

Life and Survival in Southern Africa

STORIES BY COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS ON THE UBUMBANO VOICE PLATFORM



UBUMBANO **VOICE**

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1 Background

The fellah, the unemployed (wo) man, the starving native does not lay a claim to the truth; they do not say that they represent the truth, for they, (and the context within which they speak) are the truth

FRANTZ FANON

Story telling is a powerful political tool that has been shown to improve the impact and efficacy of activism strategies. Writing your own story is empowering and unleashes imagination about viable solutions to problems when they are presented in black and white. Writing a story lends to the writer some distance, objectivity and perspective; and to the reader it gives insight and understanding into a specific situation.

The [Ubumbano Voice App](#) is a free platform that encourages activists and community participants to share their lived experiences with the world. The stories are directly presented from the writer – unedited and un-curated – this is a space for activists and community members to represent and interpret their own lived reality, to represent their truth.

This publication collates and analyses stories written during the lockdowns and restrictions that was a response to the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The pandemic upended the lives of millions in the Southern Africa region (and globally) with grave implications for people's social, economic, health, environmental, and

technological well-being. The stories collated here are about the challenges communities faced because of the virus: the extended lockdowns that negatively impacted and in some cases halted economic activities; access to resources necessary for survival; food insecurity; the inequalities exposed by the pandemic in education; and the denial of human rights enabled by states of emergency or disaster implemented in the southern Africa region. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the depths of inequality, poverty and unemployment in the region. The stories also tell a tale of innovation, resilience and strength of will in a bid to survive and thrive.

The stories posted to the Voice App have been classified thematically, and each section preceded by a brief analysis and commentary. These categories are:

- Climate Change, Poverty, and Food Security
- Survival and Economic Justice
- Human Rights
- Technology and Access to Education

The analysis is neither academic nor literary. It is instead an attempt to draw meaning from the stories told by the writers about their lived experiences.

ACT Ubumbano is a loose network of organisations, churches and community groups. It provides space for activists to reflect on their social justice practice, and to see where they can support community struggles by listening more closely to the voices of those who fight for communal dignity.

Introduced in 2017, the [Ubumbano Voice App](#) is a tool through which community voices are given a safe space to share their lived experiences in their own words on a platform that augments their voices. It is also a platform for community activists to share resources, and information, and to support local communities and organisations in their struggle for change.

This online platform consists of a WordPress website and an Android smartphone app.

2 Climate Change, Poverty, and Food Security

Overview

As countries across southern Africa assess the cost of the COVID-19 pandemic and its attendant lockdowns, it's clear that the socio-economic impact has been devastating. In South Africa alone, Statistics South Africa¹ reported that almost 23,6 per cent of South Africans in 2020 were affected by moderate to severe food insecurity, while almost 14,9% experienced severe food insecurity². According to HungerMap LIVE, approximately 4.2 million people living in Zimbabwe were estimated to be facing insufficient food consumption at the beginning of March 2023³. The World Bank estimated 60% of Eswatini to be living below the poverty line in 2017, and UNICEF estimated 46.3% of children in Mozambique to be experiencing multi-dimensional poverty⁴. This reality is most likely the case in other southern Africa countries as well.

The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing when all people have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy lifestyle at all times. Food insecurity occurs when people's access to food is minimally adequate and they have trouble meeting their basic needs, while

severe food insecurity occurs when there is a critical lack of access to food.⁵

Covid-19 related lockdowns curtailed informal economic activity, effectively closing the door to the ability of poor people to work and fend for their families. This has very quickly thrust a number of previously self-sufficient individuals and families into food insecurity and, in some cases, severe food insecurity. A gloomy picture of this is painted in the story *The Poor Bear Brunt of Lockdown*.

Inadequate social grants and social security systems could not cater for the needs of all affected families. To make matters worse, what resources were available by governments and non-governmental institutions in the form of food parcels were stolen by corrupt government officials (*Food Parcels for Poor Pillaged*). The politicization of food, not a new phenomenon in Africa, saw food being given to only those who carried party membership cards (*No Party Card – No Food*). Is it any wonder then that people vote with their stomachs? No help was forthcoming from the police, which further adds to the mistrust that citizens already have for duty bearers such as politicians, the police, and soldiers.

1. <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=15273>

2. Ibid

3. <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-food-security-and-markets-monitoring-report-february-2023>

4. <https://www.unicef.org/media/131906/file/2023-HAC-Mozambique.pdf>

5. Ibid

The situation was worse for undocumented migrants as they did not have the legal documentation to access official government assistance, and so relied solely on NGO help (NGOs Step in to Address Food Insecurity and Malnutrition; African Diaspora Forum Assists Vulnerable During Lockdown). Add to this political unrest in places like Eswatini and Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, the global energy crisis fuelled by the Russia-Ukraine war, and the electricity crisis in South Africa and you have a recipe for disaster.

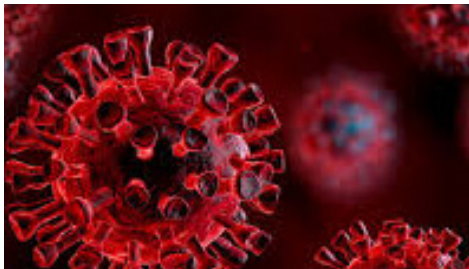
The increased intensity of weather phenomena like drought and flooding was mentioned in several stories, highlighting the fact that climate

change, land degradation and perceived land shortages are impacting food security (Climate Change is Real, Land degradation worrying the Penhalonga Community).

From South Africa to Malawi, from eSwatini to Zimbabwe, these stories illustrate the impact of these crises at a micro-level. They reveal the extent to which COVID-19, food shortages, lack of timely government grants and changing climate patterns are affecting lives, especially those of women and vulnerable groups. Importantly, embedded in these stories is evidence of resilience of affected people that offers just a glimmer of hope in a grim situation.

The Stories

“The Poor Bear the Brunt of Lockdown



When I heard that our South African government extended the lockdown by two weeks, I was so devastated and I wished I could sleep and never wake up again.

The first thing that came to my mind was about my neighbour who is staying next to the dumping site and making a living by begging around Empumelelwe eMalahleni and he cannot afford to buy food during the lockdown. The issue that is so touching to me is the fact that he is old enough to get a grant but his not even getting it. I called one of my leaders asking about the food parcel but she just said I have to wait until next week, which means the old man has to wait for next week to get something to eat and to me it is heart breaking knowing exactly that I can't even spend a day without eating.

It hurts me because we have people making offerings to pastors instead of feeding the poor and I still thank God for giving us a leader who is choosing people's lives over people's personal interests because the economy can recover but lost lives can never be replaced.

“Food Parcels for Poor Pillaged



Lock down did not happen because it was supposed to but it was due to an unforeseen virus that left many people jobless, without food and caused people's lives to be on standstill. People who thought of the poor not just about themselves organised food parcels for the poor, the vulnerable and the needy so that they can eat together with their families.

However I am disturbed by those who receive these food parcels that instead of taking these food parcels to the relevant people, they help themselves with the same food. These are selfish people who can afford to buy food themselves but they deprive the poor.

What should be done when those who are supposed to distribute don't do the distribution, what should be done when food parcels are found in the back of the car, what can be done when food parcels are distributed at night in the dark for the few or even sold, what should be done when the same food parcels distributed according to structures of the political party and what should be done when the problem is not yet contained?

“ Diversion of Food Parcels Meant for the Poor Cause for Concern



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“ Who Will Police the Police?

Whilst the lock down is slowly eased I've seen that people can do anything to survive even if it means robbing others. I have also realized that some of the police officials are corrupt taking bribes from illegal gamblers. Gamblers are a group of people who stand on street corners pretending as if they don't know each other so that they can scam passers-by.

It is worrisome because it is the police who should be ensuring that people do not gather There are also reports that police are harassing foreign shop owners demanding money, food among other things and one shop owner stated that the same police officers came threatened them with arrests if they did not give them what they wanted.

Meanwhile, I have been following food parcels theft story... Recently, I heard that a Councillor had his car filled with the same food parcels that were supposed to have been given to people in Vusimuzi. He was caught in Limpopo and he was arrested for theft then released after paying 5000 rand bail. Someone who declined to be named said that the same person took some of the mobile toilets that belonged to the people who stay at informal settlement in Vusimuzi to rent them out in Limpopo.

The integrity of our duty bearers is now questionable.

“Children Resort to Selling as Hunger Strikes



Since the start of the locked down, I have realised that children play everywhere with no problem at all. To my surprise yesterday

morning I witnessed three kids between the ages of 9 and 14 moving door to door selling tissues and steel wool without putting on face masks. When I asked whom the stuff belong to they said that they were helping their unemployed mother to generate income. They said she is engaged in an informal business which has since been affected by the lockdown and her returns cannot even buy these days makes a small profit not enough to buy a bag of mealie meal. The older one said that they had since registered for food parcels and to date they haven't received anything and they now miss going to school.

On another note, I am worried by people who seem not to care about their health and safety or that of others. I am not sure whether it is out of ignorance or not if men sit together drinking home brewed alcohol from the same container denouncing the lockdown rules and regulations.

Meanwhile, the police became visible as of yesterday after many days of being inactive around Vusimuzi section in Tembisa as I witnessed some law enforcement agents announcing making an announcement that they will arrest those moving around without wearing masks

“ No Party Card – No Food



Day 20 of the lockdown presented a new form of challenge for communities. In Phokeng Ward 4, 5 and 7 wards which are all wards of the ANC. The councillors issued food parcels but most food parcels did not reach the most needy households. The method used is that community members who attend ward meetings are prioritized as well as those who hold ANC membership cards.

The struggle is real as some depend on asking for food from their neighbours who would have benefited.

No one knows how the food parcels are rolled out and the provincial authorities are silent.

“ Politicisation of COVID-19 Food Relief



I have been talking to people i know in Diepkloof and Riverlea with regards to the current situation since lock down. Many confessed that hunger is the major problem since many people last worked before the lock down was announced. There were however challenges associated with food parcels that were supposed to be distributed to people who are in need and Sophie not her real name alluded that one needed to register first for him or her to be able to get the food parcels but to date people who have registered to be helped with food parcels have not received instead few people received and these are card carrying members of a certain political party.

In Riverlea, people have been waiting long for the food parcels I'm advised by Suzan not her real name that food parcel donations were brought in Riverlea but the problem is the few parcels that were brought only benefitted a few and when Suzan send a text message to the person in charge of the distribution in their ward asking about the few food parcels that were intended for the community of Riverlea, instead of the person in charge to explain why only few food parcels were brought, the person took Suzan off the list and said the minute her text message was received her name was deleted immediately.

“ NGOs step in to address food insecurity and malnutrition



Internally displaced children in Bulawayo have in the month of October begun benefiting from the engagement of civil society organizations and other non-governmental (NGOs) that have stepped up to address the rise in food insecurity and malnutrition.

The initiative came about as a reaction to the negligence by social welfare and local authority, especially when the impact of

COVID 19 had worsened their already dire state. The collaboration of various NGOs and CSOs has set up soup kitchens for the children in their communities as a reaction to their welfare and communities being overlooked and not catered for in the food aid programs even after COVID-19 has ravaged communities.

“ African Diaspora Forum Assists Vulnerable During Lockdown



African Diaspora Forum (ADF) has met with different communities to help vulnerable with food parcels. On April 20 April, ADF leadership was at Dobsonville Soweto to handover food parcels.

ADF Spokesperson Amir Sheikh Hussein said that When the lockdown was announced by President (Ramaphosa) we decided to assist the local communities and we are very happy that Sowetan migrants' business owners together with ward 47 & 48 councillors will hand over the food parcels to them. Sheik Hussein added that 300 households received food parcels each worth R500 in Meadowlands and surrounding areas further

more we have to distribute 1000 food parcels to migrants that reside in Mayfair and Inner City of Johannesburg.

Ward 48 councillor Tshepo Nawane concluded by saying that this is what being an African is about, living together and assisting each other, someone who didn't have food at all today will have something to eat today.

“ Social Justice Organisation Join Hands to Help the Needy in PMB



PMB Covid 19 Concerned Collective is an alliance of social justice organizations that have joined forces to help and support the poor and vulnerable communities in fight against corona virus during the nationwide lockdown which was announced by the President of the Republic of South Africa. The organizations such as PACSA, CREATE, Midlands Community Initiative (MCI) and Arise & Shine Community Organization. The PMB Covid 19, using the principles of SEE, JUDGE & ACT took a collective decision based on the needs of the communities with uMgungundlovu District to mobilize support from family members, colleagues from each respective organizations, the business community and community members to support the food parcels drive initiative with an aim to provide food for the needy families.

The food parcels under the #sharewithothers was popularised through social media (WhatsApp & Facebook) and has since distributed 50 food parcels to families in need during this lockdown in areas such as Trustfeed, Swaymani, Thembalihle, Azalea, Edendale, Cinderella Park and Sobantu. This initiative gave us an opportunity to interact with the community members and to observe the behaviour of people during this lockdown in trying to curb the spread of the corona virus. Most of the precautions that are meant to be followed such as social distancing and washing of hands are seem not to be followed in most of the above mentioned communities that we visited. We are also planning to raise awareness among these communities on the measures they need to take.

“ Beneficiaries bemoan late payments of Elderly Grants in Lugongolweni

Beneficiaries of Elderly Grants in Lugongolweni in the Lubombo Region cry foul over late payments of the grants. The elderly grants are paid after three months and beneficiaries are affected by hunger since the cost of food has gone up gradually. These old people are now finding it difficult to take their medication on empty stomachs and find themselves in situations of borrowing money which they are unable to pay back because even the money they get after three months is too little. Some of them stay with their grandchildren yet they cannot afford to support them. They suggested that if the government can at least pay them on time, their problems can be minimised.

“ No joy for pensioners



Since the beginning of the lockdown, people have been struggling to get their social grant where we saw elderly people queuing for hours. It is now September, 5 months since lockdown but things have not gotten any better. Some stay in the queue while hungry and this is a life threat to our elderly people. There is no social distancing and this is a huge risk as some can get the Corona virus. I spoke to Ramaisela Mohlala who told me that she was in the queue since 5am in the morning. It was around 12:30. The pension money should be taken back to the villages again to save lives of the elderly. While I was standing with Ramaisela I saw people running after a young woman and when I ask what was happening the people who were there said ‘ an old woman got her grant and she(the young woman) took the money from her’. This showed how our elders are not safe being away from home to collect their social grant. She was caught and forgetting the social distancing rules people went to see her.

“ Wasteland turned into vegetable garden



A community waste land that lied for many years behind shops in Palm Springs in the Vaal is being successfully put into good use to ensure food security during lockdown as it has been turned into a vegetable garden. This piece of land used to be a home for rats for year and the community used to dump waste whenever it was not collected by the local authority. The bad odour and rats from the dumping site affected people staying close by for years but now the piece of land has been cleaned for use on something that will benefit people because they will at least have fresh food from this garden. This garden was started by an old man together with a couple of guys who were called nyaope boys because they were addicted to nyaope drug that is still terrorising young boys and girls in townships. Today the community of Palm Springs in Section H is happy to have this vegetable garden rather than rats and what makes even the community happier is that the boys don't steal anymore as they are now of great help to the community.

“ Climate Change is Real



The dry spell experienced in the last few days explains it all! It is a rare occurrence for Zambia, worse off for the farmers that by December 15, a number of them would have not planted. It is however common that by this time around, crops have already germinated depending on the amount of rainfall received. However, the opposite is the case. Many farmers have not yet planted but have their fields ready just in case the rains come.

Gilbert Habaalo, a peasant farmer in Lusaka West is well aware of what is happening to the weather pattern and follows the guide by the Meteorological department to the later.

I grow maize, soya bean and sunflower during the rainy season using conservation farming- an approach in which soil management practices are reduced to a minimum, thus preserving the soil properties and nature biodiversity, Mr Habaalo said.

Additionally, Mr Habaalo's method of farming involves minimum soil disturbance, crop residue management where he leaves the previous crop residue in the field or planting a cover crop and crop rotation practices. His fields are therefore ready for planting and once the rains start, he will be able to plant and depending on how the rain would be, he may plant early maturing seed variety. He says when the meteorological department projected a dry spell for 10 days, I knew this is what climate change has brought with it- changes in the weather patterns over a long period of time.

Mr Habaalo says the weather pattern in Zambia has over the years changed drastically and is mostly characterised by drought or flood.

We may be experiencing drought this farming season but not all hope is lost yet because there is still time to grow crops and mature. It is important for farmers therefore to be aware of what is happening so that informed decisions can be made in good time, he says.

Apart from Mr Habaalo, Kelvin Malama, a small holder farmer of Chongwe district promptly cultivated his two hectares piece of land when the area received the first rains. When the area received the second rains, he was certain that the rainy season had come and planted maize but alas, the dry spell crept and the maize crops are nearly dead.

I misjudged the rain pattern because of inadequate information. I was not aware there was a circular from the meteorological department warning of no rains for more than two weeks. I however, still have the chance to replant, Mr Malama said.

While some farmers are advantaged than the other in the manner the access information of weather patterns, It is not the first time that Zambia is experiencing a dry spell that eventually affects the farming season as a whole. The country experienced dry spell in January 2018, mostly in the southern parts of the country and generated anxiety in the country and raising fears that Zambia might be food insecure in 2018.

According to a release by IAPRI, the concerns were largely directed towards the southern regions of the country, which are Western, Southern, Lusaka and some parts of Eastern and Central Provinces. During that time, IAPRI reported that some stakeholders contended that there would significant reductions in maize availability in the 2018 marketing season, and argued in this regard, that Zambia was headed for a disaster.

However, there was a high likelihood that the northern parts of Zambia were poised for a good harvest. The Zambia Meteorological Department recently projected a dry spell to continue for ten days in most parts of the Country. The Department further urged

farmers not to plant any crop until there is adequate moisture and further advised farmers who are not practicing conservation farming to continue preparing land and to apply basal dressing fertilizer at planting time.

Farmers who are not practicing conservation agriculture (Minimum Tillage) should continue with land preparation and take advantage of the little moisture in the soil from the rains received so far. It is strongly advisable to apply basal dressing fertilizers at planting time to ensure vigorous crop emergency and good root development read the bulletin.

The department disclosed that the dry spell experienced in the last days could have led to reduced soil moisture, which is likely to affect germination and have therefore advised farmers not to plant any crops, apart from Cassava until the rainfall improves in the Country.

The Zambia Metrological bulletin released to ZANIS, stated that most rainfall activities were confined to the northern and Western parts of the country and that the rest of the country recorded less rainfall with high temperatures due to atmospheric wind circulation that suppressed cloud development and rainfall.

Most of the country experienced less rainfall due to atmospheric wind circulation patterns that have suppressed cloud development and rainfall activities over the country read part of the bulletin.

The department has also urged farmers to look out for any pests and disease outbreaks, especially the fall armyworms which are likely to increase as a result of the dry spells being experienced.

The information from the meteorological department only reached a handful of farmers in the country like Mr Habaalo while others are still wondering what is happening to the skies. Climate change is here and farmers need to have access to information for them to plan well.

“Land Degradation Worrying the Penhalonga Community



Land degradation, food insecurity and water pollution in the Mutare River has led to loss of animal and human life in the gold mining village of Penhalonga in Manicaland, a province in eastern Zimbabwe.

Two people have died; as have a number of cattle, and the river has shifted its course more than 10 times in the past 5 years. These

social problems have led to the suspension of the mining company, DTZ-OZGEO (Pvt Ltd) in Penhalonga by the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), an agency of the climate and environment ministry.

In 2014, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mines and Mining Development made a resolution to terminate the company's mining license. The mine left massive land degradation, and since that time there have been illegal gold mining activities happening there, says community member Lloyd Sesemani

According to Sesemani, the community of Penhalonga has never benefited from DTZ-OZGEO mining activities. The community was not consulted before mining operations began in 2007, and since then there has been no meaningful contribution to services such as road maintenance, and the building of infrastructure like schools and bridges.

There are rumours that the government of Zimbabwe has engaged a mining company from Belarus to restart mining operations in Penhalonga. We are not against any mining company operating in our community, but we are just against having history repeating itself. With DTZ-OZGEO several families lost farming land which was their only source of livelihood and most of them are now living in abject poverty, says Sesemani.

The community has met and outlined the issues to be addressed before mining activity can resume. These include meaningful consultation with all stakeholders around issues like development in the community, ensuring local procurement, and ensuring the employment of local people in the mines. The mine must have an environmental impact assessment certificate from the EMA. And there needs to be meaningful compensation paid to those who have been affected by operations.

“ Women in Mining Speak



Women miners and community monitors from Runde Rural District council gathered at Pote hill Hotel in Zvishavane, Zimbabwe on 6

March 2019 for a workshop convened by Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation to deliberate on challenges faced by women in mining especially on safety issues. Women managed to speak out advocating for safety and peace at work as well as peace at home and in communities for development. Only where there is peace, women can benefit and develop in the mining business and the communities at large enjoy their natural resources. The issue of national security is also a barrier in the development of women in mining business, and law enforcement agents take advantage of women who are financially weak. At that workshop Sophia Takuva managed to conscientise women on the importance of speaking out and the power of their voices using the teaser If a tree falls in a forest and no one saw or heard it fall, did the tree fall?- that she learnt at Ubumbano Voice workshop and the conscientisation process came out a success.

“ Mgazini Youths Lament Loss of Land



The youths of Mgazini chiefdom under Chief Sicunusa is lamenting over sale of land that belongs to their forefathers and fathers.

People from outside the chiefdom of Mgazini, Mankayane in Eswatini are flooding the place and buying land directly from the chief without following proper kukhonta process. As a result, land is given to outsiders and young men are starting to wonder where they will build their homes in future if the land of their forefathers is taken away from them. The failure to follow the proper process by the chief and the people makes it difficult for the community elders responsible for land allocation to stand by the affected people.

3 Survival and Economic Justice

Overview

These are stories not just about survival but about livelihoods and the quest for dignity; the determination to have a productive existence despite daily frustration, pervasive hopelessness and despair.

Although some of the stories speak to the devastation wrought by the pandemic, the majority aptly characterize the longstanding crises of unemployment, unfair labour practices and government ineptitude, especially with regards to social grant programmes. We are told of young women forced into sex work in order to survive in societies that criminalise sex work; and of women who are coerced into accepting what are dubbed carpet interviews, or sex for work. This undermines the gains made in promoting gender equality and women's financial independence. These stories are told in the context of ever worsening energy and power crises in the region that have led to long periods of power cuts, job losses and rising cost of living.

The stories also spotlight the struggles of small-to-medium enterprises and the 'informal sector' that play such a big part in the region's economies. These informal enterprises are plagued with unending red-tape and regulations with corrupt officials demanding bribes when struggling entrepreneurs do not have the

necessary permits. As these economies open up in what is hoped to be a post-Covid recovery period, there is little likelihood that small and informal businesses will return to pre-pandemic levels, for various reasons including some of the following:

- Small businesses were unable to make the shift online as easily as bigger business did. Those that have do not possess the marketing and advertising muscle of large corporates to complete effectively for sustained profitability.
- The rate at which economies in southern Africa are recovering from lockdowns and other restrictions is proving inadequate to respond to the worsened economic situation of their citizens.
- University graduates feel disheartened and let down by an education system that has left them unemployable within undeveloped economies with little to no job creation.
- A pessimistic, apathetic attitude has permeated even the communal fibre of many communities and this paints a very bleak picture.

Despite this, human resilience and the quest for survival remains strongly in evidence. Despite the immense challenges we also find in these stories great innovation and creativity in the daily pursuit of survival.

The Stories

“Quest for Survival as the Economic Crisis Escalates

People have been through so many challenges during the lockdown. Retrenchment, unemployment, loss of income, water crisis, no schooling, Gender Based Violence, hunger, etc. and this has caused lot of people to stand up and start businesses by selling products and services.

I was at Jane Furse Plaza and I realized that there is more people who are selling products. People have struggled during the past months and no one likes to live in poverty or go to bed with an empty stomach.

I also listened to a guy who was selling bananas and avocados, his advertising skills were so good that I realized that people have skills but need a good Samaritan to help them to be great business people.

“Unemployment Driving Sex-Work in Matsapha

A number of young girls in Matsapha, Mbuleni, decide to go to the streets and informal beer selling spots to sell their bodies just to have (kudayisa umtimba) something to eat.

According to a source, most of the girls are qualified teachers and they have been unemployed for more than 10 years now.

The writer managed to interview one of them and this is what she said:

You may judge us for what we do to put food on the table but you don't really know what we are going through as young people, being unemployed for more than 5 years. When you try starting a business you are blocked by all means but we have families to feed. I have 10 siblings that I am supposed to be feeding and I am also taking care of my mom who is also on medication, so where am I supposed to get the money to do all these things? The only choice I have is to go to the streets and do what I am doing and it's better than going to bed with an empty stomach.

The crisis of unemployment is a huge issue because most people especially the youth then find themselves in difficult situations and they are not immune from Gender Based Violence and HIV.

“Tuck shops livelihoods for Harare urbanites

The increased economic hardships currently being experienced in Zimbabwe has forced many residents to be creative for survival. This is also being fuelled by the high unemployment rate obtaining in the country. A visit to most of Harare high density suburbs is welcomed by tuck shops. Some are located at the front of households, some on open spaces and some along the streets. Some tuck shops are even operating at shopping centres competing for customers with retail shops.

Tuck shops are one trade that has become a source of livelihood for many. Most tuck shops sell grocery products while some are into cosmetics and even second hand clothes. Tucks shops also sell airtime and cooking gas. Tuck shop operators purchase their goods from wholesalers in bulk and sell them mostly at black market rate.

Tuck shops are convenient because of their relaxed operating hours. They are close to residents as compared to the traditional retail shops. Some shops offer credit to known and trusted customers.

Most people operating tuck shops have managed to lead decent lives. This source of livelihood has enabled them to pay school fees for their children and rentals. In actual fact this has become one of the most sustainable sources of livelihood that many people have embarked on.

“ Informal Traders Lament Too Much Regulation



Bulawayo informal traders say the only way they can continue to survive and sustain their families is to continue with informal trading.

Triffonia Mthunzi said that: In Zimbabwe we have too much regulations that impose costs, so many taxes and because of these regulations it leads to corruption chioko muhomwe for their business to be formalized.

As business women we are not motivated to formalize because we don't have incentives for formalizing our business. If our government does not do away with some of the regulations that are not necessary and bureaucratic, the informal sector will continue to rise because we have families to feed, said Mthunzi.

“ No Permit – No work

About 5 city officers stopped by a guy who sells potatoes on the street corner outside the library and municipal offices and requested that the guy produce a work permit for selling potatoes. The officers said that if he didn't have the permit, they will confiscate his potatoes but one thing that caught my attention is how calm the guy was and how he was responding to the officers and I suspected that he did not have the permit.

He then pretended to be calling someone to bring the permit for him and the officers left saying they are coming back but they did not return.

“ Small Business Hard Hit by Lockdown



For smaller business owners who are not operating online, times like these might be a setback for their businesses.

Maybe people should be sponsored with data to run their businesses online or given a better option to do business. Yes, government is assisting but more needs to be done for the sake of the country's economy and improving lives.

People who were doing door to door business are suffering. What should be done to help them? Will they be able to make enough money to take care of their families? Will government be able to offer enough food parcels to make sure they do not go to bed on empty stomachs?

“ Street vending, a major source of livelihood for struggling Harare residents



The economic hardships that are being experienced by Zimbabweans have resulted in older adults swarming the streets of Harare in an effort to make a living out of vending. Street vending in the pathetic economic environment is a relief to the suffocating economy as it creates jobs, not only for older adults around the city but also for the youths who most of them are drowning in drug abuse as a stress reliever. Street vending also provides alternative source of income particularly for women and provides low cost products mainly to low-income groups in the city who are trying to make ends meet in an economy where jobs are not available.

The increase of vending stalls is a clear sign of the high rate of unemployment yet only in June this year 2021, the City of Harare demolished vending malls, threatening the survival of the small scale businesses. The sad part is the city council workers take all the stuff the elderly sell when they catch them unaware, leaving the majority of them at a sad loss. The City council should have been sensitive and considerate enough and provide acceptable alternatives to the vendors and all relying on the informal sector, before demolishing the vending stalls. In as much as vendors should operate in designated places, the economic environment is not so encouraging hence they end up operating in the undesignated places which they are now destroying. As for the recent demolitions, the city council should have given a clear and long notice period at least than catching the elderly poor and vulnerable unaware.

Vendors have a right to find economic opportunity in an environment where opportunities to do so in the formal sector are scarce. As much as safety and order are important, the livelihoods of hundreds of people (elderly) who are relying on selling for the livelihoods of their immediate and extended family are equally important or else people are relegated to extreme poverty, considering most of these elderly, especially women are widows who will be looking after grandchildren who have parents drained in extreme poverty due to the high unemployment rate amongst the young adults. The destruction of vending markets is just but a huge blow on these elderly vendors

who are surviving on a hand to mouth basis. It continues to widen the gap between the rich and the poor, especially in the context of Covid-19, where lockdown is the new normal widening the gap between the rich and poor.

Vending has helped older adults to deal with stresses that are associated with being idle all day in homes. In a dialogue with the elderly woman, a vendor in Budiriro, she said opportunity permitting, she wants to be employed but in the meantime vending is the only option she has, to sustain her family. The community they live in should offer free space for them to keep them occupied during the day hence meeting their social needs and also economic needs. Depression affects the elderly mostly, due to idleness, so the fact that they now establish small scale markets outside their home gates is therapeutic and should be embraced by building them legal vending stalls.

This calls for regulatory authorities and government to put in place legislation and policies that recognize street vendors as key players in the country's national economy. The suggestion is that local authorities prepare and provide space for the elderly vendors before they demolish vending structures with no alternative solutions to people who are only trying to make an honest living out of their vending markets. The City Council should engage with vendors to come up with immediate solutions whilst working on permanent and sustainable strategies. Governance structures in local authorities should be strengthened as well

and transparency equally with accountability should be improved, to enhance revenue collection which the Local Authorities need. Political interference and corruption should be arrested in order to achieve this.

“ Women Resort to Brewing Beer for Income

Many unemployed single women in Ikemeleng have started employing their skills they acquired from their parents for survival. These women have now started brewing traditional beer and sell it to the community members for income.

In the past, people in the community used to drink home brewed beer only when there were cultural ceremonies. Now it is a way of making money. People are desperate for alcohol. Unfortunately, some of these women do not have the skills to brew beer. Their beers often cause diarrhoea and one person was even admitted in hospital due to diarrhoea caused by the ill-brewed beer.

“ Lockdown Stripping Women of financial independence



The lockdown has stopped the women from

being financially independent. Apart from that, the means of survival is becoming extremely undermined.

At the end of the day their families are starving and their major worry is they will die of hunger and not coronavirus.

Apart from being stripped of their financial independence, women are also now exposed to gender-based violence since they are forced to spend more time with their male counterparts which they are not used to.

“ The Blesser Phenomenon: Boyfriends with Money

Many of us rely on our boyfriends with money for basic things. Some continue toxic relationships simply because the man can provide for their needs

Young women date older men, because they are not working and they say at least they will be taken care of.

A man buys a woman drinks at a tavern or even buy them food. Then they think that they are already dating and that they woman is his property.

“ Fake Marriages with Foreign Nationals

Women in our township link up with foreign nationals. Foreign nationals take advantage of the woman's state of poverty. They ask them to marry them and they promise them that they will give them an amount of R400

per month. This fake marriage means that they women cannot apply for a child support grant. They use them to get permits. They marry them and then pay them a small amount of money.

“ Failure of the Education System



We, we're all made to believe that education is the key by our parents and the government but reality is that's not true you go to school waste +/-15yrs with the hope that when you finished school you'll be employed and you'll take care of yourself after graduation you become excited and say I won I have the key with me when you go knock on the door, the door slams on your face and the world is looking up to you to excel but how do you excel when you have a key that doesn't open the door in front of you? You become frustrated in the sense that Boom you choose a short cut that takes you to the deep end which is drugs just to shift your focus and think it's an easy way. You don't have any more answers to your peers because they dropped out from school but you kept going until to the last bit (graduation) they still say the same thing that you thought you were better than us but look now as you educated but we are in same WhatsApp group we all not working despite the fact that you are a

University graduate we drink together we might as well look out for blesser (sugar daddy) to buy us alcohol and drugs we feed our cravings in exchange for sex.

“ The Poverty Traps

Poverty is more than just a lack of income or not working. Lack of resources causes one to think passively, includes shame and limited access to education.

Our parents can hardly afford money for us to go to school. We end spend weekends in the taverns. We sleep with different men in exchange for alcohol and money. We end up contracting diseases and having children we cannot support.

“ Poverty and Unemployment

Poverty and unemployment are major factors undermining young women. When families are not able to provide the basics, young women are left to search for financial support.

Poverty plays a big role, it makes us young women want to escape it to survive it even it means selling our souls. We have no idea what human dignity, dignity is foreign to us.

We have no money for even the basic stuff such as sanitary pads

Many young women are forced to assist their parents, especially when the father is not present, to look after their siblings, to provide food, school uniforms and other needed things.

“ Reclaimers hard hit by lockdown



The life threatening COVID-19 is heavily affecting the working class people and migrants. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and his cabinet tackled the pandemic crisis in a different way which left out other South Africans and migrants with no protection from the government. Those left out include reclaimers, street vendors, self-employed, which were not part of the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), the National Disaster Benefit Fund (NDBF) will be the one paying workers that their salaries will be affected during the COVID-19 pandemic and it will be a monthly payment of up to R3 500 for the three months.

African Reclaimers Organisation (ARO) is a Johannesburg organization of informal reclaimers from Johannesburg's streets and landfills. ARO has close to 6 000 reclaimers who are waste pickers in Johannesburg, some of the workers are migrants from Lesotho which makes it difficult for government to cover them as some are undocumented migrants.

Steven Leeu from ARO said that “We have been knocking in all doors of government to be assisted during the pandemic to help the waste pickers with protective equipment but they failed. Our members are dying of hunger during this Lock down because they are not working and not benefiting from the government. We have been asking for donations so we can be able to provide our workers with food parcels and other products during the Lock down.”

Landfills reclaimers had to be stopped working during the COVID-19 as they do not have protective equipment and government fear that they will spread the virus in their communities. According to Leeu, Marie Luis Landfills cite that they had to leave their materials in the landfill and denied access to take their materials to the buyer as buyers also don't have permit to buy those materials. This issue affected workers in Johannesburg and Pretoria particularly. Therefore ARO has approached Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, Barbara Creecy to tackle the issue of the reclaimers but she refused the request for reclaimers to be an essential service during the lockdown, however the Department of Environment and Coca Cola South Africa in association with ARO managed to distribute food to 2000 Reclaimers across Gauteng, they are also looking to reach more reclaimers. South Africa which is on the Lock down on 27 March 2020 has forced many businesses, schools, churches, universities to close down to stop the spread of COVID-19.

4 Human Rights

Overview

Human rights violations tend to be exacerbated by conflict and crisis. The stories in this section highlight the human rights violations that occurred before and during the pandemic, including exclusion of the LGBTQ+ community because of the stigma entrenched by heteronormativity, and discrimination against people living with disability.

Global efforts at ending extreme poverty through the Sustainable Development Goals, includes an acknowledgement of internet access as a human right. In 2016 The UN noted that access to the internet needed to be anchored in a human

rights-based approach, and that it should *be open, accessible, and nurtured by multi-stakeholder participation*.⁶

In 2020, as countries implemented stringent measures to tackle COVID-19, life moved online, and the internet became the only way in which education and work could continue for millions worldwide⁷. As life moved online, millions of disadvantaged people were left behind. The internet was also a crucial resource for finding and sharing life-saving public health information about the pandemic, making it a vital part of accessing the basic right to health. The internet has now become both an enabler for the enjoyment of other human rights, while also increasingly becoming a basic right itself⁸.

6. <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/internet-access-basic-human-right/> Accessed 23/02/23

7. Ibid

8. The United Nations has called for universal basic access to the internet by 2030

The Stories

“LGBTQI+ Community Bemoans Exclusion



There is a complaint by some minority groups of systemic exclusion perpetrated through laws, policies and cultural practices.

The LGBTQI community has decried that there should be gender markers that distinguish populations who do not identify themselves with the traditional genders of male or female, such as transgender. That population has complained that lack of this has led to their members not being able to access basic social services such as loans and IDs, passports among others because they do not identify themselves as either male or female.

To rectify this, Nolwazi Cele, from Eswatini Sexual and Gender Minorities, has suggested that authorities must put in place laws and policies that allow for a broad identification and not exclude other groups, in line with the non-discrimination clause in the country's Constitution.

“Bad Roads – A Nightmare for People Living with Disability



The wheelchair has been repaired several times due to bad terrain at the northern part of the country at Buhleni in the Hhohho region.

Sipho Dlamini who is a wheelchair bound person and other wheelchair users within the community including those who are visually impaired have problems navigating their ways to their various destinations. This is an everyday occurrence because the roads are not fixed to enhance accessibility by people with disabilities. Regular rehabilitation of the roads to ensure that they are user friendly.

“Access to the Internet a human right now

Access to internet has become more important than ever in Eswatini as we have witnessed the shrinking of civic space. It should be noted that access to internet is now a human right. With shrinking civic space, the expression of ideas, freedom of speech is critical to the realization of human rights. One of the solutions is to ensure equitable

access and affordability by introducing free internet in rural areas, schools and hospitals amongst many. Further, regulating internet to be affordable is needed and this must also include regulating MTN & Eswatini mobile.

“Community Health Care Workers Discriminated Against

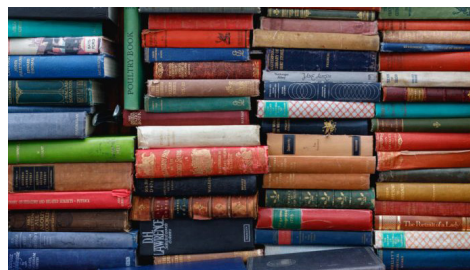


Community Health Care Workers (CHWs) play an important part in the delivering of health care services to communities. CHWs have been crucial in health care system through various programmes including testing and preventing HIV and TB, treatment adherence as well a health promotion.

Sisanda Kulima, a CHW from an informal settlement called Lawley Clinic in Johannesburg, Gauteng has been a CHW for more than 10 years in which she participated in fighting for CHWs rights that were violated by the Department of Health. The Department of Health has been running around with the issues of making the CHWs permanent. Meanwhile CHWs are earning a stipend of R3,500 which Kulima said it is not enough for them because they risks their lives, visiting ill people in the communities daily without enough protection from any diseases.

The Department of Health announced that CHWs will be assisting in tracking and tracing COVID-19 cases but they didn't give assurance of safety to these workers. It is unclear how the department is going to protect the CHWs in a situation with the shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE). We have started with the screening for COVID-19 on 15 April 2020 at Fine Town in Johannesburg, said Kulima.

“Parental Power Workshop



On the 23rd of October 2020 Dobsonville Human Rights Advice Office together with Equal Education hosted parental power workshop at Dobsonville police station. Parent power is an initiative by the DG Murray Trust and its aim is to empower parents to act as champions for their children's education in South Africa, parents or guardians are the first educators when it comes to their children regardless of parents educational background and parents are the most important people or adults in children's life's. These workshops aimed at empowering parents to know their rights at Schools no matter their primary education and these workshop's priority was to help or show the importance of being involved in their kids' education whether or not they are biological parents, community members from different organisations were

present even members of the school governing body from different schools or areas around Dobsonville, snake park and near places where present.

“ NGOs step in to address plight of internally displaced children in Zimbabwe

Internally displaced children in Bulawayo have in the month of October begun benefiting from the engagement of civil society organizations and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have stepped up to address the rise in food insecurity and malnutrition. The initiative came about as a reaction to the negligence by social welfare and local authority, especially when the impact of COVID 19 had worsened their already dire state. The collaboration of various NGOs and CSOs has set up soup kitchens for the children in their communities as a reaction to their welfare and communities being overlooked and not catered for in the food aid programs even after COVID-19 has ravaged communities. The government through the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare in conjunction with relevant departments must ensure that the welfare of internally displaced children is fully catered for.

“ Discrimination of Nambya and Tonga workers rock Hwange ZUPCO depot

Workers at the Hwange Zimbabwe United Passengers Company (ZUPCO) Depot are living in fear of being fired from work at any time. A top official on the premises has

refused to work with local people citing language barrier challenges. Hwange is situated in Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe and the primary languages spoken there are Nambya and Tonga.

Speaking to one of the employees who refused to be named for fear of victimisation, she said He said he cannot work with Nambya and Tonga people because he does not understand their language. This resulted in the termination of contracts for many local people who were employed by the Public Transport Operator at the end of September 2021. More allegations have been raised against the said official as he is being accused of not only discrimination but sexual harassment as well. Apparently sources say that he openly brags about how he is untouchable because of his high connections. Anyone who challenges his actions risks his or her contract being terminated as the official will decline to renew the contract.

A member of the workers committee, Mr N (not real name) said We are honestly tired of this issue and we wish neutral people can intervene and assist. We have tried our best but we cannot risk our jobs as well. We will be happy if this matter is resolved and people return to work.

5 Technology and Access to Education

Education is not the learning of facts but the training of the mind to think.

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Overview

A key thread that weaves through the stories in this publication is the acknowledgement that digital technology lies at the heart of contemporary education provision and business. The stories also point to the inadequacy of the public education systems that are struggling to keep up with artificial intelligence (AI) and the 4th industrial revolution.

We were all made to believe that education is the key by our parents and the government but reality is that's not true; you go to school waste +-15yrs with the hope that when you finished school you'll be employed and you'll take care of yourself after graduation you become excited and say I won I have the key with me when you go knock on the door, the door slams on your face and the world is looking up to you to excel

but how do you excel when you have a key that doesn't open the door in front of you?

The stories in this section depict the cold reality of inequality that many children live with and paint a gloomy picture of crime, drug abuse and teenage pregnancies within what should be a healthy educational space. A correlation can be made between the struggles of the children and broader malaise and socio-economic challenges in society - the vicious cycle of high unemployment and poverty that forces children to drop out of school, find 'work', fend for their families and sometimes end up pregnant or addicted to drugs.

The stories also relate how children's needs are often overlooked, whether it's their need for stimulation and engagement during periods of isolation like lockdown, or their ongoing mental health issues as they navigate life's challenges that they are not yet equipped to process.

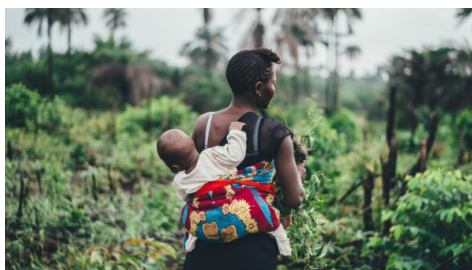
Inaccessibility of schools and teachers who have lost the passion to teach in schools that lack the facilities required to create an environment conducive to learning, are some of the challenges that children have to contend with. The stigma of returning to school after giving birth as a teen, assuming there is available childcare and money for school fees, compounds the frustration of teenage mothers. These stories speak of the inadequate psychosocial support afforded children in poverty stricken communities and the bleakness of their futures, with drug and other substance abuse often a refuge to take the edge off the daily drudgery of their lived experiences.

The inequality in society is thrown into sharp focus by stories that contrast how children in private schools accessed online schooling during the lockdown whereas the majority of those in public schools had little to no access to education for months on end.

The sad reality is that governments, schools, communities, parents and guardians are failing the children and youth. Although technology and artificial intelligence are the new normal for most education, millions of children in southern Africa have been left behind. Another crisis would decimate an already crippled education system.

The Stories

“ Teenage Pregnancies fuelled by Covid-19 Lockdowns



A lot of teenagers fell pregnant at Mafutseni during the 2020-2021 period which was the peak of COVID-19 pandemic. This was fuelled by the suspension of activities which kept young people busy and the suspension of schools also played a huge role such that teenagers then had too much time at their disposal.

This group should not have been neglected during this time. Instead, programs should have been implemented at community level to bring young people together and tackle such issues.

“ Drug abuse a cause for concern in Eswatini’s Elulakeni Region

The community of Elulakeni at the Shiselweni Region in Eswatini has an ongoing problem of their youth being involved in drug abuse. Their parents are unemployed thereby failing to pay for education for their children leading to an increase in young people dropping out of school to plant and sell dagga to support their families. They then tend to smoke the weed since they can easily access them. Unfortunately, they start stealing from their communities and other communities. To minimise the challenge of drug abuse at Elulakeni, the government must try to create employment opportunities and also enforce law against planting dagga in the country mostly in the rural areas and facilities to keep the youngsters busy when not at school and more vocational centres.

“ Mental Health Issues a Reality even for Teenagers



I was in Eshowe, Northern KwaZulu Natal, at the hospital on Saturday night where I witnessed some teenage patients of about 14 years who were brought in by ambulance because they attempted to commit suicide. Some of them evidently had anger issues.

It is my opinion that our Government must intervene with workshops in schools considering how prevalent it has become, especially in the rural areas. Workshops such as these can also help parents to know how to relate better with teenagers. It is sad that every now and then there is a funeral in our community.

“ No Schools in Emcengeni,

The children of the Emcengeni, Maphalaleni community are at risk of not completing high school as there are no available schools at walking distances. The children have to wake up very early and risk exposure to crime, abuse and rape along the way especially the girl child. Once in school, they feel sleepy, tired and concentration levels drop. The situation usually leads to teenage pregnancy and school dropouts. The community should be mobilized towards having a plan of action to build a high school in the area.

“ School Teachers Demand Teaching Incentives From Parents



On the 22nd of February 2022, teachers at Tennyson Primary School requested incentives of US\$5 from Grade One and Early

Childhood Education A and B pupils on a monthly basis so that they could learn. On the other hand, Grade 7 teachers from the same school requested US\$10 from each pupil. Following this announcement, some parents agreed to incentivise the learning of their children whilst some disagreed on the basis of affordability and the currency in which the money was being charged. This, however, led to the teachers scheduling for a meeting with the parents and it was held on Friday the 25th of February 2021.

In the meeting, the greater percentage of the parents agreed to pay the US\$5 monthly and that pupils would no longer knock off at 1pm, but instead knock off at 3pm. Unfortunately, this agreement came at the expense of the less privileged parents who struggle to send their children with a lunch box of food and those who have to board on a daily basis to school.

Parents to these pupils really want their children to go to school and benefit just as they are paying full fees, buying uniforms and buying all the books that are necessary for them to meaningfully do so. On the other hand, they have to face teachers who in the first weeks of January, either came to school and released the pupils play in the grounds or did not show up at all. However, the parents were left in a world of no alternatives and had to agree to start paying the incentives even though over 50% of them get paid in RTGS or Zimbabwean Dollars.

Parents are being short-changed because in each class which has up to 40 pupils and each Grade One pupil paying US\$5 per month, meant that the teacher would receive up to US\$200 outside his/her conventional salary and yet these children only go to school about 3 days a week.

However, some of the parents reported the matter the Provincial Office of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the ministry contacted the school which then warned the teachers against making parents pay incentives to them. However, due to lack of accountability, during the first week of March, teachers once again started demanding that parents pay the incentives. Further, as schools prepare for closure for the Easter holidays, parents of Grade Seven pupils have been told to pay extra US \$5 for holiday lessons. This will make education more of a privilege than a right! It is the mandate of the government to pay civil servants, particularly teachers and to make sure that their salaries can sustain their basic needs. Most civil servants especially teachers live below the poverty datum line and yet they play a very important role in educating the nation and giving birth to other careers.

“ Illiteracy rate rises amongst young mothers in Malawi’s Mulanje district

Young mothers in Mulanje District in Malawi are hesitating to continue with their education after delivery thus scaling up the illiteracy rate in Mulanje.

One of the young mothers at Mulanje District Hospital, Eliza Patrick, who is 17 years of age, expressed her interest to go back to school after delivery but due to lack of financial support from her parents she dropped out of school. This is a common challenge that most young mothers face. Availability of loans would enable parents to borrow money so that they can do small-scale businesses to support their children who are showing interest to continue their education.

“ Inequality in the education sector

It is now September and school children have started attending classes. As per Covid-19 rules and regulations, children should maintain social distancing in a classroom. Schools in the rural areas had to divide children into groups because classrooms are not enough. Some children go to school on Monday to Wednesday, while Grade 7 and Grade 8 go to school for 5 days. I was speaking to a child who attends school for children with disabilities and he said they haven't started attending classes yet. This

shows that children are not receiving equal education. It is time for leaders, communities and businesses to work together. Government should do proper planning so that schools can have enough classrooms, teachers and the right equipment.

“ Education is not for all



Some of children who go public schools don't have access to phones or computers. The last time they spoke to their educators was on 17 March 2020 when the schools closed. Yes it is lockdown and children are at home but it looks as if those with no access to technological gadgets will be affected on their year-end results. Is the education department working on ways to improve the quality of education not only in the time of COVID-19 but for future purposes? Links for downloading study guides and textbooks are issued but for people who cannot afford data, it is really a problem as there are no WIFI facilities nearby. Public school children will be overloaded with work once the schools re-open. Isn't e-school supposed to be for all?

“ Learning taken to WhatsApp

Teachers in Lesotho did not allow the lock down period to disrupt education nor put education on hold due to the current situation that has struck the world and forced countries to be on lock down but have decided to be in contact with parents and learners using WhatsApp as an educational platform so that learners may continue learning. They are affording learners at least three days per week from 5pm to 8pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Learners submit their work on Friday via WhatsApp. There seems to be clear coordination between teachers and parents as they hold children to account in cases where learners fail to do the needful.

A two-day youth consultation workshop was coordinated by the UN South Africa to discuss the challenges, gaps and recommendations towards the National Development Plan (NDP) 7 pillars from the youth perspective. Robust and constructive conversations took place whereby exploring different channels that the youth of SA could use to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2030 Agenda. However, a recommendation was that the young people should embrace the ‘NOTHING FOR US , WITHOUT US’ mantra meaning that youth need to participate in decision making platforms and ensuring having youth in strategic UN positions to drive the youth agenda forward.

“ UN Youth Consultation Workshop



“ Resilience: The Unsung Story of Chipamba, Magadi and Chindungwa Learners

It is said that education is a key to success but achieving that is another thing. Whilst other pupils and students are attending school from a shorter distance, the situation is not the same for some students learning at Liwonde Community Day Secondary School.

Many a times, they have to walk about 15 kilometres to the campus. Such is a sad story of students from Village Headmen Chipamba, Magadi and Chindungwa. This is just one way, by the time they finish a day's learning, hungry and tired, another 15 km is waiting to accompany them back to their homes.

With the rainy season the situation gets even worse. The security and safety of the girl child is also under threat as some people desire to have sexual relationships with them in exchange for some gifts even transport fares in some instances.

Walking such long distance to school negatively affects performance in class, since they arrive at school late and tired. Consequently, often times than not, they are punished while their fellows are learning.

For some parents, they organise boarding for their wards, especially girls to at least be within the vicinity of the school. However, such efforts are also proving to be futile as most if the self-boarders are frequenting seen with men and boys in Rest houses around the Liwonde Trading Centre. This also puts them in danger of contacting the HIV and other STIs not to mention of unplanned early pregnancies. Already, Machinga is one of the highly populated districts in Malawi, one may wonder how, this is part of the answer. For students walking this distance, their relief still remains hope for a secondary school to be built in their area. The community from the three GVHs mentioned above moulded bricks towards erecting school blocks for secondary level but 6 years down the line, no structure has been put in place. For now, such is the fate of students from the area.

6 Towards the Future: Telling My Truth

The fellah, the unemployed (wo)man, the starving native does not lay a claim to the truth; they do not say that they represent the truth, for they, (and the context within which they speak) are the truth

(FANON 1963: 38)⁹

The stories in this publication knit together seemingly unrelated issues and sew together a quilt about the interconnectedness of all aspects of life. Poverty is invariably linked to food insecurity, inadequate education, lack of economic opportunities and the violation of human rights. Compromise of any one of these facets of human life leads to the vicious cycle of inequality, poverty and instability during and outside of crises. In spite of all this, we also see the resilience of the human spirit; the hope wrung from seemingly barren situations, like in the story of vegetables grown in a waste dump feeding a community.

The Ubumbano Voice App exists to amplify the voice of those who live with injustice and who defend their dignity. It seeks, to paraphrase Fanon, to hear their truth framed within their lived experience without the filters or interpretations of self-proclaimed champions of the poor. It is in the telling of stories and the discipline of writing that there is learning and growth.

Stories shape how we think, and we act on what we think. When used for good, storytelling can shift policy, transform communities, and help us imagine better futures. It can change the world. When people connect in solidarity, change is possible. Sharing stories helps people to talk to each other and build relationships.

The Ubumbano Voice App has helped to form a community where activists are comfortable to share their daily lived experiences - the challenges, successes, and potential for change. The stories shared on this platform have helped not to just communicate facts but also to communicate meaning and emotion, which can motivate people to act. People don't relate to issues, they relate to other people - to their stories. And once we understand one another, we can identify our shared vision for a better world and work to make it a reality.

9. Fanon, F. (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Suffolk. Présence Africaine.



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