

NEWSLETTER

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SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES
ZIMBABWE

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Director's Foreword

The first quarter of 2016 has come around with great promise for SOS CVZ. The team is working ever closer together which I am certain will continue to manifest in the quality of service our program beneficiaries are able to access.

After a short break, we have resumed our newsletter-excitingly at a time when the world stops to appreciate women for their achievements! In this edition, we focus on issues affecting women such as ending child marriages, girls in sport, and the role of women caregivers.

I salute the accomplishments of all women on International Women's Day and am grateful for their indispensable role in our society and SOS CVZ in particular. With a superior female: male employee ratio it is clear that women have always and continue to play a pivotal role with SOS CVZ.

We commit to continuously creating an environment where girls and women operate in an increasingly inclusive and productive environment. Key to achieving this is - addressing cross cutting issues including facilitating dynamic work environments, empowerment of women, engaging the support of men, child protection, health and HIV/AIDS.

Thank you for your continued support towards Gender equality and wish you a wonderful reading.

Jerry Bigena
Interim National Director





Early marriages outlawed in Zimbabwe

By Kellivn Nyamudeza

In January 2016, the Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe (ConCourt) outlawed early marriages, a landmark victory for children and child rights organisations such as SOS Children's Villages Zimbabwe (SOSCVZ). By proscribing child marriages, the court has made a strong statement in protecting the rights of children.

Child marriage is defined as a formal marriage or informal union before age 18. Zimbabwe has one of the highest child marriage prevalence rates in the world. It is estimated that one in four teenage girls is married. Child marriage predominantly affects girls who live in poverty and in rural areas. Prevalence is highest in Mashonaland Central and Mashonaland West. While boys can be affected, the practice predominantly impacts girls. Given their young age, girls have limited powers to make free and informed decisions about their marriage partner, the timing or the implications of this binding commitment. An element of coercion is sometimes involved because families often pressure or force the girls into marriage. Strong social and cultural norms also drive the practice despite legislation in place.

There is a positive correlation between the level of education and the age of marriage - the more educated a woman is, the more unlikely she is to be a child bride. Education, combined with good health and economic empowerment, are the game changers for girls and women. When girls stay in school and have access to sexual and reproductive health care, they have better negotiating power within their families, can decide for themselves whether and when to have children, pursue careers of their choice, and are able to contribute more to their communities and societies.

SOSCVZ operates in Mashonaland Central Province working in partnership with Ministry of Women affairs, Gender and Community Development and community based organizations. With these partners, the organisation carries out multi-pronged interventions to respond to the plight of girls at risk of early marriages. These interventions are designed to educate communities, leaders and churches on the importance of educating girls. In addition, SOSCVZ places emphasis on enabling girls to enroll and stay in school. One of its key education interventions is the back-to-school programme for young mothers who dropped out of school due to pregnancy. Through the provision of school fees, education materials like books, uniforms and psychosocial support young mothers have been given hope for the future.

In partnership with child rights CSOs, SOSCVZ compiled the Complementary Report on the state of children in Zimbabwe and submitted to the African Committee of Experts. This is an arm of the African Union responsible for the monitoring of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The complementary report stressed the need for the government to put in place measures to combat child marriages. In response, the Committee recommended the Government of Zimbabwe to have laws and policies that protect boys and girls from marriages. SOSCVZ through the Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children contributed to a similar status report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. This committee is responsible for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In response, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the Government of Zimbabwe outlaw child marriages.

The implications of the ConCourt ruling are that strong investment by government and civil society is required to create awareness and influence towards positive behaviour change. This is critical particularly for key target groups such as religious sects and communities that practice early marriage. However, significant legal questions still arise given the lack of harmony amongst the marriage laws, and the recent ConCourt ruling. Consequently, there is an urgent need for Parliament to amend the Marriages Act so as to be in alignment with the Children's Act and the ConCourt ruling.

My experience as a child bride by Patience*

My name is Patience and I am aged 18 years. I fell in love with Kenneth when I was in grade 7. We used to see each other during the holidays when I visited my sister in a town called Chinhoyi. After three years of dating, I fell pregnant in 2012. Once I realized I was pregnant, I went back to my sister since she knew about my boyfriend. While at my sister's house, Kenneth used to visit me often. One day, he came to fetch me and we went to stay together at his house. He used to torture me; it was really sexual harassment. He would always beat me for no reason and he would not buy me food.

I then gave birth in January 2013 to a baby girl and thereafter the situation got even worse. When my baby was six months old I could not handle the situation anymore. I called my parents crying and begging them to take me back. When they agreed that I could come home I felt relieved. I packed my things, took my baby and went back home. All this happened when Kenneth was not at home. I arrived at my parents' home and they were just happy that I was alive. I wanted to start a new life and decided to forget about Kenneth.

In 2014 that's when SOS Children's Villages Zimbabwe, through the Grieg Project, started paying my school fees. I am currently studying a course in Hotel Catering and Management. The course is helping change my life. I have bigger dreams of the future. I also talk to other young girls to focus on their education and not rush into marriage. I hope the new law can also help us young women to stay away from marriage until we are really ready. I am hopeful that my baby and I will have a better future and I am truly thankful to SOS Children's Villages Zimbabwe. They do a lot of work to help us young mothers to re-shape our destiny.

***Name of the child has been changed in order to protect her identity**





From left to right: DHL Zimbabwe CEO, Jeff Phiri, Min of Sports, Arts & Culture, Makhosini Hlongwane, British Ambassador, Catriona Laing, Maizelands School Principal Zebediah Shengezi, ZRU President, John Falkenberg, SOSCVZ National Director, Jerry Bigena.

Girls Get into Rugby

By Zvik Zimunya

On Thursday 3 March, 2016, United Kingdom's Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Her Excellency, Ms. Catriona Lang, handed over kit to the newly formed SOS Herman Gmeiner Maizelands rugby teams. The donation was part of the global Get into Rugby campaign which promotes the expansion of rugby into marginalised communities.

The Get into Rugby (GIR) local initiative is led by the Zimbabwe Rugby Union (ZRU). Over the last few months the ZRU has rolled out GIR to various schools including SOS Hermann Gmeiner Maizelands Primary in Bindura Rural district. GIR incorporates life skills training, mentorship of participating children, and development of coaches from the local community (usually teachers). Some of the aims of the programme include identifying talent amongst marginalised children, and building gender equity through enabling the participation of girls.



Maizelands primary school girls during a rugby practice session

Speaking at the event, Ambassador Laing highlighted the importance of sport in rural development, especially enabling the participation of girls. She expressed hope that more girls would be encouraged to play the sport even beyond primary school. "Vasikana varikutambawo rugby nevakomana?" (girls are also playing rugby with the boys?), asked one parent as they watched the SOS Maizelands rugby teams in action.

Rugby has not been a common sport amongst girls, much less in rural districts such as Bindura where SOS Hermann Gmeiner Maizelands Primary is located. The district is a farming community situated in Mashonaland Central, a province that has the highest prevalence of early marriages. It also has some of the highest school drop-out rates. Culture can have a negative influence on the participation of girls in sport, particularly for male dominated ones such as rugby. In this regard, sport and physical activity are simple, low cost and effective vehicles for advancing positive social change including encouraging continued school

attendance. Sport can also be used to promote values such as gender equity.

Speaking at the event, one teacher commented, "We hope that this new programme will impart the necessary life skills to encourage girls to remain in school and perhaps, create opportunities for employment in women's rugby". For the children and their families at Maizelands, it is hoped that a life changing idea is received by them, that is, if girls can play a sport (especially traditionally male dominated ones), they can also continue attending school...and if they can stay in school, then they can also delay marriage.

Helping girls become stronger: The Grieg Gender Challenge

By Blessing Muudiwa

After her mother passed away, 13 year old Memory and her younger brother were placed in their aunt's custody. The family lived in the high density suburb of Nguboyenga, Bulawayo. Memory's aunt, a cross border trader, supported her niece and nephew with the profits from her business. However, she became ill and was unable to continue her business. Memory and her brother dropped out of school.

The family was identified by Nguboyenja Children's Hope Initiative (NCHI), a Community Based Organisation in partnership with the SOSCVZ Bulawayo Family Strengthening (FS) Programme. The FS Programme responds to the need of children at risk in low income communities. It is the first line of defence for children at risk before complete loss of biological or foster family occurs. The FS Programme uses a family based approach to strengthen the resilience of children at risk and build the capacity of their families to care for them.

The FS Programme partners various CBOs in planning, implementation, and monitoring programme interventions. With continued capacity building from SOSCVZ, some CBOs have evolved to fund the education interventions for children at risk such as the provision of school uniforms and payment of fees for children in communities being exited by SOSCVZ. CBO funding is raised through various income generating activities (IGAs) such as cattle fattening, hardware retail, and poultry farming. They are also evolving into grassroots advocacy movements on child rights in their communities.

To help the family get on its feet, SOSCVZ provided Memory and her brother with educational support. The children were re-enrolled into school. To ensure long term sustainability of the family's income source, Memory's aunt was supported with seed capital for a poultry project. Memory is now studying Social Work at the University of Zimbabwe.



Yes, I'd love to help children in need!

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Mama Mathe, Motherhood and Lifelong attachments

By Esther Maunze

“Leaving my children behind when I retire is my greatest fear. I wish I could take all of them with me,” says Mama Mathe.

At the end of August, 2016, Mama Mathe retires from SOS Children's Village Bulawayo. Mama Mathe has been a village mother since 1995. She has dedicated the last 21 years to looking after her children.

Mama Mathe currently has 8 children she cares for. “This is a house of prefects, of leaders and of children who are brilliant”, she declares proudly. Six of Mama's children were made prefects at primary school. Her face shines as she talks passionately of her children. Though proud of her children, she also recognises that they are not perfect – the children carry the scars of the abuse or abandonment they have undergone. Children who have experienced maltreatment are significantly more likely to develop disorganised attachments and these can have lifelong physical, emotional and social consequences. However, with love and care, she has nursed her children to good health, all the while encouraging them to shape their own futures.

Attachment is significant especially in the childhood years with the special bond developing between an infant and primary caregiver being the template for future relationship experiences. Children see this bond as a source of safety, comfort and pleasure. In addition, the quality of children's attachments is strongly influenced by the characteristics of their caregivers. The more sensitive and reliable the response of a caregiver to an infant or young child at risk, the more secure the attachment will be that develops. In this case, Mama Mathe's warm and loving nature is attractive to children and helps in the development of lasting family bonds that stretch the entire lifespan of the mother and children.

As Mama Mathe prepares for retirement, she asks herself, “How can one retire from loving one's own children?” Her two youngest, 12 year old Vusi and 14 year old Nathan* came to the Children's Village in Bulawayo as babies. She has looked after them all these years, and developed a strong bond with them. When SOS mothers retire, it is encouraged that they remain in contact with their children to ensure the family bonds nurtured from childhood are not broken. Mama Mathe has decided to register as a foster parent with the government's Department of Child Welfare and Protection Services (DCWPS). As a foster parent, she will be able to continue caring for her children even after retiring from SOS Children's Villages Zimbabwe. In this way, the bonds that have been built over a lifetime will continue to strengthen and grow.

***Names of the children have been changed in order to protect their identities.**

References:

Furnivall, J. 2011. Attachment-informed practice with looked after children and young people - The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (Iriss) Insight. Available at <http://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/attachment-informed-practice-looked-after-children-and-young-people>

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