



Zimbabwe Children's Group on the Sustainable Development Goals Report



Children engaging in a focus group discussion. Credit: Cynthia Chimbunde/Save the Children

1.0 Introduction

In 2015, all countries adopted the/an agreement called the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Under this agreement, world leaders promised to work together to create a world that was fairer, more prosperous and sustainable for the benefit of current and future generations. As part of the 2030 Agenda, 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) were agreed after asking for ideas from people around the world on what needs to be done to make the world a better place. The Republic of Zimbabwe was amongst the countries that committed to the Agenda 2030.

It must be noted that the SDGs are aligned to the different international and regional instruments that provide for the rights of children which include the UNCRC and ACRWC. Children's rights are the human rights of children (anyone under 18): they help to make sure all children are treated fairly and looked after properly, so that every child can grow up in a happy, healthy, fair and safe environment. Children's rights include the right to go to school, the right to share your views, the right to live without violence, and many others. All children have the right to be heard and for their views to be taken into account, at all levels, including the UN.





As Zimbabwe submits its Voluntary National Review on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Zimbabwe, children shared their voices through this report whose objectives are: -

- a) Gathering the views of children and provide a review on the progress made by the government in the implementation of the SDGs.
- b) Communicate the impact (progress and challenges) of government's efforts in empowering the children of Zimbabwe to realise their rights.
- c) Exercise their right to participation, be heard and freedom of expression as given in the Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe.

It must be noted that as Zimbabwe submits its VNR report, the status quo still requires government commitment to investing in all the 17 SDGs for improved quality of life for the people of Zimbabwe especially children in their different vulnerabilities. The Human Development Index (HDI) value in 2022 was 0.550 ranking 159 out of 193 countries. Although becoming a medium income country, the national poverty rate in 2023 was 39.8% with the MPI showing a value of 0.110 Birth registration is low at 49%, The stunting rate is 23.2%, UNESCO 2024 brief, notes that Zimbabwe is experiencing a learning crisis 396 out of 625 Average Harmonized test scores, violence against children is high, although statistics are not readily available 34% of girls are married before the legal age of 18, and climate change has heightened the vulnerabilities of children. The government has made recognizable efforts which include enactment of progressive legislature and policy instruments. However, public investment in child rights and enforcement of laws remain critical.

Methodology

A Children's Scorecard was used to collect data amongst children. The scorecard is a way to gather important evidence directly from children by children on progress on child rights as specified and the SDGs based on their own experiences. It focuses on 6 SDGs which directly impact the everyday lives of children. Information collected using this toolkit can be shared with local or national leaders, and the UN so that children's views are incorporated into processes to measure progress, hold governments accountable for their promises to children and help shape laws and policies. It is aligned to the People's Scorecard which is used in the adult group consultations.

A total of 353 children (177girls; 176boys) were consulted in five provinces i.e. Manicaland, Matabeleland South, Midlands, Mashonaland West and Harare. The children engaged were of varied categories i.e. Junior parliamentarians, Junior Councillors; children in residential care; refugee children; children at risk of engaging in irregular migration, children with disabilities and children living with HIV. Children took the lead in engaging with their peers to come up with the information that was used to draft this report.





For the purposes of this study, 6 SDGs were reviewed by children which have closer linages with children's right and these are.

SDG		What's the aim?
15	No poverty	To make sure countries end poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030. Poverty denies children their fundamental rights to good nutrition, health, water, education, protection and shelter – undercutting their ability to realize their potential. (This corresponds directly with Articles 6, 19, 26, 27 & 28 of the UNCRC)
2 1000	Zero hunger	To end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. (This corresponds directly with Articles 6, 19 & 27 & 29 of the UNCRC)
3	Good health & wellbeing	To ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. (This corresponds with Articles 6, 17, 19, 23, 24, 25 & 27 of the UNCRC)
4 document	Quality Education	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. (This corresponds directly with Articles 2, 28 & 31 of the UNCRC, among others)
5 IIII	Gender Equality	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (This corresponds directly with Articles 2, 19, 34 $\&$ 36 of the UNCRC)
16 MAIL ASTER MESTERNA MESTERNA MESTERNA	Peace & justice	To end violence, including violence against children; and to make the world safer and more peaceful through laws, justice, freedom and access to information. People including children should have a say in decisions that affect them. (This corresponds directly with Articles 6, 13, 15, 17 & 19 of the UNCRC)

Limitations

- 1. Minimal time was allocated towards conscientizing children of the engagement thus not many children were engaged across all the provinces.
- 2. Comprehension of SDGs was lost in translation by some children as the available materials were only in English.
- 3. Presence of government representatives might have resulted in children failing to express their lived experiences for fear of retribution in as much as child participation and safeguarding principles were adhered to.





2.0 Key Findings

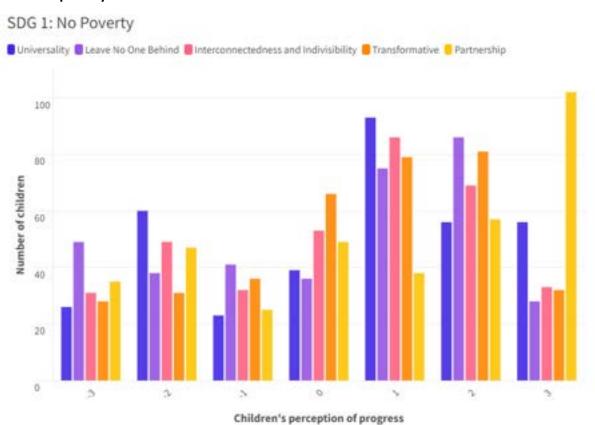
- 1. Children consulted applaud the government and people of Zimbabwe for ensuring a peaceful country which has no notable conflicts.
- 2. The economic crisis and Climate change impacts, although not reviewed, are the major factors derailing the progression of the implementation of SDGs thus impacting on enjoyment of children's rights in Zimbabwe.
- 3. All the SDGs had varying ratings which highlights the disparities amongst the different communities and categories of children.
- 4. Violence against children remain high risk factor to the improved well being of children as they still experience it within their communities.
- 5. Stabilisation of the economy, investment in child rights, ending violence against children and ending corruption were key asks from children across all the SDGs.





3.0 Goal Review

SDG 1 No poverty



Progress

The table shows that regarding the No Poverty goal, children noted some progress made to address poverty with all principles having high scores of positive 1, 2 and 3. Children noted that the Government, partners and private sector are working together in providing services such as food assistance e.g. grain distribution and cash assistance for vulnerable households. Provision of food and agriculture inputs to vulnerable families and introduction of income generating projects and trainings on sustainable agriculture projects e.g. pfumvidza in rural areas augmented the incomes of vulnerable families ensuring children have food and access to other basic services i.e education, decent shelter and clothing. clean water and sanitation through WASH programmes, good health through programmes such as mass drug administration for immunisation, education through BEAM, protection through putting in places laws e.g. Marriages Act, gender equity and assisting those affected by natural disasters. Government and other private actors have Provided of shelter to less privileged children i.e. orphans and refugee children being accommodated in institutions of care which improved the standard of living for children in need of shelter. Data collected showed that there is notable progress towards addressing poverty. Responses on minor's individual assessments were that a few people are left out, people benefit from poverty alleviation





initiatives and people are working together in ensuring no poverty at community and household level. Participants' own narratives indicated that communities are into income generating activities that are being observed by the minors in context. They also indicated that the government, organizations and community members are thriving together to ensure that poverty is minimized. They also showed that child rights in line with alleviating poverty are in place to address such at household and community level.

Challenges

Several economic, social and structural challenges have been noted in the data collected. Other than the low-lying negative pivot of the scale comments from the children showed that efforts to address poverty are being affected by lack of capital, lack of access to service providers, lack of financial literacy, climate change and institutional barriers affect the efforts to ensure zero poverty.

Some children highlighted that there are still some gaps in alleviating poverty as some children cannot access basic services because there is not enough resources availed e.g. BEAM is not paid in time and cannot accommodate all children, not enough medicine in clinics, and children are living and working in the streets, expensive clean/ alternative energies with children in the rural communities not accessing new technologies that enhance quality of education.

The situation has been worsened by inflation leading to high prices for basic commodities. Drought has contributed to impoverishments leading to conflicts in communities as there is double dipping and favouritism when aid is availed. Children in high density suburbs are at risk of cholera due to poor water and sanitation services. There are no employment opportunities for the majority poor in urban high-density suburbs.

In terms of vulnerable populations like persons with disabilities the following was noted: -

- Income generating project funding is not readily available for families of children with disabilities who are the majority poor.
- Social grants from social welfare are not benefiting all children with disabilities.

Recommendations

Children gave the following recommendations as critical to achieve the No to poverty goal and these are: -

- Stabilise the economy so that there is no inflation and prices remain low and constant. Employees will be able to provide basic services for children.
- Avail more resources to vulnerable families and be transparent in selection of beneficiaries.
- End corruption across all systems especially on protection of children.
- Feed of 0 to 5, nursing mothers, the elderly and the chronically ill.

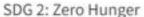


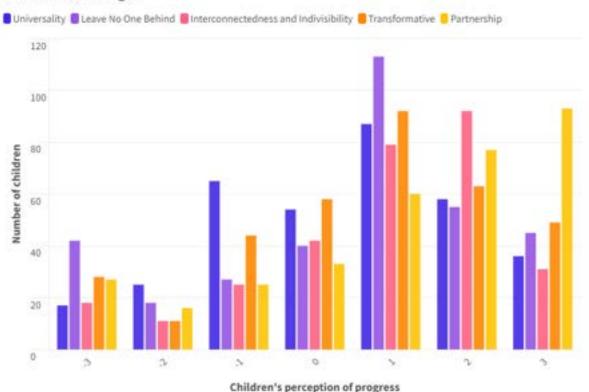


- Drill more bore halls, rehabilitate broken down bore halls, improvement of bore halls system through the installation of solar system. Construction of more piped water systems.
- Food for all should be done to improve the welfare of communities.
- There is need for school feeding programs for children.
- The government to provide children with bicycles in order to have easy access to school.
- Empowering of caregivers and communities through food production programme in this drought season.
- Create more employment opportunities for the youth. Invest in income generating projects.
- Create employment.
- Sinking boreholes to ensure access to water for irrigation.
- Decentralization of service providers.
- Offer employment opportunities to persons with disabilities and their caregivers.
- Establish economic empowerment grants and support programs for families of children with disabilities.
- Involve and consult children with disabilities when designing poverty reduction strategies.









Progress

There is some notable progress in alleviating hunger in Zimbabwe. Partnerships have been a major principle advancing the SDG. The Government and Partners who include CSOs and private actors are working together in providing food, water, and nutrition, agricultural inputs and equipping communities with sustainable agricultural practises. From the analysis done it is plausible to note that most children reported that initiatives towards achieving ZERO Hunger are being met. Data from the evaluation showed that efforts to address hunger inclusive of many community members. These include the agricultural inputs schemes, sustainable agricultural initiatives like pfumvudza, cattle and goat rearing initiatives. The children presented that they have been progress in initiatives to ensure zero hunger as communities are now aware of community support systems which include grain provision and cash transfers. Children highlighted that they have not seen children suffering from kwashiorkor in their communities. Most children in urban areas bring food to school.

Challenges

The following challenges were highlighted as still being experienced by children noting the notable number of children who rated the no progress to very large reduction in progress :-





- There is not enough agricultural produce to cater for all children. The country has been
 experiencing droughts due to climatic shocks affecting families of vulnerable household e.g.
 persons with disabilities with the majority are poor and have no consistent income even
 from government grants. In towns, there is a notable increase of children involved in child
 labour through begging and especially children with disabilities who are being exploited and
 missing on school.
- Basic food prices are high and there is provision of only grain by the government which does
 not cater for a balanced diet. In addition, the urban population is not catered for food aid yet
 there is urban poverty.
- There are still children going to school hungry thus affecting their learning processes. The coverage of food aid is limited and as a result some individuals still face the plight of hunger. These children are at risk of exploitation.
- Irresponsible parents who sell aid which they would have received from different partners to cater for other personal needs e.g. beer resulting in increased domestic violence.

Recommendations

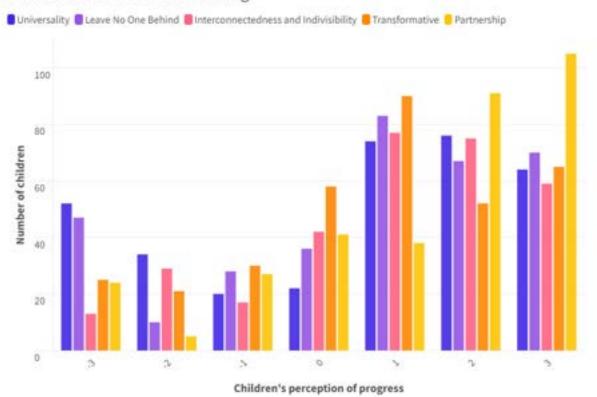
The children recommended the following as critical for the country to achieve SDG 2

- Continue investing in sustainable commercial and subsistence with innovative solutions to drought farming. Provide capital and start up resources and provide training on suitable initiatives in line with the agricultural region e.g. in Mangwe children suggested cattle rearing projects.
- 2. Consider urban agricultural interventions so that food is readily available and not expensive.
- 3. There is need to target vulnerable households e.g. Initiate income generating projects for families of children with disabilities and also nutritional programmes for such.
- 4. Water harvesting initiatives e.g. dams and borehole drilling is important so that communities can grow variety of crops to feed children.
- 5. Introduce school feeding scheme in schools so that every child can be assured of a meal.
- 6. Food aid initiatives should cover all households considering the poverty levels in both urban and rural communities.





SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing



Progress

Partnerships have driven the implementation of the goal through construction of health facilities, nationwide mass drug administration programmes and awareness initiatives that are sometimes run in schools. These have greatly helped on the access to health specifically immunisation of children. In addition, these have helped in raising awareness on hygiene practices which have helped children with information on managing the spread of diseases such as cholera and typhoid. Adolescents are being educated on sexual reproduction health. Pregnant women and lactating mothers have access to antenatal care. HIV patients have access to ARVs including the adolescent boys and girls who are also participating in care groups to improve their well-being where topics on adherence are discussed e.g. The DREMAs project. Awareness campaigns on stopping drug and substance abuse among children are being conducted. Assistance Medical Treatment Orders (AMTOs) are available for vulnerable children e.g. children with disabilities. WASH interventions are promoting access to water through drilling of boreholes, hygiene promotion through messaging and improving sanitation facilities especially in rural areas. Schools have access to water and toilets. There has been the presidential scheme on drilling boreholes in both urban and rural areas. All these initiatives help children observe good health and wellbeing.

Challenges

However, Universality and Leave no one behind principles are dragging behind as some children do not have access to good health and well-being. The challenges highlighted by children include: -





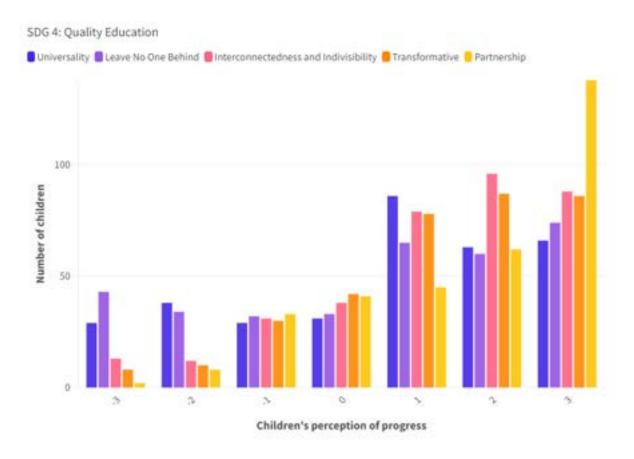
- Very high cost of health care. There are inadequate resources to support new health
 institutions i.e. medicines, tools and equipment, lab infrastructure. Shortages of medication
 at hospitals and rural clinics. In some clinics there is no basic medications for patients.
 Medication for children with disabilities is not available for example sunscreen lotions. There
 are very few doctors and specialized hospitals. Hospitals are relying on donations and these
 donations are at times a once off thing and there are no long-lasting solutions are in place.
- Some rural communities still walk long distances to access primary health care, and some
 have no district hospital to manage complications. Pregnant mothers have challenges during
 childbirth as there are no ambulances to take pregnant mothers to district hospitals for
 complications and must pay transporters who are expensive.
- Public clinics and hospitals have no sign language interpreters and access to health to health by children with disabilities is limited.
- The health care works are not working as efficient and effective as expected and there is a lot of brain drain.
- Some children have no access to healthcare due to their family's religious beliefs and social norms which do not promote the use of modern medicine. Some encourage child marriages, and these teenage mothers are at high risk of death during delivery.
- Adolescent SRHR information is still a challenge to access because of limiting government
 policies and social norms on the message around use of condoms thereby possibly increasing
 the risk of adolescents contracting HIV and other STIs including teenage pregnancies.
- Drug and substance use among children is very high with the country on the verge of losing all the youths to the problem.
- In terms of WASH services, challenges include non-collection of refuse in urban high density suburbs increasing risks of contracting cholera, and typhoid as children play in the dumpsites. Water is not consistently available especially in urban areas. There are limitations to access associated with the boreholes drilled in urban areas and in rural areas like Beitbridge. These challenges affect other children's rights noting that children are usually send to fetch water and will walk long distances impacting on their learning outcomes and face sexual abuse risks.
- Shortages of toilets within other urban wards as they use communal toilets in other locations in old locations, the available toilets are not disability or girl friendly.

- More resources should be channelled towards access to primary healthcare ensuring
 hospitals have basic equipment, medication and motivated staff to attend to the needs of
 children.
- Decentralisation of services is critical to ensure all communities have access to basic services e.g. health, transport, WASH, food as they contribute to good wellbeing.





- Strengthen law enforcement to end the drug and substance trading in the streets. Stop corruption perpetuated by the drug lords.
- Have in place clinics that are open specifically for adolescents to seek information and to
 access healthcare is important. As much as HIV awareness is very prevalent, some children
 born with the virus have a lot of questions and discussions that they might want to have
 without the influence of their parents.
- Learn from countries which have in place systems that contribute to achieving good health
 and wellbeing especially enjoyed by children e.g. a free health care system especially for all
 children. Improve WASH services e.g. Regular collection of rubbish bins by the city council,
 improve supply and hygiene promotion.



Progress

The SDG has been progressing well with Partnerships being an enabling principle for the achievements. Children noted the following developments made towards achieving the SDG: -

• The enactment of the Education Act of 2020 helped in making parents sent children to school.





Noted efforts from government and non-governmental organisations in improving the
quality of education. Government initiatives include Basic Education Assistance Module
which is paying fees for vulnerable children. Development partners are improving
infrastructure in schools and the payment of fees and provision of stationery. Such initiatives
include DREAMS, SAGE among others.

Challenges

- Basic education is not free, yet it has been a government commitment.
- Children in some rural areas still walk long distances to access schools. There are limited schools especially secondary schools to accommodate all children. This contributes to children dropping out and risk of engaging in sexual activities.
- Increased number of school dropouts due to vulnerability, child pregnancies and unwillingness to learn. The relevance of education is diminishing with entrepreneurship being on the top. E.g. a child would prefer to pan gold and earn money than going to school.
- There is inclusion and exclusion errors on selection of BEAM beneficiaries.
- Shortages of ICT facilities especially in rural areas
- Infrastructure in some communities is pole and dagga with no adequate WASH facilities,
 some schools have no proper ECD centres with adequate resource and stationery shortages.
- Lack of specialised schools for those children with disabilities. Almost all schools have no
 well-equipped resource centres to cater for the needs of different categories of students. The
 programs are not accommodating all children and it was highlighted that there are children
 of school going age who are not enrolled in school due to different reasons.
- Teacher pupil ratio is still very high. Some classes have up to 45 students and this impacts in quality of education.
- Whilst corporal punishment has been abolished, there is still increase in child delinquency as seen by use of drug and substances even in school premises.
- The current partnerships seem to be biased or concentrating on one gender only for instance DREAMS program is focusing only on girls and there are other programs that focus only on those with high intellectual capacity leaving out learners with special needs. This is widening the knowledge gap between the two groups.

- Government must uphold its commitment to free basic education.
- There should be improved infrastructure that matches the current world trends in both urban and rural areas. There must be equal opportunities for all genders. In as much its more





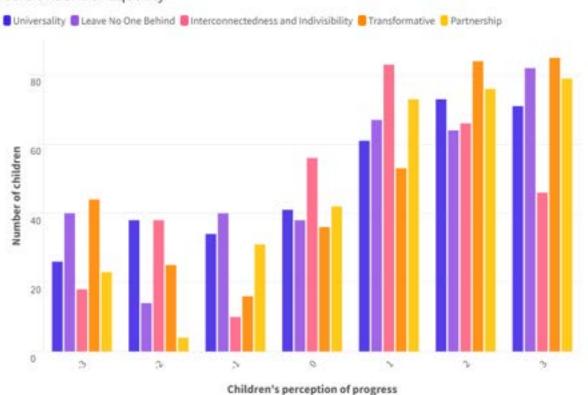
on the positive there is need to improve infrastructure in school that is disability friendly. Government must construct more secondary schools.

- End all forms of stigma and discrimination on persons with disabilities in the school
 environment i.e. infrastructure, stationery materials assistive devices and teachers must be
 friendly for children with disabilities. Government must ensure all schools have disability
 friendly environment. Government should make it mandatory for teachers to learn brail and
 sign language.
- Holding the parents to account on sending children to school. Alerting or approaching
 parents and guardians who reside with children of school going age who are not enrolled in
 school or dropouts about government programs that support their children to be in-school.
 Re-emphasize the importance of education.
- Introduce school feeding programmes to promote attendance.
- Law enforcement on issues of child labour especially in farm and mining communities. This
 includes on ending substance and drug use by children and ending child marriages. The
 government should stop corruption that deviates access to justice on such cases.









Progress

There have been notable achievements in the reporting period which include the passing of the Marriages Act which abolishes child marriages, empowerment of girls through various initiatives e.g. educational support. There has been awareness raising on girl child empowerment and their various needs including addressing period poverty are being met. There are girls representing in the Junior parliament and councils with the 2021 to 2022 child president being female whose major thrust was on improving the welfare o children with disabilities.

Challenges,

However, there are some challenges noted: -

- Girls are still vulnerable to sexual exploitation to reach their milestones at all levels e.g. educational grades and opportunities e.g. scholarships.
- Boys are being excluded in most of the programs as they focus on the girl child mainly. In the
 process of addressing disparities, they are creating disparities instead.
- There are limited platforms to address needs for both boy and girls.
- Girls living with disability and those living in the streets are segregated from some programmes.



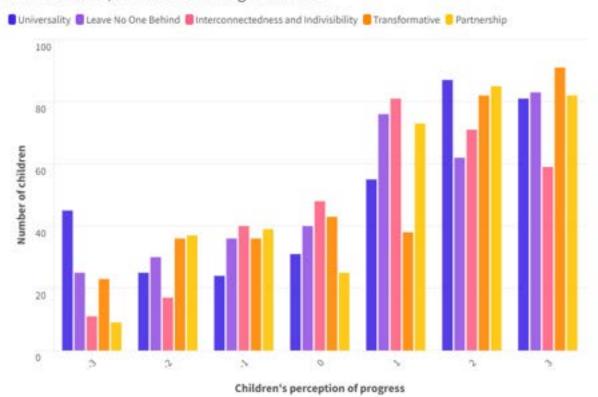


- More awareness in the community on issues related to gender equality.
- Construction of community based vocational centres for both girls and boys to equip them with technical skills.
- Create more opportunities that involve women and also, children with disabilities.
- Recommendations: Boys in the group anticipate that there might soon be a gap on the boys as most programmes target girls only and no mention of
- It was suggested that both the government and NGOs should sensitize children in various settings about gender equality.
- Partners offering education support should start by promoting equality and not only focus on one gender.
- Financial literacy services for girls and women. Introducing Mikando as one of the alternative development paths initiated by women to microfinance the economy.





SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions



Progress

The children highlighted notable progress in the maintenance of peace in the country as there is no war. There are various initiatives that the government participates in e.g. COMESA and SADC which have advanced children's rights through various bilateral agreements. In addition, the following were noted as achievements in their communities.

- Legislation that promotes protection of children in place e.g. Marriages Act of 2021;
 Children's Amended Act of 2023.
- The Department of Social Development and Victim Friendly Unit are in place.
- Awareness campaigns by government departments e.g. ZRP, Department of Social Development, Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and Women's affairs in partnerships with NGOs on children' rights.
- Most children agreed that the country is peaceful with policies that also favour the different people such as persons with disabilities and refugees.
- Birth certificates are being issued for free and that signifies the functionality of our institutions.





However, there were some challenges that were highlighted which include: -

- Child abuse cases are high and there is minimal reporting. There is increased number of sexual abuses within the communities. Rape cases are not being reported. Perpetrators are not being arrested and they instil fear to the victims.
- Sign language usage is minimal in courts yet children with disabilities are most vulnerable to abuse. Access to justice is compromised in such cases.
- There is minimal enforcement of laws. Some of the perpetrators of abuse are not being arrested as they are still seen within the communities. Seems there is corruption at all levels with lack of evidence being given as cases thrown out of court. Corruption is high and some children believe that access to justice can be made difficult if you are an ordinary citizen. Some cases still go unreported in communities thereby denying access to justice.
- Whilst the Department of Social Development and Victim Friendly Units are in place, they do
 not have adequate resources ie. Financial and resources to meet the needs of children in
 need.
- Community structures responsible for the promotion of child rights are not giving maximum support to ensure protection of children e.g. traditional leaders, community child protection committees, teachers etc.
- Many children within the district i.e. Mangwe, Bulilima and Beitbridge do not have birth certificates.
- Police patrols are very limited at rural wards thereby allowing perpetrators of abuse to continue harming children.
- There are no programmes to support survivors of abuse e.g. psycho-social support services.

- Improved awareness raising on child rights especially protection.
- Ensure access to confidential reporting mechanisms. Community reporting structures should report all cases regardless of relations.
- Stiffer penalties for perpetrators of abuse and banning of religious sects that promote violence against children.
- Improved financial support to victims and witnesses.
- Increased police patrols in both urban and rural wards
- Losen laws to allow children born outside Zimbabwe to register for birth certificate.





4.0 KEY PARTNERS

The Government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare authorised the research for the contribution of children's voices into the Voluntary National Report. The research was led by the Department of Social Development with technical and financial support from development partners. Appreciation goes to the following partners who supported children in data collection and drafting of the report: -

Child Protection Society

Save the Children International

Simukai Child Protection Programme

5.0 Key QUOTATIONS FROM CHILDREN

- Munhu anorepa asi pasina mazuva tomuona akutofamba mucommunity justice yacho iri papi? (A person sexually abuses a child but within a few days they would be released, where is the justice).
- In my community, some children cannot afford to pay school fees and BEAM *yacho haibhadhare vanoguma vadzingwa chikoro* (the Basic Education Assistance is not paid and they end up being sent away from school).
- Isu tinorarama nehurema, mari yacho yekutibatsira haiuye and zvikoro zvacho hazvina maresources ekushandisa. (For us children living with disabilities, there is no assistance that comes from the government and the schools are not disability friendly.)
- Hurumende inongopa chibag chete pasina muriwo, even muzvikoro. Plus, kupinda palist rekupiwa chikafu kunonetsa unofanira kunge wakalinker. (The government gives only grain with no relish, plus to be registered for food aid it is difficult, you need to be linked to someone).
- **Takapromiswer free education hatisati taiona.** (We were promised free basic education, and it hasn't been fulfilled).
- Esigabeni sakithi, abantwana abanengi kabala ncwadi zokuzalwa ngoba bazalelwa eGoli In our community, many children have no birth certificates because they are born in South Africa
- Uhulumende lenhlanganiso asebenzisana lazo kumele bancedise abantwana ngokupheleleyo.ukubhadalela abantwana imali yesikolo(school fees) kuphela kakusizi uma ekhaya kungela kudla njalo umntwana engela mabhuku okubhala esikolo. Yikho libona amankazana amanengi esezithwala(Partners and government should help a child holistically. Paying fees only does not help if there is no food at home or enough stationery at school. That's why you see many girls getting impregnated)





- ⁱ ZIMBABWE MPO (worldbank.org)
- ii Specific country data | Human Development Reports (undp.org)
 iii Multiple Indicator Survey Report 2019
- ^{iv} Zimbabwe Livelihoods Assessment Committee 2024
- ^v <u>Zimbabwe (worldbank.org)</u>
- ^{vi} Zimbabwe Girls Not Brides