

# Straight TALK

Keeping Adolescents Safe



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#MaskUpZimbabwe

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## GIRLS TALK: MENSTRUATION

By Fadzayi Maposah

The first cut is the deepest. No matter what it is, the first experience, the first impression, the first encounter, first exam, first interview, first love.

The beginning of anything tends to leave lasting imprints on the way that we conduct ourselves in the future.

My memory of the stained cotton wool in the middle of the netball pitch and no-one claiming it is still with me. It is my first memory of the mishaps of menstruation.

As I began high school, the mishaps that come with menstruation were experienced more frequently. With each mishap that I witnessed, my anxiety mounted.

Girls stained their skirts. Some because they did not know that "it" had come, others because what should have been in place had moved, others because they had taken too long to change.

The reasons were varied.

The witnesses' responses were never the same. Never! Some sympathized. Some acted as if the mishap had been done on purpose.

As a way of attention seeking! Really? Unbelievable! Who would want to seek attention in such a way.

For those in the waiting line, mishaps only fuelled anxiety and tension.

When mishaps happened, the effect on the majority of the affected girls was the same. Confidence plummeted. Self-esteem was dented.

Even the gait when walking showed that something life changing had happened. The faces carried the strain of the burden. Even when one attempted a smile it showed a lot of effort.

There were those girls who seemed to delight in making fun of the mishaps that others experienced. School was training ground for real life in some way...In life when misfortunes befall others, not everyone is your cheerleader.

What made the "it" worse was that two of the girls who were on "it" from each dorm had to carry the sanitary bins to the ever burning pits that were aptly called the hell pits.

Total discrimination if you ask me. It made what should have been very private, public. Early morning the bin would be carried to the pit and

emptied. The walk to the hell pit was in total silence as if in reverence to the 'cargo'.

Emptying the bin required skill. Unfortunately there was no prior learning. One had to learn and master the skill only after becoming 'a woman'.

Girls were not to be seen at the hell pit. It was the privilege of those who had graduated into womanhood. Emptying the bin into the hell pit came with its own occupational hazards. That's a story for another day.

On the way back, with the bin empty, the porters would chat and at times even be seen attempting to laugh or smile. It was a lot of work to do that.

They would talk. Trying to share as many jokes as they could. They would even attempt to get the new graduate to dance by singing songs. In most instances the new graduate would just sit and stare at them. Eyes would become bigger, full of tears. At times tears would fall.

In each generation there are people who stand up for the best interests of others.

In most cases these people do not receive awards but the impression that they leave on others' lives is life-long. The 'Bubbly Trio' are part of my happy memories from High School.

Despite the challenges that were faced at high school, menarche being one of the many challenges the 'Bubbly Trio' would always find the silver lining in each cloud.

They were so good that even when a report of a mishap did not get to them, at times, many times, the affected one accompanied by a friend or two would look for them and explain what had happened.

The 'Bubbly Trio' would be there to celebrate woman hood in whatever way they thought was applicable. And I tell you, those girls could think on the spot. Very creative. Never a dull moment with these three around.

At a time when menstruation was a taboo and many did not want to celebrate it (or shared scanty information like my mother Ma Ncube), they were promoting positive sister hood around menstrual health management.

No one assigned them any roles regarding menstrual health, they were just there in self-appointed capacities that they performed so well.

If you started menstruating during the holiday, the 'Bubbly Trio' would hear of it as volunteers

shared their experiences about 'first time'.

While others rejoiced at the mishaps, 'Bubbly Trio' brought a ray of sunshine. They encouraged girls to look out for one another as friends.

They had so many tips to share. The tips included at least telling one trusted friend that you were 'on'.

The trusted friend would check when you stood up if your skirt did not have any tell-tale signs. Period monitor.

Knowing that someone had your back was so good in high school. The 'Bubbly Trio' may have never received any award but they brightened menstruation for many girls back then.



What the 'women' coming from the hell pits knew was that as the others prepared for school at the various duty points, intentionally or unintentionally one would look up and see the porters walking back. As stated above, like the responses, the emotions felt were never the same.

Besides the gloom, there were some wonderful big sisters in the school.

What the wonderful big sisters would do was visit the ones who had graduated from being girls to women. The three bubbly big sisters whom I shall refer to as the 'Bubbly Trio' had their own way of dealing with 'it'. Once they heard that one member had been added to woman hood, they would pay her visit.

When news of COVID 19 reached Rusitu Valley Chimanimani, Manicaland Province, many people dismissed the news and the diseases as they thought it was for Western countries only.

Many misconceptions concerning the pandemic circulated in the community.

One misconception was that Europe and the United States of America were affected because of the cool weather and Africa would not be affected as the continent is hot and the virus cannot survive hot temperatures.

Another misconception which

circulated in Rusitu Valley was that COVID 19 only affects white people because of the colour of their skin.

When cases were recorded in South Africa people told each other that the virus would not reach Zimbabwe because it is land locked.

These doubting Thomases were only to be stunned when the first was case announced in Harare and campaigns and awareness over COVID 19 were intensified.

Still, some people in Rusitu thought Covid 19 would only affect major towns. It was only when President Cde Emmerson Munangagwa announced

the first lockdown restrictions in March 2020 that reality hit home.

Midway through the year, the lockdown restrictions were eased and complacency crept in. Some people lowered their guard – travelling, attending funerals and gathering as they pleased, and the result was a spike in Covid 19 cases.

The spike of new cases brought with it Covid 19 deaths in Rusitu community, thus closer to home. It was then that people in Rusitu Valley came to realise that Covid 19 is real.

*Continued on page 4*

## IS COVID 19 REAL?

By Virginia Madondo

With a grief stricken face which seems to have aged overnight because of regret, Mr Irvin Sithole shares his sorrow.

He confesses that now he has realized that COVID 19 is real following the death of his wife Mrs Servie Sithole adding that if he had had the information and conviction that he now has, he would have stopped his wife from going to her relative's funeral where she contracted the virus.

# A Life Time Experience - The Story of Ishmael Banda

By Ishmael Banda

Great privileges come with great responsibility. 2019 has been an amazing year for me, mostly a highlight of a life time experience.

Through Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council (ZNFPC), I was selected to be part of the young advocates for change program and I had the privilege to travel to different countries around Africa namely Uganda, Kenya and South Africa on the Subject to Citizen (S2C) under Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and ZNFPC peer exchange program. My first stop was at Uganda where we had a 3 days youth camp at one of the most luxurious hotels in Africa.

The purpose of the youth camp was for us to network, engage and share opportunities of the existing youth exchange programs in Africa with youth from different backgrounds and nationals.

During the camp a cultural night was hosted where we celebrated different cultures represented and embraced diversity. I never used to appreciate our African culture, but that was the day I felt proud being an African as it stood up for me in so many ways on what it means to be an African.

It is not a matter of skin color or birth but Africa is born in us. The fire that is generated and pumped through our blood of making Africa a great place.

After the camp we flew to Kenya where we had our second stop with other peers from different nations for our orientation at Mombasa for a month.

We were trained on Subject 2 Citizen (S2C) which is a philosophy that talks to the inner man or self-awareness.

The philosophy was unveiled to us on how one is subjected in his own life, family, community, nation at large and also how one becomes a responsible and active citizen.

In addition, stereotypes had to be broken and a key message "it's just different" was drilled in us which really paved a way in preparing us not to complain when things seemed abnormal to us or got tough.

Agenda 2063 (the Africa we want) was shared to us particularly on aspiration 7 of putting youth at the drivers seat in all our youth interventions (CSE/SRHR inclusive).

We launched our first power-space at the YMCA Mombasa offices with youth local youth and the event was dignified by the Mayor of Mombasa, Honourable William Kingi.

I was taking the leadership role as the co-director of ceremonies with Felana Razakamahefa, a Peer Educator from Madagascar, who happens to have once visited Zimbabwe (2017) and was trained in ASRH by ZNFPC Mat North.

We were further deployed to our stations after the orientation and I was stationed in South Africa at YMCA Pietermaritzburg branch for duration of six months. Upon my arrival the first few months were a challenge as the settings and programs were different from ours in Zimbabwe and this made it look more thought-provoking in conducting community assessment.



The branch focused on empowering young people for life in life skills, leadership & entrepreneurship skills through signature programs they offered: Youth-justice, Youth-zone, Youth-arts and Youth-fit.

Youth-Justice is a program that reaches to youth who are in conflict with the Law and those whose social circumstances place them at a high risk of potential conflict with the law.

It works with young people living in the streets and it also aims to transform young people from subjects to citizens and helps integrating youth back to their homes.

My roles were to facilitate and to coordinate programs. One of the milestone stories I managed to contribute positively to their livelihood skills is creating carpentry recycle project where they had to use old pallets into furniture items such as chairs and spice racks amongst other things so that they will have to be independent.

Another success story was sharing during the Durban International Conference Centre exhibition; we had the Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health session on drug and substance abuse, teenage pregnancy and the social inclusion of youth living in the streets.

Youth-Zone is an after school program where we assisted kids with their homework and other fun activities. Y-Modeling was a modeling for Youth-zone kids and The Economic Entrepreneurship Program (TEEEP) students.

This was to boost their self-confidence and

integrate them into the YMCA values. Furthermore with Marimba kids club we conducted cultural exchange of arts and talents and we had visitors from Tensing Ronningham Folk School Norway.

Conducted outreaches at the Bessie head library on women's day to hear different views of people, what they know and think about the women's day.

Other activities conducted include boot camps, capacity building, power spaces, and surveys for life skills as well as sports for youth.

Upon my arrival back home I had the greatest task of sharing my experiences and knowledge with fellow Peer Educators in Bulawayo and hopefully will get time to cascade the same to Mat North Peers.

Now destiny waits for the opportunity of giving back to community as I further my studies in development studies.

## The Experience!

The whole program was fascinating, it was my first time to travel by air and that on it's on was an experience. Amazing food from different cultures, touring different places of Africa, meeting new people, embracing diversity and having a deeper understanding of the meaning of life was a worthy life time changing experience

Thanks to ZNFPC for grooming me through the Peer Education program and thanks for the YMCA partnership that got me selected into the program.

## Lessons learnt

To think without the box, thinking out of the box limit us, we don't need the box.

"It is just different"- it helps to perceive from a different perspective and accept change

Self-actualization is key: you have to date yourself to understand the inner you better before anything else.

An eye opener not to be narrow minded but being exposed to variety of things.

Coming out of own closet and stepping up to success.

As young people we have the voice, the space and ability to influence.

**About the author: Ishmael Banda was born and bred in Njube high density suburb 23 years ago and joined the peer education club at Impande Youth Centre in Bulawayo. He is studying Development Studies at Lupane State University and is actively involved in ASRH programs.**

**Contacts: ZNFPC P.O Box ST 220, Southerton Harare. Telephone: Harare: 024 2660 338, 621 320, 700405, 666 584, 620 282, Bulawayo: 0292 69410, Mutare: 020 21 62981, Gweru: 054 2 221 902, Masvingo: 039 2 264 760, Marondera: 065 23 24264, Chinhoyi: 067 21 25800, Bindura: 066 2106 7470, Gwanda 084 28 20127.**

**Website: [www.znfpc.org.zw](http://www.znfpc.org.zw)**

**Email : [pr@znfpc.org.zw](mailto:pr@znfpc.org.zw)**

**Facebook: Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council**

**WhatsApp Number: 0715 056 372**

Editor : Weston Makoni

Layout and Design : Bryan Matare

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# Peer Education: A panacea to SRH Service Provision in Tertiary Institutions

By Nyashadzaishe Marima

After recently visiting a local university, I felt nostalgic about my exciting days at college and wish I could turn back the hands of time because these were the best days of my life.

Contrary to the idea that nostalgia can lead us stuck in the past, I have realized that looking back can help us look forward and refocus.

Being a first year student at a university really feels good because it is indeed a great time to enjoy freedom after high school where one now stays alone and has access to huge sums of pocket money from parents, guardians, siblings and of course blessers the term used by contemporary students.

During weekends a lot of time is spent planning and attending social scenes and most of these activities would be outside the university campus because campus premises have their own rules and regulations which are usually not in sync with what has been planned and definitely will fall out of favour.

In town, one would easily recognize university students through their latest fashionable dressing, stylish hair, moving around in groups and obviously their young and innocent looking faces. The distinction of this sub group of population from the rest makes them vulnerable and become a good and fresh prey to the blessers who are

usually older men and women with financial resources to offer students in return for sexual favours.

This generation of students faces a myriad of challenges ranging from economic, social, psychological and some could be health related. There are many financial obligations to be met by students such as buying meals, transport and stationery and failure to meet such would often result in devastating situations where students engage in transactional sex in order to get money. During social scenes such as parties and other organized events, students would want to enjoy themselves and ease the academic pressure and most of them get intoxicated and this often leads to risky sexual behaviours that would expose them and their partners to STIs including HIV, unplanned pregnancy and sexual violence. In order to minimize and avoid the above mentioned challenges faced by students, partners sexual reproductive health services in the Midlands province have embarked on training students in tertiary learning institutions through the Peer Education model. Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council (ZNFPC) working in partnership with Students And Youth Working on HIV and AIDS in Tertiary Institutions (SAYWHAT) and National AIDS Council (NAC)

recently trained 40 Peer Educators from Midlands State University and 20 from Mkoba Teachers College.

Peer Education is a model where trained and motivated young people undertake informal or organized educational activities with their colleagues. This model is very effective in as far as learning life skills to obtain positive sexual and reproductive health outcomes is concerned. The model creates a relaxed environment where young people learn through asking questions on subjects often regarded as taboo without fear of being judged.

After undergoing Peer Education training, a good Peer Educator is obliged to help young people identify their concerns and seek solutions through sharing of information, conducting peer counselling sessions, inspire fellow peers to adopt health seeking behaviours and most importantly be a role model by demonstrating positive behavior.

ZNFPC has technical and competent staff in every province qualified to train young people in Peer Education and tertiary institutions can partner with the Council so that the Universities churn out graduates with high grades and free from sexual and reproductive health problems.

## Harnessing idle minds in Covid 19 era

By Sharon Vhumisai

The extension of the lockdown period found most young people struggling to cope with the daily monotony.

The pandemic is sending dangerous shock waves across the world and a gloomy atmosphere still covers the different walks of life.

Depressed from the loss of friends and family as well as fear of contracting the COVID-19 virus, there has been a lot of uncertainty in most societies.

For most of the young people in the community of Nyazura is a brewing point for danger posing behaviours like drug and substance abuse, criminal tendencies, engagement in sexual activities which pose consequences of STIs including HIV and unintended pregnancies and in some cases SGBV as there has been an `overdose` of partners spending more time together in the same space.

The community of Nyazura has limited sources of household entertainment due to lack of electricity in recently established residential suburbs, in addition most young people in this peri-urban set up are not employed.

The majority of households in the area survive on vending along the Harare-Mutare Highway but there has not been much activity due to the national lockdown restrictions. Thus most of the young people are idle minds waiting and hoping that the break of dawn will bring a new ray of hope into their lives.

It is necessary to work towards meaningful engagement to ensure that young people do not spend prolonged periods of idleness, which has detrimental effects not only on their psychological wellbeing but on their physical wellbeing as well. As the old proverb states, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop".

Working through Nyazura Youth Centre, soccer teams have been mobilised from the different corners of the community and whenever the weather permits, boys and young men meet and burn some calories on the sports field.

Regular meetings and interaction also provide a platform for Peer Educators to address several aspects of Sexual and Reproductive Health. Some of the topics discussed during the soccer sessions include: Life skills, Relationships, STIs & HIV, Male and Female Condoms, SGBV and Stress

Apart from the regular health talk sessions, counselling and referrals are also by-products of the sessions.

In their own space boys and young men are able to share personal experiences and encourage one another on how they can improve their lives and their community.

The soccer matches are something not to miss as they create a pleasant atmosphere for all participants. It is always quality time in an empowering space rather than quantity time in a space loaded with bad influence.

Despite benefiting the players, the regular sessions are also a source of entertainment to members of the community residing closer to the sports fields. The soccer sessions are an ideal platform for talent identification and scouting.

Still, these games are conducted with adherence to Covid 19 guidelines as social distancing, washing of hands and masking up. At these games, attendees are also educated, sensitized and encouraged to get vaccinated against the disease as the country heads towards herd immunity.

## My Journey through the Peer Education Programme

By Steve D. Chamutsanga

Looking back at the journey of three years that I have travelled since I became a peer educator at Chiendambuya Youth centre in Makoni North District of Manicaland Province, I am truly amazed at how the voluntary position has transformed me.

I have been exposed to people and peers from different backgrounds, situations and challenges. I have developed great life skills.

Now I know how to react, how to encourage and advise peers without offending them, how to behave and even what to do when confronted with difficult situations.

Besides the transformation and benefits at a personal level, I am now also a source of information of reproductive health in my community and esteemed as a role model to the young people whose lives I seek to improve.

I am grateful to the Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council for enabling me to work within the community as a peer educator.

Each day is a new day with new experiences and that alone enriches me. Peer education is one intervention that is being used to reach young people in their various diversities.

Each of the 25 youth centres run by ZNFPC across the country has a compliment of peer educators who act as a crucial link between the youth centre and the community especially the young people.

The peer educators are supervised and refer to Youth Health Advisor who is nurse who specialised in youths and a Youth Facilitator who is a social scientist.

## IS COVID 19 REAL? *(continued)*

With the help of health workers, stake holders, radio, television, newspapers and social media announcements, people are now aware of the deadly disease and are taking every precaution to keep themselves safe. They now follow the precautions of social distancing, frequent hand washing or sanitising and wearing of face masks.

"I wear my mask even if I am in the field, because I lost relatives" said Mrs Muyambo.

Ngorima Youth Centre is working to ensure that all Covid 19 guidelines are adhered to by all young people who frequent the youth centre. The Youth Centre has in place sanitation facilities so that the health of the young people, the staff and the community is safeguarded.

Stay safe, sanitize, wear mask, social distance and get vaccinated.

# Menstrual hygiene poverty rife among adolescents

By Herbert Chikosi

Poko Maranda\*, 15 is a learner at Maranda High School in deep rural Mwenezi district in Masvingo province. Like many young girls of her age her menstrual periods are characterised by sharp pain and heavy bleeding. Sadly, her parents are all late and a well-wisher is paying for her school fees. Poko cannot afford proper sanitary ware. She regrets having periods.

“My periods are very painful. I experience heavy bleeding which makes me miss class for the first 3 days because I do not have money to buy pads. I usually use rags or raw cotton which we pick in the fields. However, I do not feel comfortable to move around with it because it forms a bulge

when it is soaked with blood. For the pain and diarrhoea it is a matter of endurance every month because we live far

away from the nearest health centre. The traditional concoction which I am supposed to take is very bitter and I cannot take it anymore,” says Poko with a sullen look on her face.

To ease the pain Poko was advised to have sex towards the beginning of her menses to relax her cervix a traditional practise called “*kutsindira*” in the belief that the pain will go away.

“I was advised by the local women to practise “*kutsindira*” having sex to relax my cervix as stage gap measure to stop menstrual pain, but when I did that I contracted an STI, while my other friends got pregnant. In view of this, I am determined to endure the pain so that I will finish my school and look after my siblings”.

Unlike others, Poko is determined to finish her school and she is looking forward to realizing her dream of becoming a nurse.

“As an orphan, I am determined to work hard so that I will become a nurse. I cannot be like other girls who have boyfriends who buy those pads. I know Dhizora\* the local taxi driver is doing that to many girls, but I

will not do that”, she said with a chuckle.

Many young girls of Poko's age in Maranda narrated how the culture of silence around MHM issues has negatively impacted their lives. Some indicated that their parents cannot prioritise pads as they skirt that subject as a taboo.

“The moment I ask my parents about pads they will change the subject. I have no choice but to have a BF, (sic boyfriend) who will provide them for me. “Says, Maita Kwaga with a straight face.

Asked if the said BF is not a married man or older person, and when he demands sex what she will do to which she said, “*totangira ipapo*”, translated as “we will

cross the bridge when we are there.”

'If ever BF demands sex we will see what to do, I am not the only one all the girls around here does that Dhizora\* blesses many of young girls

in his mobile bedroom.'

Available data reveal that Mwenezi district is one of the most affected districts in Masvingo with high teenage pregnancies and early marriages at around twenty percent. In some cases school pass rate is way below the pregnancy rate.

Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council works with Plan international, by supporting comprehensive MHM programmes within rural schools and community settings through training of mentors, comprehensive information dissemination and distribution of sanitary pads to young girls. The intervention has been expanded to equip rural schools to make reusable sanitary pads within their context to ensure sustainability.

Of late Kunashe Foundation, a local charitable organisation has come on board to assist with reusable sanitary pads, pad making materials and training for adolescent and young girls through ZNFPC.

\*not real names

# Girls Talk: Menstruation 2

By Fadzayi Maposah

*When I was growing up my Mother, Ma Ncube did not talk to me or my sister Nyari much about menstruation. What she shared were basically the pitfalls that we could fall in should we 'play' with boys. And to be honest I really wasn't sure what she meant but never asked.*

*One thing that my good mother made sure of was that I was adequately prepared in terms of sanitary ware. I remember my first pack of sanitary pads that she bought for me. It was a 'label' as today's young people would say.*

*Menstruation was more of a mystery than anything else. Everything about the issue was shrouded in clouds of mystery. I wasn't sure whether to look forward to the day that 'it' happened or actually dread it!*

*I really wanted to 'grow up' and become a woman. But then imagining that I couldn't play with the boys in my class brought me a lot of anxiety. There were a lot of 'cool' guys in my class believe me. Any girl wants to have one of these boys or two or even three as friends. Just friends nothing more.....*

*Looking back I can honestly attest that I experienced a lot of stress regarding menstruation.*

*There were moments after the menstruation nugget ( it was so small and hasty – nugget is the closest word that I can use to describe it) was shared that as I was walking from school happy with my friends, boys and girls alike that I would suddenly feel that something was flowing out of me! I would quickly say goodbye and literally run home.*

*Because I was big bodied, it wasn't running really it was walking fast with an occasional run. Getting home it was just dropping my book case on the floor and dashing to the toilet to inspect if something had actually flowed out or was about to start flowing.*

*And the prayer all the way would be that the toilet would be unoccupied so as to inspect. The toilet really back then was a room to seek relief, it was private space to inspect if anything had happened or there were signs that something was about to happen.*

*There was no privacy in the shared bedroom that I shared with my two sisters then before my third sister was born. There was no privacy in the bathroom, my sisters would suddenly want to brush their teeth by the hand basin as I was bathing. The only private space was the toilet, there would be no need to explain why I had to be alone!*

*The fear of something flowing or about to start flowing followed me wherever I went. It was with me as I sat in the school assembly singing to the piano energetically played by the music teacher. It was with me as I sat in class and attempted to work out a Maths problem from the*

*New Ventures Mathematics Book Seven. It was with me as I wrote an essay about what I wanted to be when I grew up. It was with me as I sat in Church.*

*It was with me as I sat under a tree reading about the adventures of the Famous Five or the mysteries that Nancy Drew was out to solve while my siblings played soccer in our yard. I had a mystery that needed solving. My mystery involved me and the pack of sanitary pads tucked away in my underwear drawer away from the investigative eyes of my sisters.*

*The fear was with me as I sat enjoying the meals that Ma Ncube prepared with so much love. It was with me as my siblings and I did our homework. It was with me everywhere. Often I wished that it just happened so that I would no longer have to worry about it happening!*

*Then something happened. I remember it vividly as if it was yesterday. Sports afternoon, girls in blue sports tunics, by the netball pitch. I wasn't playing. A few girls and I watched other girls displaying their sporting prowess from one of the staged sports benches.*

*Boom! There on the netball pitch was a lump of snowy cotton wool with a big spot of blood! All the girls ran away from it. The stained cotton wool had dropped from the sky. As we got down from the bench to walk toward the pitch we looked up to the sky just to check if there wasn't a UFO ( unidentified flying object ) that had dropped the cotton wool as all the members of the two netball teams had distanced themselves from it.*

*The coach asked who had dropped the cotton wool. She asked twice and no one answered. She asked for a stick. There were many eager to help at this point. The coach picked up the cotton wool using one end of the stick and took it to the toilet.*

*All girls started: hiii, hiii. When the coach walked back, there was a deafening silence. She blew her whistle and announced that everybody should walk to the Breezeway (which was the assembly point, open on all sides because of the hot weather of the Low Veld)*

*We walked in silence. All kinds of thoughts raced through my mind. I don't remember much of what the coach said. I remember though that I was so afraid that when I would begin menstruating I could drop my pad as I went about my activities. She filled my head with period, period, period. The coach also said that she would have one on one sessions with anyone who needed help.*

*It has been a number of decades since that happened... it is etched in my mind...up to this day I have no idea who dropped that stained cotton wool. I am sure that she was traumatised by the incident*



## ZNFPC Mat North commemorates Menstrual Health Day



It was a day never to be forgotten in the history of the lives of Embundane community in Bulawayo's Emganwini extension suburb as young women and men, adolescent girls and boys gathered to witness the commemoration of the menstrual hygiene day: for the first time in such a manner in Bulawayo.

Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council and its valued partners (AIDS Health Foundation, National AIDS Council and Grassroots Soccer) made the day great through integrating Menstrual Health Management and other SRH services such as family planning, HIV Testing and Counselling, condom promotion which culminated into a mini MHM symposium.

All services were offered totally free of charge. Pre-activity road show flash mobilization was done early morning to alert people of the free services.

The event was graced by the local Councillor, the resident's chairperson, religious leaders, and members of the local support groups, selected women and girls. These were part of the focal group discussion team that discussed challenges faced by women and girls in attaining their MHM rights.

As clinical services were in progress, every client who received an SRHR service in any form (even information) walked away with a packed of free sanitary wear. One thousand five hundred pads were distributed on the day.

There were some mini-events running concurrently at Entumbane High School, Msitheli High School and Emthunzini Children's Home where ZNFPC and PSI joined hands with members of the Junior Council and reached out to 300 girls with information and materials on MHM.

Eighty girls from Entumbane High School walked away with menstrual cups donated by PSI while eighty girls from Msitheli High School got a pack of pads each. A donation of 360 pieces of sanitary wear (pads) was given to Emthunzini Children's Home where 120 girls were reached with information.

ZNFPC Matabeleland North takes pride in positive partnerships and community engagement and would like to appreciate all members who made this even possible through various means on and services.

## I SMOKED TO FORGET

by Manzou Kumbirai

Young people have various reasons for abusing substances. These include peer pressure (be like others), feeling good/getting high, showing that one is grown up, experimenting and others to cope with different stressful situations.

Ngorima youth centre's young writers club had a health education session with a group of young people. Youth were asked why they smoke.

There were several misleading answers. One of the participants Gladman 'not his real name' had this to say, 'I was born in 2001 and stayed with my mother.'

When I was seven years I moved to another village to stay with my mother and grandmother. I didn't see my mother for some time. She was not there for me. I asked where she was but didn't get satisfying answer.

My friends would also ask me who was my mother is, this hurt me so much. After much persistence, my grandmother told me that my mother stays in a village 30km from where we stay.

Every time I would think about my mother. The facts that she didn't take care about me or my living made me think too much. I started to smoke dagga and take tablets.

The reason that made me smoke was, I wanted to forget about my mother. The habit of smoking kept my problem away. When I smoke I just forget these things. The problem is when I was not smoking I felt sad.

I joined young writers club. I used to share my problem of using drugs. With advises and ideas shared this helped me. Now I am no longer taking these drugs'.

As Gladman says, trying to solve a problem by taking a drug will not solve the problem. It may make you forget your problem a short time but your problem will still be there when the drugs has worn off you will have new problems, an addiction and the problem of finding money to pay for the drugs that you need.

## A letter from WhatsApp

by Jesman Kennedy

I wanted to smile, no, rather to celebrate my success as I am the one on everyone's mouth. Both, the young and the old are calling my name, WhatsApp!! WhatsApp!! WhatsApp!! However, instead of smiling, I started crying after listening to why all the people call my name. I have categorized the callers:

**People in love**

*"WhatsApp has finally destroyed my relationship".*

Oh come on, are you for real? Am I the one who took those nude pictures which ended up on your status for the whole world to see? Certainly, I am not! So please stop accusing me and at least put the blame on yourself and your poor decisions.

**Parents and teachers**

*"WhatsApp has finally destroyed the future of this generation"*

Seriously, am I that evil? Are you not the ones who together agreed that those little children should have phones for easy online learning and you went on to install the application WhatsApp for them? I heard you saying WhatsApp is cost effective for communication and learning. Now wait, you claim I am cheap, affordable and I am actually helpful in your children's education yet still you label me a destroyer of your kids' future. Is it because you are not ready to take responsibility for poor parenting or blame your fellow humans for luring and abusing your children through misusing me?

**Police and Politicians**

*"WhatsApp is the cause for increase in crime, a master mind of political violence."*

Well, I know you only want to destroy me right? Me, a master mind of political violence and crime? Where exactly do I get that power from? Do I have any resources to plan all that? When will you stop hiding behind me and take responsibility for your plans and actions because surely the FEAR (False Evidence Appearing Real) you are trying to impose on me will not work.

**Health Personnel**

*"WhatsApp has finally affected people's health."*

WhatsApp has finally affected people's health? This is really too much for me. Can someone please testify if I ever injected or produced medication for them? Is it not your own wickedness that causes you to lie to other people? You claim this or that works perfectly well for your health while deep inside you know it does more harm than good. Do you think it makes me great or happy when people get ill or die? Certainly not, it is only that my hands are tied; I

cannot help it. I have no power to stop your wickedness.

**Traditional leaders**

*"WhatsApp has eroded all traditional and cultural values leaving people without an identity."*

This really makes me laugh. Bitter laughter though. Were people ever really proud of their tradition before I came on the scene? You people, you always seem to call your traditional ways primitive. Please choose the identity you want and stop putting blame on me the innocent WhatsApp. My role is simple, to pass or forward your confusion you shamefully want to share.

**Social Worker/Youth Facilitator**

*"WhatsApp, a mirror and your choice"*

Oh this confused me, what is the meaning of that? I need an explanation. Oh yes! I get it now, finally someone who knows and understands my true identity. Yes, WhatsApp is all about you not the application. WhatsApp is just a mirror that reflects the images of those that use it. If you are beautiful, it will just show your beauty, but if not, it will not beautify you. It is all up to you to use the mirror to beautify yourself instead of making yourself worse or go around destroying the beauty of others and then put the blame on the mirror.

**Final Word**

Well, I guess I should rest now since there is a ray of hope that my good reputation will not be completely destroyed by those cowards who want to put the blame of their wicked actions on me.

Oh! Wait a moment, I was about to forget my manners. I know I might have offended other people, who are now calling me crazy because they never spoke about me. I know you never spoke anything bad about me and I am very sorry for bunching you together with your colleagues. It is only that I was so angry that I did not want to go near them and ask their names.

I was afraid that I might end up doing the very things they were accusing me of, thus I decided to hold on to my principle of self-control. So my dear friends, I know you are innocent and please continue with your good work of using me for a better society and empowered human race.

However, please do not forget to stop your colleague and relatives who are tarnishing my name.

Yours Faithfully  
Concerned WhatsApp

# TEENAGE PREGNANCY A THORN IN THE FLESH FOR ALL OF US.

By Ansetus Dongo

September 26 every year since 2017 (World Contraception Day), the world takes time to reflect on the safe avoidance of pregnancies wherein all pregnancies are wanted and planned for.

The commemorations aim to improve awareness of all contraceptive methods available and to enable people, especially the youths, to make informed choices on their sexual and reproductive health.

Mashonaland West Province particularly in Hurungwe District in Zimbabwe has seen unprecedented levels of teenage pregnancies despite the availability of widespread contraceptive services both community based as well as public and private health service providers, or is it? What could be the reason(s) for such a status quo?

According to a study commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Child Care in 2015/16 it was noted that a large portion (80%) of young women and girls had a very low /poor risk perception of contracting HIV or other STIs and pregnancy. (National Adolescent Fertility Study 2016).

Sexual activity was reported then to be high and still is but most of these young women and girls are not using contraceptives or accessing the FP services. This however increases their chances of getting pregnant as well as contracting HIV and other STIs.

The non use of condoms as a barrier method as well as a contraceptive method was also noted and also associated with myths and misconceptions that their use gives the girls the freedom to indulge in sexual activity.

Girls are also predisposed to teenage pregnancies in an indirect way through their parents' lack of adequate knowledge of Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH), inadequate communication on sexual matters whilst at the same time the fusing of the cultural and modern ways of handling ASRH being a challenge.

Some girls are driven to engage in sexual activity due to material needs such as clothes, cosmetics and as well as poverty induced challenges. The young women and girls are also predisposed to teenage pregnancies in their lack of opportunities as well as lack of respected role models as they end up dropping out of school and entering into early marriages.

Another factor that lead to young women and girls entering 'marriages' comes from the practice of virginity testing, which is rife in many a rural area. The girls are forced to elope to the man whom they would have had sex with to avoid embarrassment and repercussions of being known to have had sex and losing virginity in the process. In recent times, the idleness among adolescents and youths brought about by the national COVID 19 prevention, containment and treatment measures have seen many young people engaging in sex as well.

In analysis it is agreeable that major determinants of teen pregnancies are early coerced and in a majority of cases unprotected sexual activity as well as early marriages. These are compounded by the age at first sexual encounter, non use of barrier methods at sexual debut as well as low risk perception to HIV other STIs and even pregnancy.

This World Contraception Day, ZNFPC Mashonaland West take a look at how together we can address this challenge in our society. Let's take time to reflect on what we can do to help the young women and girls to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

Protecting adolescents from unintended pregnancy and HIV infection by providing them with essential sexual and reproductive health information and services is critical if Zimbabwe is to fulfil its long-term economic development goals, ([Lisa Remez, Vanessa Woog and Marvelous Mhloyi, 2014.](#))

It is key to firstly get to understand the factors leading to teenage pregnancy whilst understanding and taking into account the ever changing cultural landscape and biological processes.

The opportunities afforded by occasions like the World Contraception Day need to be utilized at "an individual, family, community and structural levels to teach both boys and girls on healthy relationships, sexual responsibility as well as self respect to reduce gender inequality and increase girls confidence to make informed decisions whilst taking responsibility of their actions" MOHCC 2014 (Study on the Determinants of teenage pregnancies in Hurungwe District)

Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Parent Child Communication are some of the key interventions that can help reduce the instances of unwanted pregnancies.

Provision of contraception and youth friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health services is also key in the fight against unwanted pregnancies.

## Family Planning Brand Ambassador implores for efficient resource utilisation

By Watseni WaMaungwe

Government and implementing partners in the adolescent and youth reproductive health sector should efficiently utilise available resources to lessen reproductive health challenges faced by youths especially girls and young women, Family Planning Brand Ambassador, Adiona Chidzonga has called.

Fielding questions from the media, in Mutare at Mutare Youth Centre, Mrs Chidzonga said there is urgent need for all stakeholders in family planning and reproductive health sector in Manicaland to start to pull in the same direction for the benefit of adolescents and youth in the province.

With the Covid 19 pandemic and the ensuing national Covid 19 prevention, containment and treatment protocols, most families literally lost their means of survival and this negatively impacted most households resulting in youths especially girls to engage in risky behaviours such as transactional sex.

'The greatest challenges our society has faced from the onset of Covid 19 are those of child marriages and teenage pregnancies. These challenges affecting most youths are emanating from the fact that a number of breadwinners are no longer able to put food on the table due to lockdowns and this has forced many young girls and women into prostitution and marriages as survival tactics.

'We do not know when this pandemic is going to go away, however, in the mean time we have to do something and urgently address issues forcing our girls and young women into prostitution and



early marriages, said Mrs Chidzonga.

The Family Planning Brand Ambassador however noted that these challenges girls and young women are facing, especially in Manicaland, are not insurmountable given the commitment government and other agencies including Zimbabwe National Family Planning have in tackling them.

She pointed out that, 'Collaborations, getting like-minded organisations and individuals on the table and pulling resources together can fix or reduce some of these problems affecting the youth.

'It takes the whole village to raise a child, and if all and sundry in Manicaland put heads and resources together indeed we can get rid of these challenges as government and ZNFPC alone cannot salvage the situation.'

The Covid 19 induced lockdowns have seen schools closed for the greater part of the year leaving adolescents and youths with idle time to explore lives they would have not explored had they be in school.

During these long layoffs, the country have seen an increase in cases and rates of drug and substance abuse, child marriages, teenage pregnancies, prostitution and school dropout among youths.

As the lead national institution in adolescent and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights,

Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council runs community based youth centres around the country with Manicaland province having the highest number of these facilities which help youth cope and understand the transition from childhood to adulthood. Most of these youth centres provide free clinical services to youths between the age of 10 and 24.

Mrs Adiona Chidzonga is a musician, young mother and wife to 'Lobola' film maker and actor Mr Munyaradzi Chidzonga.

She was appointed Family Planning Brand Ambassador for twelve months from June 2021. This is her second appointment as Family Planning Brand Ambassador in three years.

# Embracing Social media for Comprehensive Sexuality Education

## 'Masvingo CBD leading the pack'

By Herbert Chikosi

The internet is just a click away and with that click, an entire globe is unravelled to you. No shocker then, that sexting, internet porn, dating you name it have become the latest drift. Such has been the view of many. The internet has been damned, but the reality is it has made a positive difference too in reproductive health programming.

Wongai Chimhini, 47, is a Community Based Distributor (CBD) who lives and works in Masvingo urban. She says the Covid 19 came in as "a square peg in a round hole" resulting in induced restrictive measures, which significantly contributed to reproductive health challenges.

"Things were operating smoothly until Covid 19 pandemic and the government quickly intervened by introducing lockdown regulations. This made it more difficult for adolescents to access Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as it prompted the closure of schools and community outreaches. As a result, efforts to curb the pandemic led to unintended interruptions in contraceptive service provision and utilisation resulting in a surge in teenage pregnancies, child marriages and sexual-based violence just to mention but a few."

With the staff shortages the marketing and communication departments roped in Wongai to feel in the gap through training in ASRH and digital technology. She embraced the importance of using social media as a tool to disseminate information.

"My task is to educate communities on the importance of family planning and distribution of contraceptives. However in 2019, I was trained in Adolescent and Youth Sexual Reproductive Health (ASRH) and the use of digital communication tools and applications and had to cover up staff shortages within the marketing department at our provincial office. We were a few of us who were trained in ASRH and oriented in CSE programming but I was lucky to have the opportunity to shadow the provincial marketing office.'

As the old adage posit: if you do not embrace change, change will change

you, this year Wongai decided to embrace change by utilising social media to reach out to youth and parents. She is using WhatsApp to conduct CSE and PCC sessions. This has helped to close the information gap. The group feeds into Facebook and Twitter as well as radio in terms of information complementarities.

"I would usually accompany the PMCO to outreaches and orientation sessions at universities and colleges around Masvingo but Covid 19 changed all that. That is when I decided to form a WhatsApp group to guarantee continuity of CSE, PCC sessions as well as general reproductive health information dissemination. The group has allowed parents and youth to engage which is essential. The vibrancy in the group is a demonstration that it is engaging and many young people come to her inbox to get services such as counselling, condoms or referral letters for treatment."

With the assistance of the Provincial Marketing and Communications Officer, the group has adopted a snowballing methodology thus addressing key topics as indicated by both the PCC and CSE manuals. Upon finishing the topics group members are removed and new ones are enrolled. Those removed (graduated) are encouraged to form their own groups and continue with new members.

The group has been also used to feed into other social media handles for the province to share on impending radio sessions that touches on SRH issues, free services and updates. As such, Wongai has been invited for a number of radio sessions to address ASRH issues in Masvingo.

Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council is coordinating the implementation of ASRH program in Zimbabwe whose goal intends to contribute towards increasing information on safe sex and sexual reproductive health and HIV practices among adolescents and young people and enable young people to access Comprehensive Sexuality Education and realise their sexual rights.

# Social media in ASRH and crisis era

By Sharon Vhumisai

Social media seems to be a controversial blessing to humanity. It has been shunned, criticised and labelled for societal wrongs. However recently it has served an essential role of keeping humankind in contact with each other during the Covid 19 pandemic. People from all walks of life have benefitted from the social media. Despite other challenges which include limited access, lack of reliability and accountability, social media has created a potential dimension of contemporary knowledge, empowerment and value.

Nyazura Youth Centre has taken advantage of the availability of the WhatsApp platforms to stay in touch with the community and to keep the Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) program running in the midst of the pandemic. With lockdowns imposed to curb the spread of the disease, there was limited attendance at the youth centre as well as limited interaction with the community in as far as youths' social and reproductive health issues are concerned.

Since the first lockdown in March 2020 to date, the Youth Centre has tactfully reached out to over 2 000 people in and around Nyazura as well as Rusape with health education on different Sexual Reproductive Health topics through church, workplace and social WhatsApp groups.

WhatsApp groups have also been created specifically for young people and broadcasts for very young adolescents through the necessary parental guidance. Young people have also received online counselling thus equipping them with the necessary knowledge and helping them to continue making informed decisions about their health and their future. Health talks on social media have allowed sharing of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRHR) facts, clarifying concepts and dismissing myths and misconceptions surrounding certain topics as well as tackling of challenges which befell youths

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S MINDS- ONLINE SESSIONS DURING THE COVID 19 ERA- MUTARE YOUTH CENTRE

By *Patience Mukwakwasha*

Young People's Mind is a WhatsApp group which was created by Mutare Youths Centre and is mostly led by Peer Educators.

The group was established at the beginning of 2020, aimed at focusing the minds of young people to take charge for their future.

The group has helped many young during the COVID 19 era where access to reproductive health information and services in the initial stages of lockdown was difficult for the youths.

On the WhatsApp platform youths are free to air their views on the topics under discussion and misconceptions will be corrected. Lead facilitators of discussions are drawn from Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council Manicaland province and other partners and stakeholders in the province.

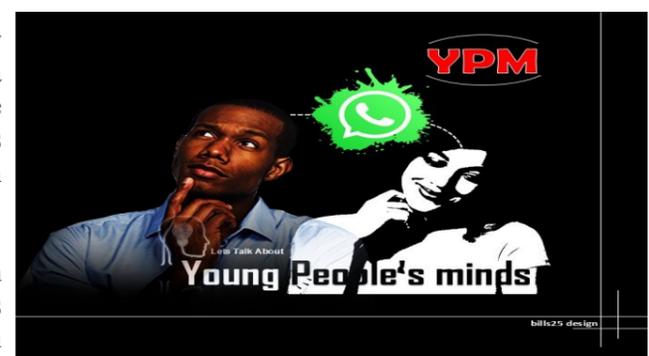
The group currently has 200 participants. Discussions are conducted regularly. Topics that have been discussed in the past include: effects of premarital sex, substance abuse, abortion, self-respect, masturbation and teenage pregnancy among other youth related issues.

due to lockdowns and the Covid 19 disease.

The fact that schools and most companies were closed, youths had more time on their hands and people spend more time together than previously brought with it challenges as stress, depression, anxiety, sexual gender based violence (SGBV) brought with them new challenges in SRHR programming, as such innovation was needed to alleviate some of the challenges. The WhatsApp based health talks empowered both the young and old with information on stress, SGBV, menstrual hygiene, life skills, relationships, entrepreneurship, child care and abuse.

While face to face communication is usually more effective and recommended in dealing with youths, in the face of a plight latest technologies became an inevitable option to which we had to adjust to. The Youth Health Advisor, the Youth Facilitator and the Peer Educators took turns to address the different groups accordingly. Peer Mentors (a group of 22 former Peer Educators who served since 2014) were also engaged to lead certain SRH discussions and share experiences. Apart from the above mentioned, community leaders like pastors, lawyers, business persons, law enforcement officers, health care specialists and other motivational speakers were also involved. The collaborative initiative did not only help convey ASRH messages but also provided social knowledge, enlightenment and therapy to young people distressed by confinement following the pandemic. Messages of hope were constantly posted and for a great number of young people, a virtual family was created.

The experience of running ASRH program through social media during the lockdown has opened avenues of enhancing programming and reaching to community. Nyazura Youth Centre continues to empower young people for a better tomorrow.



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