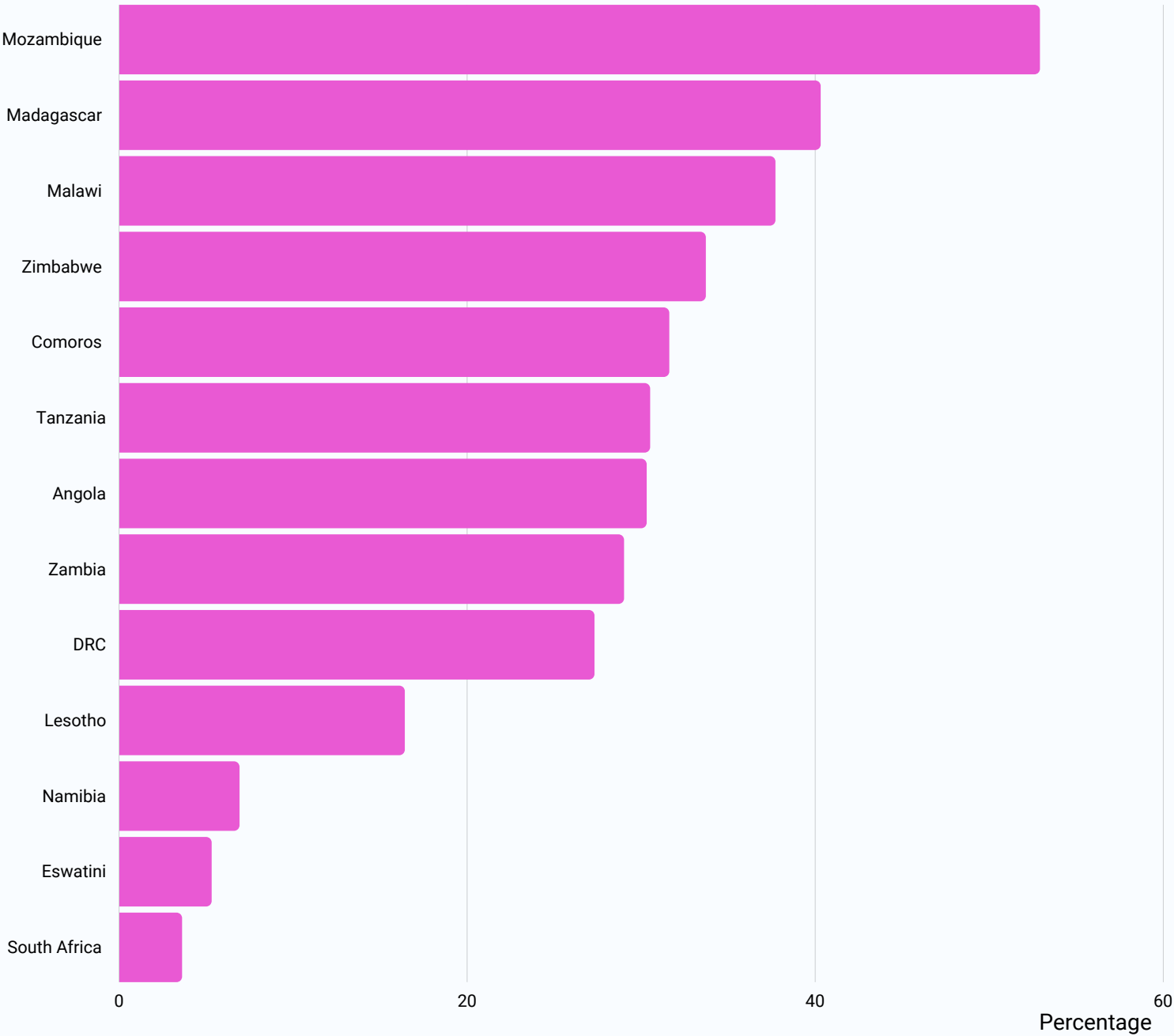


Measures such as the application of affirmative action in regard to enrolment, and secure till the end the percentages of both genders accepted in schools should be assessed regularly. Also, the states should work hand in hand with civil societies to reach communities for them alone they may try chipping in here and there but certain challenges including lack of funding may delay their plans to better education for women and girls.

However, it is most important for the state to be accountable for its actions to the people. This can be enforced by employing the act of scrutiny for government officials to the people; the society should be free to ask about their own rights and safety as well as measures taken to safeguard such and civil servants must account for those free of prejudice, discrimination and or corruption. Working together with the people and reviewing legislations and laws regularly could help address, solve and adapt to the present economic and educational challenges people face as well as to the evolving culture and time. Families should be educated and mobilized on the importance of education and girls' and women's rights as well as their violations.

Feminism is about all genders having equal rights and opportunities. It is about enabling equal access to resources for both genders and ensuring that both women and girls have the same life opportunities available to boys and men

STATISTICS ON CHILD MARRIAGE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA



Seychelles, Botswana and Mauritius have low incidence of marriages of children

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18:

UNICEF Report on Child Marriages 2022

Are contraceptives a key to solving unplanned pregnancies?

By Lipuo Mokhesi
Photo World Bank Flickr

Unplanned pregnancy in young women and girls is rampant lately in the Mountain Kingdom. The worry deepens when girls as young as 10 years old give birth at the risk of health complications and this has sparked debate among members of the community. Human rights activists' biggest debate is whether contraceptives can be ideal for young girls to try and minimise the chances of girls giving birth at an early age as such threatening their education and future.

Lesotho is in the process of developing a Prevention and Management Learner Pregnancy Policy to focus on prevention and management of Early and Unintended Pregnancies (EUP) for learners. The country also introduced Comprehensive Sexuality Education as a Life Skills-based Sexuality Education with an effort to decrease the rising statistics of early and unintended pregnancies.

Ruhusiwa Magazine has learned that young girls cannot access health services such as family planning or birth control methods in convenient times due to different reasons. Ts'epi (not her real name) is a 16-year-old who has seen her two friends forced into an arranged marriage and fell pregnant at the age of 15 and 17 respectively. Since then, she never wanted any of the incidents to happen to her, so she took a stand and went for health services at a Clinic in Semonkong twice but was denied services because she is not married.

"You know Semonkong still faces a high pregnancy of young girls. We have been taught in schools that hospitals and clinics are there to offer health services but that's not the case. I still dream of going to university and finally be a lawyer," she said, visibly angry.

The Lesotho Planned Parenthood Association (LPPA) and Population Services International (PSI) Lesotho are associations known for services such as family planning, located in the city where not everyone can afford to go. Services here are said to be user friendly and accommodating.

Government hospitals and clinics remain a challenge for young women and girls to access services. Nthabiseng Lepekola (25) said she once met the people from PSI on her way from school and they assisted her monthly contraceptive prescription but the following month she was forced to use government owned clinic.

"I think I was even lucky to run into them and get their services but there has to be consistency in what they do," said Lepekola.

UNFPA East and Southern Africa report 2019 stated that teenage pregnancy remains a challenge in Lesotho as the adolescent birth rates are high, at 94 per 1,000 girls aged 15-19. Some of young girls drop out of school when they fall pregnant, some carry to full term while at school and drop out to raise their new-borns because there's no maternity leave at school, be it secondary or tertiary.

On the other hand, Konosoang Tsipe lives in the urban part of Maseru. Unlike other girls, as a grade 11 student-she trusts her 2 months Noristetat contraceptive to allow her to finish her school without a doubt. Being an orphan, her aunt is the one who introduced the contraceptive to her.

"I know that community perceptions and religious norms categorise us somehow mischievous, but I do not doubt the decision auntie did for me. I agree with it that is why I will encourage other girls to take the contraceptive too. I can not lie and say I was scared at first now and now I have a better understanding of doing it for my future," she added.

Experts believe unavailability of services such as birth controls or family planning contributes largely to lack of education among young girls. They end up uneducated and can't create better lives for themselves due to having dropped out of school because of pregnancy. Unlike their male counterparts, they can impregnate and still continue with their studies, they are unbothered, their education is not affected whereas girls' education is not protected in this aspect.

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"Experts believe unavailability of services such as birth controls or family planning contributes largely to lack of education among young girls. They end up uneducated and can't create better lives for themselves due to having dropped out of school because of pregnancy".

Moreover, a traditional leader at Bohlokong community claims that some early and unplanned pregnancies lead to child marriages, which is also a threat to girls' education. Child marriage compromises development and deprives children of their fundamental right; Right to Education. Child marriage can often mean the end of girls' education, hindering her ability to become a financially independent person.

However, girls' education can be protected and encouraged by providing them with these services to prevent unplanned pregnancies that later on lead to dropping out of school. These services should be within school, communities; at everyone's reach. They must be easily accessed to mitigate the rate of unplanned pregnancies, especially in the youth.

www.theusawainstitute.org

I NEED THAT PEN TOO

We are tired.
We've been neglected, sidelined and
left out
And now we need to be prioritized.
Enough of upholding that discriminatory
patriarchal mindset
As girls we also need the space,
We need to be heard
And we need to be included.

A life of toil is all I know,
From the dusty and rugged hills of my
little village
Where I've been raised
To herd cattle and till the fields
That's all I've been accustomed to.
I hardly know of my rights
And how can I tell if they are infringed
upon?

I see boys my age rush to school,
Unburdened by the overwhelming
house tasks,
When I first have to balance the weight
of the world upon my shoulders.
I start the day in exhaustion and run
late for school.
My concentration is already
compromised,
So how do I produce better grades.

I've got a lot on my mind
And my heart is heavy,
I've got a lot of bottled emotions,
Untold stories

And undealt with injustices.
It's only from the insight knowledge I
merely have
That I've realized
How I was exploited,
I fell victim to scrawny-necked,
White headed village men

No one told me of my boundaries
And daily, I fell prey
To those relentless men
Who feasted on my pride
And left me shattering like a broken vessel.
Just because I'm female
I've got to deal with all this mess.

I need to tell my story,
I need to speak for my fellow young girls
here,
I need to stand up for myself
And I need to lift the light that I've just
received
And light the dark minds of my fellow
young women
Who are being robbed off their rights,
Rights they should enjoy,
The right to education.

So give me that pen
I need to put it all down.
We are dying in ignorance
And we're trapped in a continuous cycle of
poverty.
Free us from the shackles of illiteracy
And help us claim what's rightfully ours,
Equality in education.

By Tania Chipso

Promoting Re-entry and Re - Submission of Pregnant Girls in Schools in Zimbabwe

By Danai Daisy Chirawu

Sub-Saharan Africa records some of the highest prevalence of teenage pregnancy in the world (Gunawardena, Fantaye and Yaya, 2019) and UNESCO (2022) confirms that the population of out-of-school children is increasing within the region, which is concurrently experiencing an overall population surge. Like many countries in the global majority, Zimbabwe has been experiencing this same phenomena including pregnancies of children in their middle childhood (The Herald, 2022). While the issues of teenage pregnancy and out-of-school children is not a recent development; the coming of the COVID-19 pandemic certainly exacerbated pre-existing inequalities which foster the pervasiveness of such disparities.

The declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic resulted in countries taking initiatives for the promotion of the health and security of their nations, including prescribing lockdowns which conclusively affected people's freedom of movement, subsequently impacting the function of other rights. Schools were closed and many children received no education upon closure of schools (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

While other regions including some places in Africa, managed to transition to distance learning; intersecting imbalances such as poverty, digital divide, limited access to technology, access to power such as electricity, and gender based violence pursuantly hovered and ensured that many children failed to access education; let alone quality education to date; even after the lockdown restrictions have since been relaxed. Over 402 000 children in Zimbabwe, are out of school (Statista, 2022).

Within these siloed and interlaced inequalities; girls continue to be disproportionately negatively affected especially if they are pregnant or child brides. Many African countries, including Zimbabwe experienced an increase in the number of teenage pregnancies (Radhakrishnan, 2022) during the first year of the pandemic. The government reported that nearly 5 000 girls were pregnant from studies undertaken between the months of January and February 2021, while almost 1 800 entered into matrimonial unions[1] (CITE, 2021).

Once a girl becomes pregnant; the likelihood of dropping out of school is high as they face inequalities on multiple levels; 'in enrolment, retention, examination results, and in economic activities after leaving school' (Yokozeke, 1996, p.2).

Failure to access quality education for people living in Sub-Saharan Africa has overarching consequences on the growing population, 'education is the key that will allow many other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved' especially in poorer countries like Zimbabwe

where more than half the population fell into extreme poverty during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (Chingono, 2021).

Education is one of the ways of promoting participation and assertiveness in people within societies, the achievement of upwards economic and social mobility and the reduction of poverty. In terms of the economic development approach, education has been used as a gateway out of poverty into opportunity and is one of the many vital means for the emancipation of women and girls.

The right to education from a human rights approach is recognized in multiple conventions from article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Rights to International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (ICESR), The Dakar Framework for Action, Convention on the Rights of the Child (ICR) and the African Charter of Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) in article 12. The Zimbabwean Constitution additionally affirms this same right, entitling its people to education that is accessible, affordable and available.

The right to education ought to be understood more broadly, within some of the intersections which affect its effect on a population and therefore specifically to this subject; education is a gendered issue. Shabaya and Konadu-Agyemang (2004, p. 400) postulate that:

Despite all the available evidence that convincingly underscores the gains that accrue to society from women's education, gender inequalities in access still persist particularly in Africa.

International law therefore obligates member states such as Zimbabwe to protect girls' right to education and specifically to ensure that pregnant girls complete their primary and secondary school education free from discrimination (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

In 2020, due to the endemic crisis of teenage pregnancy in the country; the government of Zimbabwe amended the education laws to allow pregnant girls to go school.

Additionally the legislative amendment illegalized the expulsion of pregnant girls from school (Reuters, 2020). However much like the various amendments made to the education laws in Zimbabwe, financial resourcing and social support are lagging behind therefore slowing the actualization of the promulgated changes.

Mutombu and Muenda (2010, quoted in McCadden, 2015 p. 2) make reference to the opposition that is experienced in the implementation of re-entry or re-submission policies for pregnant girls in school as the administration of these policies goes beyond the realm of the legislature. There is fear that REPS[1] subliminally promote teenage pregnancy, weakening the perceived 'deterrent' aspect of initially banning children from attending school and reconstructing a form of reward for teen pregnancy (Mutombu and Muenda 2010, quoted in McCadden, 2015, p. 2). In her study, (McCadden, 2015) concludes that REPS alone are inadequate in encouraging pregnant girls and young mothers from reinstating into school and should be

complimented by psycho-social support along with meeting other responsibilities that the young mothers face as students and parents.

Furthermore, access to public school education is not free in Zimbabwe and the amount of school fees is seldom fixed amidst the rising rates of inflation on the Zimdollar (ZWL) currently quantified in Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS),

characterized by constant fluctuations and heavily influenced by the black market. Zimbabwe is a multi-currency system which allows for the use of the United States Dollar (USD) and the South African rand in the Northern regions, and in reality; these more 'stable' foreign currencies are used to quantify figures for access to services, purchase of goods and indeed payment of school fees - even if the cost is subsequently pegged in ZWL.

This is further aggravated by the global inflation rates which are being experienced due to various factors including the COVID-19 pandemic and Russo-Ukraine war. Understanding the currency and exchange system is complex and for the purpose of this paper can be summarized to mean that people living in Zimbabwe are highly likely to struggle with payment of school fees and school related costs for public schools because of low income, high levels of unemployment, rising rates of inflation and an unstable economy.

In this cauldron of chaos, it is plausible that poverty follows teenage pregnancy and/or vice

versa and families are unlikely to continue pursuing education for a pregnant girl as they have to choose between school fees and feeding an extra mouth.

This double jeopardy persists against the backdrop of existent barriers limiting girls in general from getting an education. Child marriage, by force, 'choice' or eloping is highly likely. Domestic violence, unemployment and child sex work persists. Due to a general lack of access to services; children who birth children in unsafe environments endangering their own lives and those of their offspring are submerged in a pool of vulnerabilities. There is an increased rate of maternal mortality and many other unfortunate compromises to their sexual reproductive health, fostering fertile ground for diseases and an overall impoverished state of being.

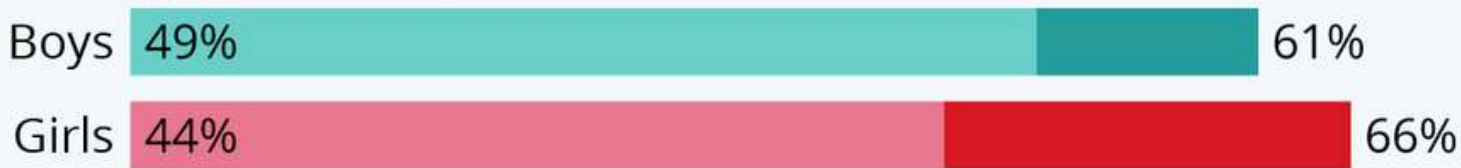
The impact of lack of access to education echoes in all corners of society as it maintains the status of poverty within the community; and poverty is a potentially debilitating state of living. Campaign For Girls Education (CAMFED) has released a myriad of studies and material on the benefits of educating girls, citing reduction of poverty, reduced maternal mortality, improved maternal health, reduced rates of child marriage and other forms of gender based violence and participation in democratic processes including gaining the capacity to function autonomously. Educating girls provides a foundation for gender equity and social justice (CAMFED, 2022). **'When you educate a girl, everything changes.'** (CAMFED, 2022).

Education in Africa: Girls Gaining Ground on Boys

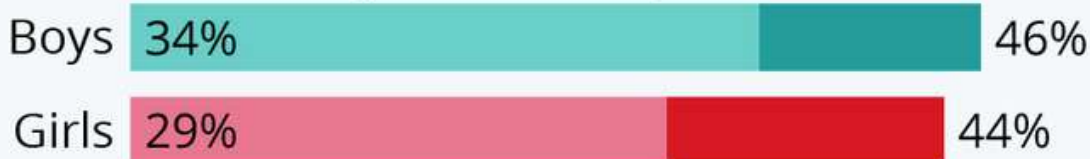
Share of children completing school in sub-Saharan Africa in 2000 and 2020, by education stage and gender

■ 2000 ■ 2020

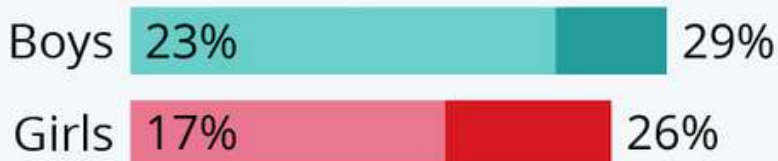
Primary school completion



Lower secondary school completion



Upper secondary school completion



Source: UNESCO via BBC



statista

Why do we have a lot of school girls dropping out of secondary schools in Africa?



Every girl has that one bad memory of their menstruation period, which could possibly affect their self esteem for life.

It could be spoiling their dress and being teased by their peers, or not knowing what to do when the first period unexpectedly came.

The cultural and religious beliefs that makes it taboo to talk about menstrual health weigh heavily on the girl child when she experiences her first period.

Sometimes it is actually the mental and emotional distress that comes with menstruating as some girls experience sickness such as nausea and cramps, and struggle to concentrate in class.

Some end up missing out on learning time as they will be mentally or physically absent.

However, the most dehumanizing thing that can ever happen to a girl or woman during her menstrual period is not having adequate and clean water.

Water shortages and poor menstrual health widens education gender gap in Zimbabwe

By Nyasha Blessing Dube
Picture: World Bank Flickr

Most areas in Zimbabwe, rural or urban, have been grappling with water shortages due to factors such as prolonged dry spells, faulty pumps among others.

Whilst there have been efforts by non governmental organizations to promote Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Zimbabwe continues to lag behind in terms of ensuring clean and safe water that promotes menstrual hygiene.

Access to safe water is critical for girls' sexual and reproductive health if we are to close the education gender gap in schools because if girls cannot manage their menstrual health, it affects their concentration in class and some end up having to skip school.

Failure to manage menstrual health by girls also affects girls emotionally as they lose their dignity and might end up with low self esteem.

Other the emotional distress that comes with not having adequate water during menstrual periods, girls also have to spend more time collecting water from distant sources.

Menstrual hygiene requires availability of clean water, proper methods of sanitary disposal, soap and proper sanitary products.

Unfortunately these provisions are not there in most schools in Zimbabwe and as long as girls continue missing school, the education gender gap is far from closing.

Recently I visited Chipangura Secondary school in Guruve, Mashonaland district of Zimbabwe- girls at that school shared their emotional distress- outlining the problems they face due to water shortages.

“When I am on my period sometimes I prefer not to come to school, because if I spoil my uniform I can not clean it up - most times our school borehole is not working and besides there is a very big distance from that borehole to our pit latrines. Imagine having to come to school with a bucket on standby, everyone would question” a girl named Rumbidzai said.

Another girl by the name Tanatswa also poured her heart out “Once upon a time , I spoiled my uniform and I was everyone’s laughing stock - since then I decided not to come to school when am on my period” she said.

“When I am on my period sometimes I prefer not to come to school, because if I spoil my uniform I can not clean it up - most times our school borehole is not working and besides there is a very big distance from that borehole to our pit latrines. Imagine having to come to school with a bucket on standby, everyone would question” a girl named Rumbidzai said.

The importance of training female entrepreneurs

By Mazvita Sabondo

For some reason, questions and debates pop up every day of why women should get engaged in women empowerment projects. The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics Report indicates that in terms of power and decision-making where women empowerment is more visible, only 28% of managerial positions globally in 2019. Only 18% of enterprises surveyed had female chief executive officers in 2020.

Women are now regarded as bold and fearless but sidelined in other issues that explore their potential, however, a slight change has been witnessed when women start tapping into the business world and leading. When women are running businesses, they often take the title of the manufacturer, quality controller, administrator, sales and marketing person, the debt collector. In fact, ten in one!

herefore, it is important that women do a self-inventory and see which areas they have strengths and which ones have weaknesses in and invest in training for that area. But, for women to fully take up a self-inventory route, they need proper guidance to fully equip them to run a successful enterprise.

Over the years, reports have demonstrated that most challenges of entrepreneurs are almost the same and most of them emanate from a lack of proper training such as record keeping. Inga Creative is the mastermind behind our

flagship course Basic Bookkeeping for Entrepreneurs, a course simply designed in a simple manner that is easy to understand, we also have practical exercises and at the end, one must have an action plan.

Evidence has been proven that record-keeping failure has kicked many out of business. The course shapes students to trace how much money can be received and paid out each day. The program encourages the systematic recording of income and expenditure on a daily basis. The information assists students to generate monthly reports.

Additionally, entrepreneurs use records to balance whether the business is doing well or not, the records help understand the mismatch. It is highly recommended that records help them control their cash. As entrepreneurs, students may require funding- say from a bank, they will need financial records and in some instances, just a daily sales register to see if their business is viable. Therefore, records will play a vital role to show those interested in helping you to see how your business is doing.

Overall, records are a need to see which goods are fast-moving or slow-moving, this can be done when comparing records of the previous month with another month, and vice-versa. Records are the backbone of the SWOT analysis- strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. As women, sometimes credit is an option-however it is to learn how to come up with a credit policy so that business stays afloat. The program equips you with monitoring payments and smarter ways to encourage customers to pay.

Need I say more, join the class as our vision is that we connect, learn together, display skill and spark collaboration!



Green learning and tackling Gender Equality

By Sinikiwe Marodza

Photo: GPE Flickr

As Africa strives to build back economies after the covid 19 blow, the green transformation plays a crucial role and the education sector has a once in a life time opportunity to build back this continent in a different way that tackles gender in equalities.

Post Covid-19 policies in the African continent need to build on gender responsive green growth strategies that create new green jobs and transform conventional into green jobs. It is with no doubt that well designed green projects can generate more employment and deliver higher short term returns than conventional fiscal stimulus. Atleast according to a recent report by the UN women, green transformation is expected to create 24 million jobs globally in the next 20 years.

The global commission on adaptation calculates that every dollar invested in building climate resilience could result in between \$2-\$10 input economic benefit.

Identifying opportunities early on and facilitating women and girls' access to them can reduce gender gaps as part of the post covid recovery.

According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), Green skills can simply be defined as the knowledge , abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in -develop and support a sustainable and resource efficient societies and nations.

Green skills result in green jobs such as technicians, environmental engineering, farm management, environmental scientists, compliance officer, solar installers, air quality engineering among other jobs.

African Union International Center for Girls and Women Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA) coordinator, Simon Yankey- Ouattara in a recent interview encouraged African governments

and educational systems to invest more on making sure girls and women acquire enough skills that are required for such green jobs.

“For Africa to be a better continent, prosperous and peaceful, there is an urgent need to invest in girls’ and women’s education across AU member states. Prioritizing and centering girls’ education is not only immediately beneficial to individuals, but rather, is closely linked to the prosperity and socio-economic gains of communities and countries.

The reality on the ground is that; pre-COVID-19 pandemic, evidence demonstrated that 100 million school-aged children in African countries were out of school, a number that disproportionately affected girls.

During COVID-19, at the peak of the pandemic in particular, schooling was disrupted for 236 million students across nearly all of the African continent. After schools reopened, millions of students remained affected with gender related vulnerabilities and inequalities placing female learners at a higher risk of not returning to school; an issue that could derail Africa’s development. These issues are even deepened with challenges caused by climate change impact”.

She added that “There is therefore a need to develop effective and transformative multi-sectoral responses, led by different stakeholders including young people here present today, that not only ensure educational continuity, but also ensure that the most marginalized, including girls with disabilities, those in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, remote and rural communities and those in the poorest quintile fulfil their right to education”.



There is no greater joy than the joy that comes from experiencing equal opportunities in acquiring knowledge to be able to transition through fundamental stages of education in life is nothing short of a blessing. I vividly recall as a girl child a point in my life where this reality suddenly seemed unattainable. An unexpected turn of events occurred that left me having to deal with multiple pressures in the year of writing (Ordinary level) The important recognised examinations that pave way to further advancements.

My pressures were not just having to study to put in the work like everyone else BUT I had to deal with grasping the unfortunate position I was in. The turn of events had crippled all resources that were required to take me to the next level suddenly and unexpectedly! It was then I began to face the reality of not going school! Yet I had been thriving in the schooling environment in so many ways beyond the classroom a lot of my abilities were discovered there including being a national team representative for Zimbabwe in sport at the time.

Suddenly there was intense uncertainty quenching the motivation to show up in the moment to study and show myself approved. Daily I grappled with thoughts of now feeling inadequate comparing to my peers who were in the boarding school classroom whilst I was home studying in my bedroom, I questioned would I make it? The voices of peer pressure on set days to pitch up at school for exams and the anxiety of being answerable to an elite school system as to why I was the only child who had not turned up to the two most important terms of school life. Nevertheless, a day of resolve came! My countenance about my future in education changed! It was on my birthday trying to study I was going through the newspaper and saw an article with a picture published of students that had graduated from the University of Zimbabwe.

RUHUSIWA #GIRLSALLOWED

Girls Get Equal Power

By Kelly Muzariri - Tavaziva

I told myself "This is me one day!" as I cut up the picture and put it in front of my wall. The resolve instilled discipline intentionally to build upon faith, and to soldier on. I passed ordinary level and years later graduating from university has been a multiplied reality.

What remains important to which I am grateful for today is opportunities to exercise all forms of potential, as a young lady building consistency in my domain from early childhood I have derived fulfillment from impacting the lives of adolescents and young people bringing empowerment in the psychosocial support and community mental health fraternity within diverse cultural settings. This narrative portrays a picture that opportunities of girls attaining equality exist. Opportunities to acquire knowledge that build their lives through vocational and education.

More so aiding to the awareness of the need to continue building upon robust systems that preserve opportunities and assist them to navigate through life in order to attain their desired aspirations successfully. Within the African society contextualising some of the inhibitors still exist whether its uncertainties, practices of child marriages, poverty and many more you may resonate with as you read through this piece. USAWA Institute continues to provide a platform through publishing to unpack and address these issues a platform to awareness of the continued ongoing work in advancing the livelihood of the African child.

www.theusawainstitute.org

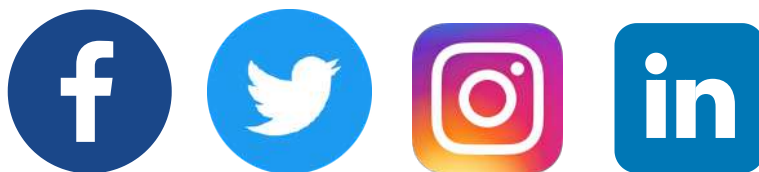


RUHUSIWA

Ruhusiwa #GirlsAllowed is published by The Usawa Institute a non-profit organisation dedicated to fostering equality through education, research and advocacy, we are fully committed to the girl child and her access to education across the continent of Africa.

For more information contact us at info@theusawainstitute.org

Follows Us On





Siblings paddling to school in
Siwito Silalo, Mongu, Zambia.
Photo by Felix Clay/Duckrabbit,