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Rights-Based Education Programming: A Complimentary Approach for Addressing Poverty, Education Inequality, and Development in Zimbabwe

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2015 sought to eradicate major problems facing the globe. Member states ratifying these goals were tasked to formulate and institute policies aimed at addressing the global economic, political, social, and environmental challenges. Three major goals sought to address fundamental issues on poverty, universal education, and gender equality. The MDGs were succeeded by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are targeted to be achieved by 2030. The intersectionality of the development goals and education cannot be underestimated. Education has been identified as a key strategy for addressing poverty, hunger, and gender equality. Although several countries ratified the MDGs, most did not achieve the goals by 2015. A shift in policy is necessary to close the achievement gap and to help the efforts for achieving the 2030 SDGs. This paper addresses Zimbabwe's progress towards the SDGs. Progress on key indicators of quality education, poverty, and inequality of opportunities is presented. Finally, the paper suggests a rights-based education programming framework to help accelerate achievement of the SDGs.

1. Human Rights Based Education Programming in Zimbabwe

During the past two decades, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) whose overall aim was to address the global socio-economic challenges facing member states (United Nations, 2015).[31] Several countries adopted the conventions and worked towards addressing the goals. Chief amongst the goals was the need to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, and promote gender equality and women empowerment. These three goals are fundamental for ending acute poverty that is prevalent in most developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, any efforts to genuinely end poverty should encompass an inclusive economic growth that targets vulnerable populations like women, girls, and children (USAID, 2020).[38] Historically, women have been marginalized from economic activity, have less educational opportunities compared to men, and lower prospects for professional growth (Techane, 2017).[26] According to World Food Program (2020),[40] women

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and girls constitute over 60 percent of chronically hungry people globally. This gender gap in food insecurity is larger for women and girls who are poorer, less educated, unemployed, or marginalized (CARE, 2020).[5] According to a UN Women (2015),[36] women have less educational opportunities compared to men. Around 39% of rural girls attend secondary school in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 45% rural boys, 59% urban girls, and 60% urban boys (United Nations, 2015).[32] The same report indicates that perennial deficits in education among rural women poses long term effects for family well-being and poverty reduction. In most African communities, women play a crucial role of fending for the family and as such, they typically bear the brunt of most family problems. Therefore, addressing political, economic, and educational inequalities among women and girls can have a large multiplier effect in addressing poverty.

Women also face a plethora of other socio-related challenges like gender-based violence, poor maternal health, and debilitating effects of climate change (Head et al., 2014).[15] According to World Health Organization (WHO), around 44% of African women have experienced some form of gender-based violence and sexual assault by 2020, yet most such cases go unreported. Although some African countries have strong legal frameworks on paper to address gender-based violence, most frameworks do not prove effective (OECD, 2014),[23] and as such, women subjected to these forms of abuse often choose to not report the cases. The rampant climate change also continues to cause numerous problems in African states (Serdeczny et al., 2017).[25] For example, agricultural production in Zimbabwe has consistently gone down during the past two decades as a result of the perennial droughts and erratic rain seasons. Because Zimbabwe's economy is mostly agricultural-based, most families relying on agriculture (e.g., subsistence farming) have been subjected to extreme poverty. Women and children are most affected as they typically rely on farming for labor (Chidhakwa et al., 2020).[6]

In order to address this and other dimensions of poverty in Africa, it is imperative to address any structural or institutional barriers to education, economic empowerment, and social protections particularly amongst women. This paper describes a rights-based framework for addressing inequalities in educational opportunities in Zimbabwe. Education plays a crucial role in ending poverty and in the accomplishment of most developmental goals. For example, a higher educational qualification is associated with increased job opportunities (Ali & Jalal, 2018).[1] Education also empowers individuals to know and advocate for their rights (Bernardi & Plavgo, 2019).[3] Although several African countries made a big effort in increasing access to primary and secondary education during the past two decades, this has not correlated with quality education, which explains why most countries still suffer massive unemployment rates despite high literacy rates (Kapel, 2021).[19] Furthermore, some educational practices in Zimbabwe are restrictive as they limit individuals from making choices regarding their educational and career goals. Most African countries adopted education and curriculum systems from their colonial masters, yet the circumstances unique to them do not sufficiently warrant western models of education. In Zimbabwe, for example, the model for enrolling high school graduates into university is based on the points systems, meaning students have to attain a certain number of points at A level in order to be admitted into a program of their choice in university. The majority of students enrolling into college end up settling for courses that are not their first choice because of the restrictive enrollment method. Furthermore, this enrollment system is biased against girls because generally, girls attain lower points at A Level compared to boys. This trend, however, stems from a cultural system that works at the disadvantage of girls. On average, girls devote less time to their studies compared to boys since they participate in more household chores compared to boys (Baten et al., 2021).[2]

2. Role of Education in Driving Development

Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the great engine of personal development" (Nel & Mabhena, 2021).[22] It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the song of a mineworker can become the head of the mind, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another". In other words, education can be a catalyst for change. Education empowers its citizens to take ownership of their future by ensuring the well-being of others. Moreover, it prepares citizens to contribute to the intellectual, social, and economic well-being of a country through innovation, critical thinking, compassion, and self-reflection.

It becomes imperative that educators and lawmakers ensure that education is free, accessible, and inclusive to all citizens. Providing education that embraces diversity of perspectives, equity in access to information, and inclusion of accessible delivery modalities can eliminate barriers that impede personal development. Thus, it allows educators to promote practical knowledge and skills to all citizens regardless of their race, gender identity, language, creed, national origin, etc. This equity driven approach to education allows educators to share comprehensive

knowledge and empower citizens to continue growing and developing.

Burns, Crow, and Becker (2015)[4] argued that collaboration is the driving force of student development. Collaboration "…brings together groups of people who have different ideas, approaches, experiences, and areas of expertise [that] creates a fertile environment for generating new concepts and methods" (p. 1). Collaboration provides a space where educators are able to share their thoughts and experiences in a way that ensures education is diverse, equitable, and inclusive for all citizens. This approach works best when there is representation from historically marginalized groups. The representatives are not there to speak on behalf of all members of a marginalized group; rather they are able to give a voice to a group or groups that historically have been silenced.

3. Economic, Political, and Social Empowerment Through Education

Furthermore, education is the driving force for economic, political, and social empowerment. Education provides citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to the economic, political, and social empowerment of a country. The essence of education is to provide diverse, equitable, and inclusive opportunities for learning that benefit all citizens. Putnam (2001)[24] noted that countries need a collective network to ensure the public good. Therefore, we will use Putnam's (2001)[24] social capital theory to explore how education empowers economic, political, and social development.

4. Economic Impact of Education

Education can have far-reaching economic implications ranging from developing business to arts. The global economy increases the demand for countries to produce a workforce that can meet their economic needs. Education is essential to the economic development of countries. Putnam (2001)[24] described that this process is achieved through social capital. Social capital is a set of norms and customs grounded in trust for the mutual benefit of all (Putnam, 2001).[24] Education can be an avenue for providing training opportunities to boost all economic development. Therefore, to achieve this goal, it is essential to have a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment that is committed to mutual economic development. The workforce needs a diverse set of skills to ensure the country's economic needs are being met.

Creating opportunities for fair and inclusive education affords citizens great financial and human capital. Increased financial and human capital affords citizens more access and opportunities to education and resources that further empowers economic development. Citizens who have access to equitable education may engage in more innovative approaches that provide a collective benefit to those in their communities furthering social capital for the community, thereby benefiting the financial and human capital of the individuals in the community.

5. Political and Social Impact of Education

Enriched social capital provides a voice for disenfranchised and marginalized groups (Putnam, 2001).[24] Education is an opportunity to provide citizens with social engagement opportunities that further the economic interest of countries. Social engagement empowers citizens to partake in civic responsibilities such as voting, community building, etc. through utilizing critical thinking. Education provides its citizens with the knowledge and skills to further their civic responsibilities by bringing their communities together to address inequities.

These efforts result in communities being represented by people committed to their needs, plight, and activism. The power of social capital brings together a unified approach by giving voice to the silenced and ensuring fair engagements for all. Education is at the core of addressing this problem. Education can empower citizens to come together in unity to push for laws and human rights. There are many instances in history from various nations where leaders used laws or force to eliminate the social capital of its citizens. Therefore, educators are at the forefront of this continual drive for political empowerment through diverse, equitable, and inclusive education. The power of education is a reciprocal process by which we give citizens the knowledge and skills to acquire social, financial, and human capital while giving them opportunities to achieve those capitals.

5.1 UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development succeeded the MDGs in 2015 and consists of 17 strategic goals collectively aimed at achieving global sustainable development by 2030. When these were developed, the ultimate consensus among stakeholders was that any development efforts that did not promote women empowerment and gender equality would not result to the realization of the MDGs, and as such, gender equality was mainstreamed throughout the entire SDGs framework (Institute for Sustainable Development; IISD, 2021).[17] The forum also emphasized the critical role of education towards the realization of all the other 16 SDGs, and more

importantly, the promotion of rule of law. As a result, UNESCO actively promotes Global Citizenship Education (GCE) as a complementary approach to SDGs (UNSCO, 2015).[35] According to UNESCO, GCE is a form of civic education that involves both "curricular learning and practical experience" aimed at empowering all learners with skills to address global issues of social, political, economic, or environmental nature. This, combined with a more rights-oriented programming is likely to result in significant reduction in poverty and global development.

The core principles guiding the SDGs include universality, leaving no one behind, interconnectedness and indivisibility, inclusiveness, and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Key goals include no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, and gender equality (United Nations, 2020).[34] Zimbabwe partners with the UN to achieve its SDGs through a partnership known as Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework (ZUNDAF), which comprises of six result areas: (a) social services and protection, (b) poverty reduction and value addition, (c) food and nutrition, (d) gender equality, (e) HIV and AIDS, and (f) Public Administration and Governance.

5.2 Zimbabwe Progress on the SDGs

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

According to the United Nations, poverty is defined as the lack of stable income and resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods, and may manifest in hunger, malnutrition, limited access to educations, and social discrimination (United Nations, 2015).[31] Zimbabwe has experienced massive poverty since 1992 following the first major drought post-independence in 1992 and the failed Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAP) implemented during the same year (Kawewe & Dibie, 2000).[20] Succeeding years were followed by accelerated rates of economic shrinkage and political instability, which unfortunately Zimbabwe has not been able to fully recover from. Being an agricultural driven economy, massive decline in production of major crops worsened poverty across the nation, particularly following the 1999 fast track land reform program (Hove & Gwiza, 2012).[16] Several industries spanning across tertiary, manufacturing, education, and healthcare all suffered massive decline because of the demise of the agricultural sector. Since 2000, Zimbabwe experienced a more severe economic meltdown and has not recovered since then.

Women and children have disproportionately suffered acute poverty relative to any other group. According to 2019 national government statistics report, approximate-

ly 50% of children under 15 years of age experienced extreme poverty during past 3 years prior (ZIMSTAT, 2019).[44] Prevalence in rural areas was greater (76.3%) compared to urban centers (20%), and the report notes that children in rural areas are more than twice as likely to be poor compared to children in urban areas. Poverty amongst people with disabilities was also acutely higher (i.e., 74.1%) compared to people with no disabilities (69.5%) in 2019. In both urban and rural households, odds of poverty were highly associated with a lower education level of the household head. That is, households in which parent(s) had a tertiary education qualification were less likely to experience poverty compared to families in which household head had lower to no education (ZIMSTAT, 2019).[42] During the same year, rural and urban children not enrolled in school accounted for 12.3% and 9.1% respectively. According to the statistics, household and individual poverty rates have not improved in Zimbabwe since 2011. As of 2017, around 60% of Zimbabwean households were in poverty, whereas 21.9% were in extreme poverty. On an individual basis, 70.5% of the national population were in poverty, whereas 29.3% were in extreme poverty (ZIMSTAT, 2017).[43] See tables 1, 2, and 3 for more information regarding poverty dimensions in Zimbabwe.

Table 1. *Household and Individual Poverty Prevalence*

	Poverty	Extreme Poverty	Poverty	Extreme Poverty
PICES 2017				
Rural	76.9	31.9	86	40.9
Urban	30.4	3.3	37	4.4
Zimbabwe	60.6	21.9	70.5	29.3
PICES 2011/12				
Rural	76	22.9	84.3	30.4
Urban	38.2	4	46.5	5.6
Zimbabwe	62.2	16.2	72.3	22.5
PICES 2001				
Rural	73	42.3	82.4	52.4
Urban	33.8	10.5	42.3	14.5
Zimbabwe	60.6	32.2	70.9	41.5
PICES 1995				
Rural	76.2	50.4	86.4	62.8
Urban	41.1	10.2	53.4	15
Zimbabwe	63.3	35.7	75.6	47.2

Source: PICES 2017, PICES 2011, ICES 2001 and ICES 1995

According to the Food Aid Organization (FAO: 2021),[10] the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe has reached an alarming level and requires urgent action. The report notes severe food insecurity worsened by the global

Covid-19 pandemic and perennial droughts. The production of staple crops in Zimbabwe dropped sharply between 2016 and 2019, mostly as a result of massive drought between those years. This resulted in hunger worsening during that same period, with statistics showing a sharp increase in the Global Hunger Index from about 16.5% in 2014 to 44.4% in 2019 (ZIMSTAT, 2019).[44] According to the Zimbabwe Humanitarian Response Plan (ZHRP, 2021),[41] around 7 million people (i.e., approximately 50% of total population) needed urgent humanitarian assistance in 2020, and over 4.3 million people in rural areas (i.e., about 40%) and 2.2 million people in urban centers (about 20%) were experiencing acute food shortages. Women have been the most affected. According to the PICES Data (ZIMSTAT, 2019),[44] 19% of female-headed households experienced multi-dimensional poverty (hunger, malnutrition, unemployment) compared to 13% male headed households.

Table 2. *Malnutrition Indicators, Children Under Five*

	1988	1994	1999	2005/06	2010/11	2015	2019
Stunting	31	29	34	35	32	27	23.5
Underweight	8	11	10	13	10	8	9.7
Overweight	5	7	10	8	6	6	2.5
Wasting	3	6	8	7	3	3	2.9

Goal 2: Inclusive and equitable quality education

To achieve inclusive and equitable quality education, the UN SDGs consist of 10 targets and indicators covering primary and secondary school completion, quality ECD, equal access to affordable and quality vocational and tertiary education, access to relevant skills for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship, and provision of equal access to quality inclusive education. Zimbabwe does not currently have data on some of the indicators (UN, 2020). In 2019, the school going population constituted about 37.3% (i.e., 5.6 million) of the total population, of which 50.05% were females (GoZ, 2020).[13] Between 2014 and 2019, early childhood development index increased from 59.2% to 68.1% for males and 64.3% to 73.3% for females. When broken down between urban and rural population, the same indicators increased from 64.2% to 75.9% for urban population and 61% to 68.9% for rural population.

In terms of school enrollment, enrollment rates across all four education domains (i.e., ECD, Primary, Lower Secondary, and upper secondary) have been consistently high during the last 10 years (GoZ, 2020).[13] On the other hand, completion rates decrease with progression into higher grades. Between 2014 and 2018, completion rates averaged 75-92% for ECD, 77-79% for primary, 63-67% for lower secondary, and 10-14% for upper secondary levels respectively (see table 4).

Table 3. *Global Hunger Index (GHI) for Zimbabwe*

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
GHI	21	20.9	17.7	17.2	16.5	16.5	30.8	28.8	33.8	32.9	34.4

Table 4. *School Completion Rates*

	ECD			Primary			Lower Secondary			Upper Secondary		
Year	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
2014	75.67	75.06	75.36	76.73	77.78	77.25	66.08	62.28	64.19	12.54	9.44	10.96
2015	84.45	83.61	84.03	78.71	80.78	79.73	67.27	64.08	65.68	14.33	10.83	12.54
2016	90.17	89.82	90	78.88	80.24	79.56	66.79	64.53	65.67	14.53	11.18	12.82
2017	94.12	93.25	93.68	77.74	79.83	78.78	68.06	66.65	67.35	16.61	13.29	14.92
2018	92.68	91.91	92.29	76.2	78.96	77.57	64.76	61.47	63.12	16.04	13.88	14.94

Indicator 4.a.1 assesses country performance in terms of availability of basic infrastructure that is essential to facilitate learning. Between 2016 and 2018, the proportion of schools without electricity was stagnant at averages ranging between 45.04 to 52.59 for primary schools and 28.53 to 40.6% for secondary schools (GoZ, 2020).[13] Most schools had access to basic water during that same period, with figures ranging from 95 to 98.58% for both primary and secondary schools. ICT remains relatively short. The proportion of schools without computers dropped significantly from 81.46% to 47.01% for primary schools and 50.31% to 28.32% for secondary schools during that same period (See table 5).

5.3 National Policies and Strategies Addressing Poverty and Education

In 2016, the government of Zimbabwe launched the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy policy, which was anchored on seven key pillars: (a) Agricultural productivity, (b) growth and rural food security; (c) social sectors, private sectors, (d) infrastructure and climate change; (e) environment and climate change; (f) gender women and youth empowerment; and (g) strengthening governance

and institutional capacity. In 2018, government adopted the Transitional stabilization program (GoZ, 2021).[14]

The entire background described above is illustrative of a deviation from the MDG. A holistic approach to addressing poverty in necessary, but this may be difficult particularly given the decade long poor state of economic performance. If Zimbabwe is to strategically address worsening poverty and make sure to attain its 2030 Millennium goals, it may consider addressing education access and equality. This paper describes a rights-based framework for addressing education inequalities that may apply to Zimbabwe.

6. Overview of Zimbabwe Education System

Zimbabwe is a developing country located in South-Eastern Africa. With a population of about 15 million, the majority of the population is below 24 years of age (CIA Factbook, 2021).[8] Zimbabwe has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa, with over 86% of the population is able to read and write (CIA Factbook, 2021).[8] Following attainment of independence, Zimbabwe inherited the British educational system. To redress the inequalities that existed in the education system, the government embarked

Table 5. *Schools With Access to Basic Facilities*

	Primary		Secondary	
Year	*Schools with water source (%)*	*Schools without water source (%)*	*Schools with water source (%)*	*Schools without water source (%)*
2016	98.16	1.84	98.34	1.66
2017	95.79	4.21	95.8	4.2
2018	98.58	1.42	97.49	2.51
	Schools with electricity (%)	*Schools without electricity (%)*	*Schools with electricity (%)*	*Schools without electricity (%)*
2016	53.33	46.67	59.4	40.6
2017	47.41	52.59	68.9	31.1
2018	54.96	45.04	59.4	28.53
	Schools with computers (%)	*Schools without computers (%)*	*Schools with computers (%)*	*Schools without computers (%)*
2016	18.54	81.46	46.69	50.31
2017	24.5	75.5	51.8	48.2
2018	52.99	47.01	71.68	28.32

Table 6. *Proportion of Teachers with at Least A Minimum Organized Teacher Training*

Level	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Pre-primary	32.7	39.9	50.5	52.9	58.5
Primary	89.2	93.9	97.2	97.4	97.1
Secondary	74.2	76.1	80.1	83.7	85.5

on massive educational reforms, which were grounded in the principle of 'Education for all'. The government-built schools in marginalized rural areas and disadvantaged urban centers, which were traditionally inhabited by blacks (Kanyongo, 2005).[18] Local communities were mobilized to provide resources (i.e., labor and other necessary resources) to enhance the success of making accessibility to education a reality.

The education system consists of primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Primary education consists of seven years of schooling with the curriculum focused on four subjects (i.e., English, Mathematics, Science, Ndebele/Shona, General paper). Students are tested in their 7th year in the objects mentioned above before they progress to secondary school. Secondary education consists of six years with four years of ordinary level and two years of advanced level. The ordinary level curriculum is focused on core subjects (i.e., Mathematics, English, Science, Shona or Ndebele, Geography, and History). Progression to advanced level is based on the students' performance on ordinary level exams. Students who choose not to proceed to advanced level after ordinary level may choose to attend teacher's training college, technical college, agricultural college, polytechnic, and nursing training college. Students who progress to advanced level major in a minimum of three subjects. The three subjects the students focus on usually determine the degree plan they will do in university.

Tertiary education in Zimbabwe covers all post-secondary education institutions (i.e., university, teacher training programs etc.). The model for enrolling secondary school graduates into university is based on the points systems, meaning students must attain a certain number of points at advanced-level in order to be admitted into a program of their choice in university. It is important to note that some students enrolling into college end up settling for courses that are not their first choice because of the restrictive enrollment method.

Although Zimbabwe has made significant progress in ensuring education for all, it is important to note that the education system is still biased against girls. This contradicts the aims of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989, and also against a backdrop of calls from other right based agencies to ensure equal educational access for girls. According to the UNCRC, children should be protected, and their rights should be met. As previously discussed, in Zimbabwe girls are unlikely to have the same educational opportunities compared to boys. This gap might stem from a cultural system that again, works at the disadvantage of girls.

Research has shown that on average, girls devote less time to their studies compared to boys since they participate in more household chores compared to boys (Dzimiri et al., 2017[9]; Gordon, 1998[12]).

6.1 Rights-Based Education Framework

Rights based programming (RBP) is a conceptual framework for program planning centered on promotion of human rights in all aspects of development. It seeks to address inequalities, injustices, and all forms of oppression in all development programming efforts (UNICEF, 2007).[30] A human rights-centered approach to development therefore seeks to ensure that all global citizens achieve their desired development in the full realization of their rights (i.e., political, economic, social, and universal rights). In education, RBP entails the realization of one's educational goals whilst attaining all other freedoms enshrined in the UN human rights codes. Education has been recognized as a basic human right in several human rights treaties like Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Global Citizenship Commission, 2016)[11] and UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; UNICEF, 2007).[30] Realization of this right is guided by the principles of free, compulsory, and universal primary education, available and accessible secondary and tertiary education, professional training opportunities, equal and quality education through minimum standards, quality teaching and access to facilitative resources, and freedom of choice (UNESCO, 2020).[33] However, the basic, fundamental right to primary and secondary education is still far from being achieved in some countries. According to UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS: UNESCO, 2015),[28] around 258 million children and youth were out of school globally as of 2018. Sub Saharan Africa represents the largest proportion of the data across all domains of primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary enrollments.

The Dakar Framework for Action adopted at the World Education Forum reaffirmed a global vision for Education for All (UN 2000),[37] emphasizing the crucial role of rights-based programming in all education programs as the single most important factor in ensuring that all nations achieve their national goals on educating their citizens. Since then, several rights-based programming frameworks have since been developed. Fundamentally, all rights-based approaches should have in common, key principles on human rights, which include (a) universality and inalienability, (b) indivisibility, (c) interdependence and interrelatedness, (d) equality and non-discrimination, (e) participation and inclusion, and (f) empowerment. In this paper, the proposed RBA addresses four fundamental aspects: (a) availability, (b) accessibility, (c) acceptability,

and (d) adaptability.

6.2 Availability and Accessibility

The first key objective of a rights-based education program requires availability and accessibility of free and compulsory primary education. Availability entails the obligation to ensure free and compulsory education for all children, whereas accessibility entails the elimination of all forms of discrimination or barriers to access, and prioritization of vulnerable and marginalized children (Tomasevski, 2004).[27] The UN CRC asserts education as a basic human right, and further emphasizes the government's obligation to ensure that every citizen attains at least the basic education free of charge, and all potential barriers to access to be removed. Although several countries in Africa have made efforts to increase education availability, access continues to lag behind particularly for historically marginalized or disadvantaged children (Wodon & Alasuutari 2018).[39] As shown on the SDG progress description in the section above, many girls and children with disabilities have limited access to education compared to any other group of students. The most common barrier is lack of financial resources to pay tuition. Achieving universal primary education requires full government subsidization of primary education. In Zimbabwe, this has not been the case. Primary education is currently not free, and as a result many students do not go to school. In rural areas, families that are financially constrained usually make a choice for who can attend school between girls and boys. In most cases, families chose to send boys to school, and girls are often given in to arranged marriages at very young ages (Dzimiri et al., 2017).[9]

There seems to be a misplacement of priorities by the government given disproportionate budget allocations to industries that the incumbent government deems crucial to its needs. Unfortunately, education is not treated as a top priority sector, and as a result has perennially been underfunded. Underfunding the education sector usually results in a plethora of problems like teachers' industrial actions, teachers' migration to other countries in search of better working conditions, and the poor infrastructure particularly in remote schools. To fill this gap, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Zimbabwe have opened channels for donations into education, particularly targeting schools in remote areas that are most in need. However, their contributions fall far short of what is needed to close the gap. The government has been making promises for free primary education for over two decades, but until now, this has not come to fruition.

In order to address education availability challenges in Zimbabwe, government should consider expanding investment into education infrastructure, professional development, and teacher remuneration to prevent losing talented educators. Building more schools in remote areas will not only increase education availability in these areas; it can also facilitate economic growth through employment creation in the various sectors involved in the construction. According to recent statistics by Building Schools for Africa organization (2022), the average cost of constructing a single elementary school consisting of 3 fully equipped classrooms in Zimbabwe is around $30,000. Considering how low this cost is relative to annual government revenue, a mass investment of $100 million can result in massive construction of schools around the country, particularly in areas most in need, and potentially a ripple effect in related industries involved in the construction. Revising working conditions for teachers is vital to prevent teacher turnover and brain drain. Not only would this entail increasing teacher salaries; it can also include increasing professional development facilities and programs for educators. Numerous studies have documented a gap in teacher professional development in Zimbabwe, particularly in areas of special and inclusive education (Chitiyo et al., 2017).[7] Addressing these limitations can help address education availability to vulnerable populations like girls and children with disabilities.

Access is not merely limited to the ability to get to schools; instead, it entails removing any form of barriers, either physical or institutional, that hinder learning. Examples of these include long prohibitive distances to school, unavailability of transport, absence of assistive resources or technologies, or laws and practices that limit students' ability to learn. As indicated in the statistics presented above, enrollment rates in rural schools are significantly lower than in urban schools in Zimbabwe. This is partly a result of several factors like long distances to schools, financial challenges, poverty or hunger, and shortage of learning materials in rural schools. In some remote areas, students have to walk long distances to get to school such that by the time they get there, they are physically and mentally exhausted and are therefore unable to learn effectively. Girls are particularly disadvantaged. Walking longer distances and attending to household chores at the same time can be tiring. Rural girls often spend more time attending to manual household tasks that include laundry, cleaning, and cooking. In addition, rural girls walk long distances to fetch firewood and water. By the time they have to go to school, they are physically and mentally exhausted, thereby impeding their ability to learn.

Government and societal pressure groups can advocate for girls' rights to education and educate communities about gender equality, gender roles, and the importance of

investing into girl child education (May, 2004).[21] The traditional cultural notion about gender roles has in the past caused severe oppression (e.g., gender-based violence) and alienation of women from important decision-making authority (Gordon, 1998).[12] A whole change in culture and perception in this regard can help address education and economic inequalities against women. Humanitarian organizations concerned with women's affairs like Musasa Project have been very vocal in advocacy efforts, calling for women's protections against gender-based violence and alienation from economic activity and decision-making authority. Through the ministry of women's affairs, government can also create programs that are particularly aimed at enhancing education attainment and success among girls.

The government should outlaw institutionalized denial of access to education. These include charging high tuition for elementary and secondary schools, turning back students because they do not have uniforms or other required equipment, or turning back students because they arrive late to school. In order to ensure that girls have access to their desired programs of study at tertiary level, government can also consider scrapping or adjusting the point-based system to access tertiary education.

6.3 Acceptable Education

The second dimension, acceptability, entails provision of quality and relevant education. This includes several other dimensions like availability of well-trained teachers and learning resources, a broad, relevant, and inclusive curriculum covering essential and relevant skills, a child-friendly, safe, and healthy environment (UNICEF, 2007).[30] Teacher training is key in ensuring that teachers are equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to facilitate learning. More importantly, teachers teaching students with special needs require specialized training in the unique need areas. In Zimbabwe, most teachers receive general education training but end up teaching students with special needs. Research has shown that most teachers feel under-trained or under-equipped to deal with special needs education (Chitiyo et al., 2017).[7] Expanding teacher training in this area can ensure that teachers are well-equipped to address the educational needs of students with disabilities. Teacher training institutions may need to create specialized degrees in Special Needs Education.

Quality education also requires a highly motivated workforce. During the past two decades, teachers in Zimbabwe have numerously engaged in industrial actions or migrated to other countries due to poor working conditions including low salaries and lack of teaching resources. Again, rural schools are usually most affected

by the losing talented educators. The first necessary step for government, therefore, is to create conducive working conditions for teachers. These include providing quality training and continuous professional development, sustainable remuneration, and quality teaching resources. Zimbabwe government needs to revise budget allocations to the education sector to ensure that teachers are well paid, and schools equipped with necessary learning resources. When teachers are well trained and paid, they are likely to be more motivated to offer their best services.

An education curriculum outlines the academic or behavioral knowledge skills that an education program seeks to address. Curricula can include both theory and practical skills that learners are intended to learn. For a long time now, the Zimbabwe education curricula have been based more on theory than practical knowledge skills. Furthermore, pedagogical methods used in schools are based more on drill instruction, which is aimed at memorization of taught concepts rather than practical skills infusion. This presents a problem when students are faced with situations that require creative and critical problem solving. Currently, Zimbabwe has one of the highest literacy rates in southern eastern Africa, and yet the highest rates of unemployment as well. If learners are educated with practical and entrepreneurial skills, they can create employment opportunities and don't have to depend on job seeking. Education curriculums should address a broad range of skills including cognitive, academic, social, and technical skills that prepare students to face and make good decisions when faced with real life situations or challenges.

A curriculum that is human rights oriented also promotes development of children's personalities, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. Drill based curriculum methods typically used in Zimbabwean schools are more focused on theoretical knowledge, and therefore do not promote development of students' attributes in the previously mentioned capacities. As a result, most students graduating with high scores fail to demonstrate those skills when faced with real life situations. Furthermore, a human rights-based curriculum promotes respect for children, their parents', and others' cultural identity, languages, and values. Traditionally, parents have been excluded from curriculum development processes denoting educational goals for children, yet sometimes parents know their children's educational traits or aspirations better. Including parents in these processes facilitates the identification of all potentially helpful attributes that are more apparent at home compared to school.

Finally, in Zimbabwe, most students are ignorant about the constitution and processes of law creation. The constitution has never been part of an education curriculum,

yet it forms the most fundamental tool for human rights within a nation. An ignorance about the law and constitution results in a civic society that is easily gullible or weak to advocate for its rights. In most rural areas, where literacy rates are lower compared to urban centers, citizens are easily misinformed about political interests, and can be tricked into vote buying, exchanging their votes for grocery items. Women are most vulnerable to this form of abuse since they typically are responsible for fending for the family. Introducing the constitution into the curriculum can help create citizens that are more informed and wiser enough to protect their rights.

7. Conclusion

The intersectionality of poverty and education is paramount in understanding ways to end poverty and increase economic growth. Economic inequalities between women and men can perpetuate poverty. Economic development efforts that marginalize vulnerable or minoritized groups like women, children and individuals with disabilities can only exacerbate poverty and inequalities. Including these groups into development programming efforts can help to end poverty. Improving education access, attainment, and equality among vulnerable groups can help to end poverty as it results to increased access to employment opportunities, a more responsible citizens, and prevention of abuse of power and authority. The human rights-based framework for education programming presented in this paper can help address inequalities in education since it is centered on ensuring citizens' realization of their rights. A rights-based education programming policy specifies all important aspects of human rights centered education, which include availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. In order to increase impact, implementation of this approach requires the active participation of all stakeholders to education, including government, schools, private and public sector businesses, parents and guardians, with each stakeholder making sure they fulfill their specified obligations. Furthermore, the program requires continuous monitoring and evaluation, making timely amendments where deviations occur. The UNESCO provides several resources for guiding implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of a rights-based education program.

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