

IMPACT OF COVID-19

PAN AFRICAN DIALOGUE WITH DECISION MAKERS 8TH JUNE 2020

VOICES FROM CHILDREN

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Q1. HOW HAS COVID19 AFFECTED CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

Thank you very much Honourable members, your Excellences, dignitaries present, participants joining online, my fellow children, all protocols observed.

I am here today to represent the voices of children from across East and Southern Africa on how COVID19 has affected our lives. Last week some of us met and shared our experiences under the new normal as it is being called. Our lives have not been the same since the outbreak of the covid 19. Our education, protection, health and rights to participate have been affected.

1. Education

When I think about the impact on education, I remember the words of my newly found friends from Ethiopia and Uganda who like many other children in Africa have not been in a classroom for months now. We cannot learn anymore and where efforts have been made to help us access education through TV, Radio or Internet most of us do not have access to these things. I personally come from a rural district in Zambia where these things do not exist for all children. Other children like in Ethiopia; they learn through telegram which might take long before reaching the learners.

2. Protection

We as children face risks to our protection as we stay at home the whole day. As my friend from Uganda said: "girls staying at home are getting pregnant and getting married off. Others get physically abused as they are beaten by parents and guardians." Now that we are at home, we have become domestic workers and experiencing child labour but if we go back to school we can at least focus on learning.

3. Socially

We are children, we like to play with our friends but since coronavirus came along. We cannot play anymore and when a child gets sick, parents will not be allowed to stay with the child in hospital. Children are also begging in the streets because their parents have lost their jobs.

Q2. WHAT DO YOU THINK OUR LEADERS CAN DO TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM THE IMPACT OF COVID-19?

Our demands to governments in Africa

1. **We know all children have the right to access to education.** We ask for governments to spend more money to make sure that we can continue learning while at home by providing radios, TVs and internet learning. They must make sure that children in rural areas and from poor families also get to learn. We want to see mobile libraries passing in our communities delivering books for us to learn. And for our friends in exam classes who have started going back to school, governments must make sure they provide water and soap, hand sanitizers and face masks so they can be safe.
2. **We are also worried about our health.** The governments must create awareness to children on impact of Covid-19 and how it can affect children and their families. They also must build more health centres in the villages where we can go to for other health problems. Governments must also provide enough soap, water and protective personal equipment that are made to suit children in the villages. The government must ensure that children on the street are also protected from Covid 19.
3. **We have the right to be protected as children during the Coronavirus Pandemic**
Governments must make sure no one practices violence against children. We don't want to see our friends sexually abused, married or get pregnant while they are still children. Enforce strong measures to prevent increase of abuse, teenage pregnancies and early marriages. Other children are worried about some protection problems like my new friend from Malawi is concerned that children are attending political rallies and they are not safe from coronavirus he asks that children must not go to political rallies but maybe they can make safe spaces to listen to the voices of children.
4. **They must provide support to poor families.** The government must give money and food to poor families as they have lost their jobs and have nothing to eat. This way, they can stop sending children to beg on the streets. And where it is possible they should allow our parents to go back to work so they can provide food and care for us.
5. Governments should involve children in the fight against COVID19. We are the change we want to see.

THANK YOU!