

## **A CALL TO ACTION: PRIORITISE CHILDREN IN THE COVID-19 RESPONSE IN ZIMBABWE**

Save the Children is concerned at the spread of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe, and devastating consequences to the economic and social well-being of Children and their families.

Recognizing and commending Government's ongoing efforts to respond to the impact of COVID-19 which include the provision of Social Protection through Safety Nets for vulnerable households, provision of Personal Protective Equipment and awareness raising on COVID-19;

Noting that the environment in which children grow and develop has been disrupted and vulnerable groups of children who include but are not limited to children in urban informal settlements, children living with disabilities, children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, children on the move and child headed families are the worst affected;

Concerned that the closure of schools disrupts children's learning, school feeding programmes, play time and sporting activities. Being away from the protective environment offered by schools, exposes children especially girls to multiple forms of abuse, especially sexual abuse and exploitation, child labour, corporal punishment, early child marriage and new forms such as online child abuse;

Troubled by the increase in incidences of Gender Based Violence during the lockdown period, which exposes children to violence and has a lasting negative impact on children's psychological wellbeing;

Concerned that the economic impact of COVID-19 disrupts household incomes during lockdowns, and also results in loss of employment and sources of livelihoods. This may ultimately lead to some guardians failing to provide children's nutritional and educational needs, and some children may drop out of school;

Being particularly concerned at the limited number of child friendly COVID-19 awareness and prevention materials, and that the voices of children might be missed in the pandemic response.

### **We call upon the Government of Zimbabwe to: Protect A Generation by:**

- Prioritising children in the COVID 19 response.
- Channelling more resources towards children's health, education and protection during and after the COVID-19 response.
- Providing ongoing education to children as education cannot wait in disaster situations.
- Devising strategies to prevent school drop outs and support learners' safe return to school and "catch up" on the lost learning time.
- Ensure children's safety and protection from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation.



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- Equally important is the need to prevent the unsafe migration of children, and ensuring the human rights of migrants and refugees already within Zimbabwe.
- Strengthening and fully resourcing the multi sectoral child protection system to ensure services are available to children facing violence, abuse and exploitation
- Establishing child friendly facilities at COVID-19 treatment centres across the country.
- Developing and distributing child and disability friendly information on COVID-19 awareness and prevention.
- Consider Social Workers as critical essential services tasked with providing mental health and psychosocial support services to children, their families and frontline officials working with children.
- Ensuring appropriate and nutritious food which is affordable and accessible for all during this pandemic period, in view of the ongoing food insecurity situation in the country.
- Financing and scaling up of social protection schemes to protect the poorest and most vulnerable households.

We therefore call upon all stakeholders to support the Government in all its efforts to prioritise the rights of children during this response, as well as reducing the impact of Covid-19 on children in Zimbabwe.