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BREAKING THE SILENCE, ONE LESSON AT A TIME.

By **Makubalo Benevolence**
DM :ASRH NURSE

Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council, through the Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health department, in partnership with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and National AIDS Council conducted a Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) sensitization program for Harare Polytechnic lecturers. The program was aimed at empowering a group of 50

lecturers with appropriate information on sexuality education, clearing the myths and misconceptions regarding CSE. It was also a space to discuss the roles of lecturers in ensuring accurate, age-appropriate and culturally sensitive CSE delivery.

The sensitization was necessary given that there was a noted gap as students view lecturers as 'parents and guardians' who should guide them and yet in most instances these lecturers do not have the capacity to assist them to make informed decisions. The discussions

highlighted the global and national policies that support CSE, explaining why training is essential in building confidence and competence among lecturers. Challenges that can be experienced in implementing CSE were also discussed. The challenges noted include lack of knowledge and cultural barriers including resistance. One major challenge noted was that human beings have different values and were socialized differently. Hence, when a youth presents an issue that clashes with the lecturer's personal values, they end up going back unattended. In order to address issues like these, topics like Value clarification, Adolescent social and

emotional development and the overview of CSE were presented and discussed.

The sensitization was of benefit to the lecturers as the facilitators noted that at the end of the three day meeting, there was improved knowledge and confidence among the lecturers/ tutors. There was increased acceptance and integration of CSE in education systems leading to positive influence on students' understanding and attitude towards sexuality education. It is expected that there will be a reduction in stigma and misinformation among the college students.

MY EXPERIENCES AT FIFE AVENUE YOUTH CENTER

By **Tendai Mwedzi**

When I was assigned to write an article about my experiences at Fife Avenue Youth Center, I saw it as an opportunity to reflect on how my work resonates with my personal journey. This felt like a continuation of my first article on living my dream at ZNFPC, yet with new perspectives and deeper realizations.

My experience took a pivotal turn when I attended my first management meeting at ZNFPC, chaired by the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Farai Machinga. The meeting exposed me to invaluable lessons in productivity, leadership, and organizational operations. Inspired by the discussions, I felt a shift within me. I was determined to adopt the mindset and work ethic emphasized by the leaders in that room. Little did I know that this newfound perspective would prepare me for an unexpected transition.

Soon after the meeting, my supervisor informed me that I would be relocating to Fife Avenue Youth Center. Initially, I felt discouraged. Moving from the Head Office to a Youth Centre felt like a setback, especially considering the added commute expenses. Negative thoughts clouded my mind, but I recalled a lesson from the management meeting: **challenges are opportunities in disguise**. This reflection helped me embrace the transition with a renewed sense of purpose.

My journey in youth empowerment did not begin at ZNFPC; it started in my own community, where I was affectionately known as "Coach 'Tindo.'" During the COVID-19 lockdowns, I embarked on a fitness journey and began playing social soccer with young people in my neighborhood. Many of these youths had talent but lacked exposure and opportunities, often drifting toward substance abuse. As I shared my knowledge of football and life skills, I unintentionally became their coach. Together, we formed a team that evolved from underdogs to champions in local tournaments, earning community recognition and stakeholder support. Our success even inspired the creation of new teams and a soccer academy.

Determined to secure better opportunities for my players, I built connections with coaches and scouts, ultimately helping some of them join professional academies and Division 2 teams. Now, at Fife Avenue Youth Center, I see another opportunity to make an impact. By engaging



A picture captured with some of the soccer team members after winning the Drug and Substance abuse Awareness Campaign Tournament at Kuwadzana Extension.

with coaches and scouts I previously worked with, I aim to bridge the gap between youth sports and access to Sexual and Reproductive Health services. My new role feels like an extension of my work in the community, empowering young people, addressing their challenges, and guiding them toward brighter futures.

Parent-Child Communication Radio session reaping positive yields in Mat North

Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council (Mat North) embarked on extensive sensitization and educative campaigns on Parent-Child Communication (PCC) through media engagement. ZNFPC partnered with Khulumani FM (ZBC Bulawayo radio station) to create awareness and educate the general public on issues affecting adolescents with the aim of creating positive relationships between parents and children. The program began in February 2024 and has so far seen 76 PCC radio sessions conducted up to date. The program is aired live on radio every Thursday from 0930-1000hrs and has so far attracted more than 5000 listeners from Bulawayo, Mat North and the diaspora with followers from as far as South Africa, Australia and Poland.

Program supporters range from adolescents as young as 12 years old to adults as old as 70 years old. The pre-recorded and at times live sessions have helped to create engagements with the communities through phone calls, WhatsApp and Facebook platforms. Due to the program, a number of adolescents have voluntarily come for counselling services with a significant number brought by their parents and guardians. Because of the program, Mat North province has become known and visible to the rural populace especially in Umguza, Plumtree, Tsholotsho, Lupane and Bubi districts where the radio frequency coverage reaches. In Nyamandlovu area of Umguza district, a radio listener (Mr Luke Phunyuka Mpofu-68 years) invited ZNFPC to come and meet the local leadership of the community after listening to 66 episodes of the radio sessions since February 2024. His

aim was to have ZNFPC sensitize the leaders on the importance of PCC in families. Mr Mpofu has since volunteered to be a Patron and Mentor for the PCC program in his village. He has pledged to organise a physical session where ZNFPC will engage with young people and their parents. It is very crucial to invest in PCC and CSE as these programs are great vehicles for positive behaviour change.

Below are comments from program followers (listeners), sent through the radio station's Whatsaap platform after a session held on the 6th of February 2025:

[22:40, 06/02/2025] Khulumani FM 2: Best advises ever

[22:41, 06/02/2025] Khulumani FM 2: Yoooo yaze yamnandi imfundiso kakhulu thina o Gogo ngifunde o kunengi Maqhoba.O lendlebe u zwile Bo Gogo .Ngu MaGasela e Cowdry park (yeah this is a very interesting lesson especially for us grandmothers. I've learnt a lot indeed. She who has an ear has had my fellow grandmothers. This is MaGasela from Cowdry park).

[22:41, 06/02/2025] Khulumani FM 2: Kubuhlungu e bantwaneni bethu (it's painful to our children)

[22:41, 06/02/2025] Khulumani FM 2: Amatshono Maqhoba kalivikwa iqiniso Siyabonga imfundiso kababa uGwafa ngugogo kaMuhle eMethodist village (Good afternoon

[22:41, 06/02/2025] Khulumani FM 2: Madawu ngiyabonga imfundiso kababa ngugogo wamatwins umampofu esizinda (Thanks Madawu for the information from that man in the studio. I am umampofu from Sizinda)



[22:42, 06/02/2025] Khulumani FM 2: Siyabonga imfundiso kababa uGwafa ingikhumbuza ekukhuleni kwami ngu baba ka Dalue Emakhandeni (Thank you so much for the valuable information from Mr Gwafa. It reminds me of my youthful days. I am Dalue's father from Emakhandeni)

[22:42, 06/02/2025] Khulumani FM 2: Litshonile maqhoba siyabonga imfundiso olendlebe uzwile labo gogo bethu sebefundile (Good afternoon great people. We're so grateful for the lesson. Those with ears have heard and learnt including our valued grandmothers)

[22:43, 06/02/2025] Khulumani FM 2: Isbongo esikhulu siqonda kubaba uGwafa siyafunda ngempela (Great thanks to Mr Gwafa we are really learning)

[22:44, 06/02/2025] Khulumani FM 2: Siyabonga infundiso esakhaya mavodloza ngunamatwinz entabazinduna ethokoza (We are grateful to this information that's building us. This is the mother of twins from Ntabazinduna)

[22:44, 06/02/2025] Khulumani FM 2: Lihlabe lephukela maqhoba sbonga imfundiso (So piercing and really touching we're thankful for this wonderful teaching)



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Edited by Titus Ruguchu
Producer Bryan Matare
Graphics by Chenai Motsi
Editor in Chief Mercy Marimirofa

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Contact Details

www.znfpc.org.zw
pr@znfpc.org.zw
(0242) 661584/ 662798

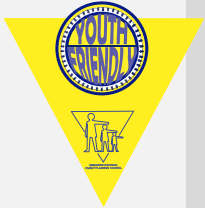


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MY EXPERIENCE AT THE FIFE AVENUE YOUTH CENTRE

By Primrose Moyo

The journey of personal and professional growth often unfolds in unexpected ways. My tenure at the Fife Avenue Youth Centre under Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council began as a Peer Educator. It started in 2023 July, and it was a role that not only shaped my understanding of youth issues but also laid the groundwork for what I am doing now as a Student Attaché. I am filled with gratitude for the lessons learnt.

Joining the Youth Centre as a Peer Educator was a turning point in my life. Initially, I was drawn to the program by a desire to make a difference in my community and support my peers.

The training I received was comprehensive, focusing on important youth-related topics. This foundation knowledge proved invaluable as I began my work.

As a Peer Educator, my primary responsibility was to engage with my peers, offering them accurate information and fostering discussions about pressing issues they faced. This role required a delicate balance of vulnerability and professionalism that is, I was not only a source of information but also a friend and confidant to many. As a result, building trust within the youth community taught me the importance of empathy and active listening.

Throughout my time as a Peer Educator, I had the opportunity to engage in numerous outreaches and events, enhancing my skills in public speaking, conflict resolution and group facilitation. I had the privilege of leading discussions, organizing outreaches activities, and even facilitating a number of sessions myself in the community of Ushewokunze. This was done with



Dialogue with parents in promoting and supporting safe and protected sexual activities among youths in Ushewokunze Harare commemorating World Condom Day.

the help of a community-based organization named Empowerment Globe which operates within Ushewokunze. Each of these experiences contributed to my confidence and deepened my understanding of the complexities of youth issues.

One of my most memorable experiences was commemorating World Condom Day. It was commemorated this year February on the 13th in the community of Ushewokunze as this was done with the help of Empowerment Globe Organization members. The Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council came through with information and clinical services. The event also promoted Parent-Child communication.

As I look to the future, I am committed to continuing this important work, inspiring and empowering young people to reach their full potential.

The BLESSER and the BLESSED

In a bustling university town, where ambition thrived and aspirations soared, lived a seemingly unassuming old man named Mr. Thomas a retired Professor. He had spent decades working in various professions and had accumulated both wealth and wisdom. However, beneath his charming demeanor lay a disconcerting secret. Mr. Thomas frequented local universities in search of companionship, not only by one student but by many at once. He was often referred to as a "BLESSER," a term denoting older men who financially support younger partners in exchange for their affection.

Enter Sarah, a bright and ambitious university student. Facing financial strain, she was lured into Mr. Thomas's world of

luxury and ease since she came from an impoverished family without exposure. The university demands and pressure from other peers then got Sarah into the life of getting easy money. What started as a casual relationship between Mr Thomas and Sarah, soon spiraled into something more intense as Sarah was linked to Mr Thomas by her room-mate, Jean (22 years of age). Mr Thomas showered Sarah with gifts, paid for her tuition, and provided a taste of the lifestyle she had always dreamed of but could not afford and felt relaxed in it. In her eyes, Mr. Thomas represented opportunity, but he was also a dangerous gamble which she was not aware of.

As months passed, Sarah began to

feel the weight of the relationship. She became increasingly isolated from her friends and family, entrapped in a web of dependency and emotional turmoil. Despite her initial excitement, she neglected important aspects of her health, blinded by the allure of her benefactor as she would engage in unprotected sexual activities.

Amidst this facade of glamour, dark clouds loomed overhead. Mr. Thomas, deeply immersed in a lifestyle that included numerous past encounters, exposed Sarah to the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV. In a moment of reckless disregard, he failed to communicate about the importance of safe practices, a common thread in

relationships like theirs. Unfortunately, Sarah eventually found herself grappling with the consequences.

After suffering from debilitating symptoms and enduring multiple visits to health professionals, the diagnosis came as a crushing blow that she had contracted herpes a sexually transmitted infection, tests revealed she was also HIV-positive. The revelation shattered her world, forcing her to confront the emotional and physical ramifications of her choices.

"The Blesser and the Blessed" serves as a cautionary tale. The Proverbial adage remains true, all that glitters is not gold!

ASRH Training—Equipping Young People for a Healthier Zimbabwean Society

By Dennis Munetsi, ASRH Program Assistant

As someone who once stood in the shoes of a trainee in one of ZNFPC's lecture halls at its headquarters in Harare, I know firsthand the transformative power of Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health (ASRH) training in advancing and improving health outcomes among adolescents, youth, and the broader community. In the third quarter of 2024, I participated in ASRH training, an experience that equipped me with the knowledge and skills to become a trainer. Today, I see myself reflected in the faces of new trainees—peer educators who are eager, curious, and ready to make a difference in their communities.

Peer educators play a crucial role in advocating for a health-conscious young generation in Zimbabwe. They serve as conduits of knowledge, bridging gaps in ASRH education across diverse social, cultural, and geographic contexts. The adage, "knowledge is power," holds particular significance in this context—peer

educator training provides young people with the tools to break through sociocultural barriers, advocate for their health, and inspire behavioral change in their communities.

From February 11th to 14th, 2025, more than 25 Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) peer educators from Mbare, a high-density suburb in Harare, and Epworth gathered at Cresta Jameson Hotel for ASRH training. The event fostered an engaging and dynamic learning environment where participants from diverse sociocultural and economic backgrounds interacted while learning critical sexual and reproductive health knowledge.

The program delved into a wide range of topics, including reproductive and mental health, economic literacy, modern technologies in reproductive healthcare management, and essential life skills training. More than just acquiring knowledge and a certificate for those that passed the final exam, every one of them, at their various learning capacities, left with a comprehensive toolkit to effectively address ASRH issues in their communities.

Having been through a similar journey, I understand that the success of these ZNFPC-led training programs extends beyond mere knowledge training and certification. Their strength lies in sustainability and capacity-building. A defining feature of these programs is their ability to transform graduates into trainers, ensuring a continuous cycle of education and mentorship. I am a testament to this. Like me, Tendai Mwedzi, who now serves as a Youth Officer at Five Avenue Youth Center, once participated in these training sessions. Now, we stand on the other side, guiding the next generation of changemakers.

By equipping young people with accurate and accessible ASRH information, the training program contributes significantly to Zimbabwe's broader health objectives. It empowers youth to become advocates, mentors, and role models, instigating lasting social and behavioral change. Beyond contributing to public health, trainees gain invaluable personal and professional benefits—leadership skills, career development opportunities, and newfound confidence in their abilities. The

ripple effects extend far beyond individual participants, fostering a well-informed, health-conscious, and resilient society for future generations.

For me, peer education was not just a training but a gateway to leadership, advocacy, and the ability to effect real change. As I stand before new trainees, I see the future of Zimbabwe's health landscape taking shape, one empowered young person at a time.

Hence as development partners, government ministries and parastatals fight to end child marriages, they need to fully recognize their power in averting certain traditions and cultures that promote child marriages in the communities. Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council in full cognizance of the roles, responsibilities and powers that the traditional leaders have, appreciates their role and continues to work with them in the provinces in a bid to end child marriages. This is done through community mobilizations and dialogues where pertinent issues, such as harmful cultural practices, that include child marriages, are discussed.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE IMPACT THE FAMILY PLANNING MEETING WITH A BANG

By Fadzayi Maposah

There was a time when the National Family Planning Forum would be the stage for adults and just the leaders for all the partners present. One may be wondering why I said that it was a platform for adults and leaders. Do we not have adults at work and should not the leaders be present so that they make critical decisions without having to say I will consult? Wait a bit so that you understand where all this is going. From the terraces where some of us sit, we observe how the leaders walk into a meeting. They carry authority. Their gait reflects the responsibilities they carry upon their shoulders. That is not to say that they are gloomy, no. They accord those they interact beaming smiles and acknowledge that they are happy to see them and if they have not met the individual, they encourage one to introduce themselves.

From the terraces one has the opportunity to watch the most powerful men and women in the reproductive health sector discuss quarterly performance of the

supply and demand side of contraceptives and the programmatic issues. When people go to clinics, hospitals, pharmacies and private doctors' rooms, they have no idea that there are some people who lose sleep and appetites in some instances to ensure that they get their contraceptive of choice. There is a lot of work that is put to ensure that all pregnancies are intended! Take my word. I have been honoured to be in rooms where these discussions are done.

Amid the busy schedule of the loaded programme, the young people were given an opportunity to share their experiences of family planning interventions in 2024. The young people prior the meeting came together so that they could speak with one voice. The young people had a consolidated presentation. Team work indeed.

The young people led by Rati from Kunashe Foundation began by thanking the organizing team for valuing them enough to have allocated them a slot on the programme. It was indeed a groundbreaking moment, history in the making and from the terraces we

could boldly say that we were there. The power point presentation was not done by an individual but during the time allocated, three young people shared the stage. Young people find great support in numbers. Remember how as an adolescent or young person you had your own gang? Solitude is a sign of advance in years (I have the Editor's protection!) The young people who tagged one another in the presentation Isabella from SAYWHAT (simply called Bella by her peers) and Dean from SAT, aced their presentation. May I also add that the Chairperson for the afternoon, Obedience was a young person too?

There was a time young people were not taken seriously in meetings. This is because the young people would allow emotions to get the best of them as compared to allowing reason to prevail. The proverb, empty vessels make the most noise was applicable! A young person would be so loud but with no substance. Not anymore. Young people as shown by the youth representatives at the Family Planning Meeting now speak from an informed point of view, supported by evidence. When they

say they are not being treated right in health facilities, they share the number of health facilities visited, number of the ones that provided youth friendly services and which did not. They no longer just throw tantrums!

At the close of the meeting the Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council, Chief Executive Officer, Mr Farai Machinga applauded the young people for their presentation. Mr Machinga said the presentation was factual and as a result it was captivating. He said ZNFPC as the technical lead for the Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Programme would ensure that the needs of adolescents and young people are fully catered for. One way of doing this was to revive and modernize youth centres spread across the country. The Chief Executive Officer said ZNFPC will ensure that there is an updated database of all trained service providers within tertiary institutions as a way of ensuring youth friendly service provision to young people as they pursue their studies.



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Celebrating the International condom day

By Mascelyn Chiwasa

February 13th marks the international condom day; to remind people of the importance of using condoms to protect themselves and their partners from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies.

A condom is a sheath shaped barrier device used during sexual intercourse to reduce the probability of pregnancy or STI transmission. In Zimbabwe, both male and female condoms are available. Male condom is a thin, disposable rubber sheath fitted onto an erect penis before intercourse. A female condom is a strong, soft, transparent, and loose-fitting polyurethane (plastic) sheath with a flexible ring at each end. Both male and female condoms prevent sperm from entering the vagina. Condoms are an effective short-term family planning method, reducing the risk of STIs, including HIV and unintended pregnancies when used correctly and consistently. In addition, condoms are available and cheap, and can be used at any time before sex.

However, some brands may cause irritation to the penis or vagina. Proper use is essential to avoid breakage.

As an organization, we celebrate international Condom Day to promote safe sex practices and encourage young people to prioritize their reproductive



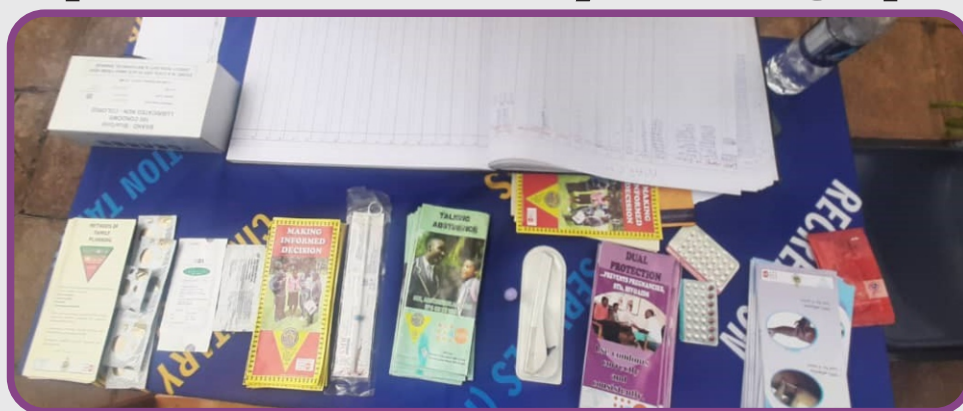
health. Condoms are widely available in Zimbabwe, accessible at healthcare facilities, clinics, hospitals, and youth centers. Therefore by using condoms consistently and correctly, individuals can protect themselves and their partners from STIs and unintended pregnancies. Let us promote safe sex practices and prioritize our reproductive health. centre, as there are a lot of things to do besides the television. The youth centre was also equipped with new curricula books as well as other IEC materials.

Fife Avenue Youth Centre uses Youth desk concept to reach young people

By Tendai Mwedzi

The Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council (ZNFPC) is actively addressing challenges faced by young people today that affect their social, physical, and mental wellbeing, as well as their sexual and reproductive health (SRH). These challenges include maternal and infant mortality, early childbearing, sexual and gender-based violence, unintended pregnancies, new HIV infections, STIs, substance abuse, unemployment, and school dropouts.

Through its Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ASRH) Department, ZNFPC has implemented several youth-centered innovative initiatives. These include peer education programs, community outreaches, parent-child communication sessions, training of ASRH service providers, and the



establishment of youth centers to improve access to SRH information and services.

One such center is the Fife Avenue Youth Center, which hosts an information youth desk every Friday. This desk provides young people with crucial information on life skills, sexual and reproductive health, adolescent relationships, substance abuse, contraception, STIs, and more. The goal is to empower youths with knowledge and skills to make informed decisions that reduce risky behaviors and improve health outcomes.

Facilitators engage youths and their

parents through small group discussions and Question and Answer sessions. During one health talk, I led a session on the consequences of early sexual activity among college students and promoted the center's free SRH services for adolescents and youths under the age of 24 years. These services include STI screening and treatment, contraceptives, and HIV testing.

After the session, a girl stayed behind to share her concerns after having unprotected sex earlier that day with someone whose HIV status she didn't know. She was referred to the clinic

for screening and later returned to request more educational materials. Her proactive step was a powerful reminder of the impact of providing accessible information and services.

Later that same day, a woman approached the desk and appreciated the YC efforts, particularly the "Let's Talk Abstinence" pamphlets. She shared a heartbreaking story about seeing very young girls, some as young as 13, already pregnant or parenting during her hospital visit.

The efforts by ZNFPC through innovative, youth-friendly platforms like the youth desk are crucial in empowering young people with the knowledge and services they need. These interventions promote informed choices and reduce negative health outcomes. Ongoing community education and engagement are essential to building a healthier, more informed generation.

Preventing something means stopping it from happening and recognizing your rights

By *Tinevimbo Nyakuchena*

A Youth Health Facilitator at Nyakuchena Youth Centre discussed the issue with Tinevimbo after she shared her plea.

My name is Tinevimbo, and I'm from Chikukwa village. I became an advocate for girls' rights in my community because of the harmful practice of 'kukaisirwa.' This custom unfairly forces girls into a boy's home if they're seen with him late at night, regardless of whether any sexual activity took place.

One Christmas Eve, I returned home after a simple date with my fiancé, we just had drinks and watched a movie. As he walked me home, we encountered my father, who immediately ordered him to leave. Though confused, I respectfully asked my fiancé to go. When I followed my father through the gate,



both my parents confronted me, angrily telling me to leave as well. Respecting their wishes, I waited for them to calm down, but was forced to sleep outside

on the veranda without a blanket. The next morning, I contacted my aunt and explained the situation, emphasizing that nothing sexual had happened

between me and my fiancé. I wasn't ready for marriage, especially since I was only 16 (now the legal age is 18). I begged my parents to understand and let me back in. Thankfully, my aunt intervened and supported me, eventually convincing my parents to accept me. Fortunately, my parents ultimately accepted me back home. Then with more vigor and determination to prove a point, I undertook my studies very seriously and as fate would have it, I excelled in my O level examinations and continued on to A levels, where I'm now studying Arts. It is, therefore, crucial for girls to stand up for their beliefs and desires. Education is a vital tool that can empower us and safeguard our futures. In that regard, I present myself as an advocate for eradicating harmful beliefs and practices against the girl child.

THE POWER OF LOVE: REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

By *Mascleyn Chiwasa*

As I got up in the morning, listening to the stories of those who fought for equality and justice, I was stuck by the power of love. The 1975 International Women's Day played a pivotal role in the whole universe and it was fueled by love and determination of those who fought to create an equitable society. The International Women's Day is celebrated on 8th March commemorating women's rights movement. It gives focus to issues such as gender equality, reproductive rights, violence and abuse against women.

The international women's day was a long struggle for gender equality and social justice. By the twenty-first century, international women's day had been criticized particularly in western countries where it was sponsored by major corporations and used to promote general and vogue notions of equality, rather than radical social reforms. At the heart of the movement were leaders like Clara Zetkin (leader of the Women's Office for the Social Democratic Party in Germany) who tabled the idea of International Women's Day to fight for their rights.

But what drove these individuals to put their lives on the line? It was love

for their communities, families, mothers and love for the ideal of a just and equal society. As Clara Zetkin said, "Bourgeois society is not fundamentally opposed to the Bourgeois women's movement, which is proven by the fact that in various states reforms of private and public laws concerning women have been initiated".

I had a small talk with some of the community members and hearing their stories first hand regarding the International Women's Day. One woman told me about the essence of this Day. "We are all humans". She said "we deserve love as women and equal opportunities". The International Women's Day was not just a struggle for gender equality, it was a testament to the power of love. It manifests that even in the face of hatred and violence, love can prevail.

International women's day was a defining moment in history and it continues to inspire us today. As we consider the power of love that drove this day, we are reminded of the importance of compassion, empathy and kindness in creating a better world for all.

Contact Details



www.znfpc.org.zw



pr@znfpc.org.zw



(0242) 661584/ 662798



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