

## Report Launched!

### The Impact of Covid-19 on Young People and Adolescents in the SADC Region



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The impact of COVID-19 will have an irreversible effect on progress that has been made if governments do not redouble their efforts and move forward with ever greater commitment to adolescent wellbeing. What is needed – now more than ever – is greater economic investment and infrastructure development in health, education, technology and protection while ensuring the

involvement of young people in the policy discourse.

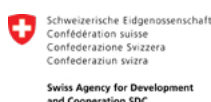
This is the outcome of an exploratory study undertaken by MIET AFRICA and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC), the report of which was recently launched.

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, some progress had been made in improving adolescents and young

peoples' lives, although economic inequalities meant that the benefits had not been enjoyed by all young people. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has not only exacerbated challenges experienced by the most vulnerable but has made every young person vulnerable.

"The impact of COVID-19 creates a looming danger and a global concern that there will be a reversal of

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progress made over the past 25 years, specifically a claw-back on education, sexual reproductive health and rights, and protection outcomes outlined by international and human rights commitments," said Lynn van der Elst, Director of Regional Programmes at education and development NPO, MIET AFRICA.

Programme Director at the SADC Secretariat, Dr Lamboly Mbukumbeko, explained that the virus took them by surprise. "Like the rest of the world, SADC Member States' health systems were not prepared for a pandemic of such magnitude. When the COVID-19 was declared a public emergency, only two laboratories in [the] SADC Region had COVID-19 testing capacity. As weeks progressed other countries accelerated mass testing. As governments and SADC, we need to reflect on how to better prepare for potential crises as part of efforts to building resilient health systems in the region."

The exploratory study, conducted in May 2020 in six SADC Member States - namely, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe - set out to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on adolescents and young people in the SADC Region. The research report provides an analysis of how COVID-19 has affected the lives of young people across four central themes: access to education; access to health care services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; protection from gender-based violence; and youth participation in COVID-19 response actions.

The report further provides an overview of the realities facing adolescents and



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young people in accessing various support and services. It reviews the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on protection mechanisms and assesses the extent to which SADC Member States have established normative, institutional and programmatic arrangements to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

"We cannot effectively establish the necessary investments without listening to young people themselves. Involving the youth in the policy discourse remains critical, now more than ever," said Research Director at the HSRC, Professor Finn Reygan. "As key drivers of transformation, their views and perspectives are important contributions and investing in them will trigger a chain reaction that ultimately leads towards a peaceful and prosperous region."

An important outcome of the study is a call to governments and stakeholders to ensure that youth in the SADC Region are able to access education no

matter where they are from, that young people have access to information and services to make informed decisions about their health and sexuality, and that they are given the agency to participate in decision-making processes.

Added Van der Elst, "The response can only be effective if all levels of policy action are involved - national governments, local authorities and civil society - working directly with the populations affected in a co-ordinated and widely publicised manner. SADC Member States should reflect on the experiences of countries that have consistently remained youth-friendly, as part of resilience efforts. These experiences include a greater focus on increases in national budgets for programmes benefiting adolescents and young people, particularly those addressing inequality."

[Click here](#) to access the research products and watch the video. ■



## We are Keen to Go Green!

### Zimbabwe's Murape Learners Put Their Backs Into Greening Their School and Community

Youth participation in community development is one of the most effective ways to promote young people's active engagement in sustainable development. Murape Secondary School is showing that this is so, especially when it comes to climate change.

Although young people should be responsible for shaping their future as leaders of tomorrow, in many communities their participation is often limited to their labour contribution, and ignores the importance of their participation in decision-making, choices, and management.

The situation is very different at Murape Secondary School, one of the 10 FutureLife-Now! pilot schools, located in Seke District, Mashonaland, East Province, Zimbabwe. The school started a club called "The Climate Change Movers". This club is working to empower its members to not only take decisions but to act on these. These young people work closely with the community to address issues they have learnt about and that they can see affecting their communities.

"Due to continuous power cuts in Zimbabwe, people have been cutting down trees in order to get firewood. This is reducing the number of trees in our community and accelerating climate change," said Form 4 learner, 17-year-old Prominence Makedza.



*Keen to Go Green: Members of The Climate Change Movers club stand proudly next to the board announcing their project*

Another Climate Change Mover, 18-year-old Delyn Mudzingwa, added, "Trees and other plants are a natural carbon dioxide sink due to their ability to convert the carbon dioxide to oxygen. Planting trees reverses deforestation and hinders global warming and its effects."

The Climate Change Movers decided to take action by planting trees around the community to help address this global threat. They called their project "Greening the School, Greening the Community". Taking the project a step further, the learners held climate change campaigns to get the

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"The donation helped to strengthen the 'Greening the School, Greening the Community' project and greatly helped to bring valuable information to the learners' doorsteps about issues related to climate change. This project is in line with one of the FutureLife-Now! objectives, namely, tackling climate change through youth-led programmes."

*Trees of Change: A young Climate Change Mover collects seedlings donated by a community member*

community involved. The result? One community member alone donated 250 indigenous species tree seedlings.

Michael Jokonya, Deputy Headmaster, and also one of the FutureLife-Now! peer educators said, "The donation helped to strengthen the 'Greening the School, Greening the Community' project and greatly helped to bring valuable information to the learners' doorsteps about issues related to climate change. This project is in line with one of the FutureLife-Now! objectives, namely, tackling

climate change through youth-led programmes."

The club members have to date planted more than 350 trees around the school and their community, and continue to nurture the trees as well as run campaigns to mobilise the community to become involved in more tree planning.

"There are some positive outcomes from this youth engagement," said Aussie Ndlovu, Zimbabwe's FutureLife-Now! Country Manager.

"The interactions between key local members and youth mean they can work together for positive change in the community. This has stimulated the community gatekeepers to readily listen and accept other youth initiatives on topics around sexual and reproductive health services, and HIV&AIDS which are part of the FutureLife-Now! agenda." ■



## Boys Cry Too

### Boys Vulnerability Dialogues in Malawi Reveal that Boys Need Feminism

**What do boys and young men need? The best way to find out is to ask them!**

**This is precisely what happened at the boys' vulnerability dialogue sessions at Ngowe and Natola Community Day Secondary schools in Malawi, on 22 and 25 June, 2021.**

The sessions were organised by the FutureLife-Now! programme in its quest to include young boys and men in programmes in an attempt to address the impact of gender disparities in society.

"There is an urgent need to strengthen the engagement of boys and young men concerning the support for gender equality and female empowerment, as well as to address their own specific social, emotional, and developmental needs," said Croxley Nkhoma, Malawi's FutureLife-Now! Country Manager, "Yet, despite a growing awareness among SADC Member States for the need to involve and support boys, the reality is that they are seldom targeted. It is imperative that we accelerate action towards SDG 5 - gender equality - to advance the wellbeing and health of young people across and beyond the SADC Region."

These sessions were the first of many more that will be held in the near future. The main objectives of the boys' vulnerability dialogue sessions are to highlight challenges

faced by adolescent boys in different communities across Malawi and in different regions across the world, share best practices, and inspire action to address these challenges.

The two hour dialogues, first at Ngowe on 22 June and three days later at Natola Community Day Secondary

In both instances, the school halls had been decorated by young girls and boys who sat a meter apart, in line with COVID-19 protocol. Above their masks, their eyes shone with excitement as they looked forward to the long-awaited boys' dialogue. In the front, two team of boys, five boys per team, were separated by a moderator ready



*Speaking Out: Martha Chiwanda from the Ministry Of Gender listening attentively to the issues raised by young boys during the boys' vulnerability dialogues at Ngowe Community Day Secondary school*

school, were both presided over by the Ministry of Gender and attended by representatives from the Ministry of Education, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Health. There were 169 young people in attendance at Ngowe, and in Natola 209 learners attended the dialogue.

to commence the dialogue. There was a hushed silence in the hall as the boys expressed themselves freely without fear of being ridiculed. Said Nkhoma, "It was the first time for many people in the room to watch the narrative of male invincibility being challenged."

One young man said: "A lot of people

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## NEWS

think boys don't cry, but we do. We have feelings and needs too. Growing up we are discouraged to express our feelings and told *mamuna salila* (boys don't cry). This makes us refrain from asking for help and forces us to deal with things alone which could be the main reason there are high suicide rates amongst men in Malawi."

The dialogues also revealed that a lot of young boys are victims of sexual abuse and harassment. However, they are afraid to report these cases because authorities refuse to take the matter seriously and rely on stereotypes. One boy reported that authorities will say: "What do you mean you were raped? Men don't get raped." He added that these sexist views are also reflected in Malawi's constitution as it does not recognise men and boys as victims of rape.

There was a roar of applause at Ngowe Community Day Secondary school when one of the students advised the Ministry of Education to have a mindset change and change the perceptions that reinforce gender stereotypes. He said, "In our textbooks, you only use female animation for professions like nurses. You need to change that because boys can be nurses too and girls can also be mechanics. We need to see that in our textbooks."

Nkhoma added, "Patriarchy dehumanises men as well as women. It creates a toxic masculinity which strips them of the dignity to speak and express themselves unless it's through anger and aggression."

In all the dialogues held so far, the need for clubs that will act as

safe spaces for boys to share their experiences has been voiced. "It is important that the issues to do with boys' vulnerability are handled and approached with the sensitivity they deserve. We intend to do this through the FutureLife-Now! Boys' Vulnerability Framework and boys clubs shortly," said Nkhoma.

The FutureLife-Now! programme plans to host more of these dialogues in order to help create a context-specific Boys' Vulnerability Framework which will be centered on the evidence-based needs of young boys and men. ■



*Ask Us: Steve Jim Banda, youth facilitator at Ngowe Community Day Secondary school, takes a selfie with some of the speakers at the boys' vulnerability dialogue*

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## Learners Linked to Health Care

**FutureLife-Now! Lesotho Develops Referral System to Strengthen Schools and Health Facilities Linkages**



*Talking Health: Health professionals at the three day workshop hosted by FutureLife-Now! work together on strengthening linkages between education and health*

**Three days of intensive interactions has significantly strengthened the linkages between Lesotho's 10 FutureLife-Now! schools and their nearby health facilities.**

FutureLife-Now! Country Manager, Rantsane Kuleile, said that the main purpose of the development of a referral system was to ensure learners in all 10 schools were aware and able to access care in supportive, friendly health facilities.

"This is in line with one of the FutureLife-Now! programme's objectives, which is to increase access to youth-friendly HIV, sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR) and ART adherence support and services, using a school-based delivery model."

The FutureLife-Now! team's three-day workshop with health professionals in Lesotho was a first important step towards strengthening linkages between health and education in all 10 schools.

When welcoming participants to the workshop, Kuleile asked everyone to be as open and interactive as possible. "We hope to come out of the three days with a working document for Lesotho, on systems strengthening."

Mathato Nkuatsana, the Adolescent Health Programme Manager at the Ministry of Health (MoH), stated that the schools' health programme is part of the ministry's policy and strategies. "Thus, health facilities should be implementing this through outreach

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# FutureLife-Now!

## NEWS

to all their nearby schools and not only to ten FutureLife-Now! schools." She added that the good lessons learned from the ten schools and their relationships to health facilities need to be replicated with all schools in the vicinity.

During the three days there were intensive interactions. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were analysed, and a draft protocol for a referral system was developed. Health facility personnel also drafted plans on how they would implement school health programmes to support the schools in their communities.

Speaking on behalf of the participants MoH Public Health Nurse, Mampho Mafereka, thanked FutureLife-Now! for reminding them of what they should be doing to support young people. "The workshop gave new ideas as well as acting as a refresher training. Now we are going back to our workplace with a clear understanding of the issues and a roadmap of what to do as soon as we get back to the office."

The outcome of the workshop was the development of a standardised referral protocol which was developed to be tested, and eventually finalised for printing and general circulation.

The main purpose of this referral protocol is to ensure an effective referral system, to strengthen linkages between health and education; and to ensure that young people are aware of and able to access care at health facilities, schools, and community-based organisations. ■

"The workshop gave new ideas as well as acting as a refresher training. Now we are going back to our workplace with a clear understanding of the issues and a roadmap of what to do as soon as we get back to the office."



*Aiding Access: Input from workshop participants led to the development of a standardised referral protocol to help learners' access healthcare*

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## Zambian FutureLife-Now! School a "Role Model"

Mwembeshi Secondary School Production Unit Lauded by Ministry of Education



*Role Models: Learners from Mwembeshi Secondary school hard at work at one of the fish ponds and in the fields*

**Mwembeshi Boarding Secondary school is a role model for all schools in Zambia in terms of its agricultural production unit.**

That is according to Dr. Jobbicks Kalumba, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of General Education, who toured the school last month and stated that other schools should emulate Mwembeshi and take guidance from the school because it is performing so well.

Mwembeshi, one of the FutureLife-Now! schools in Zambia, is located in the rural area of Chilanga district in Lusaka province, 38km west of Lusaka city. It began an agricultural production unit

in 2015 and the unit has achieved far more than its original aim which was to "feed the learners".

At the outset the school produced only cabbage, but has grown and improved in leaps and bounds and today utilises about six hectares of land to grow crops on a rotation basis, (currently, tomato, maize, onion, eggplant, cabbage and rape). The school also farms fish and raises chickens. The produce is sold to local markets in Lusaka city and to the nearby community. Of course, produce also goes to the school's boarding section for learners' meals.

The school has 592 learners and

the production unit is key in the school's activities, as it has helped mentor learners in many areas, including academically, socially and professionally.

Learners are actively involved in the production unit's activities, which helps them acquire and develop skills in growing crops, rearing chickens and fish farming, guided by the school's agricultural science teachers.

The FutureLife-Now! programme has significantly assisted the school in many areas, including in the provision of water. "Water is regarded as a key player in our everyday life, hence improving the water system at the

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school was an important development," said Padwell Habwato, FutureLife-Now! focal person at Mwembeshi.

In 2020 FutureLife-Now! helped the school install an additional borehole to overcome its seasonal water challenges. Thereafter the school was able to significantly improve its production unit, expand the size of the school garden, and create two active fishponds that can hold over 5 000 fish each. Added to that, sufficient clean water - essential for the running of boarding school – is now the norm.

Gabriel Mbewe, a Grade 12 learner, is a production unit prefect. "I act as a

bridge between the school authority and pupils on issues to do with the production unit. I assign pupils to do various work in the school gardens, fish ponds and poultry such as planting, watering, weeding, cleaning fish ponds, and feeding fish and poultry. Being a production unit prefect has created a zeal for agriculture in me and I will carry it with me even after school."

He added that the FutureLife-Now! programme has helped him in other ways too. "FutureLife-Now! has helped me to know myself, and develop my abilities academically and socially. This is because of different lessons we receive from the youth facilitators on,

for example, sexual reproductive health. I hope that this programme does not come to an end soon. May it continue to help future learners of this school. God bless the founders and funders of this programme." ■

"Water is regarded as a key player in our everyday life, hence improving the water system at the school was an important development"



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