



Covid Aftershocks

5 months of Covid
lockdown can change a
girl's life

January 2020: A
learner with
potential

August 2020: A
statistic of teenage
pregnancy, an
underage wife, an
illegal gold
panner...



Since schools closed in late March, reported cases of Gender Based Violence against Girls has more than doubled. Only one third of survivors are receiving appropriate health and psycho-social services. Far fewer ever see justice. For most, it is the end of their education.

The aftershocks of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe are threatening gains made in Girls' Education. World Vision Zimbabwe calls on partners to:

- ✓ Urgently ensure continued learning for marginalized learners while schools are closed.
- ✓ Communicate clear plans to renew the hope of girls and communities in education,
- ✓ Monitor and enforce the Education Amendment Act as schools re-open,
- ✓ Provide re-entry support to pregnant girls and young mothers to return to school,
- ✓ Provide non-formal pathways for girls who do drop-out to achieve skills and qualifications
- ✓ Meet all the recommendations in the **World Vision Global Aftershocks: Access Denied** report:

https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/2020-08-21-%20Aftershocks%20Education%20final2_3.pdf

Aftershocks of COVID-19 on Girls in Zimbabwe

The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftershocks has devastating effects for most rural communities and marginalised populations in Zimbabwe. IGATE-T, a Girls' Education Challenge project funded by UK Aid and led by World Vision Zimbabwe¹, is supporting over 70 000 children in 9 rural districts. These communities experience deep levels of marginalization and negative traditional and religious norms affect access to education and positive transition pathways for girls. With schools closed in March, learners have not been accessing in-school learning for 5 months now.

Before schools closed, girls had been reporting issues of gender based violence. Since the pandemic, and having lost the protective effects of attending school, communities, teachers and girls are reporting increased incidents of pregnancy, sexual exploitation and early marriage despite channels of reporting more being difficult to access. Without certainty on the re-opening of schools and with most not accessing meaningful alternative education, girls and their families are losing hope.

Reported cases of GBV among girls have more than doubled since lockdown with the largest increases in underage pregnancies and early marriages. Even with targeted support by the IGATE project, only a third of GBV survivors receive appropriate health and psychosocial support, and far fewer see justice².

In some school catchments where Case Care Workers are particularly vigilant, up to a quarter of girls who started Form 4 in 2020 have been reported to be pregnant since schools opened earlier this year. Some families have also resorted to marrying off underage girls. In many communities, children stay with grandparents or child minders while their parents work in South Africa. Parents have struggled to support children back home and many have been further exposed to sexual exploitation and risky activities such as mining and cross border trade.

In Chivi, community facilitators have reported cases of girls now targeted by 'illegal gold miners' due to their vulnerability and quest for quick means of survival. Girls in the Apostolic church have been exposed to more interaction with boys and men in night services that have continued despite lockdown restrictions.

"Here in Chivi, illegal gold panning has costed us our girls, the high levels of hunger in the country has been devastating for children whose parents migrated to South Africa. Some young girls are now resorting to drug abuse and prostitution with older men for survival". Community Facilitator

Cecilia³ is from Tavengerwa village in Gokwe South. She lived with her father after her mother passed on a few years ago. Cecilia is 17 years old and was doing Form 1 when schools closed due to the Covid-19 lockdown in Zimbabwe. She was married to an older man as a second wife, her husband already has a wife and 2 children. At the time that she got married she was not pregnant but the community facilitator from her village shared that due to schools closure most girls spend time not doing anything and having more time to spend with boys and men. Cecilia's friend who is also her neighbour got married within the same months that Cecilia was married off. The community facilitators together with the father of the child engaged the village head and the husband to ensure that the girl comes back home but did not succeed. This is most likely the end of her education.

Mary and Emma, sisters who stay together in Gokwe South, got married within a month of each other. Mary, 12 years old was in Grade 6, while Emma, 15 was in form 2. Emma was married off by her parents as soon as her pregnancy was known following negotiations with the responsible man. In July, Mary was married to a 22 year old.

¹ Consortium partners include World Vision UK, CARE International, The Open University of the UK, Emthonjeni Women's forum, UDACIZA and SNV.

²IGATE Case Management Tracker

³ All names are replaced by pseudonyms

In one village in Insiza 4 girls are now pregnant and one was married off since the beginning of the pandemic. Two of the girls were in secondary school including 15 year old Sihle who was learning in Form 3 until schools closed in March. She is now pregnant following a relationship with a 21 year old illegal gold panner. Sihle comes from a polygamous family with 8 other siblings. Her father is a high authority in the Johane Marange church. The family held marriage negotiations with the boy's family and as the father was respected in the church and the boy willing to marry the girl, they accepted the bride price. In this community ordinarily, 4 in every 10 girls typically get married before they reach 18 years. With schools closed and hunger biting, this is the fate of many more girls.

Among the 25% of form 4 girls now pregnant from one school in Insiza, 17 year old Memory is determined to complete her O'levels. She has teamed up with a few of her friends and together they are sharing reading material and notes to prepare for their exams. Her determination and the support of her peers will help her face the challenges ahead.

While the recently gazetted Education Amendment Act asserts no pupil shall be excluded from school on the basis of pregnancy, social norms and stigma drive drop out by pregnant girls and young mothers. In marginalized secondary schools reached by IGATE, 23% of drop out by girls was due to pregnancy and 28% due to marriage in 2019⁴. Caregivers are often unaware or unaccepting of the policy while schools often shun pregnant girls outright or through the social culture of the school. While the policy is progressive, most pregnant girls and young mothers experience huge barriers in staying in or returning to school.

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⁴ School profiling report 2019