



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **A CALL TO EMPOWER WOMEN TO REDUCE GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**

**26 March 2021**

ActionAid Zimbabwe (AAZ) acknowledges the actions taken by the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) to reduce Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we believe more can be done. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 restrictions have had detrimental effects on the economy and the greatest pinch is at household level where families are being pushed deeper and deeper into poverty, with women and girls bearing the brunt the most. COVID-19 induced economic shocks have increased the risks of violence against women and girls in and outside the home.

Lack of gender responsive public services (GRPs) such as clean water, transport, and health, have increased women and girls' vulnerability to GBV. Social media is awash with a video of a woman being harassed by touts as she is about to board a bus at a local terminus. Women are exposed to GBV in public spaces every day and express frustration at the referral pathways as these pathways are filled with challenges such as under resourcing, bureaucracy and corruption that discourage reporting violence, whether it occurs in a public space or a private space.

A survey carried out by ActionAid Zimbabwe also noted that women and girls suffered economic violence in the home because they were locked with the abusers and experienced other COVID-19 restrictions. About 79% of the respondents reported having experienced economic violence manifesting in verbal, physical and emotional abuse brought about by the lack of food and other necessities during the 2020 lockdown. The preferred reporting mechanism for the violence was largely informal as most people reported incidents of violence to neighbours. Formal reporting structures were reported not to be offering adequate services due to the restricted movement.

One of the ways the government has been trying to address the effects of COVID-19 on various sectors in Zimbabwe has been through the introduction of the ZWL18 billion (USD209.3 million) Economic Recovery and Stimulus Package. It is disheartening to note that only 516 out of the 7852 women who are members of the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Association (ZCIEA) accessed this fund with very low allocations of between ZWL280 and ZWL600 each (USD3.20 and USD6.90 respectively).

Considering the above, AAZ is calling upon the Government of Zimbabwe) to prioritize the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls by providing gender responsive public services to reduce GBV including economic violence. Using our feminist lenses and standing in solidarity with people living in poverty and marginalized groups and communities, AAZ recommends the GoZ to consider the following in responding to GBV during the COVID- 19 Pandemic:

- I. The Government should put in place mechanisms that strengthen GBV reporting systems and consider people with disability (PWD), so that survivors are confident to report cases through official reporting channels i.e., the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) Victim Friendly Unit (VFU).

- II. The Government should focus on promoting progressive and gender responsive revenue collection to provide social safety nets for those most affected by the pandemic to reduce financial pressures which are causing a spike in GBV during COVID-19
- III. The Government should be transparent and accountable in its tax systems to ensure provision of GRPS such as safe public transport.
- IV. Government should ensure that the most vulnerable are granted a fair share from the ZWL18 billion allocated to the informal sector, particularly women whose lack of financial resources increases their vulnerabilities to GBV and can be immediately life threatening.
- V. Economic security is an important safeguarding measure for women against domestic violence. The government should take necessary measures to provide decent work and economically empower women and girls.

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