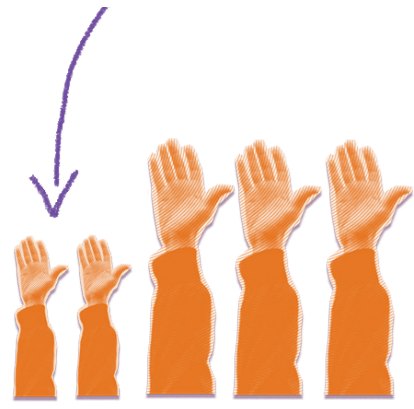


Unlocking the Future: Paving the Way for Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health in Post-Pandemic Harare

Despite HIV treatment and care being declared an essential service in Zimbabwe, studies have highlighted disruptions in HIV service delivery and access to ART. AIDS-related deaths were found to have increased from 20,100 in 2019 to 22,200 in 2020 (Madzima et al., 2022).

* **43% of young respondents in Zimbabwe**



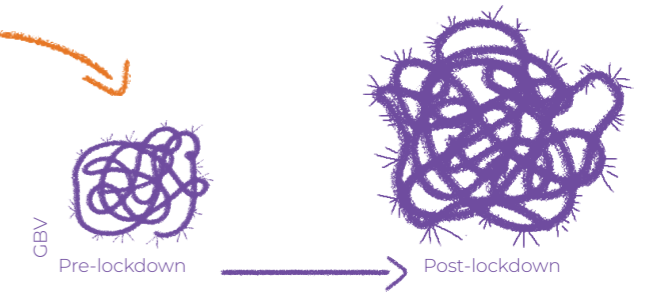
were unable to access family planning due to government-imposed curfews and fear of infection, despite 45% of young women reporting a need for these services. (Both et al., 2021)



“ Just like the government was giving out free PPE equipment and vaccines, they should also provide sanitary products for free in times of national crisis because periods do not stop despite the global challenges happening around us.

FGD participant, Harare

* Zimbabwe experienced a 40% increase in GBV compared to pre-lockdown trends. (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2021)



“ GBV was on the rise, I had a friend who’s father would beat his mum during COVID-19 and everytime it happened he would ask to stay at my house till things cooled down. I think that was the best help I could offer him.

FGD participant, Harare

“ Before COVID-19, we as young people could access free SRHR services at our local clinics. But when COVID-19 came most of our clinics and hospitals were turned into overnight COVID-19 hospitals that only serviced COVID-19 patients. This meant **we (young people) were left with no place to access SRHR services** because at that time it was not considered a priority. “

FGD participant, Harare



“ My boyfriend lived in another town during COVID-19 and to travel between towns, I **needed a valid letter so that I couldn’t be harassed or even arrested by the police** for violating COVID-19 regulations. So in the end, I started having a sexual relationship with someone from my area because it was easy for me.

FGD participant, Harare

Recommendations:

- 1. Develop Inclusive SRHR Policy:**
 - Foster collaboration between governments and policymakers to create a comprehensive, inclusive, and universal national SRHR policy.
 - Prioritise uninterrupted access to SRHR services and information for adolescents and young people (AYP).
- 2. Facilitate Meaningful Engagement and Safe Spaces:**
 - Actively involve AYP in shaping SRHR services and information.
 - Create safe spaces to embrace the diversity of AYP.
 - Organise consultations, workshops, and discussions to gather AYP’s input on SRHR policies
- 3. Ensure Access to SRHR Services:**
 - Invest in mobile clinics providing inclusive SRHR services and information to AYP, addressing geographical barriers and emergency interruptions.
 - Provide continuous training and sensitization of healthcare providers on diversity and inclusion to ensure non-discriminatory service delivery to AYP.
- 4. Expand Access to Menstrual Health Services:**
 - Nurture collaboration to provide menstrual products at public health institutions during crises.
- 5. Improve Contraception and Safe Abortion Access:**
 - Amend anti-abortion laws to reduce unsafe abortions among AYP.
 - Invest in organisations promoting contraceptive access and education to empower AYP in making informed reproductive health choices.
- 6. Promote SRHR Information:**
 - Collaborate to ensure universal access to accurate sexual health information for AYP.
 - Invest in digital health interventions for sexual health to ensure service continuity and access for marginalised groups.
- 7. Address Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV):**
 - Invest in comprehensive support services for SGBV victims, including information, referral pathways, and safe housing.
 - Lead nationwide SGBV awareness campaigns to increase reporting and awareness of legal routes for combating SGBV.

For more info, read *Stories To Actions* policy brief **“Beyond COVID: The sexual and reproductive rights and rights of urban youth.”**