

5 February – 11 February 2024

Stolen Childhood: A 14-Year-Old Girl in Zimbabwe Dies After Giving Birth.

By Thabiso Sibanda



At 14, Yeukai deserved a chance to chase her dreams, not face the risk of childbirth. In a heartbreaking turn of events, the 14-year-old girl's life was tragically cut short after a traumatic ordeal. The young girl was raped and impregnated by a known 24-year-old relative eventually succumbing to complications just one week after delivering twins. According to an article published by H – Metro on the 30th of January, the family of Yeukai swept the matter under the carpet and only demanded

a cow and seven goats as compensation from the perpetrator's family. This shocking incident has sparked widespread outrage on social media and renewed calls to address the urgent issue of sexual violence and its consequences on young girls in the country.

The incident serves as a somber reminder of the widespread issue of sexual assault encountered by vulnerable members of society, especially young girls, underscoring the pressing need for comprehensive measures to safeguard their rights and well-being. Similarly, this was the tragic situation faced by 17-year-old Courage Msimanga, who passed away shortly after giving birth to twins, and 14-year-old Memory Machaya, who lost her life during childbirth at a sanctuary of an apostolic sect. Noteworthy is the data from a UNICEF report on the national assessment on adolescent pregnancy, which disclosed that out of the 1,706,946 antenatal appointments made between 2019-2022, 4070 were amongst adolescents aged between 10-14. These distressing events raise concerns about the protection and welfare of girls in Zimbabwe, emphasizing the need for a united effort to eliminate teenage pregnancies and sexual abuse.

Rape presents a harrowing crime that inflicts severe physical, emotional, and psychological wounds on survivors, particularly when they are as young as Yeukai. Her tragic passing underscores the dire need for society to confront the underlying causes of gender-based violence and to actively pursue prevention, education, and support measures for survivors.

Dr. Chuma, a renowned gynaecologist, emphasized the importance of promptly reporting child sexual assault to the police rather than handling it internally within families. He highlighted that "When a child is raped, families should call the police and not a family meeting. Early reporting can expedite court orders for minors to receive abortion services, especially in instances of incest. It is also crucial for families to swiftly seek medical attention for rape survivors at health facilities where they can access Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) and treatment for any potential infections or sexually transmitted infections (STIs)", he said.

This incident further emphasizes the critical importance of advocating for enhanced maternal health services in Zimbabwe. Public health advocate Melody Dube stressed, "No child should become a mother at 14, and no mother should perish during childbirth. The government must make intentional strides to prioritize the delivery of maternal health services, viewing it not only as a matter of well-being but also as a fundamental human rights issue."

Zimbabwe, along with many other countries, has been striving to combat child sexual violence. President Mnangagwa recently utilized his authority under the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Act to publish the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) (Criminal Laws (Protection of Children and Young Persons)) Regulations, 2024 as Statutory Instrument 2 of 2024. This regulation raises the age of consent to 18. Previously, the age of consent for sexual relations was set at 16 in

statutory law, but it has now been increased to 18 following a ruling by the Constitutional Court confirming that the minimum age for marriage set at 18 in the Constitution also logically applied to the age of consent, so raising that to 18. The Court affirmed that the minimum marriage age of 18 specified in the Constitution logically applies to the age of consent as well, thereby necessitating the increase. This amendment also encompasses acts deemed indecent by a reasonable person and explicitly states that soliciting individuals under 18 for sexual or indecent acts is a criminal offense. The penalties for such offenses involve level 12 fines or a maximum of 10 years in jail. However, this tragic incident underscores the need to redouble efforts, strengthen existing laws, and improve access to justice for survivors. It serves as a grim wake-up call for authorities to ensure that victims receive the necessary medical, psychological, and social support they desperately need.

The legal fraternity, Civil society, and communities must come together to condemn acts of violence, demand justice, and work tirelessly to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future. Comprehensive legislative reforms, effective law enforcement, and a sustained commitment from all stakeholders are essential to creating an environment where every girl can grow up free from fear and violence. As we mourn the loss of Yeukai, let her tragic experience serve as a powerful reminder that our collective efforts toward a safer and more inclusive society must be intensified. The path to justice and healing for survivors begins with acknowledging the problem, breaking the silence, and taking immediate action to prevent further instances of sexual violence. Together, we can strive to create a world where no child faces such a devastating fate and where every girl can live a life full of promise, joy, and safety.

Councilor Nokuthula Sibanda: My 150 Days in Office.

By Loraine Phiri



Councilor Nokuthula Sibanda's first 150 days in office have been a journey of learning, challenges, and triumphs. In a recent interview with WILD, Cllr. Sibanda

reflected on her journey, highlighting the valuable lessons she's learned, the initiatives she's spearheaded, and the unique challenges she faces as a woman in politics.

"One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that leadership starts with listening," Cllr. Sibanda shared. "By actively listening to the concerns and diverse needs of my community, I've been able to identify real problems and work towards solutions collaboratively." This collaborative approach, she believes, is instrumental in ensuring service delivery effectively addresses community needs.

Cllr. Sibanda's tenure has been marked by a strong commitment to empowering women and fighting against gender-based violence. Her participation in the 16 Days of Activism campaign saw her raise awareness and challenge harmful myths within the Nkulumane community, creating a safer space for women and girls.

"In November I participated in the 16 days of Activism. I engaged my community by conducting 16 days of activism and community awareness in Nkulumane Hall. The aim was to raise awareness of gender-based violence and challenge harmful myths, to create a safer and more supportive environment for women and girls. It was attended by about 40 women who all pledged to share the information in their community and speak out against gender-based violence," she said.

Looking ahead, Cllr. Sibanda is involved in a community-level initiative to promote women's economic empowerment through a cooperative to foster collaboration and resource sharing.

"I have also been engaged in a community-level initiative to promote the economic empowerment of women through the formation of a cooperative. The cooperative will enable women to pool their resources and support one another in starting and running successful businesses. While the project is still in its early stages, there is significant potential for it to have a positive impact on the economic and social well-being of the community," she said.

As a woman councilor, Cllr. Sibanda acknowledges the additional hurdles she faces. Societal biases and scrutiny often accompany her decisions, demanding a higher standard and resilience. Despite these challenges, she remains undeterred, using her voice to advocate for her community and challenge harmful stereotypes.

Asked how she connects with the community, technology plays a key role in connecting with the community, Cllr. Sibanda noted, "Whatsapp allows me to stay informed about what's happening," she says while highlighting the importance of face-to-face interactions as well. "Some residents come to me directly to report issues like sewer bursts or share concerns on service delivery," she adds.

Learning from WILD, Cllr. Sibanda credits WILD training with equipping her with

valuable skills.

“Lessons from WILD such as self-mastery, communication, and problem-solving skills have been invaluable in my work as a councilor as it helps me connect with constituents and find solutions that resonate with the community,” said Cllr Sibanda.

Zimbabweans Face New QR Code Fee on Top of Passport Hike

By Jabulile Siwela



A public outcry erupted last November when Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube proposed doubling passport fees in the 2024 National Budget. While the initial hike from US\$120 to US\$200 was reduced to US\$150 after public pressure, many Zimbabweans still struggle to afford this essential document.

As if navigating Zimbabwe's economic challenges wasn't tough enough, ordinary citizens now face a fresh hurdle: a QR code fee on electronically readable passports. This latest twist, included in Statutory Instrument 1 of 2024, adds an extra fee of \$20 making the minimum passport fee to US\$170 and a whopping US\$270 for emergencies. That's over 100% more than the passport price five years ago! That

makes Zimbabwe's passports the most expensive in the entire SADC region, further isolating ordinary citizens and turning passports into a luxury for the privileged few. While the QR code promises electronic convenience, the extra charges on the passport push the dream of travel and looking for better opportunities abroad further out of reach for many. The government's justification remains unclear, leaving citizens wondering if this "noble move" serves them or simply lines government coffers.

The surge in passport fees affects many marginalized communities, including women, people with disabilities, and youth. Policy analysts have highlighted that these fees infringe upon the fundamental right to movement enshrined in Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution. Their concerns are echoed by ordinary citizens, many of whom rushed to apply for passports before the price hike took effect. A December survey by the WILD team witnessed a surge in applicants, a desperate attempt to beat the impending cost increase.

With unemployment skyrocketing at a staggering 90.5%, many Zimbabweans have found solace in the informal sector. But for these ordinary citizens, particularly women like Ms. Nomthandazo Mhlanga, a cross-border trader, a new hurdle has emerged: surging passport fees.

"We hoped the government would consider informal traders in deciding passport fees. My passport expires soon, and with January's low sales," Ms. Mhlanga laments. "Renewing my expiring passport feels like climbing a mountain."

This isn't just Ms. Mhlanga's story. The steep fee hike traps many Zimbabweans in a cycle of economic hardship. Dilapidated healthcare pushes citizens to seek treatment abroad, but passport costs ground them in the country. Students yearning for foreign education or work opportunities are grounded by the financial barrier. Marginalized communities bear the brunt. This isn't just an inconvenience. It's an infringement on the constitutionally guaranteed right to movement.

Legal experts like Mosupatsila Nare echo these concerns. She points to Section 66 of the constitution, stating, "it is worth noting that Section 66 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, which is the supreme law of the land, provides for freedom of movement and residence. Every Zimbabwean citizen has the right to a passport or other travel document and the right to leave Zimbabwe."

The impact is disproportionate, hitting marginalized communities hardest. Women like Ms. Mhlanga, already facing economic challenges, are further restricted. It's a public secret: these fees are simply unaffordable for ordinary Zimbabweans.

Nare emphasizes, "The passport fee hikes are very steep for ordinary women, which might result in them failing to obtain passports, infringing their right to freedom of movement as guaranteed by the constitution of Zimbabwe. The state and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must endeavor to ensure the

removal of restrictions that unnecessarily inhibit or prevent people from enjoying their constitutional human rights, including the right to freedom of movement, by ensuring that travel documents are affordable for all Zimbabwean citizens, ordinary women included.”

Bulawayo Takes Action Against Informal Traders

By Princess Tshuma



The City of Bulawayo is taking a stand against the growing problem of litter and unsanitary conditions caused by informal traders. In a recent move, the Bulawayo City Council has issued an ultimatum to all informal traders, urging them to relocate to designated trading sites and obtain proper vendor licenses by February 9th 2024.

The Council in Collaboration with the office of the Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution, is enforcing the move based on the Urban Councils (Modelo Hawkers and Street Vendors By Laws. This action aims to restore order and cleanliness in Bulawayo’s streets while ensuring the safety and well being of both

residents and vendors.

In a statement issued by the Bulawayo City Council; "All illegal informal traders are warned and advised to move to designated sites no later than Friday 9 February 2024. Registered informal traders who have abandoned their bays and/or are not paying the required council fees are advised to return their bays and regularize their operations."

The move comes amidst growing concerns over the increasing amount of litter generated by street vendors, particularly fruit and vegetable sellers. This litter not only creates an unsightly and unpleasant environment but also poses a health hazard, potentially contributing to the spread of diseases like cholera and respiratory infections. "The unsanitary conditions resulting from the lack of proper waste management and hygiene practices by street vendors have serious consequences for public health," said Nozithelo Moyo, a resident interviewed. "This move by the BCC is a significant step towards protecting the health of Bulawayo residents and vendors alike."

The BCC's initiative is a welcome step towards improving sanitation and public health in Bulawayo. However, its success hinges on effective enforcement and collaboration between the authorities, vendors, and residents. It is crucial to ensure that vendors have access to proper waste disposal facilities and hygiene training at designated trading sites. Additionally, residents must be encouraged to dispose of their waste responsibly to contribute to a cleaner and healthier city.

Cholera Outbreak: Situational Analysis

According to the Ministry of Health and Child Care as at 01 February 2024, Zimbabwe recorded 22 105 suspected Cholera cases, 2 388 confirmed cases, 21 378 recoveries, 71 confirmed deaths and 421 suspected deaths. As of 31 January 2024, a total of 103 735 people had received the Oral Cholera Vaccine.

Province	Cumulative Suspected Cases (New)	Cumulative RDT+ for Screening (New)	Cumulative Culture Confirmed (New)	Cumulative Recovered Cases (New)	Cases (In-Care)	Cumulative Culture Deaths (New)	Cumulative Suspected Deaths (New)
Bulawayo	26(0)	13(0)	4(0)	21(0)	4	0(0)	1(0)
Chitungwiza	1 670 (24)	274(11)	53(0)	1 631(19)	6	9(0)	24(0)
Harare	7 648(58)	8(0)	663(0)	7 573(58)	7	4(0)	64(0)
Manicaland	5 830(27)	40(0)	1102(1)	5 625(17)	54	35(0)	116(2)
Mash Cent	1 511(38)	282(0)	94(0)	1 397(36)	54	2(0)	58(1)
Mash East	759(13)	379(13)	124(0)	733(17)	18	2(0)	6(0)
Mash West	909(20)	461(14)	108(0)	840(0)	28	3(0)	38(0)
Masvingo	2 519(34)	105(0)	39(0)	2 398(10)	40	11(0)	70(1)
Mat North	224(2)	65(0)	30(0)	215(6)	3	0(0)	6(0)
Mat South	440(1)	85(1)	154(0)	428(0)	4	5(0)	3(0)
Midlands	569(14)	90(0)	17(0)	517(23)	17	0(0)	35(1)
Total	22 105(231)	1 802(39)	2 388(1)	21 378(186)	235	71(0)	421(5)

Source: Ministry of Health and Child Care

How Family Members Can Prevent Cholera Infection

1. Drink and use safe water
2. Cook Food thoroughly
3. Wash hands with soap and safe water after caring for the patients especially after handling poop
4. Remove and wash any bedding or clothing that may have had contact with diarrhea, preferably in a washing machine using warm or hot water. Usual machine detergents are sufficient, bleach is not necessary.
5. Use a flush toilet or approved septic system: double bag soiled materials (Items contaminated with poop) when throwing them away.
6. Use any household disinfectant or bleach solution made up of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water to clean any area that may have contact with poop, including the patient's bathroom, bed pan, as soon as possible after being soiled.
7. When possible, use rubber gloves when cleaning any room or surface that may have had contact with the patient 's poop.
8. Patients with Cholera should not swim until their symptoms have been gone for 2 weeks.
9. If another household member starts having diarrhea, give them oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) and go to a health care provider immediately.
10. While caring for persons who are sick with cholera, do not serve food or drink to anyone outside of the household.
11. Visitors should be very careful to avoid touching contaminated surfaces and should wash hands thoroughly before leaving and again when they arrive at their next destination.

Source: Africa CDC

The Gendered Impact of Bulawayo's CBD Vendor Removals.

By Jacqueline Ndlovu



The proposed removal of informal vendors from Bulawayo's central business district (CBD) has sparked conversations about economic opportunity, formalization, and the very fabric of the city. Amidst the debate, one crucial layer often goes unseen: the gendered impact on women who trade in these streets, particularly the 5th avenue market.

Women make up a significant portion of Bulawayo's informal economy, particularly in the vending sector. For many, vending represents a lifeline, a source of income for themselves and their families, often in the absence of formal employment opportunities that have dwindled due to the volatile economy in Zimbabwe. Removing them from the CBD, their established space of commerce, disrupts not just their livelihoods but also their social and trading networks, support systems, and distorts their financial independence.

The immediate consequence is the loss of income. Vending, though challenging, offers women flexible working conditions and a degree of control over their earnings. This financial independence empowers them to make decisions for themselves and their families, contributing to household needs and supporting children's education. With vending stalls dismantled, many women are left scrambling, searching for alternative sources of income in an already saturated market.

The impact extends beyond control of their finances. Vending communities often

function as support networks, offering mutual trust, friendships, and shared experiences. For women facing societal pressures or domestic challenges, these communities can be a source of solace and strength. Being uprooted from their day to day vending routines isolates them from their trading networks, compounding the stress and uncertainty of their situation. However, this further increases GBV incidents and conflicts within families as a result of decreased sources of income and disrupted food provision to cater for family members.

Women shoulder a larger burden of unpaid care work inclusive of domestic chores compared to men in the sense that it is perceived as a societal norm for women to take the responsibility to cook, clean the house, do the laundry and fetch children to and from school. Removing vendors from the CBD means increased daily commuting and this adds more expenses to their already suffocating finances. Moreover, there are new emerging dynamics within the city like the scotch cart order will further prejudice these women.

Addressing the informal economy needs more than just clearing streets but a socially inclusive and just solution that will not delay Bulawayo's evolution into a smart city by 2030. Blanket removals overlook the unique challenges faced by women vendors and can exacerbate existing inequalities. Instead, efforts should focus on creating [a dialogue between the council and the vendors] inclusive solutions that recognize the vital role women play in keeping homes together hence contributing to Bulawayo's economy and society. A more progressive approach should be employed as these removals might be met with resistance as women organize and fight for their livelihood.

Zimbabwe 10th Parliament Calendar

The National Assembly's Portfolio Committees and the Senate's Thematic Committees will be meeting from this Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. The meetings will be held **at the New Parliament Building at Mount Hampden** in the Committee Room specified in the list. Members of the public will only be eligible to attend open sessions meetings only and as observers. To gain entry to the new parliament building one is required to have an ID. Below is a list of open sessions

Open Sessions

Date: Monday, 5 February 11.30 am

Thematic Committee: Climate Change

Oral Evidence from the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Wildlife on its policies and programmes, and its coordinating role on National Climate Change Issues

Venue: Committee Room No. 4, First Floor, New Parliament Building

Tuesday 6th February at 10am

Joint Committees: Women Affairs- Higher and Tertiary Education- Primary and Secondary Education.

Oral Evidence from the Sanitary Aid Trust Zimbabwe on its petition on the management of menstrual health in Zimbabwe.

Venue: Committee Room 12, Third Floor, New Parliament Building.

Source: Veritas

Opportunities

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2. [United States Department of State Professional Fellows Program](#)
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5. [World Bank Junior Professional Associates Program](#)
6. [Government of Ireland Fully Funded Scholarships 2024 for Bachelors, Masters, and PhD!](#)
7. [Internet Society Early Career Fellowship](#)

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