



Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls

Initiated by the European Union and the United Nations



Catch them young initiative Amplified in Mashonaland Central

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) revealed that one in three girls in Zimbabwe under the age of eighteen is ushered into child marriage, which has resulted in high maternal mortality rates. Early marriage is a harmful traditional practice that continues to affect many young girls in Zimbabwe, and it is very pervasive in many developing countries. Data from the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (Zimstat) shows that at least 133 455 women aged 20 -24 years in Zimbabwe, representing 16.2 percent of the total, went into union before reaching 18 years of age, with Mashonaland Central province topping in the cases.



Young mothers from Muzarabani District, Mash Central Province

Lower Guruve Development Association(LGDA) and consortium partners Farmers Association of Community Self-Help Investment Groups(FACHIG) and Civic Forum on Human Development(CFHD) under the Spotlight Initiative Phase 2 project in Mashonaland Central (Muzarabani Rushinga, Mbire and Guruve Districts) facilitated support groups of youths including young women and girls who are survivors of child marriages to amplify the Catch them young initiative in the operational districts and integrated them with networks of women's rights groups and Civil Society Organizations(CSOs) working on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls(EVAWG) and the promotion of Sexual Reproductive Health Rights(SRHR) together with WCOZ(Women Coalition Of Zimbabwe)..

The consortium is pinning its hopes on a social and behavior change campaign to curb early and unplanned teen pregnancies The Catch the young campaign implemented in



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2020, is driven by multiple factors which include lack of information and access to reproductive health services, poverty, cultural norms, sexual coercion, peer pressure and abuse. It is being run to educate children on the importance of education and how they can avoid child abuse and child marriages. Lessons are shared to young ones through dramas, music and poetry to raise awareness in ways that can easily be understood.

Mercy Muza (***not real name***) from Ward 9, Muzarabani District, got impregnated at 15 years while doing her form three at Kapembere Secondary School. According to her teacher, Ms. Chishandi, Mercy was the best student in her class and had been nominated to be a prefect, but her education was disrupted when she started dating older man. “She is one student we counted on to pass the Ordinary level with straight A’s but because of her poor background she rushed into marriage. For girls living in poverty, the shortage of basic services in many communities leads to heightened pressure to engage in transactional sex with older men in exchange for financial or in-kind support, such as food, transportation, or clothing,” she added

Mercy is the firstborn in a poverty-stricken family of three. Her father who used to cater for the family’s needs passed on and she had to adjust to surviving in a poor female headed household. Life was never easy. “I dropped out of school because I was pregnant. My mom could not afford the family’s basic needs and I had to look for other sources of money. My boyfriend from a rich background gave me money and bought me goodies. Unfortunately, our relationship turned sour when he found out I was pregnant. I moved in with him, facing the rage of his family who never accepted me at all. They had so much hatred for me and the unborn child. I was forced to go back to my family,” she emotionally explained.

“I hope to return to school after giving birth. I regret the bad decisions I made, now I am behind with my education, most of my friends are going to be sitting for the form four examinations this year and here I am pregnant. I am thankful to LGDA and partners for the opportunity to learn about SRHR and Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV). We have been assured that if we experience any form of SGBV we can confide in one of the Community Network members such as Community Childcare Workers (CCW) and receive support. Trainings like these are impactful and lifechanging. Now I know how to identify and respond to SGBV. I commit to sensitize other young girls on the effects of child marriages in my area. There is need to shift the mindsets of young people in my community around SGBV and that getting married especially at a young age is not an achievement.” she added. Mercy revealed that most young people often experience abuse within their homes and shun away from seeking support because they fear they will have nowhere to go.

“Many young boys in Mashonaland Central drop out of school after they sit for their grade 7 final exams. With the falling economy, poverty is leading most boy learners at Mufudzi Primary School to abandon studies, start to toil in underground gold mines and earn money for their survival, despite strict labor laws, which prohibit engaging children



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below 18-years, “Mr Jameson Nzviramiri, Mufudzi Primary school head said. “School closure inadvertently create a breeding ground for sexual abuse that leads to teenage pregnancy. These same boys later come and disturb our female students, flashing money and asking them out. It is very disturbing that they later abandon the girls after impregnating them.,” he added.

“Girls who are married young are at risk of rape and physical violence as they lack power in relation to their husbands and in-laws. Since girls marry at such young ages, many girls have high-risk pregnancies due to their underdeveloped bodies. As a result, they often have a difficult childbirth. We know the horror of the challenge of child marriages. So let us do our best to end this scourge. I’m positive the Catch them young Initiative will help young girls to desist from early child marriages, “said Mr Murehwa, Community Development Officer.

The effects of child marriages on the health and wellbeing of girls are far reaching. It harms their overall health and socioeconomic wellbeing, the survival of their children, and the prosperity of their family and community.

~The end~