



Human Rights Council
Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
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Joint Stakeholders' submission on:
Human Rights in Zimbabwe

Submitted by:
Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)
(NGO with special consultative status with ECOSOC)

and

Marist Brothers – Province of Southern Africa

Geneva, July 2026

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This joint stakeholder submission of the above-mentioned organizations, assesses the implementation of recommendations accepted by Zimbabwe during previous Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle and examines the current human rights situation affecting children, adolescents, and young people. This report outlines the critical human rights priorities and proposed recommendations to the government of the country, identified by children and youth in Zimbabwe and categorized into four key themes reflecting the lived experiences and urgent needs of the younger population: **a) the Right to Education: Access, Quality, and Resources; b) Protection from Abuse, Exploitation, and Harmful Practices; c) Basic Standard of Living: Food, Health, and Sanitation; and, d) Participation and Freedom of Expression.**
2. **Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)**¹ is an international non-governmental organization with Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2011. It has more than 18 years of experience promoting and defending the rights of children, with a particular focus on access to inclusive, equitable, and quality education, as well as child protection from violence, exploitation, and neglect. FMSI works in collaboration with Marist educational and social institutions globally in more than 80 countries worldwide, supporting advocacy initiatives, capacity-building programs, and community-based interventions aimed at advancing the rights of vulnerable children and young people.
3. The **Marist Brothers** –is a religious congregation of consecrated men in the Catholic Church. They are involved in the education and the holistic formation of children and young people in schools and other educational settings, especially among those most disadvantaged. The **Province of Southern Africa** is an Administrative Unit within the Marist Institute, composed of several locations and personnel living and working in Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.² The Marist Brothers currently operate multiple schools in Zimbabwe and provide essential social services for vulnerable children and youth.

II. GENERAL REMARKS AND COOPERATION WITH THE UPR MECHANISM

4. Zimbabwe was reviewed in January 2022 at the 40th Session of the Working Group on the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)**. The submitting stakeholders welcome the constructive participation of Zimbabwe in the UPR process. On that occasion, Zimbabwe received 264 recommendations, supported 168 while noting 96 of them.³

¹ Cf. <https://fmsi.ngo/en/>

² Cf. <https://champagnat.org/en/marist-institute/our-presence/>

³ Cf. “Matrix Recommendations Zimbabwe” available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/tl-index>

5. We also welcome the adoption of many recommendations that are connected to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**⁴ such as: **16** - Peace, justice and strong institutions (51%); **5** - Gender Equality (13%); **8** – Decent work and Economic growth (7%); **1** – No Poverty (6%); **3**- Good health and Well-being (5%).
6. By adopting these recommendations, Zimbabwe has signaled a firm commitment to protecting the rights of people living in the country. While we applaud this initiative, the submitting stakeholders emphasize the need for consistent funding and practical enforcement to turn these promises into reality.
7. The report provides an evidence-based assessment of the human rights situation in the country from the previous review in 2022 until June 2026. It highlights key human rights concerns affecting children and youth and identifies priority areas requiring action by the Government of Zimbabwe and its development partners. The evaluation process involves the assessment of the implementation of recommendations accepted during previous UPR cycles. Additionally, it encompasses an evaluation of progress towards fulfilling obligations under international human rights instruments.

III. METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE TOPIC

Methodology:

8. The preparation of this stakeholders' report combines primary qualitative data collection with secondary desk-based review of relevant literature and statistical reports including government policy documents, United Nations agency reports, academic literature, and civil society publications. This approach provides a thorough understanding of human rights issues affecting children and young people by combining lived experiences with existing empirical and institutional evidence.
9. Primary data were collected through field-based consultations conducted at urban and rural schools. Data collection methods included focus group discussions. A **total of 384 participants** aged 12 to 20 took part in the study, comprising 258 males (67,19%) and 126 females (32,81%).⁵
10. This report features direct quotes from children, adolescents and young people who shared their perspectives on their human rights situation. These voices, presented "*in quotation marks*" and *italics*, were gathered through written responses offered by them during the data collection process. Their voices inspire and validate the theoretical work of the organizations behind this report

⁴ Cf. Infographic <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/upr/sessions/session40/tl/2022-12-23/Zimbabwe.pdf>

⁵ See Annex 01

11. The participatory research approach was adopted to ensure that the voices of children and young people are meaningfully reflected in the findings. This aligns with human rights-based approaches to research which emphasize participation, empowerment, and inclusion as core methodological principles in data collection and analysis.⁶

Overview:

12. **The Right to Education: Access, Quality, and Resources:** A primary challenge identified by participants is the lack of free or affordable education, particularly for children in rural areas who often walk up to 10km to reach schools and face high fees that lead to dropouts. Children and young people also emphasize a critical need for modern resources such as ICT equipment (laptops/tablets), internet access, and basic stationery to support their learning
13. **Protection from Abuse, Exploitation, and Harmful Practices:** Children and young people in Zimbabwe point out the urgent need to protect them from drug and substance abuse, child labor, and child marriage, which are often driven by poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, children indicate that many are suffering from emotional and physical abuse, calling for better reporting channels and child protection service stations. There is also a recurring call for safe shelter, specifically the construction of more orphanages and children's homes to accommodate the rising number of street kids and orphans
14. **Basic Standard of Living: Food, Health, and Sanitation:** Children face significant food insecurity and nutritional deficiencies, which negatively impact their focus and health; suggestions to address this include government-funded school feeding programs and food drives. There is a lack of affordable healthcare and medication. A specific concern for girls is the lack of sanitary wear to ensure health and dignity.
15. **Participation and Freedom of Expression:** There is a widespread lack of knowledge regarding child rights among both youth and parents, leading to requests for nationwide awareness campaigns, guidance and counseling sessions, and the integration of rights-based themes into school curriculums. Additionally, youth demand greater freedom of speech and representation in decision-making processes to ensure their specific needs and concerns are addressed at a national level.
16. The submitting organizations respectfully urge the Human Rights Council and Member States to examine these findings and advocate for Zimbabwe to strengthen its youth-focused initiatives. Specifically, Zimbabwe should be encouraged to advance inclusive development, defend children's rights, and ensure no child is excluded from national advancement.

⁶ United Nations Development Group (2017). Human Rights Based Approach to Data. This supports participatory, rights-based research methodologies.

IV. THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION: ACCESS, QUALITY, AND RESOURCES

17. The government of Zimbabwe has supported several key recommendations from the 40th session of the UPR, that directly address the right to access to quality education and resources.⁷
18. According to the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe, Chapter 4, Section 75, every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe has the right to a basic state-funded education, including adult basic education.⁸ Despite efforts to fulfill its obligations and implement recommendations from the previous UPR cycle, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education identified three main areas with persist gaps that need to be addressed: Gender, Equitable Access, and Quality Teaching and Learning.
19. According to institutional data from the Child Poverty in Zimbabwe report 61% of Zimbabwean children live in multidimensional poverty, driving deep rural-urban education gaps. While the state provides institutional relief via the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM)—designed to cover school fees, examination costs, and building levies for vulnerable learners— under the Zimbabwe Education Strategic Plan 2021-2025,⁹ official

⁷ See: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/50/9>

- **139.97 (Libya):** "Continue efforts to reform and develop the education sector to include all segments of society, including those with special needs"
- **139.98 (Malaysia):** "Take steps to improve access to education during the pandemic period, including by providing training for teachers and lecturers on using e-learning platforms"
- **139.99 (Portugal):** "Take urgent steps in order to ensure that all children have access to education, including those living in remote areas, and eliminate all root causes of discrimination against girls in the realization of their right to education"
- **139.100 (State of Palestine):** "Intensify its efforts to ensure the full implementation of the Education Amendment Act 2020 and reduce the school dropout rate, particularly among girls"
- **139.101 (Democratic People's Republic of Korea):** "Continue to focus on the issue of education to ensure accessible and high-quality education for all"
- **139.127 (Canada):** "Provide to all its citizens birth certificates and national identity cards in order to ensure access to education, government services and voter rolls"
- **140.87 (Eswatini):** "Ensure that all schools have access to the Internet"
- **140.88 (Mauritius):** "Take measures to ensure 12 years of free primary and secondary school education for both girls and boys, as recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization"
- **139.74 (Thailand):** "Redouble its efforts to ensure access to food, quality health services and education, especially for vulnerable groups such as older persons, children, the chronically ill and persons with disabilities, both in the context of the response to COVID-19 and beyond"
- **139.78 (Tunisia):** "Continue the efforts made to combat poverty and to promote education, health, housing, water and sanitation services in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals"
- **139.114 (Sri Lanka):** "Mobilize efforts on the provision of resources and the improvement of infrastructure for children in rural areas"

⁸ Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2022) "2022-2026 Partnership Compact" available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2023-03-zimbabwe-partnership-compact.pdf>

⁹ See: *A look at the state of Zim schools: BEAM payments, O & A-Level subject caps & mandatory ZIMSEC exams* for and update in this issue. Available at: <https://youtu.be/OA5QAFOhgOw?si=APwnSntZmRppCpJe>

tracking and ongoing legislative reviews in 2026 highlight significant budgetary implementation challenges, primarily around the delayed disbursement of BEAM funds to public schools, which continues to impact school operational capacities. On this regard, children also flag systemic inefficiencies in the allocation and appropriate use of fundings.

20. Additionally, the UNICEF Zimbabwe Annual Report 2025 indicates that while primary school enrollment has reached 85%, net enrollment for secondary education drops significantly to 49%, and that 15% of children aged 4 to 16 remain completely out of school, with rural areas, impoverished households, and girls facing the most severe barriers.¹⁰
21. Zimbabwean youth identify education as the *"root of their lives"*, yet systemic barriers frequently truncate their academic journeys. Primary obstacles include prohibitive school fees that lead to children being *"chased away"*, long travel distances that result in exhaustion, and a chronic lack of textbooks and lab equipment.
22. Children and young people express a strong desire for a transition from traditional learning to a technologically integrated system. They highlight several specific shortcomings, such as the critical lack of exposure to electronic devices such as smartphones, laptops, and iPads, particularly in remote areas; access to Wi-Fi and internet facilities is viewed as a *"daily need"* that is currently *"capped"* or unavailable to many students; textbooks are increasingly expensive and physically heavy to carry, especially for those who need to cover long distances to reach the school.
23. They note that the current syllabus is *"highly depending on internet services"*, which directly disadvantages those lacking *"laptops in remote areas to support students who maybe talented in certain STEM areas"*.
24. Children and adolescents participating in the preparation of this report addressed this significant issue on multiple occasions. Below, we share some of their direct expressions:
 - *"The problem is most children in the country cannot be provided education b'coz of their family financial status."*
 - *"School Fees are very high to the point were by some children dropout, as a result thefts and crimes are increasing in the country."*
 - *"Children are being chased away from school due to lack of finances."*
 - *"Lack of employment is affecting the right of education because our parents do not have jobs which give them enough money to pay our school fees."*
 - *"Opportunity - Children from rural areas can posses extraordinary talent but restricted by their under-developed schools."*

¹⁰ UNICEF Zimbabwe Annual Report 2025. Available at: <https://open.unicef.org/download-pdf?country-name=Zimbabwe&year=2025>

- *"This right is being oppressed especially in the rural areas because some children are walking 10km to school..."*
- *"Education is at risk in rural areas. Parents cannot pay school fees & students do not understand the importance of lessons."*
- *"The school passrate is going down due to lack of electrical gadgets, They are giving us limited time of researching."*
- *"Exposure to technology and internet access is CAPED."*
- *"The prices of textbooks increases every year its best to implement electronic gadgets to the learners so that they can keep thier information in their electric gadgets longer than textbooks."*
- *"Pupils are now having back problems because of caring heavy back packs, text bks are expensive... Pupils should be allowed to bring electronic gadgets eg. Laptop or Ipads so as to easily download textbooks."*
- *"The Zimbabwean HBC syllabus is highly depending on internet services and some of the students have limited access to these services."*
- *"We feel that even though our rights to education is exercised, there is an aspect lacking were we are unable to use them e.g how we are taught about electricity in class but we cannot even fix appliances at home."*
- *"Lack of essential facilities e.g laptops in remote areas to support students who maybe talented in certain STEM areas."*
- *"Stereotypes - Genders are especially girls are denied the opportunity of an education and opinion because of their sex."*

25. **To ensure that every child and young person in Zimbabwe can enjoy their right to an inclusive, equitable, and quality education in conditions of safety, dignity, and non-discrimination, as well as to turn this vision into a concrete roadmap aligned with SDG 4, the submitting stakeholders recommend the following:**

- a. **Implement a phased zero-tuition policy for all rural primary schools to eliminate financial dropouts.**
- b. **Increase the national BEAM budget by 25% in the next fiscal year to ensure 100% of verified underprivileged students receive tuition coverage.**
- c. **Equip under-resourced schools with solar-powered computer labs and satellite Wi-Fi through a Government-NGO partnership.**
- d. **Construct new affordable public schools within a 2.5km radius of high-need settlements and deploy a pilot fleet of 50 school buses across rural provinces.**

V. PROTECTION FROM ABUSE, EXPLOITATION, AND HARMFUL PRACTICES

26. During the previous UPR cycle multiple recommendations directly addressing the protection of children from abuse, exploitation, and harmful practices were supported by the government of Zimbabwe. These recommendations focus on criminalizing child marriage, combating human trafficking, eliminating child labor, and establishing robust child protection systems.¹¹

¹¹ See: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/50/9>

Protection Against Child Marriage and Harmful Practices

- **139.4 (Ireland):** "Adopt the Marriages Bill and the Children's Amendment Bill criminalizing child marriage"
- **139.11 (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland):** "Align the Marriage Act with the Constitution to criminalize child, early and forced marriage"
- **139.14 (Gabon):** "Ensure adoption of the "law project" related to marriage setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 years"
- **139.33 (Nepal):** "Step up efforts to eliminate discriminatory gender stereotypes, harmful practices and gender-based violence"
- **139.58 (Italy):** "Take additional measures to prevent any form of violence and discrimination against women and girls, including harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage"
- **139.109 (Latvia):** "Take all necessary measures, both in law and in practice, to combat violence against women and domestic violence, as well as child, early and forced marriage, virginity testing and other harmful practices"
- **139.116 (India):** "Ensure legislative and policy measures to criminalize child marriage and punish the perpetrators"
- **139.117 (France):** "Criminalize child marriage and prosecute and punish those responsible in accordance with international human rights law"
- **139.118 (Slovenia):** "Criminalize child marriage and prosecute and adequately punish perpetrators"
- **139.119 (France):** "Strengthen measures to protect the rights of women and girls and against the illegal practice of child marriage"
- **139.121 (Zambia):** "Criminalize child marriage and prosecute and adequately punish perpetrators"
- **139.122 (Angola):** "Take pragmatic actions to fight early and forced marriage"
- **139.123 (Cabo Verde):** "Make more efforts to combat early marriage by adopting firm legislation"
- **139.124 (Costa Rica):** "Eliminate child marriage"
- **139.125 (Cyprus):** "Take further steps with a view to prohibiting early marriage"
- **140.47 (Canada):** "Align the age of consent for marriage under the Customary Marriages Act and the Marriage Act with the Constitution"
- **140.93 (Marshall Islands):** "Develop a government plan for eliminating child marriage and amend provisions of the Marriage Act that permit child marriage"
- **140.94 (Sierra Leone):** "Consider amending the provisions of the Marriage Act that permit child marriage, in line with the decision of the Constitutional Court"
- **140.95 (Belgium):** "Amend all ancillary laws that may have a direct relationship with the provisions prohibiting child marriage in order to ensure consistency and harmony in the legal framework"

Combating Exploitation, Child Labor, and Human Trafficking

- **139.9 (Turkey):** "Further strengthen the Trafficking in Persons Act"
- **139.35 (Tunisia):** "Continue the efforts made to promote gender equality and combat all forms of discrimination against women, improve child protection and eliminate child labour"

27. In a major legislative update, the President signed the Marriages Act into law in May 2022.¹² This statutory framework definitively unified marriage laws, setting 18 years as the absolute minimum age for marriage and fully criminalizing the facilitation, contraction, or promotion of child marriages involving anyone under 18. However, official reports highlight a persistent "high prevalence of child marriage." The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) urges Zimbabwe to "effectively implement the Marriages Act" to criminalize these practices.¹³ Children and young participants confirm that "stereotypes" and poverty often deny girls an education in favor of early marriage.
28. Youth express deep concerns regarding emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. They demand concrete infrastructure, such as Child Protection Service stations in every city and safe reporting channels. Concurrently, they raise privacy concerns regarding school surveillance.
29. In response to modern vulnerabilities, the Zimbabwean government approved the National Child Online Protection Policy (2026–2030) in June 2026 to safeguard children from cyberbullying and online sexual exploitation.¹⁴ However, this framework also introduces discussions around restricting social media access for minors, highlighting a tension between the government's focus on digital regulation and the youth's desire for unhindered digital inclusion.
30. Stress, depression, and peer pressure are heavily cited as drivers of drug and substance abuse. Youth drug use is rapidly increasing due to extreme economic challenges and lack of employment. Scholarly articles and reports from NGOs working in the field corroborate that substance use begins as early as age 10 and is intrinsically linked to school dropouts and

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- **139.66 (Philippines):** "Step up efforts to strengthen policy measures against trafficking in persons in line with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and enhance the availability of support services for victims"
 - **139.68 (Armenia):** "Step up efforts to identify and protect victims of trafficking from and within the country and to investigate, prosecute and adequately punish the perpetrators"
 - **139.69 (Belarus):** "Step up efforts to combat trafficking in human beings, including by improving law enforcement practices with a view to bringing to justice and punishing the perpetrators, as well as by providing victims of trafficking with protection and rehabilitation"

Strengthening Child Protection Systems

- **139.10 (Ukraine):** "Harmonize laws in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child"
- **139.24 (Turkey):** "Continue to take steps to protect children online through the establishment of the Zimbabwe Child Online Protection Task Force and relevant policies and provisions"
- **139.115 (Georgia):** "Take further steps in order to guarantee equitable protection of children across the country by strengthening and implementing child protection systems"

¹² Cf. Muvingi & Mugadza (2022) *"New Marriages Law in Zimbabwe: Marriages Act Chapter 5:15"* Available at: <https://www.mmmlawfirm.co.zw/new-marriages-law-in-zimbabwe-marriages-act-chapter-515/>

¹³ ACERWC *"Thematic Report on harmful practices affecting children in Africa"* Available at: [https://www.acerwc.africa/sites/default/files/2026-04/FINAL Thematic%20Report%20on%20Harmful%20Practices.pdf](https://www.acerwc.africa/sites/default/files/2026-04/FINAL%20Thematic%20Report%20on%20Harmful%20Practices.pdf)

¹⁴ Cf. <https://thebesanaimail.com/2026/06/03/zimbabwe-approves-landmark-child-online-protection-policy-as-digital-risks-to-children-grow/>

mental health crises, recommending comprehensive mental health support, life-skills education, and a shift away from criminalization toward community rehabilitation.¹⁵ The youth urgently request the implementation of professional Guidance and Counseling services and designated therapists within the school system.

31. Acknowledging the youth's specific concerns regarding substance abuse, the Cabinet approved the Zimbabwe Multi-Sectoral Drug and Substance Abuse (DSA) Plan 2024-2030.¹⁶ The policy aims to coordinate national efforts across the enforcement, health, and education sectors to provide strategic direction and community support. The same document states that "While recognising adolescents' experimentation with drugs and substances, the DSA crisis in the country has been driven by complex socio-economic and institutional factors including illicit drug economies, organised crime networks, corruption, traffickers, and complicit criminal justice system."¹⁷
32. According to the data provided by Save the Children, 43% of children aged 5 to 17 are engaged in child labor, with 13% of these children participating in hazardous work, 26% engaged in economic activities, and 4% involved in domestic work. This organization asserts that concrete actions are imperative to ensure the full and effective implementation of the legal framework for child protection and the adoption of measures to end any form of violence against children, which is escalating and increasing at an alarming rate.¹⁸
33. Corruption is a perceived form of violence for children and young people participating in the consultation process. They expressed significant frustration with *"corruption in our day to day lives"* and a lack of accountability among leaders. Nepotism, favoritism, and financial mismanagement are the forms of corruption with which they are most familiar and which have the greatest impact on their lives, as these practices impede opportunities for personal, community, institutional, and national development.
34. Next, we hear from the children and young people who participated in the consultation process, whose voices reflect their growing awareness and ongoing concern about this alarming situation:
 - *"Abusive parents silence out their children from speaking out their rights"*
 - *"Child labour/neglect has lead to a increase of street kids that later fall into drugs 'n die/some become disabled/mentally unstable"*

¹⁵ Gwasira, D. "Exploring the Socio-Economic Effects of Drug and Substance Abuse by Young People in Zimbabwe" Zimbabwe Journal of Health Sciences (ZJHS), Volume 5, Issue 2, December, 2025. Available at: <https://www.ahpcz.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Article-7-David-Gwasira-Exploring-the-Socio-Economic-Effects-of-Drug-and-Substance-Abuse.pdf>

¹⁶ Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/reports/zimbabwe-multisectoral-drug-and-substance-abuse-plan#:~:text=Highlights,Substance%20Abuse%20Plan%202024%2D2030.>

¹⁷ Ibidem. See page 17 "Brief context: Drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe"

¹⁸ Cf. Save the Children (6 Feb. 2026). Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.net/zimbabwe/news/call-action-end-violence-against-children-zimbabwe>

- *"Children out there are being bullied or even emotionally assaulted by parents"*
- *"Taking matters of bullying seriously and providing consequences like suspension. Even if the victim was harassed by a prefect or someone of high Respect"*
- *"The government can have Child Protection Service stations in each city and province that hold occasional check-ups to locate children that show signs of abuse and neglect and offer necessary aid"*
- *"Authorities must take into consideration starting awareness campaigns, which will include where and how best a student can report abuse"*
- *"The government should take accurate measures against perpetrators maybe jail and a heavy fine"*
- *"Child Abuse through hard manual labour and rape e.t.c"*
- *"Child marriages and sexual abuse"*
- *"Corruption in schools by executive boards"*
- *"Corruption in our day to day lives"*
- *"corruption in sporting activities and party time learning"*
- *"corruption leading to injustice"*
- *"The question proposed is on, where is the financial backup for these activities going!!? corruption"*
- *"School headmasters are employing relatives, sex partners and uncertified personals which is leading to lack of proper education"*
- *"favouritism of students - prefects, headmaster kids, children with high profile peers"*
- *"sex for higher grades"*
- *"Jobs => Retrenchment of certified workers implimenting useless systems that employ relatives over qualified"*
- *"government should implement corruption laws"*
- *"luxurious trips for authorities should be reduced due to the authorities not entering trips for children"*
- *"Corruption (Among pple with higher posts.)"*
- *"Fear of speaking for justice"*
- *"Zero action taken to curb the problems"*
- *"Removing corrupt leaders and put leaders that offer fair support to all spheres of life and development"*

35. Based on the youth-led consultations, children and young people in Zimbabwe view protection from abuse, harmful practices, and corruption as fundamental to their safety and future. The submitting stakeholders proposed a wide range of recommendations for the Government of Zimbabwe to address these issues and ensure a safe environment for children and young people in the country.
- Establish "*Child Protection Service stations in each city and province*" that conduct occasional check-ups to locate children showing signs of neglect or abuse and offer necessary aid.
 - Build more "*rehabilitation centers*" specifically to help young people who have fallen into drug abuse, providing them with basic needs and guardians.
 - Create specific "*places to express any signs of abuse*" in schools and communities, integrating professional guidance and counselling sessions into the school curriculum to give children a chance to "*speak up for themselves*".
 - Implement and enforce "*corruption laws*" to address institutional injustice. This includes "*removing corrupt leaders*" and replacing them with those who offer fair support.
 - Establish regular monitoring systems focused on "*enforcing child protection and rights*" to prevent issues and favoritism.

VI. BASIC STANDARD OF LIVING: FOOD, HEALTH, AND SANITATION

36. During previous UPR cycles, Zimbabwe received several recommendations to improve its population's living conditions.¹⁹ Despite the efforts to do so, enormous challenges remain in

¹⁹ See: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/50/9>

Right to Food and Food Security

- **139.50 (Maldives):** "Ensure that people affected by natural disasters are provided access to adequate food, housing, health care and other basic and essential services"
- **139.73 (Iraq):** "Intensify efforts to address the fragility of food security challenges, particularly in the context of climate change"
- **139.74 (Thailand):** "Redouble its efforts to ensure access to food, quality health services and education, especially for vulnerable groups such as older persons, children, the chronically ill and persons with disabilities, both in the context of the response to COVID-19 and beyond"
- **139.75 (Algeria):** "Continue to take agricultural productivity measures to ensure food security in the country"
- **139.76 (China):** "Continue to take measures to safeguard food security"
- **139.77 (Côte d'Ivoire):** "Ensure the implementation of the 2013 policy on food and nutrition security"
- **139.78 (Tunisia):** "Continue the efforts made to combat poverty and to promote education, health, housing, water and sanitation services in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals"

Right to Health

- **139.80 (Belarus):** "Take further steps to improve the level of well-being and social protection of the population"

guaranteeing this right to a to all Zimbabweans, especially to the nearly 7.1 million children (47% of the population), meaning the country's future is almost entirely tied to how these young people are supported.²⁰

37. Although the government and its international partners have made progress in providing basic immunizations and establishing legislative protections, the well-being of children is greatly affected by economic instability, dramatic climate shocks, and a recent decline in international aid. Approximately two million children live in multidimensional poverty, primarily due to a lack of access to education, basic sanitation, and clean drinking water. Between 23 and 25 percent of children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition (stunting), which threatens their physical and cognitive development. Regarding the neonatal mortality

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- **139.83 (Indonesia):** "Enhance effort to widen access to health care to its citizen, including in the handling of the pandemic, involving also possible bilateral and international cooperation"
 - **139.84 (Malaysia):** "Strengthen efforts to improve access to health-care facilities and medical assistance in order to address the overall mortality rate"
 - **139.85 (Mauritania):** "Strengthen the health sector by improving the quality of care in order to allow health workers to work in better conditions and to ensure that people have access to the necessary health care"
 - **139.86 (Portugal):** "Improve access to quality and affordable health services, including in remote areas, by allocating sufficient budgetary resources to health, allowing for the establishment of hospitals with skilled and human rights-trained health professionals"
 - **139.87 (Sri Lanka):** "Take appropriate measures to improve the coverage and accessibility of health services"
 - **139.88 (Brazil):** "Guarantee access to health care and assistance, in particular to vulnerable groups, including by further increasing the budgetary allocation for the health sector"
 - **139.89 (Côte d'Ivoire):** "Guarantee women living in rural and remote areas access to health and social services, especially in terms of family planning"
 - **139.90 (Democratic People's Republic of Korea):** "Continue to create an enabling environment for the improvement of public health through the National Health Strategy for Zimbabwe (2016-2020) and a robust HIV response strategy"
 - **139.91 (Algeria):** "Continue to strengthen children's access to health services, particularly with regard to HIV, malaria and tuberculosis"
 - **139.92 (Cuba):** "Continue prioritizing public health policies, particularly in primary and community health care, to maintain the decline in mortality rates in all age groups, especially children, teenagers and young people"
 - **140.58 (Iceland):** "Protect intersex minors from non-consensual surgeries and violations of bodily integrity"
 - **140.89 (Thailand):** "Strengthen its efforts to enhance access to prevention and early detection programmes for women and girls at risk"

Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation

- **139.81 (Iraq):** "Increase efforts to provide access to safe drinking water and sanitation"
- **139.82 (Côte d'Ivoire):** "Improve access to drinking water and appropriate sanitation facilities"
- **139.106 (Cyprus):** "Intensify efforts towards the economic empowerment of rural women while ensuring access to electricity, water and sanitation"

²⁰ UNICEF "Situation of Children in Zimbabwe" Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/situation-children-zimbabwe>.

indicator, the rate of 37 deaths per 1,000 live births points to a worrying upward trend since 2015.²¹

38. Historically, Zimbabwe maintained robust childhood vaccination campaigns, keeping diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP3) coverage at around 95%. However, local health systems are currently facing severe strain.²² Waterborne diseases like cholera regularly flare up due to crumbling municipal water and sewer infrastructure. Even more alarmingly, malaria cases have skyrocketed, with over 65,000 cases recorded in early 2026 alone —nearly double the rate of the previous year.²³
39. Much of the health crisis stems from sudden, massive cuts in global development assistance. The scale-down of major funds like the Health Resilience Fund (HRF) and freezes on pediatric HIV programs have left clinics without basic medicines and critical outreach programs, directly threatening child survival.²⁴
40. Additionally, children are bearing the brunt of the region's climate crisis. Zimbabwe recently suffered its worst drought in 40 years, triggered by a powerful El Niño weather cycle in 2024. This environmental emergency left an estimated 3.5 million children facing acute food and water shortages. With dry wells and ruined crops, the rate of child wasting (the most severe, life-threatening form of malnutrition) has ticked upward, forcing families to rely on international emergency food aid to survive.²⁵
41. Access to safe and affordable sanitary wear is one of the most critical factors impacting the education, health, and dignity of adolescent girls. The intersection of economic hardship, cultural stigma, and deficient infrastructure creates a phenomenon known as period poverty, which heavily disadvantages young women, particularly in rural communities.²⁶
42. Data from the Forum for African Women Educationalists Zimbabwe Chapter (FAWEZI) and UNICEF highlights a stark reality: up to 62% of rural girls regularly miss school during their menstrual cycles.²⁷ Conventional, disposable sanitary pads are a luxury item that millions of

²¹ Ibidem.

²² UNICEF Zimbabwe, *Annual Report 2025*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/media/14281/file/THE%20UNICEF%20ZIMBABWE%202025%20ANNUAL%20REPORT%20DIGITAL.pdf>

²³ Save the Children. “Aid cuts threaten Zimbabwe’s malaria gains, with cases and deaths surging”. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/aid-cuts-threaten-zimbabwes-malaria-gains-cases-and-deaths-surging-save-children>

²⁴ UNICEF Zimbabwe, *Annual Report 2025*.

²⁵ UNICEF Zimbabwe *Humanitarian Situation Report No. 6 (Multi-Hazard)* - August 2024. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/unicef-zimbabwe-humanitarian-situation-report-no-6-multi-hazard-august-2024>

²⁶ DAPP Zimbabwe. “Keeping Girls in School: Advancing a Period Friendly World Through Menstrual Hygiene Support” Available at: <https://www.dapp-zimbabwe.org/news/keeping-girls-in-school-advancing-a-periodfriendlyworld-through-menstrual-hygiene-support>

²⁷ GPE. “Zimbabwe: How rural youth champions are working to end period poverty”. Available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/zimbabwe-how-rural-youth-champions-are-working-end-period-poverty>

low-income Zimbabwean households simply cannot afford. This forces girls to rely on unsafe, unhygienic alternatives.²⁸ Many public schools lack standard menstrual hygiene essentials, such as lockable toilet doors, private changing spaces, and proper disposal containers. Without privacy or a place to wash, girls face intense anxiety, trauma, and teasing from peers.²⁹

43. The children and young people who participated in the data collection expressed their concerns about these issues. Here are their voices in their own words:

Food

- *“Hunger – Lack of food and basic nutrition can lead to pre-mature death and disease.”*
- *“Some children are not able to have food to carry to school”*
- *“FOOD has been scarce in surroding Regions. Many children do not have food at lunch and break.”*
- *“This have caused them to lose focus in their studies and they begin shaving bad habits, such as stealing.”*
- *“Adequate food supply in schools... Suggestion: Children should have 3 full meals a day.”*
- *“States sponsered lunch programs, This means upon all government schools lunches are provided for free or at a reasonable price for all districts in the Nation.”*
- *“The government can expand school feeding programs using locally grown crops. This ensures that the children can have atleast two nutritious meals a day.”*
- *“Food – Build Soup kitchens that offer free and nourishing food.”*
- *“Need Of food | The government should do annual donations to the underprivileged.”*
- *“Under privileged people should be taught farming drills and learn to make their own food.”*
- *“Government should reduce the cost of all food stuffs so everyone can afford food and eat.”*
- *“Starvation due to lack of food.”*
- *“Food at the DH (Quality n Quantity)... Share enough food for all prefects and non-prefect in addition ripe food.”*

²⁸, E. & Bhala, E., 2016, ‘Menstrual hygiene – A salient hazard in rural schools: A case of Masvingo district of Zimbabwe’, Jambá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies 8(2), Art. #204, 8 pages. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/jamba.v8i2.204>

²⁹ GPE. “Water access reshapes education for rural Zimbabwean pupils”. Available at: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/water-access-reshapes-education-rural-zimbabwean-pupils>

Health

- *“GOOD HEALTH SERVICE | PROVISION OF PROPER MEDICATION.”*
- *“Inadequate Healthcare... Health care should be free in hospitals.”*
- *“Local health facilities | construction of health centres in nearby residential areas.”*
- *“Medication | Building more clinics in remote areas... The government must ensure sufficient medication is supplied at lower costs.”*
- *“The WHO should provide more free vaccinations.”*
- *“Medical facilities (free) e.g Zimbabwean Hospitals | Introduction of medical dispensaries in schools.”*
- *“Health and medical care – less consultation for high expenses.”*
- *“Immunisation and health services should be at a low cost to allow children to have quality health services.”*
- *“Lack of proper healthcare.”*

Sanitation and Water

- *“Clean school environment... Suggestion: Proper ablution facilities.”*
- *“Less privileged students in some schools are lacking sanitary wear which is making them feel uncomfortable during lessons and also, it is disturbing their health.”*
- *“By lack of sanitary wear, they are using cow dung which is affecting them health wise.”*
- *“The government can provide reusable sanitary pads, soaps for hygiene hygienic activities as well as underwears.”*
- *“Lack of proper Sanitation... it affects childrens health and their accademies.”*
- *“Government is supposed to emplant health organisations to do health inspections in schools and provide sanitary for the girls.”*
- *“Lack of clean and adequate water in some Schools.”*
- *“Establish Water Purification Plants and also educating people on how to purify it.”*
- *“Poor Sanitary Conditions.”*
- *“Having frequent cleanup campaigns and giving out knowledge on personal hygiene.”*

44. **Considering these challenges, as well as the initiatives of children and young people, the submitting stakeholders propose the following recommendations to the Government of Zimbabwe aiming to improve living conditions and advance SDGs 1, 3, 5, and 6:**

- a. **Establish a permanent National School Feeding Program in 100% of government-run day schools, providing at least two balanced, locally-sourced meals daily to eliminate student hunger and improve academic focus.**
- b. **Construct 50 community health clinics in designated remote districts, and simultaneously implement a "zero-fee" policy for essential pediatric medication and primary care for all children under 18 years of age.**
- c. **Install solar-powered smart boreholes and integrated water purification systems in all rural school districts to guarantee 100% access to safe drinking water and treated sanitation facilities.**
- d. **Provide monthly distribution of comprehensive hygiene kits (including reusable sanitary pads and soap) to 100% of underprivileged female students, combined with quarterly health inspections in schools to ensure proper sanitation standards are maintained.**

VII. PARTICIPATION AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

45. Zimbabwe supported the recommendation proposed by Switzerland³⁰ focused on SDG Target 16.7, which specifically promotes responsive, inclusive, and participatory decision-making at all levels. Progress is measured by two primary indicators: the representation of diverse populations within government institutions, and the proportion of citizens who believe their voices are heard and addressed.³¹
46. Children and young people's opinions highlight a critical structural reality in Zimbabwe: while the country possesses progressive legal frameworks on paper—such as Section 20 of the Constitution which mandates youth development and participation³²—there is a stark gap in everyday implementation.
47. The widespread lack of knowledge regarding child rights among both youth and parents is heavily documented by civil society organizations (CSOs) operating in Zimbabwe. Access to information regarding constitutional rights is heavily concentrated in major urban hubs like Harare and Bulawayo. Children in rural, impoverished districts frequently live without basic knowledge of their legal protections.
48. Grassroots organizations like Youth Advocates for Children's Rights (YACR) report that high rates of child marriage and domestic violence persist because children lack the rights-

³⁰ See: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/50/9>

- **139.7 (Switzerland):** "Take concrete and immediate legislative measures to enshrine the principles of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance in national laws in order to guarantee free, credible, transparent and fair elections, in line with target 16.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals."

³¹ Cf. SDG16+ Indicators Guide. Available at: <https://www.sdg16toolkit.org/guides/sdg16-indicators-guide/>

³² Cf. Constitution of Zimbabwe, As amended up to 20th June, 2023. Available at: https://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Constitution%20Consolidated%20%282023%29.pdf

literacy to recognize violations, let alone report them. Peer advocates from these programs frequently report that prior to targeted community outreach, they "didn't know they had rights".³³

49. Efforts to teach children about their rights often face pushbacks from parents and traditional leaders who fear that rights-based education undermines parental authority. This tension underscores the urgent demand for parent-targeted awareness campaigns.
50. The demand to integrate rights, life skills, and child protection directly into formal schooling is currently driving major educational reforms in the country. To address these gaps, Zimbabwe's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has structured a new educational framework: The Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) that shifts the focus from purely academic rote-learning to holistic, values-driven instruction. Under the HBC, Guidance and Counseling has been integrated as a core learning area starting from Early Childhood Development through Grade Seven, and as a standalone subject in secondary schools.³⁴
51. While Zimbabwe has progressive structures meant to facilitate youth expression, empirical evidence shows that genuine, structural participation remains a challenge. For example, academic and civil society evaluations of the Junior Parliament –a highly visible and formalized structure established in 1991, where youth representatives mirror the constituencies of the senior parliament to bring child-centered issues to the attention of the government– indicate that youth participation is often treated as purely ceremonial. An in-depth study on youth in governance in Zimbabwe³⁵ revealed that young people face heavily restricted, "veiled" participation. Decisions are routinely made by older political elites, and youth platforms are frequently used for symbolic endorsement rather than authentic policy co-creation.
52. In response to these persistent demands for genuine agency, the government approved a newly updated National Youth Policy in June 2026, aimed specifically at increasing youth participation in economic decision-making and entrepreneurship. However, civil society groups continue to push for this policy to expand beyond economic integration into true civic and political representation.³⁶

³³ Cf. Marang "Zimbabwe: Empowering youth to champion children's rights and end gender based violence" Available at: <https://www.genderlinks.org.za/marang/drivers-of-change/zimbabwe-empowering-youth-to-champion-childrens-rights-and-end-gender-based-violence>

³⁴ Ndongwe, E. (2026) "The Heritage-Based Curriculum (HBC) 2024–2030: Implications for Quality, Inclusive and Competence-Based Education in Zimbabwe". International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology, 11(1), 31693174. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jan824>

³⁵ Chupicai, M. (2014) "Participation of youth in governance and democratisation processes in Mutasa district, Zimbabwe: rethinking youth political leadership" Available at: <http://41.174.125.165:4024/jspui/bitstream/123456789/3404/1/>

³⁶ Cf. <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/government-unveils-new-youth-policy-targeting-unemployment-drug-abuse/> and <https://www.heraldonline.co.zw/national-youth-policy-gets-cabinet-approval/>

53. Regarding this issue, children and young people expressed their concerns and suggested some paths for improvement:

- *“Responsible authority (CRC) should host/conduct free guidance ‘n counselling or educational drives which give children chances to speak up for themselves.”*
- *“children should be allowed to interact so that when they venture out in the world, they are able to interact and have a voice for themselves.”*
- *“Authorities must take into consideration starting awareness campaigns, which will include where and how best a student can report abuse.”*
- *“Threats at school from authorities for children trying to stand for their rights”*
- *“info dissemination on CRC & ACRWC.”*
- *“creating platforms where children express their views & hw their rights can be met.”*
- *“Lack of Knowledge on their rights.”*
- *“Workshops to educate children on their rights.”*
- *“children should be given enough time and room to fully express themselves.”*
- *“Government should enforce laws that support freedom of speech for the youths.”*
- *“Hosting youth empowerment campaigns that help to empower children and allow them to know their rights.”*
- *“The youth are not taking part in the decision making that affects their lives.”*
- *“Creation of national platforms which youth can use to take part in decision making.”*
- *“Self Advocating for union and awarness.”*
- *“discussing on certain rules before enforcement with students.”*
- *“children don’t understand their rights.”*
- *“shortages of programmes that enforce child rights.”*
- *“Creating clubs which promote child rights.”*
- *“Hosting educational seminars on rights which must be offered to institutions leaders & they will pass pass it to the rest.”*
- *“Everyone should be given a privilege to speak.”*
- *“Awareness campaigns and all children should be taught to whom and when to report to.”*
- *“One can never fully enjoy their rights, if one doesn’t know and understand his/her rights.”*
- *“Conduct educational awareness campaigns on children’s right.”*

- *“Introduction of regular Guidance and counselling sessions on children’s rights in schools.”*
 - *“Advocacy of children’s rights on radio stations, televisions and social media platforms to reach a wider audience.”*
 - *“Introducing rights based cross cutting themes in curriculums.”*
 - *“Having awareness campaigns on reducing child abuse.”*
 - *“Children of nowadays are not having the chance to express themselves.”*
 - *“build or construct suggestion boxes around the xull, for children to express their thoughts to the xull in use of letters.”*
 - *“Having awareness campaigns in rural areas.”*
54. **Based on the above findings, the stakeholders submit the following recommendations to the Government of Zimbabwe, urging for the implementation of recommendation 139.7 (Switzerland) and advance in SDG Target 16.7**
- a. **Integrate mandatory child rights education into the national "Heritage Studies" or "Guidance and Counseling" curriculum for all grades, ensuring 100% of students receive information on the CRC and ACRWC.**
 - b. **Launch a sustained, nationwide "Know Your Rights" campaign on all state-run radio and television stations. Specifically target rural and remote areas and broadcast in 16 official languages to spread knowledge of rights among children and young people.**
 - c. **Mandate that all registered schools establish student-led Child Rights Clubs and install anonymous suggestion boxes, with a formal requirement for school administrations to review and address student feedback in monthly administrative meetings.**
 - d. **Conduct mandatory human rights seminars for school administrators, traditional leaders, and local authorities to ensure that institutional leaders are equipped to listen to and empower children and young people in decision-making processes.**

VIII. CONCLUSION

55. The submitting stakeholders recognize the constructive steps taken by the Zimbabwean Government regarding previous UPR recommendations. Moving forward, it is critical to prioritize the systematic implementation, financial resourcing, and ongoing evaluation of these frameworks to convert institutional commitments into meaningful progress for children, youth, and local populations.

56. Addressing intractable challenges such as poverty, inequality, and corruption necessitates a multifaceted approach. We believe that the protection and promotion of human rights and a true guarantee of its fulfillment can only be achieved through the collaboration of the government, civil society, and the public. As stakeholders, we are committed to contributing to the realization of this shared vision.
57. We also strongly believe that listening to and considering the direct voices of children and young people living in Zimbabwe is the best way to provide appropriate responses to their needs. As explained in the methodology, the participation and protagonism of them is at the core of the work carried out for the preparation of this report.
58. We are grateful for the opportunity offered by the United Nations to participate through the UPR mechanism. Special thanks for allowing us to amplify the voices of the children and young people with whom we have worked, reflected, and drafted this report.