

ACT NOW:

Experiences and recommendations of girls and boys in
Southern Africa on the impact of COVID-19



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World Vision is a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, we are dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

CHILD AND ADULT SAFEGUARDING CONSIDERATIONS

World Vision ensured safe and ethical participation of children when they shared their stories, adhering to World Vision's safeguarding protocols. Names of children have been anonymised and changed to ensure confidentiality. All photos were taken and used with informed consent.

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12-year-old Beauty wearing the new mask she received from World Vision.

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13-year-old Valdemira wants to be a nurse when she grows up so that she can take care of the sick. Valdemira used to walk eight hours round-trip to collect water a few days a week during the drought that gripped Angola. She missed a lot of school in 2019, as she simply couldn't get there on time. World Vision rehabilitated a water point which has now reduced the distance that Valdemira and other community members have to walk to fetch water.



FOREWORD

Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, girls and boys in Southern Africa already faced various forms of abuse, including sexual violence, child marriage and exploitation, and throughout World Vision's response over the past six months, we have continually been concerned about how the pandemic may worsen these trends. Which is why I am happy to present the voices of nearly 200 children and young people from across the Southern Africa region who shared their experiences on how COVID-19 continues to have an impact on their lives.

During these conversations children and young people told us about increased isolation and vulnerability, fighting and physical violence at home, sexual abuse from close relatives, and an increased workload once schools closed. Altogether over 62% of the children and young people consulted mentioned having witnessed or experienced violence during the pandemic.

However, it was reassuring to hear from the young respondents about the many ways that they had been helping to end the violence and stop the spread of the virus in their communities. I have seen some of these efforts myself at food distribution sites in Zambia during the pandemic. Children and young people at the distributions raised awareness of the importance of handwashing to protect against the spread of COVID-19, as well as a myriad of other diseases, but also brought people's attention to the rise in violence during this time.

Sometimes raising awareness about sexual violence happens through very practical means. In many rural communities I visit, both girls and boys learn how to sew reusable menstrual pads, which not only enables more girls to attend school, but also creates opportunities for boys to discuss their responsibility to reduce sexual and physical violence.

As a Christian organisation, our ultimate goal is to ensure that all children are cared for, protected and feel loved. We work towards empowering children and young people to become change agents on issues that affect them, and so, alongside our concerns over reports of increased child rights violations, it has been a source of inspiration to hear from children and young people about how they are rising to the challenge and raising awareness of the threats of COVID-19 in their communities.



However, it is important that we, along with our partners and governments, continue to consider the views of children and young people and heed their recommendations listed in this report.

Let us join our efforts and act now because children and young people's views matter!

Mark Kelly
Regional Leader
World Vision Southern Africa

A delighted 13-year-old Precious happy to receive a card from her sponsor.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19 is currently wreaking havoc on countries around the world. The devastating health consequences of the virus are only the tip of the iceberg. The pandemic's secondary impacts, such as loss of livelihoods, school closures and restrictions on travel and socialising have far-reaching effects on children and young people's health, safety, education and well-being. During this period, many children and young people are spending more time at home, with family and online. In this context, children and young people are at risk of hunger, isolation, witnessing and/or experiencing violence at home and in their communities, child labour, early marriage, and, in some cases, online risks. This consultation explores children and young people's views and experiences related to COVID-19 and its indirect impacts. Firstly, it looks at children and young people's perceptions of whether they are facing an increased risk of violence at home, in their communities, or online during this period. Secondly, this consultation investigates the ways in which children and young people are working to help to stop the spread of the virus and lessen its impacts.

This consultation was conducted from April to August 2020 using a qualitative approach. Listening to children is at the heart of World Vision's child-centred approach and our commitment to amplifying the voices of children and young people on the world stage. The consultation included 181 children and young people (95 girls and 86 boys) between the ages of 7 and 18 from eight countries across the Southern Africa region, including Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The interviews and focus groups took place in-person with physical distancing, over the phone and through online platforms. This consultation followed the minimum standards for consulting with children and young people developed by the Inter-agency Working Group on Children's Participation.¹

The report is organised around the three themes emerging from the data: (1) the impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people; (2) their resilient responses to these impacts personally, in their families and communities; and (3) the support that children and young people need to be safe, healthy and help to fight the further spread of the virus.

Children and young people from across Southern Africa shared examples of violence at home, child labour, early marriage and various online risks in their communities. However, it is clear from this consultation that children and young people are not merely victims of the current crisis. Despite the many challenges they face, children and young people shared stories of resiliency and hope, of following best practices to stop the spread of COVID-19, of navigating complex home environments and of helping vulnerable people in their communities; however, they cannot face these challenges alone.

Based on these children and young people's views and experiences, World Vision recommends that the relevant actors work together to provide practical help in the areas of education, health and hygiene, food provision, family livelihoods and COVID-19 awareness raising. Furthermore, World Vision recommends the establishment and maintenance of comprehensive child protection mechanisms and clear avenues to seek support. Moreover, World Vision urges all relevant stakeholders and decision makers to listen to children and young people and take their views seriously.

While the challenges children and young people face during this time are immense, this consultation highlights countless examples of their resiliency and activism in the face of a complex crisis. World Vision thus calls on governments, United Nations (UN) agencies, donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), faith-based organisations and the private sector to take a collaborative approach to support children and young people around the world.

“When my grandmother gave me five goats, I learnt how to take care of them, so that they can be healthy. Now I have nine goats, and I want to have more so that I can continue to help my family,” says Justine, from Zambia.



INTRODUCTION

On 11 March, the World Health Organization (WHO) escalated the COVID-19 outbreak from a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” to a pandemic.²The WHO director-general explained he was “deeply concerned by both the alarming levels of spread and severity, and by the alarming levels of inaction”.³This pandemic has had an impact on children and young people, families and communities around the world; between December 2019 and September 2020, WHO confirmed 30,905,162 cases of COVID-19 and 958,703 deaths worldwide⁴ with 711,179 of these confirmed cases and 17,108 deaths in Southern Africa.⁵

Country	Confirmed cases	Confirmed deaths
Angola	3,991	152
DRC	5,002	89
Eswatini	5,269	104
Lesotho	1,390	33
Malawi	5,731	179
Mozambique	6,771	43
Zambia	14,131	330
Zimbabwe	7,683	225
Total	49,968	1,155

Table 1. COVID-19 country data ⁶

WorldVision is responding globally to the COVID-19 crisis in 70 countries, nine of which are in Southern Africa. The COVID-19 pandemic arrived in the region on the heels of natural disasters and outbreaks of malaria and typhoid.⁷ Since March 2019, Southern Africa has experienced devastating cyclones, a historic drought, record high temperatures and macroeconomic shocks in multiple countries. These disasters have occurred against a backdrop of existing vulnerabilities, including unemployment and record levels of food insecurity.⁸ These combined factors have contributed to the pandemic’s far-reaching and devastating impacts across Southern Africa.

Over the next 18 months, World Vision aims to reach at least 72 million people globally, half of them children and young people. In Southern Africa, since the start of the pandemic, World Vision has reached 7,774,090 people, 3,712,107 of whom are children and young people, with much needed information and material support. World Vision is focusing on countries that have significant pockets of fragility and poverty where children and young people are most at risk, including conflict-affected contexts, urban slums and refugee settings. World Vision's response is focused on four key areas to help to limit the spread of COVID-19 and reduce its impact on vulnerable children and young people and families: (1) scaling up preventative measures to limit the spread of disease, (2) strengthening health systems and workers, (3) supporting children and young people affected by COVID-19, and (4) collaborating and advocating to ensure vulnerable children and young people are protected.

World Vision works in collaboration with local authorities, frontline health workers, academic institutions, faith leaders, communities, and local NGOs. Following its commitment to place children and young people at the centre of their work, World Vision responds in times of crisis by listening to children and young people, empowering them and amplifying their voices at the local and global levels. This report is part of World Vision's continuous effort to listen to children and young people. With these findings, World Vision hopes to contribute to improving the ongoing work of child-focused agencies, decision makers, adult professionals, and children and young people themselves.



Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Carlington, from Zimbabwe has not lost hope. He dreams of becoming a teacher.

Nine-year-old Ireen collects clean water from the borehole that was drilled by World Vision in her village.



METHODOLOGY

World Vision considers children and young people active social actors capable of interacting with others and shaping their environments, not helpless, hidden victims of this pandemic. Following this premise, for this consultation the methodology included collaboration between adults and young leaders engaged as peer researchers who also conducted interviews with other children and young people.

AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This regional child consultation sought to explore children and young people's views and experiences related to the outbreak of COVID-19, with a specific focus on violence against children and young people and opportunities they have to contribute to stopping the spread of the virus.

Research questions included:

- How is COVID-19 affecting the lives of children and young people in their countries and communities?
- How are children and young people contributing, or can contribute, to the fight against the spread of COVID-19?
- Are there children in your community who are facing violence or abuse in this time of COVID-19?

SAMPLE

This consultation included individual interviews with 111 children and young people (59 girls and 52 boys) and four focus group discussions with a total of 70 children and young people (36 girls and 34 boys). Participants were between the ages of 7 and 18 from eight countries across the Southern Africa region, including Angola, DRC, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This report is not representative of the views of all children and young people in the region. What this report does do, however, is provide a useful snapshot of what children and young people are thinking and feeling about their experiences living in the time of COVID-19.

METHOD, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This project used a qualitative interview approach which allowed the research team to capture information about participants' personal meanings and interpretations.⁹ Data were collected through interviews conducted via electronic devices, online platforms, or face-to-face, while maintaining physical distancing measures (i.e. four in-person focus group discussions in Zambia).

Interviews and focus groups were conducted between April and August 2020. The World Vision team in each country adapted the data collection procedure to the contexts of the participants. In each country, children and young people were asked three questions (in addition to the prompt questions used to stimulate the conversation). Participants were asked about their views on the impact of COVID-19, their right to be protected from violence and abuse during this time, and their responses and concerns to fighting the spread of the virus. The research team transcribed audio recordings from the interviews and focus group discussions and analysed the transcripts to identify emerging themes and patterns mentioned by the children and young people.

LIMITATIONS

- This research was based on three open-ended questions. Each question had a series of prompts to gain further insight and detail. Interviewers used their discretion utilising these prompts, and as such, these variations are reflected in the data.
- Given the sensitive and often hidden nature of violence, it is highly likely that children and young people sometimes chose not to answer some questions.
- While the primary aim of the research was to highlight the voices of children and young people, some percentages are noted, based on the responses for each question, to provide a clearer picture. All percentages were calculated based on the total number of individuals (111) interviewed. They do not include the 70 young people who took part in focus group discussions; however, statements made during the discussions are highlighted throughout, where appropriate.
- Of the 111 individual interviews, 18 interviews focused on children and young people's responses to the pandemic generally. They did not include a question about violence, nor did they include a question about what children and young people needed to stop the spread of the virus. For this reason, the percentage of children and young people who shared experiences of violence and recommendations is out of a total of 93.

ETHICS

This consultation followed the minimum standards for consulting with children and young people developed by the Inter-agency Working Group on Children's Participation.¹⁰ These principles include transparency, honesty, accountability, provision of a child-friendly environment, equality of opportunity, and the safety and protection of young participants.¹¹ This project took into account the special considerations required to gain informed consent, ensure confidentiality and anonymity, acknowledge the diverse cultures of the research sites, and refrain from presenting any information that may potentially harm participants.¹² The facilitation team ensured safe and ethical participation of children and young people, strictly adhering to World Vision's safeguarding protocols, including a referral procedure in coordination with local partners engaged in the crisis response. In order to ensure that participation was meaningful, safe and ethical, World Vision staff members facilitated conversations with the child participants, and they were encouraged to decide on their own whether or not they would participate.

Tatenda is a youth leader at his school in Zimbabwe, where he engages with fellow students to find ways to improve his school.



FINDINGS

Children and young people's views are arranged in three parts. The first section outlines the impacts of COVID-19 on children and young people in Southern Africa, including their risk of witnessing or experiencing violence. The second section considers the ways in which children and young people are responding to these changes in their daily lives. Lastly, the third section spotlights the recommendations of children and young people, highlighting their ideas for ensuring that child rights are upheld moving forward. The pandemic affects all children and young people differently; however, COVID-19 highlights existing inequalities in rural, poor, marginalised and indigenous communities who face these challenges with fewer resources and support.¹³

I.

IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Across all eight countries, participants pointed out seven significant ways that the pandemic has affected their lives including: (1) food insecurity and hunger, (2) difficulty following preventative measures, (3) navigating a new normal at home, (4) an increased risk of witnessing or experiencing violence, (5) child labour, (6) early marriage, and (7) online risks.

FOOD INSECURITY AND HUNGER

Food is running out at home since children eat all day, and there are a lot of mouths to feed now that no one is going anywhere. (Dlamini, 18, male, Eswatini)

In the Southern Africa region, COVID-19 has worsened existing food insecurities.¹⁴ Estimates suggest that: "The percentage of children under 5 with severe acute malnutrition could rise globally by about 15 per cent (7 million children) over the first 12 months of the pandemic. Certain areas in Africa may see up to 20 – 25 per cent increase."¹⁵

25%
children talked about
hunger, not having
enough food and/or
rising food prices.

When children and young people were asked how COVID-19 has affected their lives and the lives of their peers, 25% children talked about hunger, not having enough food and/or rising food prices. Moreover, Over one in five children said COVID-19 had contributed to a loss of family livelihoods and income. More than half of children and young people interviewed in Eswatini, DRC, Lesotho and Zimbabwe mentioned these issues, though the issue affects families across the region.

Over **ONE IN FIVE** children
said COVID-19 had
contributed to a loss of
family livelihoods and
income.

Globally, the World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures, 346 million children have lost access to school meals programmes.¹⁶ Prior to COVID-19, many children relied on their schools to provide their midday meal. Sipehelele, an 18-year-old female from Eswatini, said: "COVID[-19] has affected children's lives since they used to go [to] school and get some food, and now some miss that meal they got from school." Karabo, a 17-year-old male from Lesotho, stated: "There are those children whom we know are really struggling to survive within my community, who will only get food at school. They now go to bed on empty stomachs."

Families must provide more meals for children and young people who are at home all day, but this is difficult because of rising food prices and loss of livelihoods. Dabulamanzi, a 16-year-old male from Eswatini, explained: "Because of the lockdown and everyone being at home, if before we ate one loaf of bread, now we eat three." Vanteli, a 17-year-old male from DRC, reported: "We no longer have enough to eat because all the items in the market have increased [in] price. Our parents are no longer working, and they are now having trouble assuming their responsibilities." Melody, a 17-year-old female from Zimbabwe, explained: "Parents have no means to provide for their families. There are a lot of children that are hungry and desperate."

Food insecurity and hunger are significant issues in their own right, but they are also problematic because, in extreme cases, the stress caused by hunger and food insecurity puts children and young people at a greater risk of experiencing violence.¹⁷

Violence has increased within my community. Cases of child marriage have increased; issues of children being murdered have also been heard of in my area. Maybe it's because parents don't know what to feed their children. For example, a child was found dead in a donga [dry gully] within my area. Communities are [not safe anymore]. (Tsepang, 14, female, Lesotho)

DIFFICULTY FOLLOWING PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

38%
children
acknowledged that
they should maintain
social distancing.

Children and young people's lives have changed due to the pandemic, and many found themselves having to adjust to preventative measures to stop the spread of COVID-19, such as social distancing, staying home, and wearing a mask. Children and young people were not always happy with how these recommended measures affected their lives, particularly the social distancing guidelines, but they recognised the importance of following them. More than a third of respondents, 38% (42 out of 111), acknowledged that they should maintain social distancing. Midias, a 12-year-old male from Malawi, voiced a common frustration: "When we want to play with our friends, we are told to be one metre apart. [But] how can one play when you are one metre apart?" Vanessa, a 12-year-old female from Malawi agreed: "Even with playing, we've been told that we can't play as we used to, that we need to keep a distance. It is no longer fun to play."

Social distancing measures were also difficult for children and young people to follow because they stopped them from being able to hug, shake hands, and “bond” with friends. When asked about how the governmental restrictions affected him personally, Sinethemba, a 12-year-old male from Eswatini, commented on the lack of physical contact they could have with anyone. Similarly, Banele, a 17-year-old male from Eswatini, responded: “We can’t even do handshakes or have contact with anyone – basically no more bonding.”

Social distancing guidelines are impossible for some children and young people to follow because of the structures of their homes and size of their families.

Some of the household setups were not built with COVID[-19] social distancing in mind because, in some, you find that 10 people live in the same small house, which just doesn’t allow for any social distancing. Another thing [is] our sleeping arrangements, it just doesn’t allow for social distancing. (Dabulamanzi, 16, male, Eswatini)

NAVIGATING A NEW NORMAL AT HOME

Children and young people’s support networks shrank due to school and church closures and “stay-at-home” orders. Respondents reported that they missed social interactions with friends, teachers and faith leaders in their communities. This isolation had repercussions on their mental health, well-being and ability to seek help, if they experienced violence or abuse.

Mhlonishwa, a 12-year-old male from Eswatini, gave this example: “I could be violated by my parents right here at home and have nobody to tell. But [before], I could call the police, tell my teacher or a trusted relative.” Joao a 16-year-old male from Angola, explained: “Myself, I know who to report to in our community, though it will be good for every child to know who to consult.”

38%
children said the
pandemic had
impacted their
ability to play with
friends

Half of the children and young people interviewed, (55 out of 111), responded that COVID-19 had prevented them from socialising, and 38% (42 out of 111) specifically commented that it had affected their ability to play with friends. Ntombifuthi, a 17-year-old male from Eswatini, stated: “We have our parents at home, but you can’t chat with them like you did friends.”

In Southern Africa, not all children and young people have access to the Internet or phones to stay in touch with their friends, furthering their feelings of isolation. Zethu, a 17-year-old female from Eswatini, mentioned: “We prefer socialising in person, and we don’t all have the phones for WhatsApping, and those that do can’t always afford data.”

I feel isolated with just [being around] my family. I cannot go to school, or even visit my friends. (Child respondent, 11, female, Angola)

Some were concerned that the lack of contact with friends would negatively affect their relationships in the future. Mwiinga, an 18-year-old female from Zambia, worried: “We are so isolated from one another, we do not know how it will be when the time comes ... to resume our relationships. Maybe our friends won’t want to hang out with us.” Mandisa, a 14-year-old male from Eswatini, explained: “We no longer meet with our friends to chat and play. While we used to enjoy that, somehow the connection between us has been lost.”

46%
participants said
the COVID-19
pandemic had
affected their
ability to practice
their religion
and/or grow
spiritually.

Apart from individual friendships, children and young people missed attending church or mosque. In fact, 46% (51 out of 111) participants said that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their ability to practise their religion and/or grow spiritually. Lwazi, a 13-year-old male from Eswatini, said: "People can't go to church and that makes me sad."

Some people that we only saw at church, we no longer see and no longer know what those people look like anymore. Talking to them on WhatsApp is not the same or enough. Sharing the word [scriptures], which was something that we did at church in fellowship, is no longer possible, and that depresses me because now I read the Bible on my own and have nobody to clarify it for me. (Dabulamazi, 16, male, Eswatini)

Children and young people missed church, not only because it provided them with an opportunity to learn more about their faith, but they also valued the fun and sense of community they had there. Sipelele, an 18-year-old female from Eswatini, shared: "Church is in groups and it's just not fun since you can't worship together as we like [to do]."

INCREASED RISK OF WITNESSING OR EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE

62%
children spoke
about violence
during the
COVID-19
pandemic.

We children, we feel so in danger because, with the violence that we are currently experiencing, our future is uncertain. (Arnold, 17, male, DRC)

Children and young people were asked if and how the current global pandemic had affected the risk of experiencing and witnessing different forms of violence and abuse. During interviews, 62% (58 out of 93) of participants spoke about some form of violence occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic. Not all children and young people shared personal experiences of violence, but some gave examples using their friends and community members.

Violence against children takes many forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation. Violence occurs in many settings, including the home, school, community and over the Internet. Similarly, a wide range of perpetrators commit violence against children, such as family members, intimate partners, teachers, neighbours, strangers and other children. Such violence not only inflicts harm, pain and humiliation on children; it also kills. (UNICEF, 2015)¹⁸

VIOLENCE AT HOME

From the time quarantine started, there has been domestic conflicts between parents involving children, where they are physically abused by their own parents or guardians. Physical abuse cases towards children have really risen in our neighbourhood. Previously, the most prevalent violence against children cases were parental neglect. (Fernanda, 16, female, Angola)

As a result of the global pandemic, school closures, “stay-at-home” mandates, and advice to avoid large gatherings, children and young people are spending more time at home.¹⁹ In environments of heightened stress, children and young people are at greater risk of experiencing or witnessing violence.²⁰ In some cases, domestic violence was already taking place inside the home prior to the outbreak of the virus. The increased time children and young people spent isolated at home only increased the risk.²¹ Nkambule, an 18-year-old female from Eswatini, said: “Violence has increased at [the] household level as parents are not used to spending such a long time together in one place.”

Children and young people who grow up in homes where domestic violence is taking place are more likely to be victims of abuse themselves,²² and the most likely perpetrators of violence against children and young people are people they know.²³ Mwiinga, an 18-year-old female from Zambia, explained: “Children really don’t feel safe anymore because no one knows where the next risk will come from. Most times, it is within the household or [from] close relatives, so this is very worrisome for us.” Dlamini, an 18-year-old male from Eswatini, confirmed: “Beating and physical discipline has increased as children spend their time at home with their uncles and cousins who beat them for misbehaving.”

Children and young people cited the increased amount of time being spent with family and parent/caregiver stress as catalysts for the increase in violence at home.

Children are increasingly undergoing abuse, yes. For some reason, adults seem to be angry and they just beat children, even for eating food that was left over. Maybe, it’s because children are at home throughout and they are annoying elders. (Titus, 12, male, Zambia)

Some peers are being beaten more than usual now that they are stuck at home with their parents [who are] taking out their anger on them for their job losses or other frustrating factors. Strict parents are taking out their stresses on their children. (Nokthula, 17, female, Eswatini)

SEXUAL ABUSE AT HOME

Children continue to get sexually abused by people they live with. (Eunice, 11, female, Zambia)

Several children and young people from Eswatini and Zambia perceived an increase in the risk of sexual abuse since the COVID-19 outbreak began.

It may happen that, in some cases, there is even sexual abuse because [children and young people] are now spending a lot of time as well at home with many other relatives that have come back due to the coronavirus. (Philiswa, 17, female, Eswatini)

I have heard of a child that was sexually abused by their uncle during this period. (Makuka, 13, male, Zambia)

Sexual abuse is, however, happening now. It is a concern because even children as young as 3-years-old are sexually abused by uncles and cousins that live close to them. I even heard of a 3-month-old baby that was molested and she died. (Mwiinga, 18, female, Zambia)

The heightened risk of sexual abuse was attributed by some young people to relatives who returned from abroad to live with children and young people and their families in their homes. A group of 15 to 18-year-old females from Zambia reflected on this in a focus group: “For girls, the risk of being sexually abused is more prominent amongst people they live with. So, it’s a challenge for us young people.”

CHILD LABOUR

PAID WORK

Child labour is defined as “work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development.”²⁴ There are currently 71.2 million children and young people involved in child labour across Africa; the largest number of any region globally.²⁵ The majority work in family agriculture, and many parents are reliant on their children to generate income.²⁶

Chadza, a 15-year-old male from Malawi, confirmed child labour was an existing issue prior to COVID-19: “Yes, child labour and child marriages are common in this village.” Esther, a 17-year-old male from DRC, agreed: “In some families, our child friends already work to support their families, and they feel unsafe or exposed. Parents are exploiting their children more.” Recent research shows that, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, more children and young people could be pushed into child labour.²⁷ This is, in part due to the loss, or reduction, of family income and school closures.²⁸

In the community, there are children who are victims of mistreatment, especially during this period of COVID-19. There are parents who force their children to do heavy work [and] burdens that are unsuitable for children. Others have started to economically exploit their children, and often these children even sell until very late at night [starting at] 8 pm. (Mygod, 16, male, DRC)

In the wake of school closures, many children and young people worked to contribute to the family income. Despite the fact that some countries were in total or partial lockdown, some children and young people still worked at home or on family farms. Dorothy, an 11-year-old female from Malawi, said: “Yes, the closure of schools is also exposing children to different kinds of child abuse, which includes child labour, as parents are taking advantage of the presence of children in the households.”

Since children are no longer in school during this period, parents take advantage of this to bring their children to the fields every day without rest, and others use their children to sell to feed their family. Children sell chikwanges (cassava stick) at night for the benefit of their parents who are at home. However, the child protection law, it’s Article 55, says that children should not work more than four hours a day, but this is not the case in the community. (Joihane, 15, female, DRC)

Child labour exposes children and young people to other types of harm and violence, for example, physical, psychological and sexual abuse, as well as dangerous working conditions.²⁹

Especially since there is no more school, the parents take the opportunity to send and give heavy work to their children ... the fact that today parents no longer work as before, forces some children to contribute to family survival, for example, by selling water, and this exposes them to risks, such as traffic accidents, rape, etc. (Miradie, 15, female, DRC)

Some [children and young people] have had to take over their small family businesses like spaza [unofficial] shops at the bus station. It's not safe because, if you're at the station by yourself every day, you could get taken advantage of because there's not many people or traffic passing by. (Zethu, 17, female, Eswatini)

CARING AND HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

For some children and young people, the increased time at home has led to increased domestic responsibilities, including looking after younger siblings and doing housework. Young women and girls are more likely to carry household workloads; however, this type of work is rarely represented in child labour estimates.³⁰ Kettie, a 12-year-old female from Malawi, stated: "Now all we are doing is helping our parents, I help my grandmother, with chores at home. I also help to take care of my younger siblings."

Like paid labour, in some cases, the extra burden of housework and childcare kept children and young people from their education.³¹ Salifyanji, a 16-year-old female from Zambia, responded: "When we are home, the house chores are too many, and this keeps us away from learning." Banele, a 17-year-old male from Eswatini, shared: "There are times when the house chores have taken you out of the house, such as [when you're] fetching water, so you will miss the class." Dlamini, an 18-year-old male from Eswatini, agreed: "There are children who sometimes need to stop doing their schoolwork or learning as they are assigned to do household duties."

EARLY MARRIAGE

Child marriage has always been a problem in this area ... [but] parents now hide the marriage because they know it is wrong. By the time this situation [the COVID-19 pandemic] is over, we will find out that some girls have been married off. (Titus, 12, male, Zambia)

27%
children said
that they were
seeing more
child marriages
or were more
afraid of
experiencing
early marriage
themselves
than before the
onset of the
pandemic.

Globally, sub-Saharan Africa is home to the second largest number of child brides, with over 18% of the global burden. This is equal to 115 million individuals marrying before the age of 18.³² The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that over the next decade there could be an additional 13 million early marriages taking place that otherwise would not have occurred because of the indirect effects of COVID-19.³³

Children and young people were asked if, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, other children and young people in their communities were getting married or if they were more afraid of getting married than before. In individual interviews, 27% (25 out of 93) answered affirmatively.

Before, girls got married because they could either not afford to pay for school fees or because they had no opportunities for being in school. Now, everyone is affected. So, I am not sure how it will be like because staying at home, especially in the village, like here, doing nothing is really a big problem. (Chiluya, 15, female, Zambia)

Children and young people viewed school closures as a risk factor for child marriage. Arnold, a 17-year-old male from DRC, confirmed that “children pass to early marriage . . . due to the lack of schooling activity”. Similarly, Karabo, a 17-year-old male from Lesotho, explained: “Child marriage seems to be high now. Since parents are not working and schools are closed, children feel there is no more hope for the future, so they opt for marriage.” Payi, a 16-year-old male from DRC, said: “Girls ages 16, 17 and 18 are stigmatised by some adults, sometimes even their own family members, [who] tell them ‘. . . It’s shameful for you, if school activities don’t resume, we’ll [get you married].’”

In some extreme cases, participants shared that early marriage was employed by families as a solution to poverty and hunger. In a focus group, young women between 15 and 18 years old from Zambia, cited a lack of family income and a shortage of food as risk factors for early marriage. They relayed that “mothers let girls get married because they fail to source enough food to feed the family on their own”.

Early marriage puts children and young people at greater risk of experiencing sexual and physical violence.³⁴

There are many children that are forced into marriages nowadays. Some girls just run away from their parents to go and marry their boyfriends. Some boys are young that marry [the girls], so they bring them to live in the same houses as their parents. The problem is that they now have to be adults and are expected to cook and clean, just like an adult mother. And if they don’t do things the boy or man demands, they are beaten. (Focus group participants, ages 11 to 14, female, Zambia)

ONLINE RISKS

In Southern Africa, some children and young people are spending more time online, due to recommendations to stay at home and school closures. This has increased their exposure to online risks.

Because during these times [when] children no longer go to school, they devote themselves to social networks, and many people spend more time publishing things that harm children’s lives, such as pictures of people naked. It does not allow us to develop as before. (Joihane, 15, female, DRC)

According to the latest available statistics from the International Telecommunication Union (ITC), in many countries in Southern Africa, less than half of the population have access to the Internet.³⁵ In Eswatini, for example, only 30% of the population accessed the Internet over a three month period in 2017. In contrast, the percentage was much lower in DRC with only 9% of the population using the Internet during the same timeframe.³⁶ It should be recognised that these figures have likely changed since 2017; however, children and young people’s discussion about online risks reflected the variation in their Internet access.

Not all participants in the consultation had access to the Internet, phones, or, in some cases, electricity.

Due to the lack of electronic means of communication by most children, many of them have not been abused [on] social networks; however, the same cannot be said about the abuses that they may suffer at home or in other places. (Lucinda, 15, female, Mozambique)

Most children have no access to the Internet because they generally don't [have] phones that can offer this facility. So, the risk of getting preyed on by Internet users is not a risk; the real risk is within communities. (Focus group respondents, ages 15 to 18, female, Zambia)

Children and young people with access to the Internet did report that they or someone they knew had seen inappropriate (sexual) content online. Miradie, a 15-year-old female from DRC, explained how this made her friend feel: "A friend of mine told me that when she was online, she was looking at pictures on Facebook, and she came across an obscene photo and it bothered her morally."

Children and young people confirmed they and others they knew were asked to send indecent pictures of themselves online. Philiswa, a 17-year-old female from Eswatini, reported: "Yes, it happens on Facebook most of the time when you accept a friend request from a person you do not know, and that person will ask for your nude pictures." Zethu, a 17-year-old female from Eswatini, highlighted a gender divide in these risks: "Boys download porn, and girls are more likely to share nudes to the males that give them money."

These risks are directly related to children and young people's ability to access the Internet.

Those children who have pocket money are able to buy data bundles and be in a position to access Internet where they find themselves exposed to inappropriate content. They end up meeting people they do not know who ask them to send them their naked pictures. (Dlamini, 18, male, Eswatini)

Cyberbullying was only mentioned by a few children and young people. Nkambule, an 18-year-old female from Eswatini, stated: "Some children do post bad things about other children online." However, access to the Internet and technology affected the prevalence of these issues in Southern Africa.



Eleven-year-old Senamile from Eswatini talking about the impact of COVID-19 in her community.

2.

RESILIENT RESPONSES: FACING CHALLENGES AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Children and young people are not just victims of the global crisis; those who participated in this consultation thoughtfully reflected on the current pandemic and how it had affected their own lives and those of their families and friends. Children and young people's responses gave evidence to their capacity as active and engaged citizens. They were aware that they could contribute to making a significant difference through individual and collective actions in their families and communities. This section looks at the ways in which children and young people are responding to the new or heightened challenges to their safety created by the pandemic, and how they are working towards bettering their own lives and the lives of those around them.



FOLLOWING BEST PRACTICES TO STOP COVID-19

We can play our part by being agents of change in observing all preventative measures, starting with ourselves. (Luciana, 14, male, Angola)

92%
children and young people said they were following one or more preventative measures to stop COVID-19.

When asked how children and young people were contributing or could contribute to fighting the spread of COVID-19, children and young people said that they should follow the guidance given by their governments and other trusted organisations (e.g. World Vision and WHO).

Furthermore, they demonstrated their use of preventative measures. In fact, 92% (102 out of 111) of children and young people said they were following one or more preventative measures (e.g. social distancing, staying home, avoiding big gatherings, and/or practising good hygiene).

Of the 111 respondents, 76% (84) said that they could help to fight the spread of the virus through practising good hygiene, such as handwashing, wearing masks, and using hand sanitiser. Evan, an 18-year-old male from Zambia, stated: "Children are fighting COVID-19 by washing their hands regularly with soap and clean water. Children are also following all instructions given by the government."

76%
children and young people said they were following one or more preventative measures to stop COVID-19.

We are listening to the information that is being given about the prevention of the virus, and we are taking safe precautions; for example, we wash our hands with running water and soap for 20 seconds [and] we are staying at home. We need to continue following the instructions that are being given by the health professionals on how to prevent COVID-19. (Mandisa, 14, male, Eswatini)

Staying at home as much as possible was a precautionary measure mentioned by 42% (47 out of 111) of participants, and 19% (21 out of 111) cited avoiding big gatherings as a way to fight the spread of the virus. While children and young people recognised the importance of following these guidelines, they also expressed that it was difficult for them. According to Banele, a 17-year-old male from Eswatini: "Youth are frustrated, we are not used to just sitting and not doing anything, it's hard. But we do what we can as well to prevent the spread [of the coronavirus]."

CONTRIBUTING AT HOME WITH FAMILY

This section looks at the ways in which children and young people were responding to new challenges and creating opportunities at home with their families.

POSITIVE OPPORTUNITIES AT HOME

Children and young people shared their experiences of spending more time with family as a result of “stay-at-home” guidance. Several children saw it as a positive opportunity to bond with family members, though they recognised the challenging realities of prolonged close proximity. Zethu, a 17-year-old female from Eswatini, replied: “We love being with our parents, but when they keep nagging about school, it irritates us. We love having our parents [at] home with us though; we get time to bond and build our relationships.” Chiluya, a 15-year-old female from Zambia, explained: “The good part is that my family and I have become close because, really, we are always together. We sometimes argue with my siblings, but I think spending time together as a family is also important.” Eden, an 11-year-old female from Zambia, agreed: “My parents and I are together, and this has helped us to bond as a family.”

TEACHING OTHERS

14%
children are teaching
others about the
virus to stop the
spread of COVID-19.

Children and young people, 14% (15 out of 111), specifically mentioned this as an opportunity to teach others how to fight the spread of COVID-19. Evah, a 12-year-old female from Zambia, stated: “We can also improve hygiene and encourage family members to improve hygiene and practise social distancing when they go out.” Titus, a 12-year-old male from Zambia, suggested: “We can also help our little brothers and sisters to keep their hands clean and talk to them about not touching their mouths and noses with unclean hands.”

HELPING THEIR COMMUNITIES

This section spotlights the varied and creative ways children and young people are helping their communities, despite the risks and challenges they face.

AWARENESS RAISING

*We too, as children and young people, must stand hand-in-hand to raise awareness amongst others to protect themselves.
(Esther, 17, male, DRC)*

In a focus group conducted with girls between 11 and 14 years old in Zambia, they shared that children and young people, like themselves, could make a difference in their communities, and one way that they could do this was through awareness raising. In-person and online actions were mentioned by 32% (36 out of 111) of respondents as a concrete effort they could or were doing to help to fight the spread of COVID-19 in their communities.

Children and young people had several creative ideas on how to spread awareness. Arnold, a 17-year-old male from DRC suggested communicating “verbally, written (by leaflet), in pictures, by media, or by a children’s website”. He commented: “One thing is certain, an awareness made by the child is much more followed because adults are curious to hear children speak.” Radio was another platform that children and young people suggested using to raise awareness. Sebongile, an 18-year-old female from Lesotho, mentioned: “Radio is one of the most powerful media channels, like social media, [for] programmes [for] children [to] share messages with other children. Specialists could be invited to the programmes and children [could] call and share their thoughts with them.” Dora, a 16-year-old female from Zambia, alternatively proposed: “I think coming up with a drama about how COVID-19 is spread can help, then sharing it on social media for other children to see and learn from it.”

Not all the children and young people in Southern Africa had access to Internet. However, social media and cell phones were mentioned as important awareness-raising tools, and the majority (17 out of 20) of participants from Angola said that raising awareness on how to prevent COVID-19 via social media was an effective way in which they could contribute to fighting the spread of COVID-19. Fernanda, a 16-year-old female from Angola, replied: “Children and young people should be able to disseminate the information of COVID-19 on social media to raise awareness.” Sinethemba, a 14-year-old female from Eswatini, urged other children and young people to “educate their friends through social media about the importance of preventing the virus”.

I think if we, as children, stop creating and spreading myths about coronavirus through social media and confusing the nation, we can help to notify the nation and other children of the danger of the virus and how they can help to fight it. (Liteboho, 17, female, Lesotho)

Children and young people were especially concerned that messages and guidelines were not reaching the most marginalised or vulnerable groups, including disabled people, the elderly, and those living in poverty. Chadza, a 15-year-old male from Malawi, said: “We are transmitting what is being spread through the media to those who cannot get the message, like the elderly and the disabled. We are also washing [our] hands with soap and observing social distancing.”



Nineteen-month-old Paulino with his grandmother, Cordelia, 49, who is his primary caregiver. Paulino was severely malnourished and has been receiving nutrition support through World Vision’s work in Angola.

3.

WHAT'S NEXT? SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

During interviews, children and young people were asked to share what resources they needed to continue their efforts to fight the spread of COVID-19 and provide suggestions to the leaders of their countries on how their governments could help to support and protect children and young people in the time of COVID-19. From their replies to these two questions, five themes emerged: (1) supporting children and young people to fight the spread of COVID-19, (2) protecting children and young people from violence, (3) including and listening to children and young people, (4) supporting education and (5) supporting families. Here are a few of their ideas in their own words.

SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO FIGHT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

When children and young people were asked what they would like their president or head of state to do for children and young people during this period, they had many ideas. Some said they wanted their governments to provide their communities with more supplies to help to stem the spread of the virus. They also called on their countries' leaders to work towards ensuring that sufficient advocacy work is done so that all people are aware of how to limit further transmission of the virus. Some children and young people also expressed their desire for medical facilities to be fully equipped and accessible.

SUPPLIES

One-third (31 out of 93) of children and young people said that they needed more hygiene supplies, such as soap, masks and hand sanitisers, in their communities to fight the spread of COVID-19, as they were frequently mentioned as items in short supply, or simply too expensive. Eric, a 16-year-old male from Zambia, suggested: "The head of state can help by providing masks and protective clothing for children that cannot afford to buy these themselves or those whose families can't afford to buy."

[The government should prioritise the] distribution of masks because people complain they have no money to buy [them] and use it as an excuse [not to wear one]. Provide gloves, especially for those working in shops, so they don't handle money with their bare hands because they may get infected in that way. Provide sanitisers and vests to be worn by those doing sensitisations so they can be taken seriously.

(Dabulamanzi, 16, male, Eswatini)

12%
children
stated that
they needed
better access
to clean
water.

Aside from hygiene supplies, 12% (11 out of 93) of respondents stated that they needed better access to clean water. Sinethemba, a 14-year-old female from Eswatini, explained: "Our families need to be provided with water so that we can be able to wash our hands as there is a scarcity of water in the community – for example, tankers that will supply us with water." Bwembya, an 11-year-old male from Zambia, confirmed: "In our community, we need support of handwashing facilities, such as buckets, clean water and soap so that people can wash their hands frequently." Clever, a 7-year-old male from Malawi, agreed: "We need more soap and water to continue fighting corona[virus]."

ACCURATE INFORMATION

Children and young people said that more information and advocacy work were needed to make people aware that Children and young people said that more information and advocacy work were needed to make people aware of how to lower the risk of contracting COVID-19. In fact, 14% (13 out of 93) participants said that they needed more accurate information or training to stay up-to-date and then share with others. Philiswa, a 17-year-old female from Eswatini, suggested that the government should “put posters that talk about the virus, especially in the waiting rooms and other places where we can be able to read”.

Children and young people also wanted to know detailed information on how they and others could keep themselves safe, including how best to use supplies. Eden, an 11-year-old male from Zambia, said: “The support we need is to be taught how to wear masks correctly. Most people don’t know the correct way [or] the correct way of handling the masks to keep them free of contamination.”

MEDICAL SUPPORT

Children and young people urged their countries’ leaders to ensure hospitals were accessible and well equipped to treat patients with COVID-19 and other pre-existing illnesses, such as HIV and AIDS. Rates of HIV and AIDS are high in the region; in fact, Eswatini has the highest percentage of people living with HIV, and it is one of the leading causes of death amongst adolescents.³⁷

For those living with HIV and AIDS and other illnesses, [COVID-19] is a risk because some are critical and really need nutritious foods to survive. If they die, there is a risk of children again not having people to look after them. So, I think we need to do something as a country to make sure everyone is protected and to reduce the spread of COVID-19. (Evan, 18, male, Zambia)

I am just fearing that, with my condition, our local clinics may run out of the medicines I require. I do not want to default on taking my medication. During lockdown we are not allowed to move to different parts of the country; I also don’t have transport money to go to town and get the medicines, so, this is just my fear. (Child participant living with HIV, 17, male, Zimbabwe)

We want the president of the republic to put in place possible means for combat[ing] the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as strengthening equipment in hospitals. (Miradie, 15, female, DRC)

I would ask that he [the king] provide mobile clinics for our areas to minimise travelling to clinics. (Zethu, 17, female, Eswatini)



PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM VIOLENCE

Children should be protected from harm and violence. (Dickson, 12, male, Zambia)

Children and young people are not just victims that need to be protected but are also creative and vocal advocates with ideas on how to create safer and more supportive communities. In light of their concerns regarding their peers’ heightened risk of experiencing or witnessing violence, children and young people recommended increased government support in response to efforts to stop violence in their communities. Titus, a 12-year-old male from Zambia, summed this up: “We want to continue being protected from violence because now we are hearing [about] a lot of children that are being abused in homes.”

Children and young people recognised that their countries are undoubtedly going through difficult times, yet they urged their governments to prioritise child protection. Osvaldo, a 15-year-old male from Mozambique, said: “The children ask [the government] to look [at] the issue of protection of the rights of the child in this period.” Esther, a 17-year-old male from DRC, agreed: “The government and other actors, like NGOs, the UN, etc., must involve children and ensure that the protection of the child is always respected, despite the time that the country goes through.”

INCLUDE AND LISTEN TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The participation of children is a right, not a favour, and COVID-19 affects our lives [too]. (Arnold, 17, male, DRC)

Children and young people want their voices to be heard by their countries' decision makers, to be involved in the decision-making process, and their views to be respected and taken seriously.

[Governments should choose youth leaders to advocate for the needs of the youth. (Nokthula, 17, female, Eswatini)

It's pertinent at this point to hear the children, I really enjoyed it [giving my opinion in this consultation], and I feel like we haven't been forgotten. (Delma, 13, female, Mozambique)

The Congolese government and its partners [can] support children and young people by making their participation and protection [more] effective at this difficult time. (Esther, 17, male, DRC)

To protect children and young people, we need a space to share our knowledge with others who still do not understand the seriousness of consequence that coronavirus has generated in our lives. (Payi, 16, male, DRC)

SUPPORT EDUCATION

I wish the government will soon open the schools so that we can go back to class. (Happy, 13, male, Malawi)

90%
children
and young
people said
COVID-19 has
affected their
education.

When asked how COVID-19 affected their lives, 90% (100 out of 111) of children and young people cited education – including school closures and difficulties continuing education at home.

Dorothy, an 11-year-old female from Malawi, replied: “I miss my experience at school. I wish I [had] time to do schoolwork, but I do not have books at home and my parents cannot assist me with schoolwork as they are always busy with other things.” Clara, a 12-year-old female from Zimbabwe, agreed: “We need the government to open the schools so we can continue with our education.”

School closures have further highlighted existing inequalities. Children and young people who did not have electricity, Internet, radio or books at home had great difficulty continuing their education.

Right now, there is a disparity because some are learning online, while those that can't afford to do this are just sitting at home. I don't think this is fair for us [who] can't afford to use the Internet to learn or with our teachers. (Eunice, 11, female, Zambia)

In my household, I sometimes get lucky because we get to have solar power to watch TV, and I can see what is being shown on the new TV stations introduced for education. But, in some households, this is not the case. Some children do not have solar panels to power their TVs and watch. Those other children are really lagging behind with school. (Dora, 16, female, Zambia)

This issue was prevalent across Southern Africa; in fact, a recent study revealed that “the share of students who cannot be reached by digital and broadcast remote learning policies is the highest in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa”.³⁸ Respondents also drew attention to the divide between the rich and poor and rural and urban households.

I want to call for the government to make decisions with the poor in mind, as not all of us have access to Internet to do online education. We equally need to pass, but we have not been learning at all throughout this lockdown. This is the time for the government to show leadership and protect the poor. (Melody, 17, female, Zimbabwe)

[The head of state should] talk to the Minister of Education and our teachers [and tell them] that they must come up with learning techniques [for] while we are staying at home; these must benefit all children, both rich and poor, as some do not have radios at their homes. (Sinethemba, 14, female, Eswatini)

In town, children are using online classes and watching TV. Here in the village, we can't have any of that, and this means we are behind. We won't be at the same level; so, let's just open schools and all go back to school. (Bwembya, 11, male, Zambia)

Children and young people wanted their governments to restart education as soon as possible, in part, to equalise the inequalities at-home learning has illuminated.

SUPPORT FAMILIES

Yes, we would like the government and NGOs to give communities, including us children, food as we are indeed hungry. We really feel negatively affected by COVID-19. (Tsepang, 14, female, Lesotho)

Children and young people recognised the financial impact of the pandemic on their families. Loss of income meant parents had difficulties providing food for their children. Children and young people asked their governments to provide food, regulate the price of food, and/or provide financial assistance to families so children and young people would not go hungry.

PROVIDE FOOD

Children and young people called on their governments to provide food and other basic resources, especially to poor families.

The king can provide food because parents have no work, so there's no money to buy food. (Lwazi, 13, male, Eswatini)

Give food to all those who are hungry. (Ntombifuthi, 17, male, Eswatini)

Governments must provide food for the vulnerable. The assumption is that children in urban areas are in a better state than those in rural areas. That is not true. We have a lot of children that are spending the entire day hungry, and it is difficult for the parents too. (Melody, 17, female, Zimbabwe)

Children and young people in urban areas may have difficulty accessing food during the COVID-19 pandemic for several reasons; for example, restrictions on movement mean families cannot access markets regularly and some city residences have little space for food storage.³⁹ Nokthula, a 17-year-old female from Eswatini, asked governments to pay attention to this widespread need by providing “food support for all families, not just a chosen few, since even others have lost their jobs”.

SUPPORT LIVELIHOODS

Others suggested that the government provide financial assistance so families can buy basic necessities, such as food. Dlamini, an 18-year-old male from Eswatini, asked his government to “help in meeting the basic needs for children and communities, such as money, in order for the elders to provide the basic needs for their families”. Sinethemba, a 14-year-old female from Eswatini, said the government should “give food or money to the poor and those that lost jobs”.

Aside from food assistance, children and young people also asked governments to support livelihoods so that parents could afford to provide for their children. Beulla, a 13-year-old female from Zimbabwe, stated: “We need [the] government to help our parents with some projects to do. Sometimes they struggle to get food for us.” Tino, a 17-year-old male from Zimbabwe, agreed: “We want [the] government to allow our parents to start working so they can support us financially.”

SUPPORT MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

I would like you to ensure that the most deprived children have their basic needs met. (Delma, 13, female, Mozambique)

Children and young people were especially concerned about the most marginalised people in their communities, particularly disabled people. They asked their governments to support the disabled people, specifically to ensure they had access to information about COVID-19 and the means to protect themselves.

Ensure that people living with disabilities are catered for and aren't left out because they are equally at risk of getting COVID-19. There should be an organisation specifically focused on people living with disabilities, to sensitise them on COVID-19, particularly the deaf, blind and mute because we may want to help them as regular people but struggle communicating with them. (Dabulamanzi, 16, male, Eswatini)

We also support those with disabilities to make sure that they get the messages and are practising the precautionary measure to prevent the spreading of the virus in our community. (Midias, 12, male, Malawi)

Sarafina with her daughter Grace. Sarafina says coronavirus has negatively impacted business in her area, forcing her to close her grocery shop.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Children and young people are ready and willing to play their part in fighting the spread of COVID-19. In addition to highlighting how they and their peers have been affected by the crisis, children and young people are also working to respond, but they need support from their governments, UN agencies, donors, NGOs and the private sector to do so. They are not only beneficiaries but are also rights-holders. Relevant stakeholders must create an environment where child rights are protected, and children and young people are included as actors in their own rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WORLD VISION

The following are World Vision's own recommendations to ensure that children and young people are active participants, protected, educated and have their basic survival and development needs fulfilled throughout this crisis.

I. LISTEN TO, INCLUDE IN DECISION-MAKING, AND EQUIP CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH PRACTICAL HELP TO FIGHT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

- **Provide age-appropriate information to ensure that children and young people, families and communities are aware of the changing COVID-19 situation and the measures being undertaken.** This includes accounting for populations with little to no Internet access in hard-to-reach rural areas and indigenous communities.
- **Recognise and embrace children and young people as rights-holders and social actors with capabilities to contribute to stopping the COVID-19 spread.** This includes utilising appropriate strategies to ensure that their participation is safe, sensitive and meaningful. Spaces and partnerships with children and young people need to be developed to help them to take action to cope with the crisis and contribute to reducing the spread of COVID-19.

2. PROTECT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FROM VIOLENCE

- **Governments, donors, UN agencies and the international community must prioritise child protection actions in all national COVID-19 responses.** This includes ensuring continued functioning of child-friendly reporting mechanisms, such as SOS hotlines, to enable child-friendly counselling and ensure children and young people know where and how to contact these services.

- **Governments, UN agencies, civil societies, churches and faith-based organisations must fund and implement a mental health and psychosocial (MHPSS) strategy** for reaching those directly and indirectly affected, especially the most vulnerable, taking into account gender, age and disability. This support should address fears, stigmas, negative coping strategies and other needs identified through assessments. It should build on positive, community-proposed coping strategies, promoting close collaboration between communities, inclusive of faith actors, and health, education and social welfare services.
- **Government, UN agencies, civil societies, faith-based organisations and the private sector should work together to make the Internet a safer place for children and young people.** This includes strict implementation of laws on cybercrime, such as the online sexual exploitation of children and young people and online bullying, and intensifying efforts to raise online safety awareness amongst children and young people.

3. SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION

- **Governments, donors, UN agencies and the international community must improve access to and availability of age-appropriate and gender-responsive distance education methods** to mitigate the disruption school closures, due to COVID-19, are having on learning. This means urgently rolling out child-friendly, age-appropriate methods, such as remote learning via television, radio or online.
- **Governments must ensure that education reaches the most vulnerable children and young people,** particularly where learning has already been difficult or interrupted due to fragility or exclusion. This includes taking into consideration children and young people with limited access to the Internet or technology and the challenge of households with several children of different ages.
- **Distance learning curriculums should include life skills education** to help children and young people to recognise and mitigate violence, exclusion, stigmatisation and poverty-associated risks. This is crucial to preventing increased rates of child labour and child marriage.

4. PROVIDE FAMILIES SUPPORT AND LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES

- Governments, donors, UN agencies and the international community must urgently take action to scale their responses to acute hunger **by investing in public health and water, sanitation and hygiene to address root causes of child malnutrition.** They must ensure that critical food assistance and nutrition programmes (e.g. community management of acute malnutrition) are adapted safely and function throughout the COVID-19 responses.
- **Governments should ensure social protection measures are in place for the most vulnerable throughout the response and recovery phases,** providing families with cash or food assistance to meet their children's immediate basic needs and supporting parents to identify positive coping mechanisms for themselves and their children. Policies and services must be inclusive, especially for women, indigenous groups, minorities and migrants.
- **Governments, banks, microfinance institutions should develop and fund poverty alleviation plans that incorporate economic recovery lending to help the most vulnerable families to recover more quickly after the shock.** These institutions can provide temporary grants to smallholder farmers and businesses to restart production and generate income. Banks can waive fees on loans and extend payment deadlines.

The closure of schools in Zambia due to COVID-19 has affected children forcing them to learn at home. However, excessive household chores are preventing many from focusing on their studies.



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