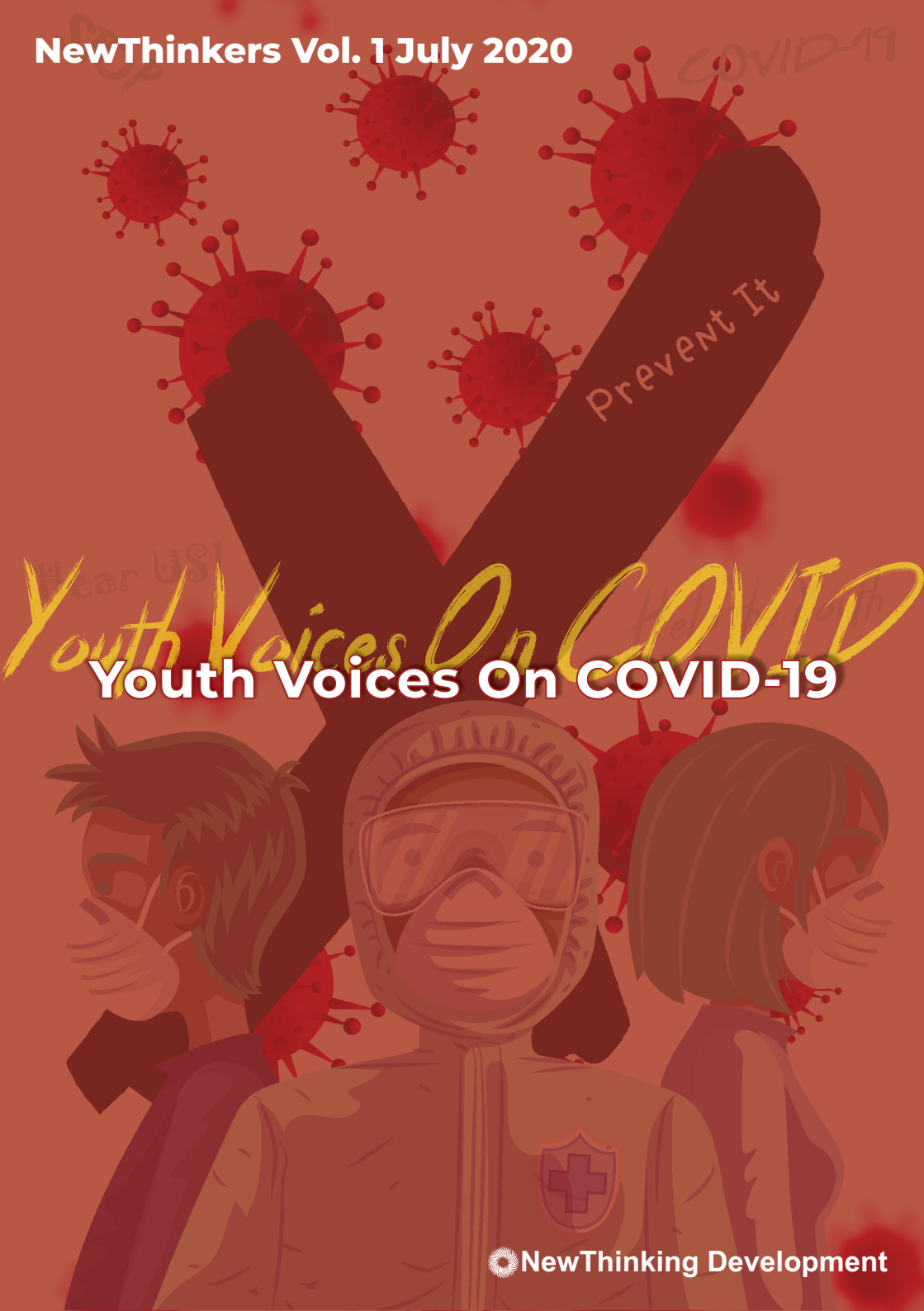


NewThinkers Vol. 1 July 2020



# Youth Voices On COVID-19

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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We sincerely thank the contributors for sharing their stories and thought essays on the effects of the corona virus pandemic on young people in Zimbabwe.

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## **ABOUT NEWTHINKERS**

**NEWTHINKERS!** is a new publication by *NewThinking Development*. It is a tool and platform to amplify the voice of the marginalized and those who are left behind. It explores fresh thoughts and ideas to build an inclusive and participatory Zimbabwe. The publication solicits stories and thought pieces from ordinary citizens and a team decides on the themes, topics and participates to publish. It seeks to promote inclusive and participatory ideals that place citizens at the heart of policy making, decision making and innovation in Zimbabwe. This edition of **NEWTHINKERS** explores how the coronavirus has affected young people in Zimbabwe and suggests ideas for government, business and the community at large to respond to the pandemic.

### **DISCLAIMER**

The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the individual authors and do not represent the views of *NewThinking Development*.

### **FEEDBACK**

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# FOREWORD

The coronavirus has caused unprecedented pressure and challenges for young people in Zimbabwe.

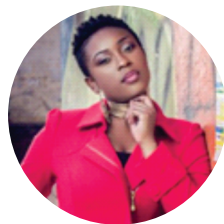
The socio-economic lives of young Zimbabweans have been negatively affected by the pandemic. We are used to seeing cyclical trends in the decline of income and health for young people, but the coronavirus has accelerated the downward spiral for young people. According to UNFPA 62 percent of Zimbabwe's population is under 25 years of age. Making this demography the most severely affected by the pandemic. They are four times more likely to be unemployed than adults and most of them are in the informal sector and informal employment. Young women especially rural women have been hardest hit putting them at risk of domestic violence, mental health issues and limited access to reproductive health.

In this publication, we have invited young Zimbabweans to share stories and thoughts on how the coronavirus pandemic has affected their socio-economic lives. In these stories young professionals, students, activists, artists and journalists help us understand how they have been affected by the pandemic. They offer possible policy and other solutions to help cushion young people. As the papers show, the coronavirus pandemic has brought to light long existing socio-economic challenges that young people in Zimbabwe have faced. The pandemic has above all shown the deep and growing inequalities that exist in our society, showing the haves and the have-nots. The current socio-economic system in Zimbabwe has left most young people behind, perpetuating the power of elites whilst hollowing out.

Young people have solutions to their socio-economic challenges- but too often they are not heard. As government rushed to respond to the coronavirus and continues to look for ways to deal with the deadly pandemic informed debates with young people remain critical. Young people, as the most affected demography have not been given adequate platforms to inform government's response to the pandemic. The common sentiment coming through all the papers in the publication is the urgent need to prioritize public policies that give young people a fighting chance. The social protection system, stimulus packages and safety nets approved by government for families have not brought the desired effect as many families and young people continue to wallow in distress and poverty.

While the effects of the pandemic have already caused massive shocks to young people there is still a chance to turn it around. Some of the recommendations suggested by young people in the publication encourage collective action from government, business, churches, civil society and society at large to address long standing socio-economic challenges affecting Zimbabweans. There is need to actively include young people in public policies on education, health, technology and most important the informal sector. Millions of lives have been disrupted by the continuous closure of the informal sector which is a source of income for young people who are failing to get jobs in the formal sector. The questions that arise are- has government and business taken time to listen to these young people? Has government and business invested in understanding the pains and solutions from young people? We know that this is possible. NewThinking Development aims to amplify the voices of young people and the marginalized to encourage collective action between government, business, trade unions, civil society and society at large for an inclusive response and recovery plan.

With the coronavirus pandemic still affecting the country, the priority remains a vigorous, public health and economic response that interrupts transmissions and provides effective care, treatment and cushions the livelihood of young people. The complex challenges the country faces call upon formidable leadership from government, however government alone cannot solve the effects of the pandemic. They need the ideas, wisdom and commitment of citizens especially young people. In this effort, young people can play a key role in supporting government and business. As this publication shows, young people are already disproportionately unemployed and for those who are employed, many work in the informal economy, gig economy, on precarious contracts or in service sectors of the economy that have been severely affected. Young people are not physically in school and some are homeless. To win the battle against the pandemic and its effects, we must collaborate, put trust in each other and shape institutions that serve our greater good. It is a time where collaboration should take center stage to ensure each sector of the economy and society plays a part in the fight against the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.



Rumbidzai Takawira  
aka  
Newsbae  
News Anchor



Samkeliso Tshuma  
Co-Founder  
The Girls Table

# CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN HAS WORSENERD THE PLIGHT OF YOUNG WOMEN IN REMOTE AREAS



**By Nokuthaba Dlamini:**  
*Victoria Falls-based journalist, who is passionate about issues affecting the society's marginalised and the voiceless.*

Prior to the ongoing lockdown to slow down the spread of coronavirus young girls in remote areas in Zimbabwe were already facing an uphill struggle in accessing reproductive health services.

The national stay at home orders that first began on March 30 have made a bad situation even worse. In addition, the coronavirus outbreak is piling pressure on an already broken healthcare system.

As a journalist based in Matabeleland North, a province largely made up of rural people, the interaction shows that the novel coronavirus has taken its toll, particularly on girls' reproductive health, with hospitals inaccessible and shops closed, rural girls have been forced to alternate between using unhygienic and unsafe sanitary wear.

When the lockdown was announced on March 28, rural people were not given enough time to prepare for the stay at home order in terms of stocking up on necessities such as their adolescents' sanitary wear, while others had no money to stock up. The situation is being worsened by strict road travel restrictions, making it even more difficult for those who can at least afford to buy sanitary wear in shops. For their monthly cycles, young girls in Tsholotsho and Lupane have alternated to using tree leaves or old clothes that they wash and reuse. Some have also resorted to using newspapers, textbooks and old books as the situation continues to worsen. The government does not seem to have a plan, with no contingency measures being put in place to aid rural girls.

Citizen Health Watch official Fungisai Sithole says the plight of young girls in Matabeleland North is similar to that of many across the country. As a result, many young girls are at risk of having poor menstrual hygiene that can lead to many issues, such as fungal or bacterial infections of the reproductive and urinary tracts. Some young girls said after using tree leaves as sanitary wear, often felt skin irritation, discomfort and their pelvic areas developed sores and blisters. Also due to lack of sanitised detergents, those who have alternated to using cloth as pads have experienced some itching of skin as they normally wash their cloth for reuse without soaps and clean water, or even anti-germ detergents.

Furthermore, young girls at adolescent stages are also at risk of contracting diseases such as HIV and Aids as they have no access to sexual protective wear like condoms. According to a World Health Organisation study of 2019, each day; an estimated 564 people of between 19 and 49 years become infected with HIV, while the total number of adults and children living with HIV is nearly two million. The numbers according to health workers are going to increase, possibly leading to more deaths, particularly in rural areas, where young people are vulnerable, as they have no chance of visiting hospitals and clinics for testing and screening due to the lockdown.

Also according to UNICEF in Eastern and Southern Africa, Zimbabwe needs to provide timely and quality HIV services mainly in rural areas. The number of adolescents between 10 and 19 years accessing antiretroviral therapy increased from 62 845 in 2015 to 66 886 in 2017, with 40 385 being females. Zimbabwe records approximately 33 000 new cases of HIV annually among persons aged 15 to 64 years, according to UNICEF figures. With the current lockdown, fears are that the numbers will shoot up.

Young girls are also struggling to access family planning services due to the indefinite lockdown extension and are at risk of having unwanted pregnancies, abortions and possible deaths of mothers and their children in the process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. It is therefore imperative for the government to ensure that rural communities are not left behind during this coronavirus lockdown period by giving them credible information, which they can use to assess the situation for them to make decisions and take precautions.
2. The government should also send certified health workers to visit remote rural areas and educate young girls about reproductive health, including practising healthy hygiene, sexual abstinence, prevention of unwanted pregnancies and distribution of pads and family planning methods.
3. Diaspora community initiatives should also be stretched to remote rural areas where young girls will be taught how to sew recyclable sanitary pads that they can even stock for resale.

*Failure to address the lack of access to reproductive services for the young girls, might leave Zimbabwe facing twin pandemics of HIV/Aids and Covid-19 and it is a war that this economically drained country will surely not win.*

# A STARVING ARTIST'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY AND BEYOND



By Isheanesu Dondo:

News of the lockdown took me by surprise. I did not take the news seriously at all. How could people be forced to stay indoors when they were already living from hand to mouth? A lockdown in Zimbabwe was unthinkable.

But the lockdown did come after all. And when it did, I was ill-prepared. I had a few art materials, little money and some paintings I was meant to post overseas for more revenue. The rest of the artwork was meant for a now-cancelled upcoming exhibition at a local gallery. Suddenly, everything came to a halt.

The first few days were manageable as I was sure the dust would settle soon. I spent most of them watching television, painting and reading. As the days went by, however, I started getting anxious. My canvas, paint and ink ran out. The television and reading routine became monotonous. Days started to seem longer. No one knew when the lockdown would be over. I didn't know when I would get my next paycheck, could not ship or sell the art I had stocked up. I missed my normal social routine.

My anxiety grew into the all too familiar emotions of confusion, irritability, anger, fear, panic and then depression. As someone who had prior experience with depression, I knew I could not afford to stop doing art. That was my last line of defense from a total emotional breakdown.

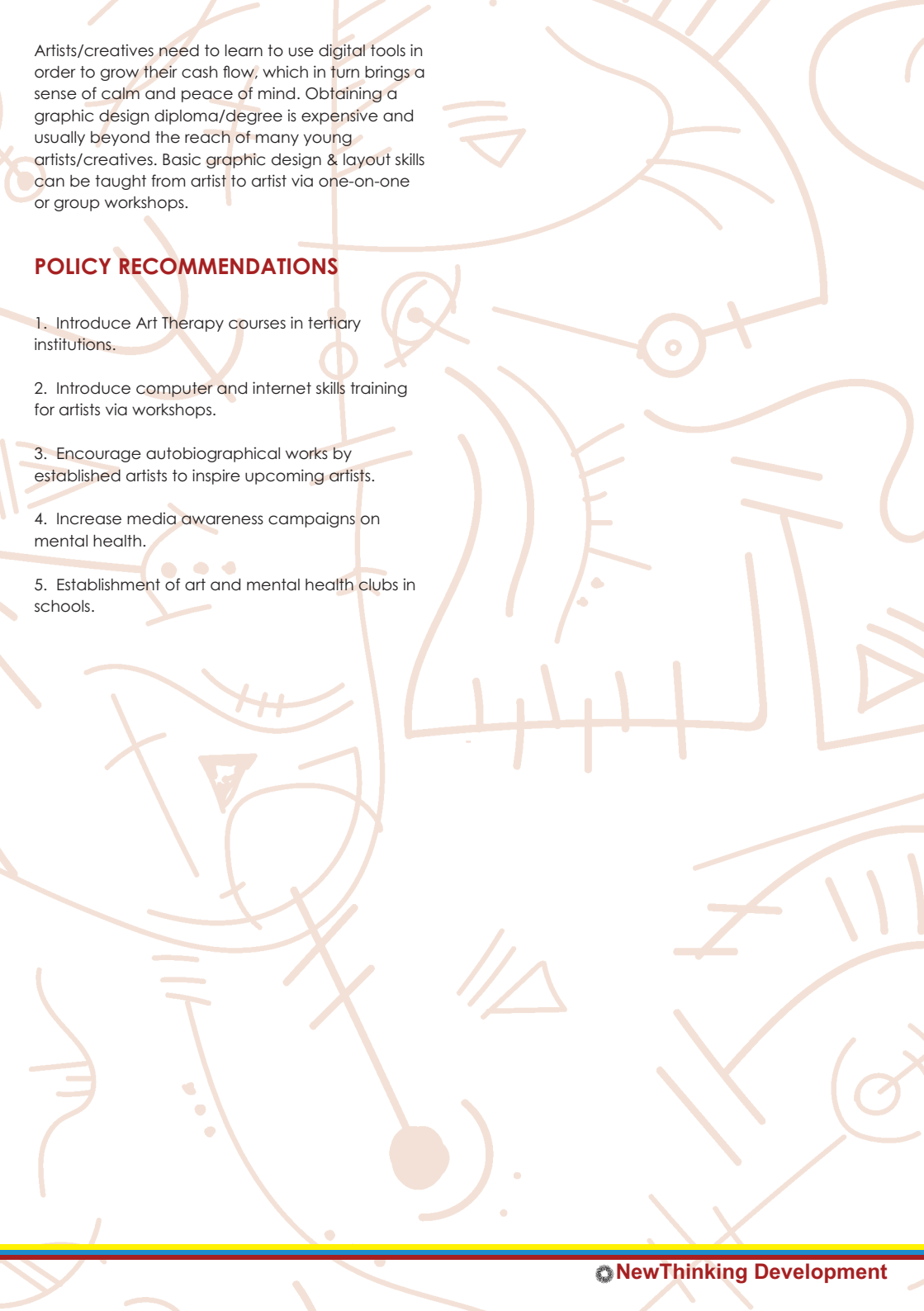
Art is a very powerful and effective meditating tool. It helps settle the mind and channel energy and thoughts. Incarcerated individuals have professed how art has helped them mentally during solitary confinement. In countries like Namibia and India, there is a tradition of drawing

geometric patterns in the sand as a way of mind training. Ndebele women have a tradition of painting colorful geometric art on their houses. Colour and pattern are therapeutic tools.

Art Therapy is now offered at various tertiary institutions around the globe. Unfortunately, none is being offered in Zimbabwe so far. If one wants to be a professional practicing Art Therapist, they have to go beyond the border. This has to be corrected especially now that we have a growing number of mental health cases and only a handful of psychologists & psychiatrists. I know some artists such as Sandra Ndoro and Mercy Moyo, who are active and passionate about psychology and art therapy but are yet to get practicing certificates. Such individuals are essential to the mental health sector.

With this background, I knew I had to keep working, even without 'proper' art material. Over the years, however, previously unexplored materials have been introduced, with success, by artists who happened to be in tough situations. A recent example was the use of old computer keyboard keys to create sculptures. One such artwork was bought in 2020 by American Pop celebrity Jay Z (Sean Carter) from Zimbabwean artist Moffat Takadiwa. The list of examples keeps growing by the day. I was lucky to have previously collected discarded cigarette boxes and old tattered books from Mbare township. I used these as drawing paper. So each day I would make sure to do several sketches on this medium as preparation for work after the lockdown. This was good therapy. However, I still had to make an income during this time, even without physical access to a gallery or collector.

I approached Mugove Chandauka, a friend and art aficionado, who helped me to access free internet during this time. For years now, Mugove had always repeated that everything was going online and had encouraged me to have more online presence. The lockdown had hastened this trend. I used my internet time to look for online art & graphic design opportunities. I applied to many and got some favorable responses. This kept me going.



Artists/creatives need to learn to use digital tools in order to grow their cash flow, which in turn brings a sense of calm and peace of mind. Obtaining a graphic design diploma/degree is expensive and usually beyond the reach of many young artists/creatives. Basic graphic design & layout skills can be taught from artist to artist via one-on-one or group workshops.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Introduce Art Therapy courses in tertiary institutions.
2. Introduce computer and internet skills training for artists via workshops.
3. Encourage autobiographical works by established artists to inspire upcoming artists.
4. Increase media awareness campaigns on mental health.
5. Establishment of art and mental health clubs in schools.

# YOUTH, LIVELIHOODS, AND COVID-19 IN ZIMBABWE: WHAT'S NEXT?



**By Fadzai Chipato:**

*Ph.D. student with eyes on displacements, resource governance, livelihoods, hydro politics, and rural politics.*

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic is changing the face of the world. The Ministry of Health and Child Welfare (MOHCHW) report published on the 4th of May notes 34 confirmed cases in the country, 11 between the ages of 15-29 years, also 8 cases between the ages of 30-44 years showing youth as the most affected demography. This article focuses on the effects of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of youth. The country has a huge youth bulge where 60% of the populations are young people. The African Youth Charter (2006) defines youth as a person between the ages of 15-35 years and, this article adopts this definition focusing on this group.

Youth in Zimbabwe face numerous struggles due to the recurrent decades of economic instability. This has resulted in most young people graduating from college and universities but failing to get employed. The unemployment rate figures in the country are contested between 4.9% and 90%. This misnomer in statistics is reflected by the situation on the ground where most young people are venturing into the informal economy due to absence of formal employment. The informal sector that young people are involved in includes buying and selling commodities such as selling mobile talk time on street corners, working in hair salons, and IT shops. The bulging informal sector though acknowledged by the government of Zimbabwe lacks proper mechanisms to support young people.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the government of Zimbabwe imposing a total lockdown to limit the transmission of the disease and flatten the curve. Interestingly, the total lockdown excluded what the government termed essential services operators such as supermarkets and pharmacies.

Additionally, when the lockdown rules were relaxed it allowed most businesses in the formal sector to operate. However, the lockdown measures remained in force for the informal sector. Most young people are involved in the informal sector and it forms an important part of how they make a living. Therefore, the lockdown measures left them without a source of income. The total stoppage on the 'hustling', left the young people prone to a lot of challenges like failure to pay rentals, buy food, pay for water and electricity bills. Their livelihoods are now fragile and coupled with uncertainty.

COVID-19 has exacerbated an already difficult situation in the informal sector. These small businesses are meant to provide an alternative livelihood option where people can get employed. However, the 'one size fits all' social distancing measures adopted are affecting the youth in the informal economy immensely. These young people lack assets, which can be disposed to cushion their livelihoods in the event of exposure to shocks and stresses. The challenges are intensified by a weak social welfare system where the government is not providing alternative social safety nets to buffer the lost livelihoods. It did promise to provide ZWL \$180 per household though this never materialized and there are allegations of elite capture and patronage issues. Also, the sophisticated methodology that the Minister of Finance proposed to select the beneficiaries has been under scrutiny by the citizens with fears that it's exclusionary. This, therefore, further exposes the youth to a vicious poverty cycle where they will have to start over again to build their small business when the pandemic is over.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

The measure of a total lockdown taken to limit the spread of the coronavirus raises questions on its practicality in fragile states. In a state that cannot provide social welfare services for its citizens, closing the informal economy, which forms a critical part of the youth's livelihood activities results in starvation and more social problems. The article, therefore, necessitates that there is a need to recognize the informal sector so that policies are crafted to support its growth.



The growth and policy support of the informal sector will create employment opportunities for other young people and also provide much-needed revenue for the government. Using virtual platforms is fundamental in helping youth transact at the same time maintaining social distancing. Conducting virtual awareness campaigns on COVID-19 pandemic and youth in the informal sector can also help in getting the message of the severity of the disease to young people. Also, it opens up platforms for young people in the informal sector to receive training on how to reconfigure and diversify their businesses to suit the current trajectory. This can be achieved by making internet accessible to youth because the current data prices in Zimbabwe are very high which only leaves the privileged class with the means using these platforms.



# THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE INFORMAL SECTOR



**By Albert T Mashambanhaka:**  
*Social Work Student University of Zimbabwe*

COVID-19 pandemic is like a messenger sent to remind us of the structural deficiencies within the social protection nets of Zimbabwe. The situation is exacerbated by a poor economy characterized by plummeting industrial capacity operating at about 27%, hyperinflation estimated at 750% and high unemployment. Undoubtedly, the local population has failed to sustain the financial costs associated with COVID-19. The state has failed to extend services beyond the current basket, leaving vulnerable populations looking for support through the traditional system of social welfare such as family support and remittances from the diaspora.

The Zimbabwean economy as it stands is informalized, considered by the IMF as the second largest in the world at 60% following Bolivia's 62.3% in contrast to the most formal economies like Switzerland and Austria at 7.2% and 8.9% respectively. The burning question is, what does a country lockdown mean for the informal sector where most youth are embedded? Will the social service sector bear the pressure given that everyone is now supposed to rely on social services? The questions raised allude to the fact that the mostly youth-run informal sector has and will take a huge hit.

Zimbabwe lacks the financial muscle to invest a fraction of what other governments are investing in terms of social cushioning for vulnerable communities and groups such as youth. This means that the youth ousted from their means of survival will have to resort to other means of production and avenues for survival during the lockdown. In the global West, governments have come up with stimulus packages and safety nets to cushion citizens and offset the immediate costs of COVID-19, for instance,

the USA and Swiss governments have each committed US\$2 trillion and US\$10.6 billion respectively.

A report by the United Nations on the impact of COVID-19 on women confirms the devastating impact of the pandemic on the informal sector especially for young people and women who are the majority in the sector. The report highlights the economic impact of the pandemic on young people and women across the globe, because already women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector.

Lockdown literally took the bread out of the mouths of informal sector workers. Some cannot restock because their supply routes were cut off due to closing of borders, especially the South African border. The informal sector is constituted by day wage earners; they eat what they hunt on a daily basis. People are suspicious of goods from the informal sector. They are shifting to formal products clearly showing that their means of survival is now at stake. COVID-19 is imposing serious problems to the informal sector players because the hustles and deals they used to do are now inhibited by measures taken by the Government.

The supreme negative effect which the pandemic is causing for young people in the informal sector is hunger and starvation. Young people are starving bringing about social ills such as theft, smuggling, robbery and prostitution within their neighborhoods. Up surging prices of basic commodities have worsened these torrid times, it's now difficult for most youths to put food on the table. The rise of gender-based violence and other crimes is a clear indication that the government needs to reconsider the lockdown.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

There is a lot of copying and pasting going on as the country tries to deal with this new and confounding disease. What Zimbabwe needs are homegrown responses without copying and pasting. The package that was announced for cushioning is equivalent to or less than US\$10. This situation is pushing the youth to go back to their areas of specialization in the informal sector. The Government is relying on enforcement by security services. The problem is that their methods are brutal to the youth in the informal sector. Butressing the argument, what Zimbabwe needs are homegrown Covid-19 responses. The homegrown solutions needed should come from the people through initiating a research more of a cross-sectional study to understand the challenges being faced thus avoiding subjective responses leading to misinformed social policy to curb COVID-19.

# BLEED WITHOUT FEAR



**By Tatenda Rukarwa:**  
*Sociologist, blogger and  
advocate for women and  
youths rights*

The alarming rates of infections and deaths have made young people sceptical and conclude that surely their future is bleak. Vulnerable and marginalised youth are at particular risk of Covid-19 and its impact. Regardless of race or ethnicity young people have challenges accessing healthcare services and their wellbeing is a necessity.

Services targeting the needs of young women and girls have been, in some cases, disrupted or have had their resources diverted. It is the right of all persons to have access to and have the highest attainable standards of health. Affordability and accessibility of sanitary wear for young women and girls in this pandemic; especially water is critical for their menstrual hygiene management. The cost of sanitary wear has risen, the economy and the lockdown have both led to many streams of income being shut down. How will our young women and girls bleed without fear? They are the mothers of tomorrow therefore they need to be safeguarded as jewels of the society. We have many organisations running to rural areas with supplies but have we checked if sanitary wear is availed to the vulnerable in society during this time? Now there is a need for low-cost sanitary wear like reusable cloth pads which last longer to curb stress on how their next menstrual cycle shall be.

Young people with physical or mental health conditions also face an elevated risk in relation to the pandemic. The pandemic and economic recession may further fuel stigma and discrimination against certain groups of young people, which in turn will further exclude them from accessing healthcare and maintaining their livelihoods. The on-going crisis and mitigation

measures also have implications for mental health. Many young people with mental health conditions are experiencing a deterioration of their health status. Prolonged social isolation and stress are expected to increase the incidences of young people with mental health conditions (Lee, 2020). Mental health (awareness, treatment or management), therefore, should be integrated as part of the broader health response.

Kassa et al, 2020 reiterates that should schools remain closed and cause girls to drop out, we should anticipate an increase in teenage pregnancy in the year ahead. A recent meta-analysis of the prevalence and determinants of adolescent pregnancy in Africa found that adolescent girls out of school are two times more likely to start childbearing than those who are in school. Local clinics are not functioning to full capacity thereby causing young people to lack access to sexual and reproductive health products which are being overlooked as the focus is on COVID-19 and its impact.

According to UNICEF (2020), 368.5 million children across 143 countries who normally rely on school meals for a reliable source of daily nutrition must now look to other sources and this may lead to a rise in malnutrition. World Food Program, (2020), child nutrition is a vital concern. Additionally, hastily implemented lockdown measures risk disrupting food supply chains and local food markets, making it hazardous for young mothers, pregnant youth and children.

Mavhinga, (2020), COVID-19 has made an already dire and dangerous water crisis even more urgent in Zimbabwe." Over the last three decades, Zimbabwe has experienced a gradual decline in access to clean and safe water. Over two million people in the capital city, Harare, and the greater metropolitan area incorporating Chitungwiza, Epworth, Ruwa, and Norton, have no household access to safe drinking water or adequate waste and wastewater disposal services. Thousands of women and school-age children may spend eight to nine hours or all night in line at crowded boreholes or narrow water wells to get water that may not be safe. This will increase typhoid and cholera scares.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Therefore the government should put in place measures to ensure that water is available through drilling boreholes especially in high-density areas which are suffering the most.
2. The government should prioritise that food is availed to all in the nation through inclusive safety nets for marginalized people.
3. Health centres should avail services to young people so that they access contraceptives easily to avoid unwanted pregnancies as their minds are docile and will indulge eventually.
4. Both urban and rural young people have the same needs let us not only think of the other as inferior but equity is needed for full programming efforts in this Covid-19 pandemic. Government should ensure sanitary wear is availed in all corners of society be it through contracting local organisations that produce sanitary wear to up-scale and deliver to everyone.
5. Therapists should ensure they enforce mobile applications that keep track and monitor the mental wellness of young people and enforcing awareness campaigns during this period.



# PROMOTING COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION, SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS DURING A PANDEMIC: “HOW AND WHY IT MATTERS?”



By Clifton Dawany

When a disaster strikes it leaves a trail of blood and its negative effects creates chaos where governments, business tycoons, non state actors and graduates appear as if they failed to prepare on time to tackle the disaster. The Government of Zimbabwe upon realizing the threat of Covid-19 to its citizens took measures to introduce lockdown. The lockdown has led to the closure of young people's formal and non formal education. This article seeks to explore the challenges that adolescence youth are facing with regards to Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) due to lockdown and how the government, organisations, parents/guardians and individuals can intervene with solutions. These challenges include lack of access to youth friendly services, deprivation of social engagements and lack of access to information on CSE and SRHR.

The introduction of lockdown has led to the prolonged periods of closure of young people's formal and non formal education. These prolonged periods of closures and movement restrictions have suspended activities of organisations which were providing affordable youth friendly services such as STIs screening and distribution of free sanitary wear. Whilst organisations who were assisting with SRHR services had to suspend their projects due to lockdown, the fact still remains that adolescent girls still need sanitary wear, contraceptives are still a necessity, and youth still need continuous guidance on CSE and SRHR. Lack of information and youth friendly services can lead to unwanted pregnancies, early child marriages, increase in cases of STIs and HIV/AIDS.

The prolonged stress on the health systems and organisations to address Covid-19 has led to

disruption of the normal delivery of youth friendly services especially with regards to Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights. Many adolescent young girls and young women tend to face high levels of domestic and intimate gender based violence driven by quarantine and isolation. An increase in gender based violence cases as a result of the lockdowns have been reported across the country.

There is need for a multisectoral approach from government, organisation (public and private) and parents/guardians. Whilst the government has made its first step of addressing these challenges through gazetting Statutory Instrument 99 of 2020 which allows the formal sector to operate whilst adhering to the health guidelines, the following recommendations forms part of the solutions to address challenges faced by youth when it comes to provision of youth friendly services.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. There is need for the government to walk the talk of implementing the gazetted Statutory Instrument through giving clearance to organisations such as NGOs to provide youth friendly services without too many restrictions on movement.
2. Institutions such as the Zimbabwe Republic Police through its Victim Friendly Unit should also partner with community based organisations to embark on awareness campaigns on how victims of gender based violence and other forms of violence should seek assistance in case of emergency.
3. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other private owned organisations should make use of Statutory Instrument 99 of 2020 to get clearance from relevant government line ministries to continue provision of youth friendly services such as distribution of sanitary wear, STIs screening services and counselling services. Organisations must ensure that they also decentralise their SRHR initiatives such as provision of youth friendly information and services to rural areas of the country.



4. During Covid-19 period, profit making organisations should plough back their profits in communities as corporate social responsibility. Organisations like retail outlets should initiate youth friendly services which benefit youth in their communities like distribution of free sanitary wear and even distributing food hampers to child headed families since poverty has remained a push factor for sex work and other forms of sexual abuse.

5. The closure of formal and non formal education means that an adolescent who was receiving a weekly lecture on guidance and counselling from his/her tutor is no longer receiving it due to lockdown the same applies for a tertiary student who was attending health and life skills. It therefore leaves parents and or guardians with the greatest responsibility not to be just parents/guardians but to be guiding and counselling tutors and health and life skills lecturers to their children. Parents and guardians must re-adopt the model of Padare (Men's forum) or the Nhanga Model (Girls' forum) so as to ensure that adolescent youth continue to get advice on issues relating to Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights. Parents/guardians must establish good relations with their children so that children feel free to discuss health problems.

## **SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH**

### **In conclusion**

**A multi-sectoral approach  
remains a key solution to  
ensure that there continuous  
provision of youth friendly  
services to adolescent youth.**

## **SEXUALITY EDUCATION**

# MENTAL HEALTH AND COVID-19



By Kudzaishe Chimedza

The Mental health of our Zimbabwean youth has gone on rampage during this COVID-19 pandemic. It has led to the exposure of mental conflicts that have been pre-existing. Youths are facing numerous emotional turmoil, psychological breakdowns and social disorientation. They have innumerable thoughts going through their minds. Most of which are not being sufficiently addressed. Thoughts such as, will we ever be able to support our families? Will we ever be able to get jobs and ultimately build sustaining savings? Will our nation ever get better? Will we ever be heard?

Mental health takes into consideration a person's emotional, psychological and social well-being. All these three aspects have been affected of late. The manner in which our youths think, feel and interpret the world around us has been affected. Instead of seeking harmony and peace our youths are seeking survival. We see this in how people are exorbitantly pricing goods and services, how the crimes being committed keep rising. They live in fear of investing because of fear of being made to sign bogus documents and lose money in the act, which they are likely never to recover because of our inefficient judiciary system. Psychologically they have now resultantly begun to question their autonomy, personal growth and development and meaning in life. Will they ever be able to stand independent of their parents or social welfare?

Given the numerous health issues affecting people in our nation, the issue of mental health has often been considered to be a lower priority. But if we are to make an intimate consideration of what rightfully deserves to be highly prioritized we would eventually stumble on the issue of mental health. The mental health status of our youths affects all of us in one way or the other.

Humans are social beings. So many of our abilities to do certain things depend on how we interact with others. We depend on each other so that our needs are met. We achieve happiness, prosperity and progress through social interaction.

Our mental health comes first in all aspects of our life, it affects our will to do what should be done. The will to obey the law, to do better, to eat well, to pursue education, to seek medical help and ultimately the will to build a better Zimbabwe.

Mental-health conditions have a significant impact on youth development, social and economic integration. Their ability to successfully form supportive and healthy relationships and manage conflict in relationships, which is particularly unsettling given that adolescence is a critical time for identity formation and taking on of roles. Disruptions in the ability to form and sustain interpersonal relationships can have lasting impacts on youths' social and emotional functioning. Mental-health problems increase the likelihood of poverty, limit employment opportunities severely, and impact work performance negatively.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

*Having taken all that into consideration.*

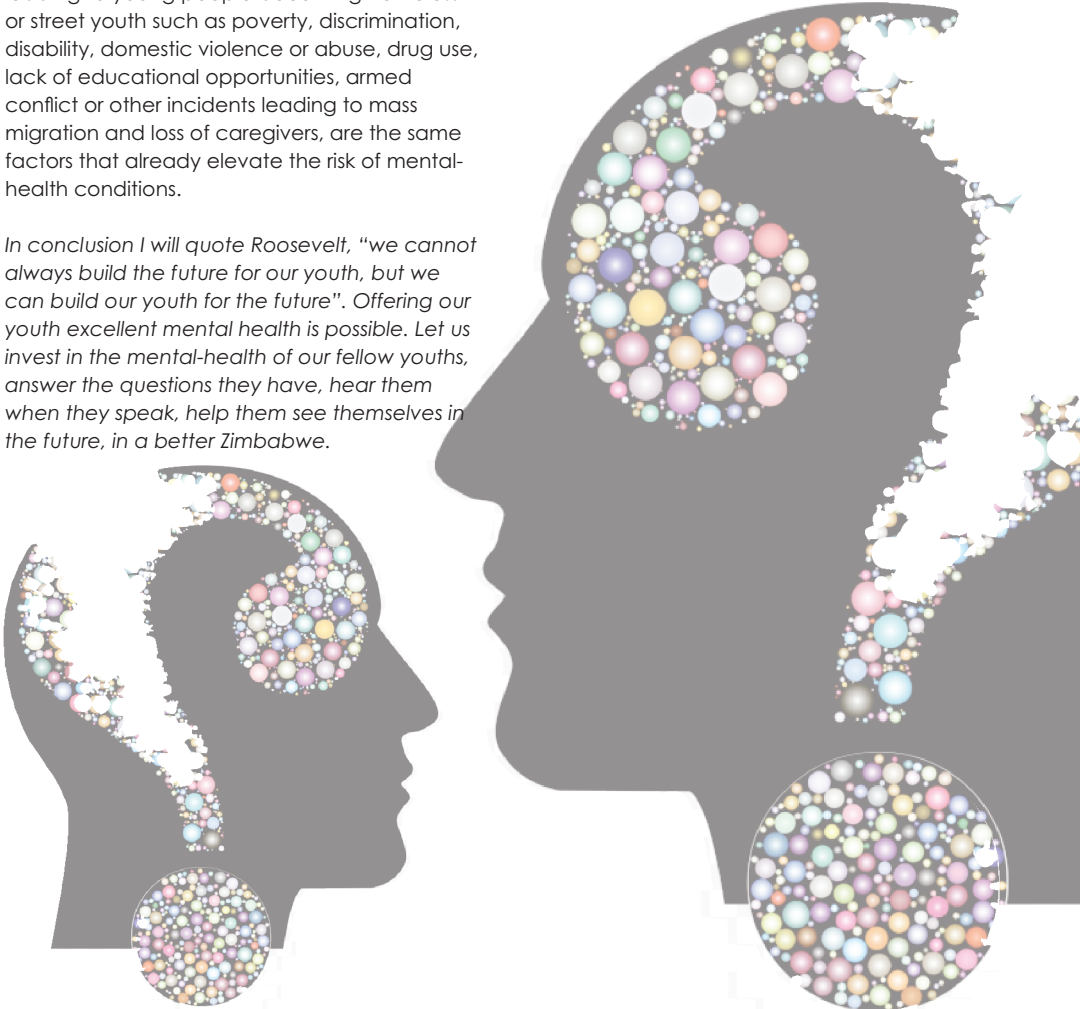
1. Improved surveillance and monitoring and evaluation will aid in the identification of both the risks and protective factors to be targeted through preventive interventions. It is critical that we collect data regularly regarding a broad range of risk and protective factors and probable mental-health outcomes. Although surveillance efforts have been developed in our country, few initiatives have been sustained enough to guide practice.
2. Investment into research is needed to document the impact of promising programs in our country. Although a large number of programs and policies have been identified as effective, the vast majority of the research has been conducted in high-income countries hence forth little is known about the extent to which these findings are appropriate to our settings.

Academic problems including low engagement, poor academic performance, learning disabilities, discipline problems, poor attendance and, eventually, school dropout might be as a result of assaults on our youth's mental health.

3. Culture should also play an important role with respect to mental-health conditions. When confronted with individuals suffering from mental- health conditions it is important how we respond to them as a community. Stigmatization has been a cause of concern, so education on the issue of mental health is of uttermost importance. Many of the factors leading to young people becoming homeless or street youth such as poverty, discrimination, disability, domestic violence or abuse, drug use, lack of educational opportunities, armed conflict or other incidents leading to mass migration and loss of caregivers, are the same factors that already elevate the risk of mental-health conditions.

*In conclusion I will quote Roosevelt, "we cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future". Offering our youth excellent mental health is possible. Let us invest in the mental-health of our fellow youths, answer the questions they have, hear them when they speak, help them see themselves in the future, in a better Zimbabwe.*

***"we cannot  
always build  
the future for  
our youth,  
but we can build  
our youth for  
the future"***



# COVID-19 PANDEMIC: AN IMPETUS TO UP-SCALING HEALTH & SAFETY PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS IN ZIMBABWE



**By Ernest Mando:**

*Environmentalist and an Occupational Health & Safety Practitioner with working experience in education, industry and NGOs*

Statistics show that schools harbour the majority of the national population in Zimbabwe that includes the learners, the teachers and the ancillary staff. A submission made by the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ) to government on 26 April 2020 shows that there are 9159 schools and about 6.5 million learners nationwide. It is my feeling that their juvenility, density and immaturity compound to increase their vulnerability to natural disasters. The novel COVID-19 is deadly and indeed a threat not only to education but to the health and safety of learners. The lockdown which was suddenly adopted by government in response to COVID-19 means schools closed when children were not prepared to deal with this pandemic. I believe that this novel pandemic is a wakeup call to up-scaling health and safety issues in schools.

COVID-19 brought an unusual lifestyle for school children the world over. Based on the academic calendar school children have exceeded their vacation period. Amid the pandemic, I often ask myself- will these children be able to take precautions against COVID-19, who will teach them to take appropriate measures when social distancing and lockdown keep them in-house? Barely 2 weeks after the closure of schools in Bikita community Masvingo, I saw a crowd of roughly 15 year old boys playing football in one of the handball pitches and no safety precautions were taken by players and the spectators. There was neither social distancing practised nor use of protective equipment. I saw a deficit of knowledge, understanding and perhaps appreciation of implementing health and safety measures that prevent and protect children against COVID-19. Given the recent Cyclone Idai that devastated communities and particularly school going children in Chimanimani and Chipinge districts.

My assumption was that communities are better prepared to deal with similar disasters through education and awareness. To that end, I expected that the government, schools and communities would have educated children and communities on disaster risk reduction prior to COVID-19 which has become one of the worst disasters ever.

That inadequacy presents the urgent need to require schools to have occupational health and safety (OHS) policies administered by National Social Security Agency (NSSA) which currently only focuses on industries. Health and safety is a small component of school curriculum and a miniature instrument of the Education Act whose pragmatic impact remains lean. My experience with various schools shows that systems and procedures for health and safety are very poor and minimal, for instance schools do not have health and safety committees, school based OHS policies, OHS surveillance systems and procedures among other issues. Education on health and safety outside the curriculum is very limited. I have no doubt that children remain a vital but vulnerable cog of the community against COVID-19 in and outside school environments. Against that milieu, I proffer the following recommendations:

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Besides just incorporating health and safety in school curriculum and as a mere policy circular, the government needs to up-scale the implementation of stringent health and safety measures in schools. The existing disaster risk reduction (DRR) policy circular is neither well disseminated nor known by school communities- a situation that makes OHS a trifling part of school culture.
2. Government through the existing structures from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should implement health and safety education and awareness campaigns through training workshops and other virtual platforms. While practising social distancing, broadcasting devices or speakers can be used at ward level, and when resources permit door to door education should be carried out.

3. A special budget for health and safety for learner safety needs to be set aside. In that regard, the government should work with key players like NGOs and the private sector in the funding, design and implementation of health and safety systems in school.

4. I also recommend that communities and schools set up committees that administer community health and safety under the technical guidance, monitoring and evaluation of the relevant ministries (Ministry of Health and Child Care MoHCC and MoPSE).



# SAFETY

# MILLENNIALS AND GENERATION Z



**By Vuyelwa Langelihle Sibindi:**  
*Language and Communication  
graduate passionate about  
writing and public speaking.*

Zimbabwean millennials and generation Z are currently facing the biggest health crisis of their time. Already struggling with a record high unemployment rate and reliance on the informal sector the challenges facing youths in the country seem to be stacking up. Covid-19 has brought the world's biggest economies to their knees and for Zimbabwe's younger generations who are yet to experience financial independence the after effects could be catastrophic.

Zimbabwe has felt the impact of the virus leaving the country's financial purse bleeding. The country's education sector has also taken a knock evidenced by the inability of students to go to school, see their friends and attend classes physically. Currently many university students are confused, how will the academic year progress, will final year students manage to graduate and those who have applied are wondering how classes will be conducted etc.

The pandemic has affected students in local institutions in more ways than imagined and their academic development is in regress. Disrupting the lives of students who took university halls of residence as their home during the academic year, Covid-19 has forced students to return to unstable homes with no internet connectivity and support systems. Libraries and residence halls make it possible for students to complete their school work without interruption by providing desktops and internet access. It is obvious that the Zimbabwean education system needs to develop an ecosystem centred on equality.

The question of equality in the education sector has always been a challenge and student organisations or groups have protested against inequality for decades in the country.

Covid-19 is aggravating this, student loans are not enough they do not cover the cost of books, laptops and internet access. It is a time to identify vulnerable students, engage with them in order to understand the support they need to continue with their studies.

Local institutions have failed to take advantage of having multi-generations, meaning they have failed to conjoin traditional teaching methods and the technological revolution. Though this can be attributed to the digital divide it is linked to lack of funding, inadequate infrastructure and the fear of technology replacing traditional teaching. In 2018 Zimbabwe had the second highest expensive data in Africa driven by our inability to achieve supply vs. demand. This shows the need for policies that encourage the use of information technologies in the education sector promoting internet usage in the country.

Exorbitant internet prices have made it difficult for all tertiary students to keep up with their academic work suggesting that some may find it hard to resume the academic year. Without course work students won't be able to sit for examinations and poorly researched assignments are likely to score low marks. For the country's most susceptible groups the sacrifices made by parents or guardians to send their children to tertiary institutions will not be maintainable in the aftershock of financial blows caused by the pandemic.

Students in Zimbabwe's tertiary institutions have become secondary victims of Covid-19, the short-term solutions implemented by institutions such as online distance learning have shown inconsistencies in the country's education sector. We are getting to see which institutions are better equipped and experienced than others. This also shows how lack of funding in new institutions is hampering their ability to provide quality education to enrolled students.

This is a stressful time, but this is also a time for having difficult dialogues and addressing our challenges head on as a country. It is a time when we should discuss the rebirth of the Zimbabwean education sector by prioritising digital literacy.

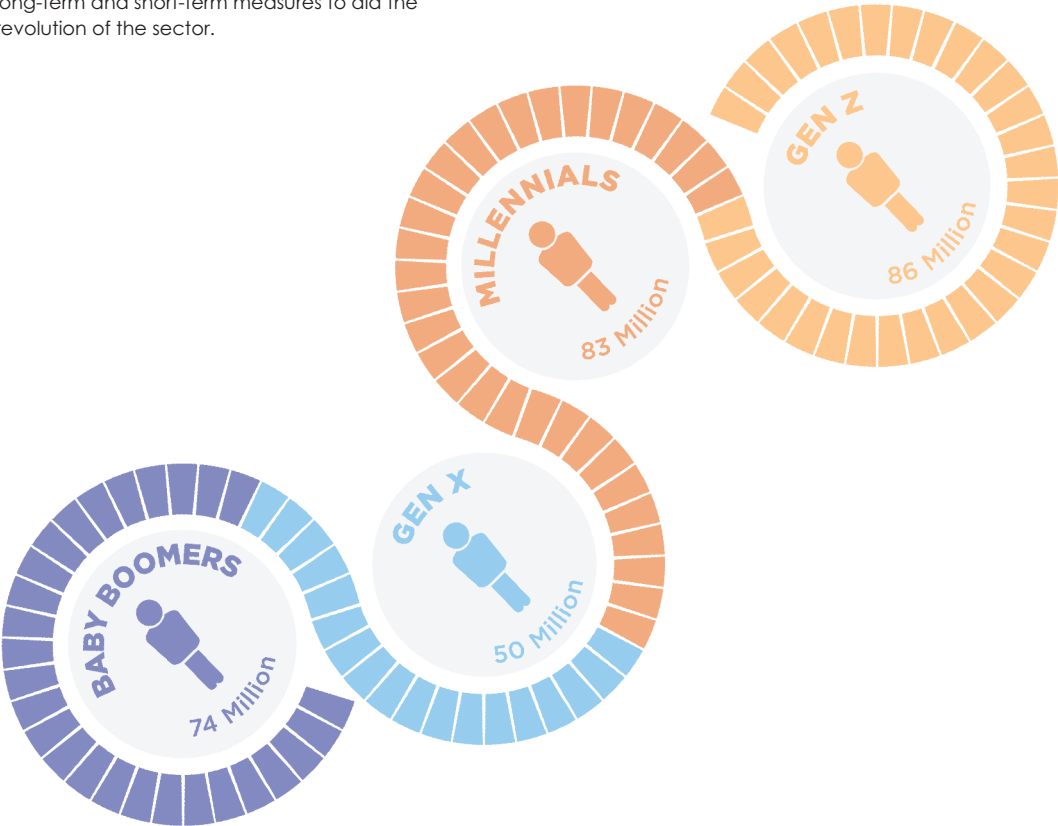


Covid-19 has become a leveller giving all countries a time to re-look at the strategies they have been implementing. For Zimbabwe it is an opportunity to examine the manner in which education is delivered and the role of lifelong education.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1. The government has to engage with tertiary institutions and support their efforts by drafting and implementing equity oriented policies and providing adequate funding.
- 2. The telecommunication industry has to provide adequate internet infrastructure countrywide. They also have to develop a framework that will make it easy for students to access educational material online, attend lectures or even communicate with lecturers making education accessible for all.
- 3. There should be a taskforce that will suggest long-term and short-term measures to aid the revolution of the sector.

**Exorbitant internet prices have made it difficult for all tertiary students to keep up with their academic work suggesting that some may find it hard to resume the academic year.**



# LOCKDOWN GUTS YOUTH-RUN INFORMAL SECTOR



**By Ernest Nyimai:**  
*Aspiring development economist and policy analyst working in the NGO sector in Zimbabwe.*

The eruption of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe has become a timely reminder of challenges faced by youth in the informal sector. What is more worrying is the state's incapacity to guarantee social protection to the youth in the informal sector. The vulnerability of the majority of youth in Zimbabwe has worsened in the COVID-19 era. The poor macroeconomic environment characterized by dropping industrial capacity utilization, hyperinflation and high levels of unemployment in Zimbabwe have been exacerbated further by this situation. The youth account for half of the informal sector, with an average salary of US\$80 which is far below the Poverty Datum Line (Newsday, 2020). This partly explains the unusually high dependency ratio in Zimbabwe. Moreover, youth in the informal sector cannot sustain the financial costs associated with COVID-19.

Zimbabwe lacks the financial muscle to provide the much-needed homegrown solutions for youth in the informal sector, thus presenting a complexity for the informal economy, whose members live from hand to mouth. As such, suspending informal activities which account for at least 50% of employment for the youth and about 48% of the Gross Domestic Product, has become a huge challenge. The youth's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product through their informal activities remains a key driver of growth in Zimbabwe. Almost 95% of Zimbabweans work in the informal sector with approximately 65% of that being the youth. The World Bank report (2020) warned governments against copying and pasting anti-COVID-19 policies as this is detrimental to struggling economies like that of Zimbabwe which depends more on the informal sector. In Zimbabwe, a day without hawking and selling means one cannot feed themselves and their family, making COVID-

19 induced measures a great barrier and yet another source of food deficiency and malnutrition. The government is failing to establish requisite social protection programmes that cater for the needs and welfare of youths in the informal sector and this has heightened poverty and the increasing arrests of youth political activists.

For most of the youth in the informal sector, it is now business as usual even under lockdown as they cannot stay home without food. For instance, vending continues to take place in the early hours of the morning, some even continue the whole day and only disperse when the police and army are patrolling. In other places, informal businesses start after 6 pm when the police are no longer in operation. Government has given leeway to farmers to sell their produce in one major source of fresh vegetable, Mbare Musika. However, the amount of traffic there defeats the whole purpose of social distancing. This has serious consequences of spreading the COVID-19 pandemic. What's more disheartening are reports of police burning farmers' produce and some of these goods belong to the youth who are into farming or vending.

Of concern, is the inability by youth to resume their operations and businesses after lockdown as most have likely depleted their capital to feed themselves, their families and they may not have the capital to start over. Since the Zimbabwe economy has been reduced to a country of retailers and vendors, the lockdown makes it difficult for youth to afford sanitary pads at the expense of basic necessities, hence leaving the girl child's needs unattended to. While the social stimulus, health and PPEs are the main priority for government, attention should also be given to issues such as family planning, anti-retroviral drugs, maternal care and other special needs for youths who are not formally employed in this period of COVID-19. Increasing crime rates and rampant drug abuse reflect the extent of the challenges that youths are going through because of the pandemic.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The government must come up with an elaborate Youth Relief Fund and Social Protection package with both financial and non-financial benefits.
2. Since it is obvious that youth vendors are still in operation even during odd hours, government, development partners and other like-minded players need to have support structures to ensure strict monitoring and adherence to guidelines on COVID-19.
3. Community innovations tailored by and for youth should be explored with the assistance from government and private sector in the production of face masks, hand sanitizers and other essential products required.
4. It's clear that strict confinement cannot work in our kind of economy hence unique anti-COVID-19 approaches or homegrown solutions need to be explored targeting youths.
5. Infection control at household level requires every household to have a basic test kit. This is also because suspected cases are recommended for self-isolation at their homes and youth can spear-head such initiatives.

# THE BURDEN OF COVID-19 ON YOUNG WOMEN IN ZIMBABWE



**By Silondolozwe Dhlodhlo:**  
*An Honours in Sociology degree graduate. She is a proponent of initiatives targeting the girl child and young women.*

Unequal relations of power which disadvantage the girl child and women, has meant that the effects of COVID-19, are more felt among the Zimbabwean girl child and female youth, simply because of their sex. Pronounced as a pandemic by the World Health Organization on the 11th of March 2020. COVID-19 has not only negatively affected the developed world, but also the developing world. Drawn from the African Union Report; on the 3rd of April 2020, there were 50 African Union Member States that had cited 7,028 cases, 561 recoveries and 284 deaths due to COVID-19. With an increased burden on caregiving and worsened cases of gender-based violence (GBV). COVID-19 is undoing the gains that decades of global and local feminist movements and activism, have achieved for the girl child and young women in Zimbabwe. Amidst this unpreparedness for the pandemic, there is an urgent need for the Zimbabwean government, the non-government and local communities to find ways to curb the impact of COVID-19 on the girl child and young women.

GBV among young people, particularly the girl child and young women, has increased in the wake of Covid-19. Young women and the girl-child have found themselves being victims of patriarchy, caused by mental tensions due to the disruption of family livelihoods. Living in confined spaces with the perpetrator, due to the limited movement that has been enforced by the government, has made them more likely and less able to resist abuse. Labelled as a pandemic within a pandemic, GBV related incidents have been growing at a concerning rate. Shamwari Yemwana Sikana; an organisation that advocates for the rights of the girl child, notes that it has dealt with 12 gender-based violence cases since the lockdown started (London School of Political Science, Lovejoy Mutongwiza,

23 April, 2020).

According to Tag a Life International (TaLI) director Nyaradzo Mashayamombe, during the lockdown, many young women were saddled with the unpaid care that COVID-19 had brought (The Herald, Roselyne Sachiti, 27 April 2020). Most hospitals have shifted focus away from other chronic diseases, implying that the girl child and young women have had to shoulder the burden of caregiving that was formally attended to by hospitals. Additionally, the shortages of basic provisions such as water and electricity which are necessary for caregiving, have made their predicament more unmanageable. This is causing a strain on the mental and physical health of young women, while also interfering with their education. The question is, as the girl child and young women are weighed down by caregiving, who takes care of the caregiver?

What is the way forward to ensure that the impact of COVID-19 upon the girl child and young women is reduced, and that they recover from the deadly pandemic?

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Address the gendered nature of caregiving at a family, community and national level. Families and communities should come up with mechanisms of redistributing caregiving between male and female, both within the context of COVID-19 and the long term. Building up on extended family ties is also crucial, as they can offer care giving assistance. Importantly, the government should recognise the girl child and young women as invaluable workers in caregiving. This means remunerating them for their service through social protection systems such as mobile money transfer. Furthermore, the government should ensure that there is availability of electricity and clean water which is necessary for caregiving.
2. Setting up easily accessible victim friendly protection centres for GBV victims is vital. This can be done through re-purposing structures that are currently not in use, such as local schools and churches as protective shelters, so that victims will not have to travel long distance to find help.

Making regular follow up visits to those who had reported incidences of abuse prior to the COVID-19, will help to ascertain if they are in danger and in need of being placed in protective shelters. In the long run, it will be helpful for the donor society, government and the community to make a concerted effort of setting up local protective shelters for victims of GBV. Moreover, they should hire local community workers who will identify victims of GBV and assist them



# WHEN OLD SOLUTIONS FAIL: WHY ZIMBABWE AND ITS YOUTH SHOULD MOVE INTO THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



**By Ishmael Bhila:**  
*Project Coordinator for  
Chatteris Educational  
Foundation*

When Covid-19 broke out in China, few people anticipated that it would affect Zimbabwe. As February 2020 approached, people began to realise its global nature. Significantly, when Zimbabwe began to act against the impact of the coronavirus, everyone worried about the extent to which the current economic structure could sustain the fight against the virus. Zimbabwe's economy, which is mainly agrarian could not possibly be trusted to resist the devastating impact of Covid-19. The coronavirus pandemic has shown us that globalisation is real, and we cannot design our economic structures based on archaic ideas. It is time for us to transition into the fourth industrial revolution- the technological revolution. It is time for youth to start participating in the global economy. Rather than seeing Zimbabwe as a carapace, youth should start seeing the world as a small and interconnected economy within which everyone has a place.

Zimbabwe's economic structure as of now is either non-existent or the most confused of any on the planet. We have a system based on the agrarian hunter-gatherer economy, without a real currency and with no secondary industry. We cannot continue to base our economy on agriculture, every economy has to develop in order to be compatible with global trends. Some argue that Japan developed using culture' but they have arguably the best technological advancements on the globe. Economies in Asia- Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Japan just to mention a few, were praised for their impeccable response to the coronavirus because they have economies whose base is technology.

A technology-based economy is essential because it is easier to coordinate because of state-of-the-art modern technologies.

Zimbabwe could be way ahead by now had we considered connecting all our cities with modern technologies. This is not just wishful thinking, countries like the Philippines have made huge strides in that sector. All systems, including health, education, transport and production are based on a technology economy. We could have better virus tracking systems had we invested in technology. Generally, with the impact of climate change one cannot realistically expect agriculture to flourish without the right technologies. Education could have continued to function online had we made internet accessible throughout the country. The efforts by former Ministers Lazarus Dokora and Jonathan Moyo to make STEM the backbone of the education sector should be applauded but the government did nothing to base the economy on technology.

Zimbabwe's economy cannot deal with any disaster because we are not moving with global trends. The global economy is changing. Liberalism and neoliberalism, in their variants, have dominated the global economy for the past century. Despite the initial success of these ideas in the 1980s and 90s in the West, they failed to be transferred into societies that had been deeply unequal particularly as a result of colonialism. The 2008 global economic slump showed that neoliberalism does not work. The strength of the technological revolution is evident for everyone to see during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic as it is the only sector that has actually been on an upward trajectory whereas rigid economies are all faltering.

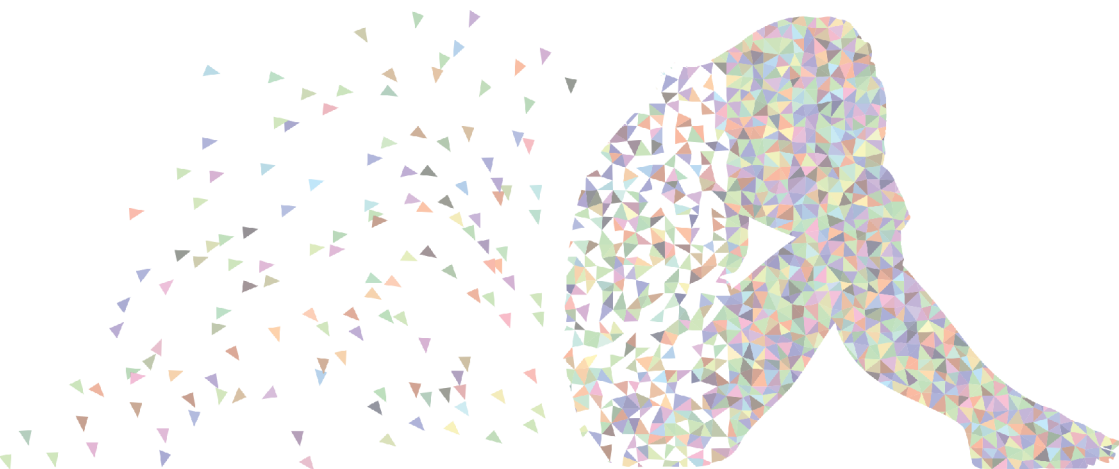
The consumerist economy that characterises globalisation has led Zimbabweans to start buying things online from across the world, especially China. Technological entrepreneurial ventures have remained unscathed by the effects of coronavirus, with technopreneurs like Jack Ma (Alibaba), Bill Gates (Microsoft), Josh Bezos (Amazon) and Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook) among others having contributed more to the fight against Covid-19 than most countries.



Social media platforms have become sources of wealth for so many people and yet Zimbabweans have not yet managed to become part of that movement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Government and youths should start understanding and participating in the global economy, and ultimately the technological revolution.
2. Local tech companies should be leading the revolution together with the government, ushering the country into a new era.
3. All social and economic sectors should be based on technology.
4. For youths, if our country cannot provide that, go elsewhere, you have a better chance of contributing to the livelihoods and technological advancements of your people by way of remittance.





By Tatenda Magetsi

Education is not a privilege! Education is a fundamental human right for all and is essential for everyone to make the most of their lives. This is especially true for those, like me, who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Education has fundamentally shaped my arguments in this write-up. To demonstrate the impact of Covid-19 on education in Zimbabwe, I will focus on the quality of teaching staff, accessibility and affordability of the technological equipment and the cost of mobile data. The central thesis of my write-up is that the impact of Covid-19 on education is, by and large, a social calculus.

The upsurge of Covid-19 resulted in social distancing and lockdowns being implemented by many countries, to plank the curve of transmission of the virus. The dramatic changes came with dramatic requirements, for example, that schools should resort to virtual learning platforms. However, our Zimbabwe schools are far from being adequately prepared to roll out such measures, particularly given the state of our economic meltdown. A good share of our teaching staff, particularly in secondary, high school and universities are not proficient or equipped in the use of modern technology, especially computers, to conduct online classes effectively. Neither are the students equipped with the capabilities for online classes. They lack not only the necessary computing skills, but the technology needed for online classrooms.

I had a conversation with a brilliant friend of mine, a Zimbabwe Open University student and Secretary-General of the student council, and he reiterated how unprepared most lecturers were to conduct online classes. Noteworthy, this concern only applies to those who have access to the technological means to conduct and access

classes. Those in the rural areas are left in increasingly difficult circumstances and without access to education. They are the collateral damage of a system poorly prepared to handle these shocks.

This Covid-19 pandemic should, therefore, act as a reminder of the importance of systems strengthening in our different ministries. As Paul Farmer (2001) rightly articulated, 'infectious diseases [such as Covid-19] are biological expressions of social inequality.' Hence to redress their ramifications, we need to revisit the structural inequalities which produce and reproduce these inequalities. Investment in education should cater for differences in social contexts. The Zimbabwe education system has systemically excluded those in rural areas, and yet in this digital era and the 4th Industrial Revolution, we cannot survive as a country if we leave anyone behind. It is high time the government revolutionised education in rural schools. The government should revisit the grey areas in the new curriculum, and investment in education should focus on those areas where there is most need. For me, this is the best way to ensure sustainable development in Zimbabwe. In my World Bank 2019 #Blog4Dev essay, I reiterated the need for us as Africans in general and Zimbabweans, in particular, to create cosmopolitan citizens and individuals who are highly adaptive to the technological developments of the artificial intelligence (AI) era. This can ONLY be made possible by investing in improving access to the necessary education infrastructures, particularly technology and ICT infrastructures.

On 5 May 2020, Econet Wireless was the main news headline, after increasing data tariffs by up to 225%. Before this, Forbes in 2019 reported that Zimbabwe is the most expensive country for data where a gigabyte averages \$75.20, 289 times as much as in India. Ridiculously though, Zimbabwe has one of the world's worst Human Development Index, due to unresolved socio-political issues. This disparity alone is worrying. Yet at a time during which online learning is the only accepted form of learning, data tariffs shoot up by 225%.

How will those students who live in residential areas where life was unbearable before the scourge of the coronavirus cope? Will they be able to afford the data to access online learning material? These are the questions the government should grapple with.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. This is the time for POTRAZ, the Ministry of ICT and the Ministry of Education to forge complementary synergies and cushion students. The right to Education is not only a right when things are "normal" (whatever that is); it is a right every time, including and especially now.
2. I recommend that our disaster response plans as a country (if we have any) should ensure such inviolable rights as access to education are incorporated into such plans. The benefits of our education system should not just be ad-hoc and circumstantial.

Succinctly, pandemics are indicators of social inequality. They are at their worst when vulnerability is high, and resilience is minimal, so the best way to resist their scourge is through strengthening our systems. There is a need to revisit our education system and resolve the structural inequalities thereof, make education an opportunity for all, not an opportunity for some.



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