



COVID-19 INDUCED INEQUALITIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ATTAINING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A CASE FOR ZIMBABWE



NOVEMBER 2020

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BEAM	Basic Education Assistance Module
COVID- 19	Coronavirus disease
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
WHO	World Health Organisation
RWIMS	Rural WASH Information Management System
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
GBV	Gender Based Violence
ZIMSTAT	Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency
CSA	Climate Smart Agriculture
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
ZERA	Zimbabwe Energy Regulatory Authority
ZETDC	Zimbabwe Electricity Distribution Company
ZIMVAC	Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Corona virus, termed COVID-19 first reported in China in December 2019 marks a turning point in the 21st century. The previously celebrated indicators of globalization namely global connectivity systems through travel quickly became the conduit for spreading the virus across the world. By the time the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic in mid-March, 2020, 114 countries had reported cases¹. The multi-faceted impact of the pandemic has far-reaching implications for the attainment of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs). The graphic presentation below shows the impact on selected SDGs:

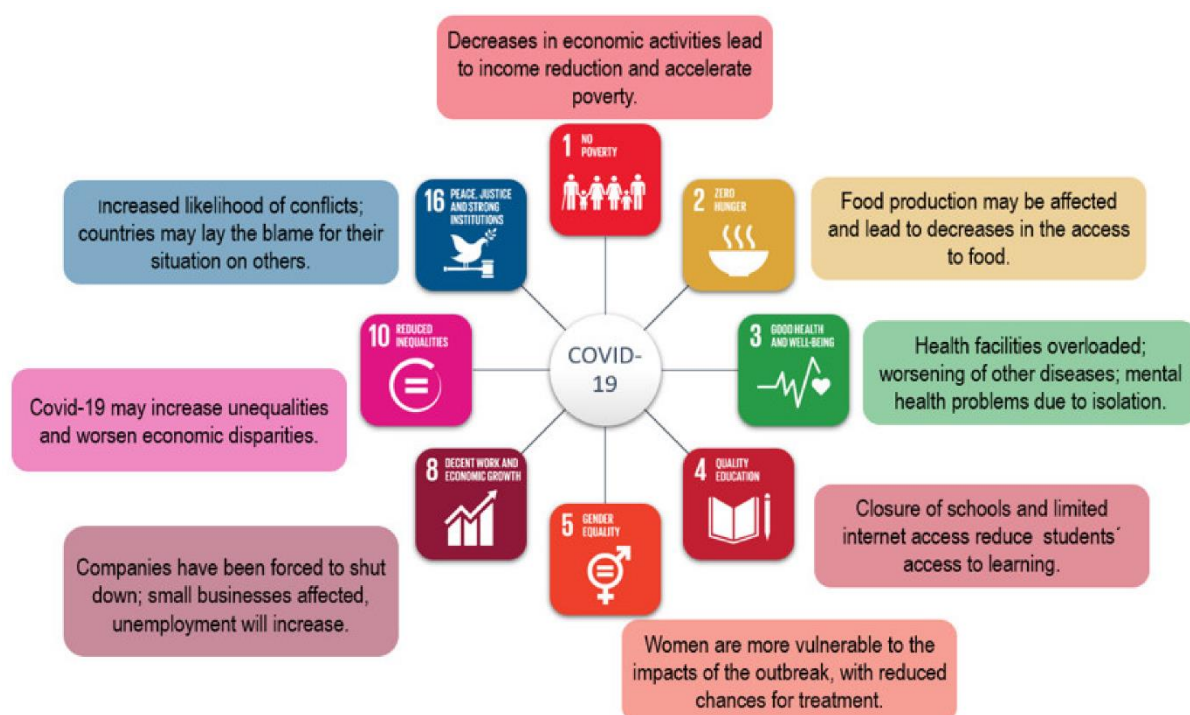


Figure 1: Impact of COVID-19 across SDGs

As the interplay of the impact of the COVID-19 takes place, it is disproportionately felt by the various groups in society thus widening the inequality gap. As governments everywhere have been on their toes trying to contain the pandemic and potential loss of lives, an economic crisis could not be abated and for most countries including Zimbabwe, the pandemic only aggravated an already existing economic crisis .

The COVID-19 is unprecedented and its trajectory will be determined by fundamentals that are as yet poorly understood. However, from what we have experienced since the emergency of the pandemic is that it has unleashed a cascade of economic, political and social turmoil that has deepened inequality, fuelled violence, weakened public services and institutions and

¹ World health Organization(2020), WHO Director- General 's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19-11 March 2020. (online). Available at:<https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/details/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020> (accessed 20 April 2020).

exposed growing injustice in communities. Social groups in which poverty is concentrated and are systematically marginalized, namely women, girls, boys, indigenous people, elderly persons, people with disabilities, migrants among others are feeling the disproportionate impact of the pandemic. COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing inequalities and aggravated the conditions in which these groups live. The risks associated with these inequalities increase dramatically due to lack of social protection systems and the absence of effective and timely economic measures by the authorities to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic.

At the root of the injustices and inequalities exposed by COVID-19 are the structural and systemic factors that render our governments unprepared to address the complexities presented by the crisis. While for example the economic impacts of the pandemic are still largely hidden to some, to the majority of marginalized groups, they are glaring. Indeed some government have come up with bailout packages, which to some extent have been large and innovative but those as well have not been equitably distributed.

1.1 Study Objective

The study seeks to spotlight the nexus of COVID-19, SDGs and inequalities induced by this pandemic across selected sectors that include Education; Health, Water & Sanitation and gender equality. The study will also highlight the intersectionality of the impact across the SDGs. It is the objective of this study to focus on both the challenges and proffer recommendations for a way-forward that ensures protection, voice, agency and accountability for those marginalized both during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.0 COVID-19 IMPACTS ON SDG 6: CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Long before the coronavirus pandemic, much of Zimbabwe suffered severe water and sanitation crisis. Over two million people in the capital Harare and the greater metropolitan area incorporating Chitungwiza, Epworth, Ruwa and Norton have no household access to safe drinking water or adequate wastewater disposal services. Thousands of mostly women and girls spend an average of eight hours daily in line at crowded boreholes or shallow wells to fetch water that might not even be safe for their consumption. According to most residence, the need for the precious liquid supercedes the caution for social distancing as a measure against the spread of the COVID-19. Inadequate basic services therefore hinder the capacity of vulnerable people to follow basic, effective prevention measures against the virus, thus increasing their vulnerability.



Residents in Harare queue for water: Picture courtesy of Columbus Mavhunga/ VOA, 20 August, 2020

Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution provides in Section 77(a) that "every person has the right to safe, clean and potable water". Unfortunately, this remains more on paper than is the lived realities.

Washing hands with soap frequently under running water is the main advice against the spread of COVID-19. However, for Zimbabwe, the pandemic serves as a magnifying glass revealing ages of neglect in the Water and Sanitation sector in the country. According to the OCHA Cluster Status : WASH report (updated 24 September, 2020), over 3, 7 million people were in need of WASH support under the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan along with 7,3 million people in need under the COVID-19 Addendum. Not only are the WASH challenges an urban phenomenon, but also a rural one. While in the urban areas those with resources can either sink boreholes at their homes or buy water from suppliers, the situation in the rural areas is more dire as most of the marginalized populations neither have the means nor capacity to address the WASH woes. Access to safe water in rural areas remains a challenge with only 30 percent of the 55, 709 water sources tracked by the Rural Water Information Management Systems (RWIMS), providing water from a protected sourceⁱ.



Figure 2: <http://kubatana.net/2020/10/21/water-woes-hit-zaka-district-communities>

Cases have been reported of women and girls who have been abused at the water points. This had led to organizations like Shamwari Yemwanasikana, Community Water Alliance, Deaf Zimbabwe Trust, Police Victim Friendly Unit among others, launching an anti-Violence campaign dubbed: Borehole diaries” Unearthing and addressing the hidden and complex SGBV violations against girls and women at water collection points in Chitungwiza”(<https://www.herald.co.zw/boreholes-a-breeding-ground-for-covid-19/>).

EPWORTH LOCAL NEWS LN

Epworth Quarry dam

Its almost empty.....



THE FEARED AND SCARRY DAM IN OVERSPILL EPWORTH HAS BECOME THE ONLY SOURCE OF WATER SUPPLY

Tuesday 13 October

The Quarry dam is now the main water supply to Epworth residents following our current drought situation. Last year we did not receive enough rains, so we are praying for heavy rains this year. At first people were afraid of the stories said about this dam. Some people say this dam is cursed but I personally say its just a dam, and its our last resort of water supply.

2.1 NOWHERE TO RUN TO... The hospitals too are no longer safe

Generally, the poor and marginalized social groups seek medical services from the public clinics and hospitals where the charges are relatively affordable. At the pick of the COVID-19 pandemic, Parirenyatwa, Chitungwiza and Harare hospitals had no incinerators and the accumulation of medical waste posed a serious health hazard to the staff and patients of these facilities. The disproportionate impacts of the pandemic continued to widen the inequality gap in terms of safety and protection for men and women, as the majority of the health frontline workers in these facilities are females.

According the RWIMS, 44 percent of rural health facilities did not have functioning incinerators in September 2020, while 3.5 percent had no functioning toilets and 12 percent had no handwashing facilities. All these inadequate facilities continued to undermine the critical requirements for curbing the spread of the pandemic.

2.2 Quarantine measures: 'the haves -and -the -have-not'

As part of the measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government made it mandatory for all returning residents or visitors to be quarantined in a facility initially for a period of 21 days upon arrival. The quarantine period was later reviewed to eight days with the

remainder being completed at home when one tested negative on the eighth day. From an assessment of quarantine centres undertaken by IOM and WHO in the country, only 62 percent of the centres had running water while 40 percent of handwashing stations had soap. The public quarantine centres across the country have been characterized by unacceptable hygiene food conditions. In most of the quarantine centres, the inmates had no PPEs. According to the Ministry of Health & Child Care public relations manager, the national command centre tasked with managing the COVID-19 pandemic lacked a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), three months after the President, ED Mnangagwa had declared the COVID-19 a national disaster.

“Between the testing and the time the results are released, there is a high possibility that we could be reinfecting each other”, said one inmate from the Harare Polytechnique

The government allowed those who could afford, to book themselves into private quarantine centres which on average would cost US\$800.00 for the eight days inclusive of the PCR tests. The country saw private facilities springing up to offer quarantine services after inspection from the Ministry of health and fulfilling all the COVID-19 protocols. For those who could afford the exorbitant fees, the private quarantine centres offered relatively safer environment with better facilities.

3.0 GENDERED IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 has been shown to affect everyone but not in the same way. The pandemic is causing economic shock that is leading to decline in women’s incomes and labor participation than in men. Evidence shows that more than 70 percent of women are employed in the informal sector. With the introduction of the nation-wide lockdown, the informal sector was the most affected and invariably, women found themselves most affected. As already highlighted above, within the health sector, women are also highly exposed to the virus since they make up 65 percent of the workforce in the health sector, hence experienced disproportionate burden both on their health and well-being.

3.1 Women and the new online-way of working

Gender equality as pronounced in SDG 5 tends to get more uneven as a result of the gendered impacts of COVID-19. Under lockdown measures, most companies and organizations made contingency measures for their employees to work from home. Most employees had access to gadgets such as laptops, ipads and i-phones and some employers made provisions for internet data so that the employees could work from home. Not only did the pandemic widen the inequality gap between men and women, it also put a spotlight on inequalities among different groups of women. While women in formal employment were mostly catered for and could work from home, the majority of women who occupy the informal economy felt the brunt of the economic impact of the pandemic as they instantly lost their only source of livelihood. The situation was also compounded by the reality that beyond using their phones for

communication purposes, very few women in the informal sector knew how to use their phones for marketing their products through such platforms as facebook, twitter. The country already had a pre-existing gap in gender usage of mobile internet services and the pandemic exacerbated it. E-commerce was largely the preserve of men hence the lockdown found most women in the informal sector flat-footed. Most women in the informal sector have no income security, no unemployment insurance or sick pay and often very limited savings. This brings in a heavy toll on their own well-being during this pandemic.

3.2 Women and the burden of care

Exacerbated burdens of unpaid care work for women and girls, rise of domestic violence due to heightened tensions in the household as family members are in lockdown, decline in economic empowerment, exclusion from leadership roles and interrupted access to sexual reproductive health all pose serious threat to gender equality. As the working population moved to the new way of working as a result of the pandemic, that of working online, working from home, this has serious implications on women's burden of care. The working woman did not only find herself adapting to the new digital way of working, but in addition, unlike her male counterparts, the home situation had other demands that she could not ignore. The unprecedented intersectionality of the productive, reproductive and domestic roles of women calls for a balancing act which is bringing a high burnout in women. Whereas before COVID, if there were community activities like funerals, the working woman could mostly attend to them after work (unless it was in the family), now working from home would make it difficult not to join hands with other females in the community and participate in the domestic chores. As schools were also forced to close and learning migrated to digital platforms, overnight, most women, more than men found themselves "situation-imposed tutors" to their school-going children. In addition, since some households could not keep their house-helpers as a result of the lockdown, most women found themselves assuming the household domestic roles and responsibilities as well in addition their work-related duties.

3.3 COVID-19 and Gender -Based Violence (GBV)

The national GBV hotline (Musasa) recorded a total of 5 306 GBV calls from the beginning of the lockdown on 30 March until 7 October 2020, with an average increase of over 60 percent compared to the pre-lockdown trends. According to Musasa, about 94 per cent of the calls were from womenⁱⁱ

4.0 EDUCATION AND COVID 19 (SDG 4)

What started as a health crisis has turned out to have devastating effects on the general wellbeing of the human race. The advent of the novel corona virus and its mode of transmission resulted in closures of all economic and social activities in a bid to limit physical contact and the spread of the disease. Whilst many countries reacted differently in adopting strategies to curb the spread of the virus, most countries including Zimbabwe, imposed lockdowns which restricted movement of people. What was viewed at first as temporary closure of certain various sectors of the economy and society such as public markets, schools and other forms of public gatherings, ended up as potent sources that would exacerbate different forms of inequalities as the crisis became long drawn. The COVID 19 threatened the very existence of the human race and compromises had to be embraced to forge a new path for the survival of the human race in what is now coined the 'new normal'. The education sector was not spared from the wrath of

the novel corona virus which littered devastating fatalities across the globe. The outcome was varying effects which presented challenges and opportunities for the education sector.

4.1 Children Receiving No Education

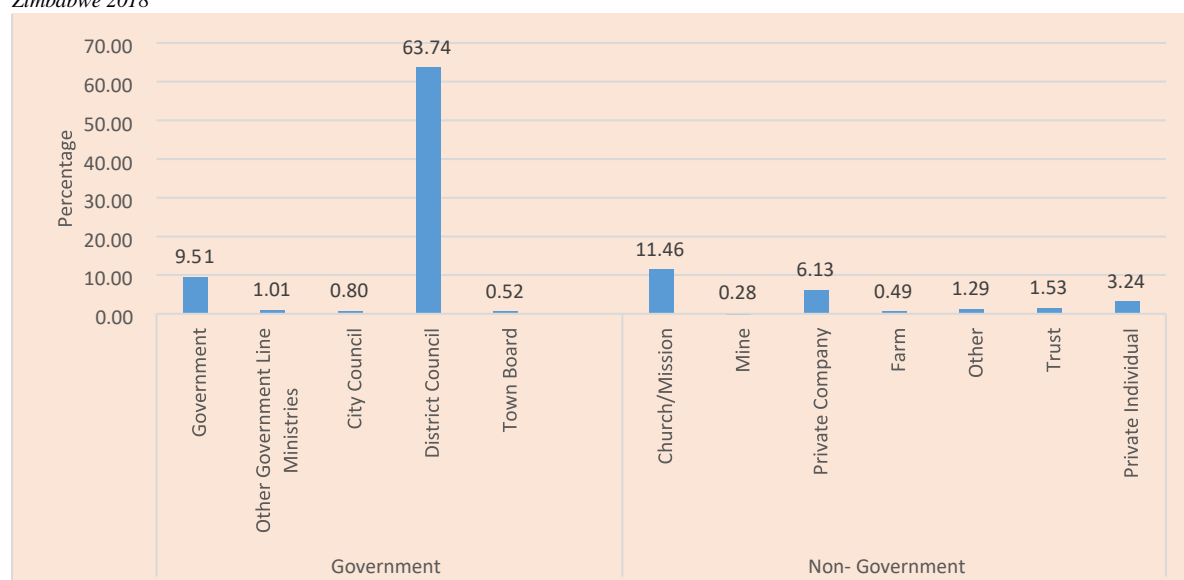
Zimbabwe went into total lockdown on 31 March 2020 following a Presidential Directive issued by President E. Mnangagwa on 27 March 2020. The directive was further operationalised through Statutory Instrument (SI) 83 of 2020 known as the Public Health (COVID-19 Prevention, Containment and Treatment) (National Lockdown) Order, 2020. The SI 83/2020 did not classify education as an ‘essential service’ hence the subsequent closure of schools across the country. By September 2020, a total of 165 schools across the country’s ten provinces had been prioritised by the Ministry of Primary & Secondary Education as needing new boreholes. According to RWIMS, 53 percent of schools had no existing handwashing facilities and 21 percent of the schools had no safe sanitary facilities. The intersectionality of poverty and vulnerability has been magnified in these instances.

All 9500 schools in Zimbabwe were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and more than 4.6 million children in the country were affected (UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO, September 2020). The closure of schools deprived learners of the opportunity to advance their classes and threaten to erode gains accumulated from years of investment in the education sector. The UNICEF (2020) estimated that the longer children are out of school, the higher their chance of permanently dropping out of school and their likelihood in facing dire problems including child labour. There is a great likelihood that after such an extended absence from school many children may fail to return to school. Over 400 girls from four districts in Manicaland dropped out of school altogether owing to pregnancy, marriage, financial challenges and illness when the schools were partially opened for exam classes on 28th September 2020 (The Herald). The numbers are high considering that they were only recorded in 4 of 7 districts in Manicaland, and not include nationwide figures. Although Section 68C of the Education Amendment Act .No15 of 2020, Amending Education Act [Chapter 25:04], stipulates that “no pupil shall be excluded from school for non-payment of School fees or on the basis of pregnancy”, the dropout rate is still alarming. Culture, tradition, and stigma maybe attributed to be the force that takes children out of school, especially girls, in the event that they fall pregnant and get married off. There are higher chances of girls dropping out of school once they succumb to early marriages than boys who may continue going to school even after impregnating a girl. To this end, girls are disproportionately affected as compared to boys, something which society should correct.

4.2 Digital Poverty and Worsening Inequalities

The forced closure of schools to curb the spread of COVID 19 fast tracked the use adoption of e-learning led by private schools and private institutions of higher learning. The education sector was not prepared to go virtual almost instantaneously having relied on physical classes pre-COVID 19. Students in private schools continued with their education using e-learning services owing to the availability of resources at the schools and parents’ disposal. This made transitioning to online learning faster compared to those in public schools.

Fig 1: Distribution of all Secondary Schools by Government or Non-Government and *Responsible Authority*, *Percentage Distribution*, *Zimbabwe 2018*



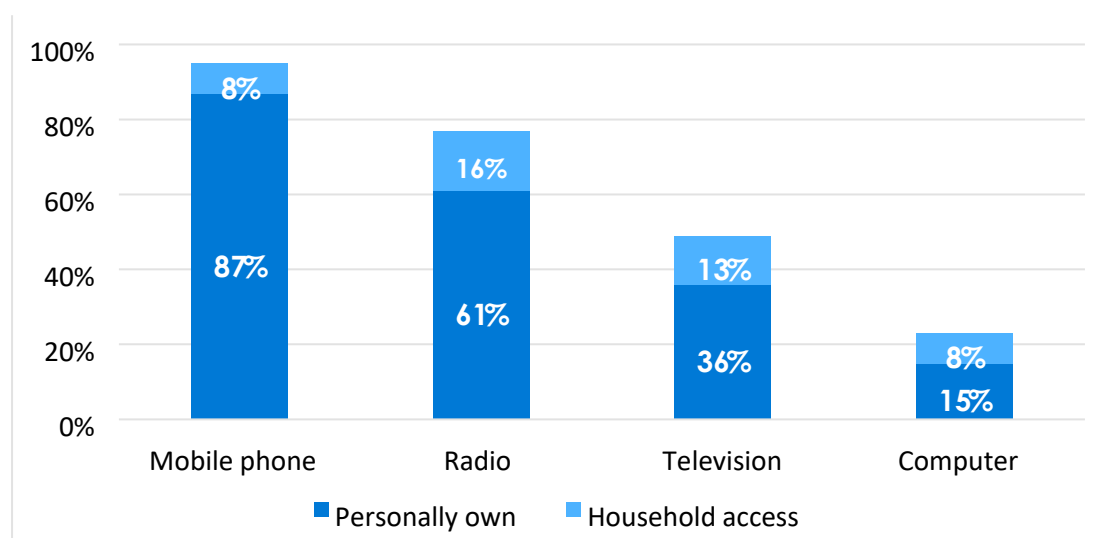
Source: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education- 2018 Primary and Secondary Education Statistics Report

The 2018 Primary and Secondary Education Statistics Report clearly depicted the skewedness of enrolment towards government school. The small proportion enrolled in private individual, private company and others which cumulatively constitute 10,66% of learners had the greater opportunity of making the transition to e-learning platforms. The outcome was the unequal opportunity to access education by all children and progress of a limited few towards completing the academic year curriculum. The government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Services relaunched Radio lessons which were part of local radio programming until 2001. The radio lessons have somehow provided a vital learning tool during the current emergency. Despite the benefits for some families, a radio receiver is beyond their reach and poses a challenge in supporting their children to catch up with the lessons (UNICEF, 2020).

4.3 Rural urban divide: Children Living in Rural Areas

The current measures to ensure that scholars continue to access quality education during the pandemic widened the inequality gap between rural and urban school going children. COVID 19 exposed the inadequacies of infrastructure that is currently available to support learning. Prior to the advent of COVID 19, rural school children were already suffering deprivation of the requisite infrastructure that supports e-learning such as electricity, mobile network, access to cell-phones and computers. The Afrobarometer survey of 2018 established that household ownership of computers is by far more prevalent in cities (51%) than in rural areas (7%) and among the highly educated (80%) compared to their less- educated counterparts (3%-19%). Although the Afrobarometer survey involved only adults (aged 18 or older), findings provide an overview of the resources to which school-age children might have access at the household level.

Figure 2: Household access to communications devices



Source: Afrobarometer 2018

Fig 2. further demonstrates that the school going children have very limited access to communications devices even in cases where there is an individual with the device in the household. The situation is dire in rural areas where most of the communication devices do not support internet services. Afrobarometer (2018) reported that in urban areas 64% of cellphones owners had phones which accessed the internet as compared to 28% of their rural counterparts. This means that children in the rural areas were unlikely able to receive education instructions over the phones as compared to their urban counterparts.

4.4 Education Not Free

The pandemic only exacerbated the challenge of access to education and making the realisation of SDG 4 indicators on free primary and secondary education, equal access to quality pre-primary education and eliminate all discrimination in education. Zimbabwe had not achieved free primary and secondary education pre-COVID 19 and the pandemic increased the cost of accessing education in Zimbabwe. Despite paying school fees and tuition, parents whose children accessed online learning had to contend with data costs which are relatively high compared to obtaining incomes for the ordinary people. The poor and economically marginalised groups whose incomes regressed during the peak of the lockdown and COVID 19 pandemic were further relegated into the deeper echelons of poverty and unable to support their children accessing online education services.

4.5 Inter-Generational Education Inequalities

The current education challenges under COVID 19 has brought another phenomenon of inter-generational education inequalities. The demands of distant learning as a result of e-learning entails that parents have to monitor and provide the physical assistance required by students. However, not only are most parents not techno savvy, but most are also not conversant with the Zimbabwe Education Blue Print (2015-2022). This situation will likely compromise the quality of education that students receive. These two challenges reinforce each other as they incapacitate older parents from assisting and participating in the education activities of their children. The Zimbabwe Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 Findings Report established that 16,3% of students surveyed had 3 or more books to read at home (Zimbabwe National

Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) and UNICEF, 2019) whilst it was 37,4% and 9,4% for urban and rural areas respectively further compounding the challenge to access to the learning materials.

5.0 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY (SDG 7)

The commitment to ensure the provision of affordable and clean energy by 2030 is paramount to the achievement of other SDG goals worldwide. SDG 7 is one of enabler SDG Goals that has a direct bearing to achievement of other goals such as improving quality education, reduce human reliance on environmental degrading fuels, promote green jobs, reduce poverty and supply of potable water and ultimately increase human quality of life. The advent of COVID 19 has put pressure on limited available resources that has been channelled and redirected towards alleviating the health crisis and social protection services for the poor. The efforts towards realising this goal have been disrupted during the time of the pandemic.

5.1 Increasing Costs of Accessing Clean Energy

The period coinciding with the COVID 19 pandemic showed relative increase in costs associated with accessing energy such as electricity and fuel energy. As a response to COVID 19 and as part of measures to ensure ease access to food and other essential services, the government of Zimbabwe through SI 85/2020 allowed the public to transact with free funds (specific currency defined by law) to purchase goods and services denominated in local currency. The promulgation of SI 85/2020 sent the re-dollarization of the economy into overdrive. The sale of fuel such as diesel and petrol in foreign currency which very few people has access to, had an over spilling effect on the costs on food, public transport which have been on the upward trend since the introduction of the SI 85/2020. The supply of electricity generally improved due to temporary closure of industries but this did not translate into reduced costs of accessing electricity for ordinary people. Strategic areas of intervention in COVID-19 recovery within the sector must include: (i) sustaining investment in energy infrastructure, including through deepening the participation of private capital; (ii) addressing regulatory and business climate to complement constrained public resources with private sector investment; (iii) accelerating energy transition while expanding energy access; (iv) addressing the challenge of transmission and distribution systems upgrade and expansion with effective participation of investment under public, private and public-private partnership models; and (v) finding a fiscal space for capital expenditure in infrastructure to support sustainable recovery and growth in Zimbabwe in the midst of a public health emergency which require public expenditure in social protection and health.

The Zimbabwe Electricity Transmission and Distribution Company (ZETDC) and Zimbabwe Energy Regulatory Authority (ZERA) agreed to increase electricity tariffs. This was done to enable ZETDC to raise funds to repair generators and to pay for electricity importation from South Africa and Mozambique, but has put the costs of electricity beyond the reach of the majority poor whose incomes have stagnated and drastically reduced during the COVID 19. The impact is likely to have drastic effects on the progress made towards expanding access to clean energy and reduce environmental degradation and climate change.

5.2 Limited investment in energy generation

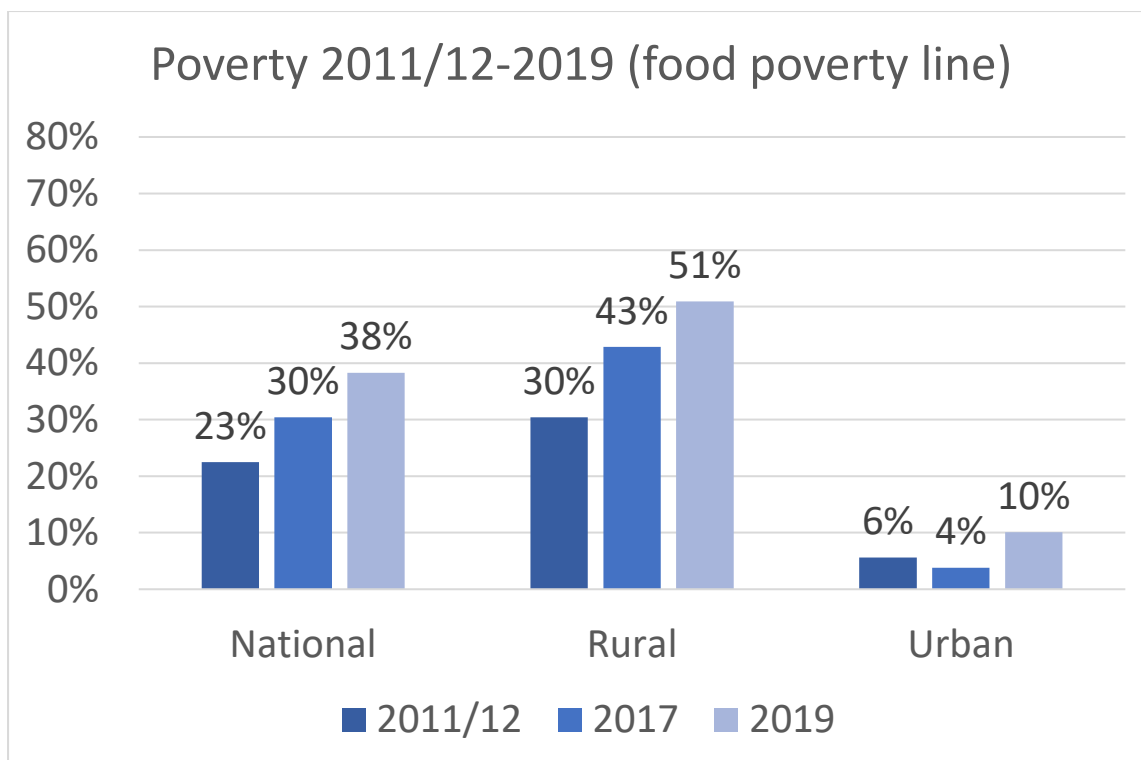
The Renewable Energy Solutions for Africa (2020) argued that the global economic crisis that causes a decrease in energy consumption makes it harder for existing customers and businesses

to pay for their energy services and African utilities. The slowed supply chains and reduced investment flows are causing energy companies to run out of cash, putting many jobs at risk and reducing the customers' access to energy. The situation emphasises the ever need of renewables-based energy solutions. This situation holds very troubling implications for the African continent because a stall in progress towards universal energy access will potentially worsen poverty and inequalities (Akrofi and Antwi, 2020). The pandemic has also affected the manufacture and movement of renewable energy technologies to Africa, slowing the rate of adopting renewable energy technologies. Akrofi and Antwi (2020) noted that China, the leading global producer and supplier of clean energy technologies has been severely hit by the pandemic, hence, disrupting the delivery of Renewable Energy technologies such as solar panels, wind turbines, and batteries. A 1.5 billion U.S. dollars project to expand Zimbabwe's biggest coal-fired power plant by 600 megawatts by Chinese firm Sinohydro has fallen behind schedule due to travel restrictions owing to the COVID-19 pandemic (Xinhua, August 2020). The project was earmarked to have reached 57% completion by August 2020 but is currently stalling on 47,5%. The impact is likely to slow reindustrialization process and uptake of online learning platforms in the education sector. Effort is required in building more robust and efficient energy infrastructure systems as well as implementing decentralised energy solutions using renewable energy sources to ensure that achieving SDG goal 7 remains a possibility.

6.0 COVID-19 AND POVERTY (SDG:1)

Poverty has been increasing in Zimbabwe as shown by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) Poverty, Income, Consumption and Expenditure Survey (PICES) of 2017 and the follow up Mini-PICES 2019. Extreme poverty (using the food poverty line) rose faster than general poverty increasing from 23% in 2011, to 30% in 2017 and 38% in 2019. Meanwhile the general poverty marginally increased from 54% in 2017 to 57% in 2019. The poverty indicators also show inequalities according to areas and the different groups of people. Rural poverty is dominant with 51% of the population in extreme poverty as of 2019 while urban poverty was at 10% highlighting the rural and urban divide. However, urban poverty has been rising at a faster rate moving from 4% in 2017 to 10% in 2019 compared to rural poverty that rose from 43% to 51% during the same period. As a result, of the increasing urban poverty, 51 percent of the extreme poor were male and 49 percent female in 2019 compared to 48 percent male and 52 percent female in 2017.

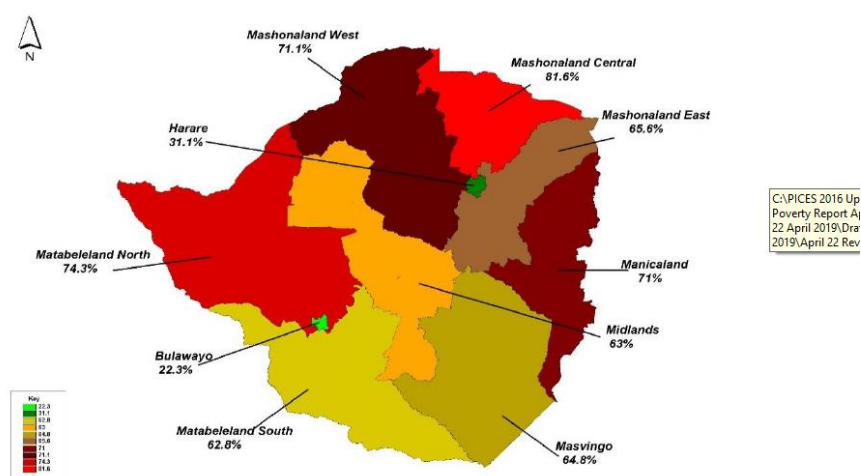
Persons with disabilities are worse off with a poverty prevalence of 74.1 percent in 2017 compared to 69.5 percent for those not disabled. On the other hand disabled persons deemed extreme poor were 32.2 percent compared to 28.5 percent for those not disabled. COVID-19 interventions must prioritise persons with disabilities who are already the most marginalised.



Source: Mini PICES 2019

Further to the rural and urban divide, there are also disparities across provinces. According to the PICES 2017, Mashonaland Central has the highest percentage poverty prevalence for household with 81.6 percent compared to Bulawayo province with the least at 22.3 percent and Harare with 31.1 percent. The other provinces have percentage poverty prevalence above 60 percent with Matabeleland North at 74.3 percent, Mashonaland West 71.1 percent and Manicaland 71 percent as shown in the map below. This is the same for percentage of extreme poverty for households with the worst affected being Mashonaland Central with 41.2 percent, Matabeleland North with 33.3 percent and Mashonaland West with 41.2 percent respectively compared to Bulawayo with 0.9 percent and Harare with 3.8 percent.

Map1: Percent Poverty Prevalence by Province for Households in Zimbabwe PICES 2017



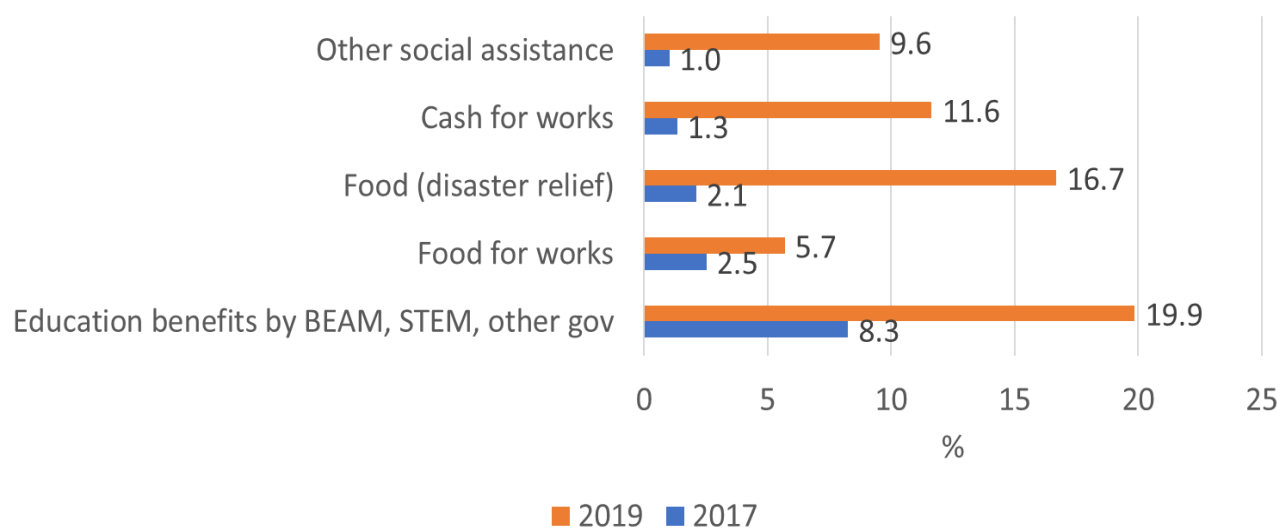
Source: PICES 2017

Social protection is one of the most important tool for fighting poverty. Goal 1.3 calls for the implementation of nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable. Social assistance coverage of the total population increased during the period 2017 to 2019. However, the coverage still remains low at 0.26 percent of GDP for 2019 and estimated at 0.7 percent in 2020 against the 4.5 percent GDP recommended by the Social Policy for Africa in 2008. The bulk of the social protection covered the education sector with the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programs covering 20 % of the extreme poor in 2019. Food at 16.7 percent and cash for works with 11.6 percent are the other major social protection programs.

The 2020 budget proposed increasing the number of children under BEAM from 415 000 to 700 000. However according to the 2021 Pre-Budget Strategy the budget is supporting only 450 000 vulnerable pupils. There were positive developments with respect to the Food Deficit Mitigation Programme which benefitted a total number of 760 692 households against a target of 756 980 households. The 2020 Budget Estimates shows that the government was targeting increasing the number of ultra-poor households receiving cash transfers from 65 000 to 75000. Additionally the 2020 budget proposed to scale up the Harmonised Social Cash Transfer from 23 to 33 districts. However the 2020 Mid-Term Budget review shows that only 63 000 households had benefitted under the scheme. In order to deal with the negative impacts of COVID-19, the government proposed to pay out ZWL\$300 to 1 million households. Although the gesture was a noble one the amount proposed was too little given the food poverty line for an individual was at ZWL\$1,442.00 in August 2020. Despite the figures being inadequate disbursements were slow and the 2021 BSP shows that only 250 000 people are now receiving the ZWL\$300 cash transfer under Covid-19 and Cereal Support Programme. Minister Mthuli Ncube noted that government is working on increasing the number of beneficiaries and addressing the negative externalities of the action taken on mobile banking platforms in terms of the bulk lines, used for disbursing the funds (Hansard 3 September 2020).

The 2020 Budget Mid-Term Review showed that during the period January to June, total social protection expenditure amounted to ZWL\$902.2 million against targeted expenditure of ZWL\$1.3 billion. The poor performance of the social protection at a time that the poor's challenges worsened due to the drought and the COVID-19 is a cause for concern. There is need for budget implementation to prioritise the poor and most vulnerable in order to reduce poverty. The increased number of people in poverty resulting from the loss of income due to COVID-19 restrictions such as lockdown and border closures will put increased pressure on the few available resources.

Social Assistance Coverage of the extreme poor (%)



Source: Mini PICES 2019

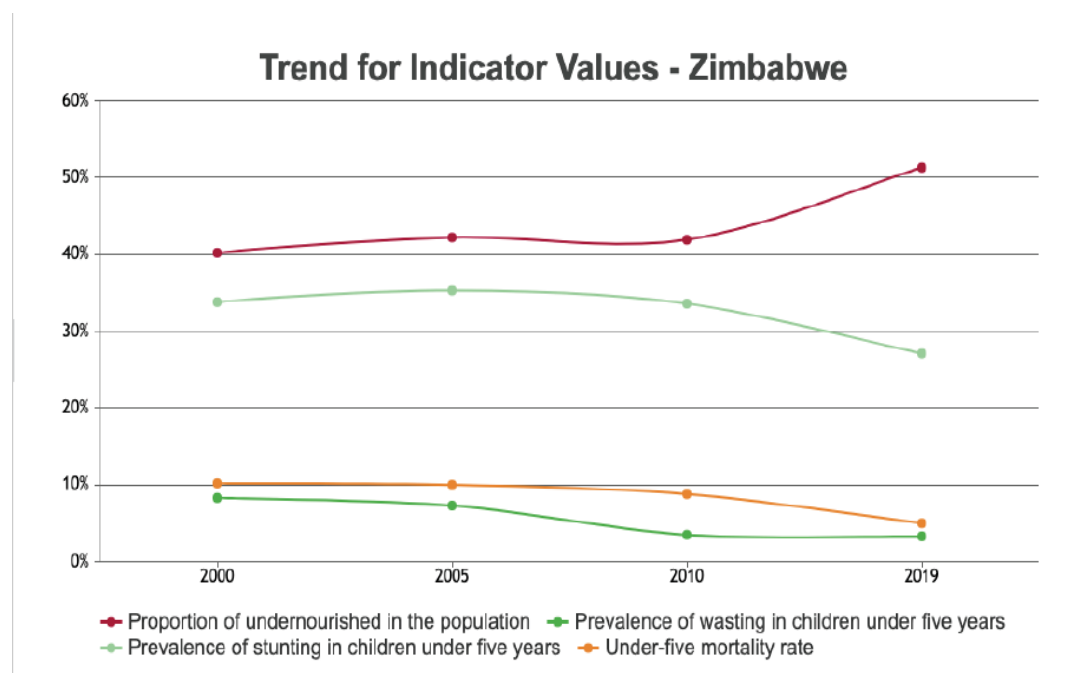
7.0 COVID -19 ON GOAL 2: END HUNGER

Zimbabwe was already food insecure prior to the COVID-19 pandemic with the 2019 Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) Rural Livelihoods Assessment (RLA) report projecting that 59% of the rural population would be cereal insecure during the peak hunger period (January to March 2020). According to the report, this food insecurity prevalence translated to a population of about 5.5 million rural people. On the other hand the World Food Program (WFP) in December 2019 estimated that 2.2 million of the urban population would be food insecure in 2020 to bring the total population of food insecure Zimbabweans at 7.7 million. There was need for urgent food distribution or cash based transfers (to promote the local economy where feasible) to food insecure households in order to avoid a worsening situation. In the 2019 Global Hunger Index, Zimbabwe ranks 109th out of 117 qualifying countries. With a score of 34.4 Zimbabwe suffers from a level of hunger that is serious.

The 2020 Humanitarian Response notes that drought and crop failure, exacerbated by macro-economic challenges and austerity measures, have directly affected vulnerable households in both rural and urban communities. Zimbabwe suffered from consecutive climate induced droughts. The El Nino induced drought of 2018/2019 brought searing heat and caused massive crop failure. Cyclone Idai that caused destruction and displacement of thousands of people, washing away their homes, crops and livelihoods in parts of Manicaland and Masvingo provinces in March 2019 worsened the situation. The late and erratic rainfall in the 2019/20 season led to another poor harvest in 2020 further increasing the number of food insecure people in Zimbabwe. The ZimVAC report highlights poverty as the major underlying cause of vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity as well as precarious livelihoods in Zimbabwe.

The 2020 Humanitarian Response highlights that nutritional needs remain high with over 1.1 million children and women requiring nutrition assistance. Approximately 95,000 children are acutely malnourished (3.6 per cent of children under age 5) and require immediate life-saving nutrition treatment. The 2019 Global Hunger Index shows that the proportion of undernourished in the population has been increasing from 40 percent in 2000 to about 51 percent in 2019 over the period 2000 to 2019 as shown in Figure1 below. There has been a reduction in stunting in children under five, from a peak of 35.3 percent in 2006 to 23.5 percent in 2019. During the same period under five mortality improved from 10.5 percent in 2000 to 4.6 percent in 2019. Prevalence of wasting in children under five also improved from 8.3 percent in 2000 to 2.9 percent in 2019. However, the underweight children increased by about 21 percent from 8 percent in 2015 to 9.7 in 2019.

Figure: Zimbabwe Global Hunger Index 2019



Source: <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/en/2019/Zimbabwe.pdf>

Diarrhoeal cases due to deteriorating access to clean water and sanitation may also exacerbate the situation, as these are an immediate cause of under-nutrition. Maternal undernutrition increases the probability of low birth weight, which in turn increases the probability of neonatal deaths.

7.1 COVID-19 Impacts on ending hunger

Zimbabwe is behind in terms of achieving the second SDG of Zero Hunger by 2030. COVID-19 pandemic presents new challenges for achieving Zero Hunger in the near and long term future. The measures put in place to contain COVID-19 including the lockdown and boarder closures in March 2020 and other restrictions had a negative bearing on achieving food security. The lockdown mainly affected the informal sector, which was not able to operate from end of March 2020 until the gradual opening of the economy during the beginning of the second half of the year. With the 2019 Labour Force Survey putting the share of informal employment to total employment at 75.6 percent, this means that the majority of employed people suffered from loss of income. This led to more people failing to buy adequate food and thus negatively affecting the goal to end hunger.

According to the 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan, the continuous increase in food insecurity, coupled with high food prices, may negatively affect the nutritional needs particularly of children and pregnant and lactating women as the lean season is expected to extend beyond March 2020. Inflation continues to erode purchasing power and affordability of food and other essential goods is a daily challenge. The inflation peaked at a high of 837% in July 2020 before retreating to 761% in August 2020 and further down to 659% in September 2020. There was a massive hike in food prices from the time that the government announced the lockdown in March 2020. The Food Poverty Line for one person in March 2020 was \$473.03 while that for an average household of five persons stood at \$2,365.15. However, during the period from March 2020 to August 2020 the Food Poverty Line increased by 205% to ZWL\$1,442.00 for one person and ZWL\$7,211.00 for an average of five persons further increasing the food

insecurity in the country and putting more people into hunger. The COVID-19 enforced closure of schools disrupted the Home Grown School Feeding Programme covering all primary schools. This has a negative impact on malnutrition in children.

Agriculture got the bulk of the ZWL\$18.2 billion stimulus package with ZWL\$6.1 billion allocated to the sector. The agriculture sector prioritise embracing Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) that harmonises agriculture development, with shared funding, environment protection and reduction to vulnerabilities to climate change. Other priority areas include irrigation development, mechanisation, strengthening early warning systems as part of drought proofing, agricultural extension and advisory services. These programs are in place to deal with the low productivity in the sector with maize yields at 0.6 tons per hectare in 2020. The productivity of smallholder cattle herds is low, with average calving rates of about 45% against a potential of 60%, and off take rates of about 6%, against a recommended 20%.

As part of the Climate Smart Agriculture the Government introduced the Vulnerable Input Support Programme for the 2020/21 season targets 1.8 million households to grow maize and traditional grains. The programme titled Pfumvudza/Intwasa adopt Conversation Agriculture Principles (CA) as a way to climate proof the programme. Training of farmers and agriculture extension workers on the conservation concept has been undertaken. The 2020 Humanitarian Response plan shows that 1.5 million smallholder farmers are in need of season- sensitive emergency crop and livestock input assistance. Therefore, the Pfumvudza/Intwasa comes at a good time when most smallholder farmers are not able to procure inputs. This will see an increase in the proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture.

Other agriculture programs that the government had set aside include the irrigation rehabilitation programme. The target was to develop and rehabilitate 10 000 hectares per year (200 hectares per district). However, according to the 2021 Budget Strategy paper a total of only 669 hectares of the target has been developed. This could be partly because of limited resources and the impact of COVID-19 lockdown on works. Mechanisation programmes include the Belarus Mechanisation Facility worth over US\$50 million of agricultural equipment being facilitated through banks to qualifying and deserving farmers and the John Deere Agricultural Equipment.

The increasing poverty levels and reduction in people's income at a time when food prices have been rapidly increasing during the COVID-19 period poses a major risk to the goal to end hunger with more people needing support. The expected negative economic growth rate for 2020 of -4.5 percent (BSP 2021 forecasts) worsened by COVID-19 will have a negative impact on government revenue and the capacity of government to adequately fund social protection programmes needed to end hunger.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Responding to the pandemic should not just be about rectifying long-standing inequalities, but also about building a resilient world in the interest of everyone with women at the centre of recovery.

- The government should focus on building forward better, adopting a paradigm of growth that includes equity and well-being in order to realize the SDGs.
- The financing gap for SDGs that was already large is expected to widen, increasing fiscal vulnerability on the government, as such, government has to focus more on Domestic Resource Mobilization (DRM) and closing the leakages that are draining the national resources including curbing corruption.

- Access to WASH is crucial to boost resilience to multiple threats, including current and future pandemics. The government should thus prioritize WASH service delivery in the presence of competing needs. While government should provide WASH services in various dimensions from small village water schemes, through large urban sanitation infrastructure projects, to national integrated WASH, perhaps focus should be on the programs with the greatest impact on the most beneficiaries, that deliver enormous economies of scale (for example the Africa Development Bank, Lake Victoria Water Supply & Sanitation Program)².
- WASH should be a central part of any post-COVID-19 national recovery plans as access to WASH provides improved pandemic resilience, creates employment opportunities and health benefits.
- There is need for coordinated, decisive, inclusive and innovative policy action especially financial and technical support to the country's most vulnerable and poor.
- The government has to make a deliberate move to come up with policy interventions aimed towards reducing the chance of digital literacy disadvantage being passed to the next generation.
- Government must invest in intersectional and gender-disaggregated data to guide response and recovery efforts
- There is need to invest in digital education systems that allows children from both the rural and urban areas to access e-learning service. These include both government and private sector led investment and support from the internet network providers through reduction of data tariffs

CONCLUSION

The current pandemic crisis is a harsh reminder that the most vulnerable people are the first victims in times of major socio-economic disruptions. The COVID-19 pandemic and the social and economic crisis it triggered are threatening the well-being of billions of people and risk derailing the global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. More than ever, the COVID-19 represents an opportunity for government systems to take the right actions and by so doing to put people, dignity, rights and lives first. The indiscriminatory nature of the virus is also a harsh reminder that development can no longer be exclusive and that negligence for one is negligence for all.

² The program is part of an initiative to address water and sanitation needs of about 44.5 million people who live on the shores of this major body of water spread across the East African Community partner states, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. <https://www.herald.co.zw/covid-19-stresses-the-need-to-transform-africas-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-services-sector/>

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ⁱⁱ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/zimbabwe/card/2XxB9GOV93/>