

## SANCRRC report on the SADC Children's Symposium

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### Introduction

*Despite a strong policy framework endorsing the rights of children in SADC countries, children's rights in the region, which were, at best, tenuous prior to the covid pandemic have been further eroded since its outset. Against this backdrop, child representatives from 11 SADC countries were invited to a Children's Symposium run by the Child Rights Network for South Africa to share their insights about health, education, child protection, children with disabilities and the need for child participation in solving country-specific and regional challenges.*

Challenges across the region were summed up as follows:

*"Children's rights violations are the new pandemic in Africa and the world. We need assistance from government and the corporate world. The sensitisation should be as loud as the one on covid-19".* Kamuti Sitale, Advocacy for Child Justice, Zambia.

This was echoed by a Namibian delegate: *"In this meeting, I have seen the true picture of where children's rights stand in Africa, and I have learnt just how much work needs to be done for them to be realised. What we took from the discussion is that we as Africans face mostly the same struggles. We would like to create a world where children are fully catered for, safe and their opinions are heard."*

The high-level feedback from a South African participant, Kanye Olifant, emphasised: *"management failure, apathy, lack of motivation, bureaucracy, structural weaknesses and a lack of special interest groups."* South Africa and other countries like Tanzania also noted a worrying gap in many countries between policy, legislation and implementation.

### Overview

Delegates provided input on these key topics:

- Child participation
- Health
- Children with disabilities
- Child Protection
- Education

### Child participation

Evident throughout the symposium was children's awareness of how their voices are muted. This was summed up in a quote from a delegate from Lesotho. The focus of the quote is on covid, but was applicable to every area of children's lives discussed during the symposium: *"Children's views are not heard during covid. Children were neglected because children have a small voice"*.

Amplifying their concerns, children spoke about how they were disempowered and unable to contribute to conversation and policy even around areas that directly affect them. They stressed that an openness to child participation was needed across societies, beginning at family level, in their communities, schools and at

government level. Children stated that to have maximum impact, child participation should be driven and normalised by government, not the NGO sector.

The presenter from Lesotho stated that *“children need to have a say about issues that affect them. Education: children need to be involved in school boards. Health: children could be raising awareness about HIV, covid, Diabetes. Children should be involved in budgeting.”* But, they continued, *“children who speak out against abuse are seen as “disrespectful.”*

Many children echoed this concern. It appeared that across multiple countries, children who voiced an opinion and argued for changes in policy were seen as disrespectful. This was expanded by delegates from Zambia who maintained that even though there are more children than elderly people in their country’s population, *“parents tell us to keep quiet”*. They think if we participate, we will become *“stubborn or reckless”*.

The Zambian delegate continued that adults "make it hard for children to participate. *“Children want to be involved in decision making, and budgeting. We should have a say in what schools do. We can help leaders know what children need so we need platforms to enable children to participate. Participation must be strengthened, starting at home with parents encouraging child participation.”* Importantly, this should not just be children in cities but those in rural areas too.

One of the most important questions asked during the symposium was this: *“Given that children must be able to give their view. What is being done to promote it? “*

Critically, children did not just want to discuss issues, they wanted to be involved in decision-making too. A participant from South Africa stated this as follows: *“I would like the government to give children the right to freedom of expression and also take part in the decision making of the country.”* A Zambian presenter asked that children be included in parliament and other public decision-making processes and explained how a local young voice survey indicated that 84% of children were willing to participate in decision-making, but were not included. This was problematic because *“being involved in the decision-making process will enhance children’s best interests.”*

This topic was powerfully summed up by Mundia Lubinda, Zambia, who said, *“I want the government to know that every child matters. Therefore we want to participate, we need to participate and we must participate.”* Further, *“I want my parents to know that I have rights and they need to be respected. I want my fellow children to know that we need to exercise our rights because they were meant for us. If we do not participate and demand protection, then who will?”*

## **Health**

In the topic of health, the following key themes emerged: covid, specifically the children’s response to it, how it has impacted them and how the pandemic has affected their access to health care, food security and hunger, and mental health.

In the [2021 Lancet study](#) on the death of primary caregivers as a result of covid, researchers estimated that 1 134 000 children experienced the death of primary caregivers between March 1, 2020, to April 30, 2021. South Africa was particularly badly affected with almost 95,000 losses which amounted to 5.1 per 1000 children losing their primary caregiver, a ratio only second to Peru of the 21 countries included in the study.

Other African countries were apparently not as badly affected with Kenya next highest with 4,500 losses, Zimbabwe with 2,978 and Malawi with 2,367. However, researchers did stress that of the African countries

included, only South Africa provided details about excess deaths so the numbers for other African countries were likely far higher. This was certainly the children's experience.

Many children talked about the death of family members and friends and increasing numbers of child-headed households and orphans because parents have died.

Loss and fear were the most obvious messages when they spoke about covid, , including fear of getting sick, of losing loved ones and especially parents, and the fear involved when they had to choose seeing family and risking making them sick, or staying away and losing relationship or sometimes losing them anyway.

A presenter from Namibia expressed this poignantly: *"covid is scary, my whole family has had it. I'm afraid of losing my parents. What will happen to children if their parents die, will they end up in a child-headed household or in an orphanage?"*

This was echoed by a delegate from Botswana who emphasised: *"high number of deaths with covid"* and how there was fear of losing families. They had experienced the *"devastation of being separated from their extended families and the disruption of grieving process."* Restrictions on the grieving process were also a common theme.

The Lancet study explained that although many grandparents are in the older age groups prioritised by WHO for vaccines, data from April 2021 showed that many of the countries with the highest rates of COVID-19- deaths might not reach herd immunity for more than four years. Thus, COVID-19 will continue to fuel the loss of parents and family members, leaving children whose parents die with fewer options than before the pandemic.

Children also spoke about vaccinations, and specifically how vaccines are not available to children in most African countries and how they are finding the vaccine hesitancy of many adults difficult to face.

A Botswanan presenter said, *"we have to push for people to be vaccinated"*. Others explained that although government is persuading people to be vaccinated, their *"parents don't want to take them because of superstition. Children are getting sick because vaccines are not available to them. We are trying to get adults vaccinated to protect children, but vaccine hesitancy is putting children at risk"*.

Delegates from South Africa and Zambia agreed: *"parents are choosing not to get vaccinated because of rumours that they will get sick. They believe the myths about the vaccinations."* But, even though children would like to be vaccinated, *"governments say that it is not affordable for vaccines to be given to children. Authorities believe that children's immune systems are strong enough."*

Children also noted a decline in access to clinic facilities to manage chronic illnesses including HIV and tuberculosis during the pandemic. They spoke about the fear that going to health facilities will put them at risk, and how children on long-term medication are neglected and dying. They also bemoaned the lack of proper health facilities in rural areas.

Kirsty Mashele from South Africa echoed these concerns: *"in my village it was not easy to go to health care facilities to get help or other medical related services (like child immunisation and family planning). There were long queues outside the clinics, nurses were serving slowly, some even stopped working because they were afraid of catching the virus."*

Kirsty's concern about the lack of access to clinics to get contraception during covid, was repeated by other delegates. Phindile Zungu, also from South Africa emphasised that it has *"increased the rate of teen pregnancies."* This is likely a contributing factor in the [massive spike in teen pregnancies](#) between April last year

and March 2021 (23,000 in Gauteng, South Africa alone). The same statistics indicated that 1300 girls were infected with HIV every week.

Sex and reproduction was identified as a wider challenge. One of the Zimbabwean delegates explained that in the country: *“sexual reproduction rights and health are not spoken about. They are suppressed because of superstition and ignorance, and children are not educated about sexual feelings and how to handle them.”*

With regards to food security and hunger, many countries closed their school nutritional programmes during the pandemic. According to a delegate from Lesotho, *“the school nutritional programme was not operating during covid. Many children didn’t have anything to eat during lockdown.”* Government could have provided seeds to help people feed their families.” In South Africa, this resulted in a landmark court case where government was compelled to [reopen its school feeding programme](#).

Mozambiquan delegates also explained their concerns about malnutrition and how it has been exacerbated by floods, drought and now covid: *“our health was not only affected by covid. Many children were affected by malnutrition. It has remained very high in our country over the last 15 years. 43% of children are affected by malnutrition. According to UNICEF, 81% rely on agriculture for their livelihood, but 95% of food crops reduced because of floods and drought.”*

One of the solutions suggested by children to combat hunger and malnutrition is for government to provide basic financial support and school meals for disadvantaged children.

Finally, children stressed that their anxiety and stress levels were very high because of covid, that there was an increase in emotional and physical abuse, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder and how children were thinking about negative things. Crucially, none of the children mentioned any government interventions in addressing children’s mental health.

### **Children with disabilities**

The delegates presenting about children with disabilities stressed that these children had experienced challenges prior to the pandemic, but that these had been exacerbated by covid. There were also numerous references to the abuse and even ritual murder of disabled children and to the scarcity and unequal distribution of resources for disabled children.

The key message from Zimbabwe on this topic was that the country has 1.4 million people with disabilities of whom 60% are children who are being *“left behind”*. The presenter emphasised that for children with disabilities, covid had made an existing problem worse. Prior to covid, there weren’t enough books in braille and many deaf children experienced language problems. But when, like many other countries, covid resulted in schools turning to online learning, this made it harder for children with disabilities to learn.

Blind children were excluded from online schooling and radio programmes were problematic for deaf children. According to delegates from Lesotho: *“Everyone should be able to thrive, including those with special needs. But, “children with disabilities are often not in school.”*

In addition, children with disabilities found it harder to access health services. Parents couldn’t afford their medication and travel bans made it hard to get to clinics. Hyperinflation in the country worsened malnutrition and poverty especially amongst the most vulnerable.

Delegates spoke about the disruption of livelihoods, especially in the informal sector which resulted in a widening gap between social classes, and how when parents were not working, they were not able to take care of their children.

Delegates from Lesotho explained how children with disabilities were left without care during covid and how children with disabilities and sicknesses were abused because their parents are abused.

Zimbabwean children also spoke about the abuse of children with disabilities. Along with children from Tanzania and Zambia, they highlighted how frequently children with special needs were abused or exploited and about the horror of ritual murders amongst children with disabilities.

Given that the exploitation is a problem for all children, but worse for children with disabilities, they recommended that the rights of these children be specifically protected.

Another important emphasis was the unequal distribution of services and how children with disability's needs are not being met by the system. The lack of resources including learning materials.

South African delegates concurred, explaining that in South Africa, there aren't enough schools for children with disabilities, no special schools in some areas and a lack of resources in others. There were also concerns about affordability of education for children with special needs.

Some of the solutions presented by delegates were for society to be educated about children with disabilities. They recommended the need for research to marry theory with practice and so that authorities can make well-informed decisions about children with disabilities, for gaps between what children need and what they receive to be bridged, for increased budget and policy reforms, and for parents to learn the skills needed to support their children with disabilities, including learning sign language.

Mozambiquan delegates suggested educating mothers so they can educate their children at home, establishing groups for children with disabilities and teaching them about sexual and reproductive health. Finally, they asked government to build more schools for the disabled so they can exercise their right to education.

### **Child protection**

During the discussion about child protection, children highlighted ten areas of concern including physical and sexual abuse, child exploitation, child marriage, lack of birth registration, corporal punishment, incarcerated children, discrimination, bullying, vulnerable and orphaned children, substance abuse and child labour, and how many of these had been exacerbated by the pandemic.

One Zambian presenter summed it up by saying, *"Child abuse is at a disaster level. Children are kidnapped and sold for body parts. Poverty is resulting in the selling of children. Harm and abuse is a norm in Zambia for vulnerable children and orphans."* A delegate from Lesotho concurred, *"Child abuse is at disaster levels. People sell body parts, there are kidnappings. Honestly, there are lots of ways to hurt a child. The Lesotho delegate continued, "more needs to be done to end child abuse and trafficking. Trafficking a big problem, along with substance abuse and child labour. As is physical, emotional and sexual abuse."*

Zimbabwean delegates explained how covid had worsened the situation in the country, disrupting livelihoods and widening the gap between social classes and how hyperinflation has not only led to an increase in child mortality and malnutrition but also in children being left alone, in more child delinquency, child sexual

exploitation, substance and drug abuse, theft and burglary, malicious damage of property and public violence, and in increased cases of ritual murder.

Zambian delegates explained that *“child exploitation can include taking advantage of children, selling children, child marriage or trafficking.”* In answer to the question about why more wasn't reported, they speculated that it *“can be an embarrassment to family which prevents children from reporting to authorities”*.

Child exploitation can include sexual exploitation and child labour. Zambian presenters expressed concern about street children and stated that child protection units in police stations need protocols for ending child prostitution. Zambian statistics show 1.3 million children involved in child labour in the country. The number is reported to be lower in South Africa, but is still concerning. Recent statistics indicate that there are approximately [571,000 children in child labour](#) of whom almost 200,000 are exposed to at least one hazardous condition.

Many children cited statistics of children abused both physically and sexually. A Zambian delegate explained how having children at home during covid, *“led to abuse and harmful practices.”* Lesotho delegates agreed that covid has exacerbated the problem, *“our Vision 2020 is that every child should be in school. Education is a powerful weapon. Abuse is increasing because of closure of schools. We need to educate parents about negative impact of abuse on children.”*

A South African child agreed, *“I think that people in the rural areas are really afraid to report a perpetrator to the police because you may find that the person who is sexually abusing them is a bread winner and they are afraid to report because if they report, they will not have food.”* This puts a burden on poor girls. *“I think the government should improve the protection systems for children in the rural areas.”*

Zambian children also expressed concern about the number of children being sexually abused and how crisis pregnancies take girls out of school. They suggested that parents should be educated because early marriages particularly affect children in the rural areas.

Child marriages was identified as a problem in many of the countries. In a 2015 study, UNICEF found that more than one in three African women and girls entered into marriage or union before age 15. According to the Unisa-Africa Girl Development Programme, if current trends continue, [almost half of the world's child brides](#) in 2050 will be African.

In South Africa, a 2017 survey results released by Statistics South Africa indicated that over [91 000 girls](#) in South Africa between the ages of 12 and 17 were married, divorced, separated, widowed or living with a partner as husband and wife.

Zambian delegates, who proposed banning child marriages, quote statistics showing that an astonishing “29% of 15-19 year olds are married before age of 18.”

Tanzanian delegates emphasised how early marriage violates children's values and speakers explained how in Zimbabwe, *“early child marriages contribute to school drop-outs”*. They stated that *“authorities including chiefs must work together to eliminate child marriages.”* They also explained that *“children are unable to access support after being abused and that children need child and victim-friendly policing.”*

Child marriage was identified as one of the many forms of discrimination against girl children. According to Zambian presenters, *“discrimination or treating someone differently because of race, gender or disability is a*

*problem in Zambia. Girls are not allowed to go to school, especially girls with disabilities They are not treated as human."*

Universal birth registration was also recognised as a common problem across the countries. In South Africa, conservative estimates are that there are half a million undocumented children, but the Department of Education cites more that [1.1 million undocumented children](#) in the school system alone. This, however, is not as bad as Zambia. Children stated that only 14% of the children under five have been registered. In other words, only 5.9% of these children have birth certificates.

Delegates from Lesotho concurred, and provided some solutions. They suggested that the country needed *"universal birth registration where everyone has a birth certificate which should be budgeted for at national level. They further propose mobile registration centres to ensure that every child is registered, and that the processes should be child-friendly."*

Zambian presenters also explained how the lack of birth registration affected who is treated as a child. Children are often treated like adults because they do not have papers. In addition, these delegates asked government to provide a clear definition of what a child is, especially where customary law clashes with the law of the land. *"According to Zambia's Child Protection Act, children under the age of 16 cannot be imprisoned."* But this is different to the global definition of a child which includes all children under 18. They argue that *"children under 18 should not be incarcerated."*

The Zambian presentation also included a story from Castro, who had been incarcerated as a child. He explained how he got involved with the wrong crowd during covid because life was tough and how he began to steal. He was caught by the police and held for 12 days. During that time, he had to sleep on the floor and experienced pain in his body. More disturbing, he was held with adults.

While he acknowledges that what he did was wrong, he argues that *"children should not be held in cells, they should be counselled and reformed."*

Although South Africa has outlawed corporal punishment at school and in the home, it remains a challenge in many other countries. Violence in schools and corporal punishment has been identified as a severe problem in Zambia. And a Tanzanian delegate who agreed that it was a problem explained that *"students were still beaten to death at school"*.

Children also identified bullying and peer abuse as problems. They bemoaned that parents and teachers seem to think it is normal. In Zambia, it's especially bad for children with disabilities, and statistics show depression and suicide because of bullying, both cyber and physical.

Zambian children also explained how substance abuse is rife because *"cigarettes and alcohol are cheap (cheaper than food)"*. They were concerned about how substance abuse damages health. Tanzanian delegates agreed that children needed to be educated about drug abuse.

A final child-protection concern is orphaned and vulnerable children. Zambian delegates indicated that there are 10 413 children in institutions. Presenters pointed to the lack of space in facilities and how this results in *"vulnerable children and orphans living on the streets and ending up on roads and highways and bus stations without enough food, water or shelter. Their basic needs not met"*. Their solution is new orphanages but primarily that, *"children need to grow up in families"*.

While the picture painted by the children was bleak, they did suggest some solutions. They were to:

- Address traditional customs and a lack of police services in the rural areas.
- Development of recreational facilities to keep children engaged and away from harmful practices and substance abuse.
- Care and protection of minors.
- Protection of children from early marriage and child abuse.
- Authorities working to build children's trust.

In conclusion for this section, two important solutions were proposed around education of parents and policing:

*"A shadow report speaking to the sustainable development goals for the voluntary national review conducted by us, the children of Zambia, shows that most of the children's rights violations in Zambia exist because there is a lot of ignorance around them. Many parents do not have an idea of the rights of children, thus they fail to acknowledge them".* Kamuti Sitali.

*"The government must make sure they employ skilled police and security officers in order for child abuse and child labour to end."* Lundazi CAN.

## **Education**

The education presentations highlighted ten key concerns related to education. They included covid-related challenges and specifically online learning, infrastructure in schools, a lack of resources and teachers, access and quality of schooling, lack of funding for education or misuse and unequal distribution of funding, inequality in education, drugs and violence at schools, academic-bias and not enough focus on skills, and the cessation of the school feeding schemes under covid (this last topic was covered under health).

The presentation made by Malawi primarily focused on schooling in local refugee camps. The eight refugee children who presented explained that *"education is a particular challenge for children in the refugee camp. There is only one pre-school, one primary school and one secondary school in the camp. There are not enough places for all of the children in the camp.*

*There are 24,000 children enrolled in three schools. Children who can't cope are forced to leave because of the lack of school spaces. What happens to drop-outs? There is a big difference between the number of children and the number of available spots so some children in the camp have to wait many months before they can get a spot.*

*The quality of the teachers is poor and affected by the number of children in the class. Teachers have to teach 100 learners.*

*In addition, there is also too wide a cross section of abilities amongst the children. They are all in one class regardless of their level of competence. Plus, children from the camp cannot access government universities. The lack of a future makes children lose hope. Many end up practicing risky behaviours and immoral ways as a result. Government needs to explore ways of providing tertiary education for refugee children.*

*What is important is the annual budget given to education. All children including refugee children need quality education and education that adds value."*

Many of these problems were echoed by other countries. Participants from Zimbabwe bemoaned the lack of books at school. In Tanzania, schools have a shortage of teachers and equipment including libraries and science labs. In Lesotho there are challenges in access to schools and their quality. They also acknowledged

infrastructural problems and a lack of schools. Concerningly, most of the teachers are male and teach stereotypes to girls. They had challenges with e-learning during lockdown. It was not effective because not every child had access and government did not assist with data or access to devices to keep children learning.

The first presentation from South Africa was from Jessica Mungoma from Limpopo province. She emphasised that all children in South Africa have a constitutional right to basic education and government promotes lifelong education and training. However, she named some challenges in realising those rights. They include spending on education, misuse of funds and how available funds are allocated.

She explained how different schools provide a different quality education. *“Many schools lack basic amenities including libraries, water, laboratories, and toilets.”* Jessica’s school had no water and infrastructural problems. *“My classroom was filled with cracks. I couldn’t focus because the classroom could have collapsed. We were living in fear. There were no improvements in classes or infrastructure. It led to overcrowding of classes.”*

For this child, *“the pandemic has been a disaster. There are not enough classrooms for children to socially distance. Children are not safe. Some don’t have classes. In grade 10, children choose subjects. Children are split and some have to be taught under the trees. They don’t have a table or a desk to write on.”*

Covid resulted in the schools being closed for long periods. Many children are also still not back at school every day because schools are too small to allow them to socially distance. Estimates from the NIDS-CRAM study are that some children have [lost up to a year of learning](#).

When children went back to school, they were months behind schedule. Teachers have overloaded them with homework, assignments and exams to catch up, but that has been emotionally draining and many children are struggling with their mental health. In addition, teachers are dying. Numerous children have experienced the huge trauma of losing a teacher.

Highlighting the problem of funding, Kirsty Mashele explained how in her province they had been faced with the looting and unequal distribution of funds, where urban areas get more funds than the rural ones and not all schools are receiving their finances. Delays in teachers getting their payouts have resulted in strikes and further school disruptions.

She emphasised the failure of provincial department of education to deliver on commitments for extra classrooms and asked government to intervene in cases where funds were looted because, she said, *“these challenges affect children’s progress in the classroom.”*

Other problems highlighted by delegates include teachers having sex with children and manipulating children to give them “A”s, discrimination against children, especially the girl child, lack of facilities such as science classrooms, the need for skills training and an African education based on local needs, and drug abuse and gangsterism.

The children spoke about *“daily reports about high levels of violence and physical abuse, sexual abuse and gangsterism in school high in Limpopo.”* They attributed gangsterism to poverty, unemployment, and a lack of jobs. *“People end up under-qualified for jobs and because of the lack of options, children end up in gangs.”* One proposed solution was active safety and security committees for schools.

Delegates from Angola explain that *“education has been dragged down significantly by the pandemic. There is a need to address the fact that not everyone has access to online learning. Also, exam timetables and procedures*

*need to be tailored in such a way as to ensure that students aren't disadvantaged, and don't fail because of situations that are beyond their control like school closures because of covid."*

*They also said "we have difficulty learning because of lack of financial means. We don't have enough equipment due to the covid 19 situation. We young people have been confined, many people have become unemployed, and this has generated frustration."*

The recommendations that the children made in response to the challenges were very practical and included increased accessibility in schools, more schools in rural areas, fixing problems with infrastructure, more classrooms, and a greater emphasis on vocational and hands-on schooling.

They also wanted additional funds for education and an end to corruption. They believed that a clear indication of change would be improved and adequate infrastructure and the construction of libraries, laboratories and sport courts.

In addition, children need more books and other resources and these need to be fairly distributed especially to children in rural areas. Children felt that school management should be held accountable for not putting in orders in time.

Interestingly, they saw some good in the pandemic, including university graduates without jobs being given the opportunity to work as teaching assistants providing extra tutorial classes to help with learning deficits. But they felt that the syllabus needed to be revised, to be more balanced and appropriate for SA children.

Malawian refugee children wanted to be able to access government universities.

Finally, delegates emphasised that children need a safe learning environment.

Here are some of their quotes:

*"I want the government in Limpopo to go and survey the old schools that are no longer suitable to be a learning environment for children. New school buildings are needed".* Kristy Mashele, SA

*"Funds need to be distributed equally. We need skills development centres in the rural areas."* Kristy Mashele SA.

*"We talk of hospitals, roads and electric power that we don't have, and then they come up with online learning, how can we do that?"* Esther Cibwalu

*"Even though they introduced and launched the educational channel, we still have a shortage of power in this country."* Mundia.

*"Imagine some of us in rural areas, how are we going to do the same online learning if they are not supplying us with the same things for online learning".* Sipho

The South African children's concerns echo [national findings](#). Poor schools in seven provinces have been underfunded for textbooks and other needs, schools are being forced to find funds to pay teachers and one cannot fill vacant teachers posts after National Treasury slashed provincial education department budgets. Equally concerning is government's redeployment of [education and ECD infrastructure budgets](#) to provide schools with PPE during the covid pandemic

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there are some important questions that governments need to answer, specifically:

- Are they including children and their voices when they speak about important issues that directly affect them?
- Are they only letting them speak, or are children participating in decision making too?
- Why were children's needs not prioritised when decisions were made about covid? Why does this remain a problem despite the omission being brought to government's attention?
- How will they address ongoing challenges around health, education, child protection, and children with disabilities, unequal funding between urban and rural areas and problems with the cohesive implementation of policy?
- How can they facilitate change at all levels in the countries, starting at family level, then community, in schools and in government, along with a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach to decision-making?

Change is needed across society.

To quote the children, *"parents, you need to take part in the development of your children, we need you."*

*"We need a representation of young people in Parliament."*

*"Children need to be actively included in decisions that affect them. Be it regarding school, in the household and at national level and anywhere else."*

While they saw that there were problems across the continent and that some countries were worse affected than others, one child had this to say, *"I would really appreciate a turnaround in the governmental structure and global governing as a whole."* From another child

*"The change we'd most like to see is young people making decisions that benefit them, basically letting their voice be heard. "*