

## **The impacts of urban housing infrastructural use-change on Children's Rights: A case of Children growing up in Sidojiwe Hostels, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Numerous reports of challenges being by children living within the squalid conditions of the Sidojiwe hostels have been submitted to various child protection organisations and responsible duty bearers yet no effective and conclusive solutions have been implemented towards resolving their plight. Due to several resounding socio-economic and political challenges faced by the government (resulting in the closure of industry and contributing to residents being exposed to pervasive poverty), the hostels have unfortunately been converted from being bachelor to becoming family housing. Overcrowding and hostel vandalism have been noted as the major causes of violation of the children's right to life, survival and development. Some children have assumed income-earning responsibilities and roles to provide for their families. The study sought to assess the challenges being faced by children in accessing their right to an adequate standard of living within the Sidojiwe hostels, how urban housing use-change at Sidojiwe hostel has impacted on the children's right to life, survival and development and how the reported child labour cases within the community have contributed to the violation of children's rights. The living conditions in the hostels have negative consequences on the wellbeing of children and this reflects the precise definition of an inadequate standard of living. The study highlighted the impact of housing challenges on child development and to what extent these challenges have impacted on the achievement of the Sustainable Developmental Goals. The overall conclusion is that the quality of housing a child is subjected to have undeniable impacts on the child's development and its inadequacy plays an extreme role in the violation of their fundamental entitlements.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2006) estimates that, more than 600 million urban residents in the South live in health-threatening environments, on dangerous land sites, in overcrowded, precarious housing and in neighbourhoods that lack basic amenities and services. These living conditions have particularly far-reaching consequences for children and adolescents as they are more vulnerable than adults to a range of environmental concerns and hazards. Children and adolescents are more likely to be affected in ways that have long-term repercussions (Bartlett, 1999). Hardships endured by children in poor communities are often concealed and thus perpetuated (The State of the World's Children, 2012).

Inadequate or adequate housing can impact a child's well-being negatively or positively and may play a major role in either the violation or the protection of children's rights. This study examines the effects of urban infrastructural housing use-change on children's rights, particularly focusing on children growing up within Bulawayo's Sidojiwe hostels in Zimbabwe. The effects of urban housing use-change may be negative or positive, but this research will pay attention to the overwhelmingly negative effects and how they present a danger to Children's Rights and violates their wellbeing. Auret (1995) outlines the socioeconomic effects of inadequate housing as including low quality of life and break-up of family units because overcrowding and poor conditions affect family cohesion. These effects have a direct impact on the wellbeing of children and may undermine the child's ability to access protection from relevant duty bearers.

The concerns of Child protection continue to be a priority globally and the Zimbabwean government has made efforts towards the promotion and protection of children's rights through policy frameworks and engagement of relevant stakeholders concerned with child wellbeing. Children need protection and safeguarding for many reasons. They may need protection from the effects of violence, poverty, exclusion and discrimination (Defence for Children International, 2011).

## **1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

According to Bulawayo Municipality's Department of Housing (1997), Sidojiwe Hostels were built in the 1960s for single male workers in the industrial area of Bulawayo. Bachelor hostels for workers including Burombo, Sidojiwe, and Vundu were constructed in a conveniently close distance, a few kilometres away, from the Industrial areas and the Central Business District to locate cheap labour close to where it was needed. Companies such as the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ) also housed its employees in these hostels. The Sidojiwe Hostels were historically designed to temporarily accommodate only 82 people but by 2018 the hotels served as accommodation for over 500 people, mainly living as extended families.

Hundreds of Zimbabwean families displaced by the government's resettlement programme, Operation Murambatsvina/ HlalaniKuhle (Drive out Filth) in 2005 are still awaiting alternative accommodation. They were told at the time to return to their rural villages, but many, including the descendants of immigrants, had nowhere to go and were forced into government-sanctioned resettlement camps on the outskirts of urban centres with no source of employment and still languish there (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2008).

The concern for the well-being and status of children stretches back to The Declaration of the Rights of Children in 1924. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child was the first effort to address the rights of the child on an international level. The Declaration posits that; 'mankind owes to the child the best it has to give (League of Nations Official Journal, 1924). Cohen (1993), further explains that, The Declaration of Geneva was drafted by Save the Children Fund, an organisation established by EglantyneJebb. The document was submitted to the League of Nations and was adopted by the League of Nations in November 1924. This then saw in articles 25 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) children's rights also being acknowledged and defined. It proclaims a catalogue of human rights that apply to all human beings and therefore implicitly to children. It reiterates the rights of children to special care and assistance as was previously canvassed in the 1924 Declaration on the Right of the Child (UDHR, 1948). This was then followed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. The CRC was adopted by the UN General Assembly, to protect the civil-political rights and economic social and cultural rights of all children (Cohen, 1993). According to Martenson (1991), the CRC is unique because it protects the broadest scope of fundamental human rights ever brought together within one treaty - economic, social, cultural, civil and political. The UNCRC (2009) advances that, the Committee wished to encourage recognition that young children are holders of all rights enshrined in the Convention and that early childhood is a critical period for the realization of these rights.

### **1.2.1 THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD.**

**Article 6 (Child's right to life, survival and development):** Children have the right to life. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop in a health promoting environment. State parties are urged to take all possible measures to improve prenatal care for mothers and babies, reduce infant and child mortality, and create conditions that promote the well-being of all children during this critical phase of their lives. Malnutrition and preventable diseases continue to be major obstacles to realizing rights in early childhood. Ensuring survival and physical health are priorities, but state parties are reminded that Article 6 encompasses all aspects of development and that a child's health and psychosocial well-being are in many respects interdependent. Both may be put at risk by adverse living conditions, neglect, insensitive or abusive treatment and restricted opportunities for realizing human potential. Children growing up in especially difficult circumstances require particular attention. The Committee reminds State parties (and others concerned) that the right to survival and development can only be implemented holistically, through the enforcement of all the other provisions of the Convention, including rights to health, adequate nutrition, social security, and adequate standard of living, a healthy and safe environment, education and play (arts. 24, 27, 28, 29 and 31), as well as through respect for the responsibilities of parents and the provision of assistance and quality services (arts. 5 and 18). From an early age, children should themselves be included in activities promoting good nutrition and a healthy and disease-preventing lifestyles.

**Article 27 (Child's right to an adequate standard of living):** State Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development. State Parties, following national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly concerning nutrition, clothing and housing.

**Article 32 (Child labour):** The government should protect children from work that is dangerous or might harm their health or their education. While the Convention protects children from harmful and exploitative work, there is nothing in it that prohibits parents from expecting their children to help out at home in ways that are safe and appropriate to their age. If children help out in a family farm or business, the tasks they do should be safe and suited to their level of development and comply with national labour laws. Children's work should not jeopardize any of their other rights, including the right to education, or the right to relaxation and play.

It becomes ideal to state that the participatory nature during the drafting of the convention has been criticised for the limited involvement of African states as it resulted in pivotal cultural norms and practices being ignored. This prompted the drafting of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in 1979 by leaders of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Ekundayo (2015) argues that, one of the reasons for having an Africa Children's Charter was the feeling that Africa had been underrepresented during the drafting process of the CRC (only Algeria, Morocco, Senegal and Egypt participated meaningfully in the drafting process). A second reason was the thinking that Africa needed to have a charter for children which reflected the specifics of the African context. Despite the mentioned shortcomings of the UNCRC, its credibility remains unquestionable considering the importance and relevance of its four fundamental principles that should not be compromised under whatever circumstance which are: the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, right to life, survival and development and the need to hear the views of the child (Ankut, 2007).

### **1.2.2 THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF CHILDREN.**

The importance of Child Protection has also been paramount to the development of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) agreed upon by the African Member States of the African Union. The ACRWC (1990) observes, with concern that the situation of most African children, remains critical due to the unique factors of their socio-economic, cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances, natural disasters, armed conflicts, exploitation and hunger, and on account of the child's physical and mental immaturity, children need special safeguards and care. Through this, it therefore echoes the same sentiments represented by the UNCRC on the need to protect and promote the rights and wellbeing of the child. Murray (2004) notes that a committee was constituted to draft a version that was Africa-compliant on issues of children, apartheid; living conditions; Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the unequal treatment of the girl child; lack of participation of children in the communities; refugee children; duties and responsibilities of the child; children of imprisoned mothers, adoption and fostering by relatives; discrimination and the definition of the child.

Comparisons of both the CRC and the ACRWC have proven that the two instruments enforce the same principles of non-discrimination, best interests of the child, children's participation and the survival and development of the child.

**Article 5 (Survival and Development):** 1. Every child has an inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law.

2. State Parties to the present Charter shall ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the survival, protection and development of the child.

**Article 15 (Child Labour):** 1. Every child shall be protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or interfere with the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.

2. State Parties to the present Charter take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure the full implementation of this Article which covers both the formal and informal sectors of employment and having regard to the relevant provisions of the International Labour Organization's instruments relating to children.

**Article 16 (Protection against Child abuse and Torture):** 1. State Parties to the present Charter shall take specific legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse, while in the care of the child.

Conclusively, both the CRC and the ACRWC have had remarkable impacts on the lives of children worldwide, they both recognise children as rights-holders with a voice and a contribution to make to the wider community. Both aim to realise the children's survival, development, protection and participation rights. Since the ratification of both treaties, it is evident that African states have become increasingly child-friendly (Ekundayo, 2015). For the study, the rights that will be highlighted are those influenced by issues surrounding the impacts of urban housing use change on children..

### **1.2.3 Children's Rights Programming**

Approaches to developmental work have changed considerably over the past decades, as well as differing in emphasis depending on dominating political ideologies. Early international development initiatives were often based on the assumption that improving economies and personal wealth alone would improve the lives of individuals. More recently a trend to more "people-centered", empowering, and participatory approaches have emerged (Save the Children Alliance, 2005). Child Rights Programming (CRP) is a child-focused version of a much broader range of approaches to doing relief and development work that are rights-based (Rozga, 2001).

CRP applies rights-based approaches specifically to work in order to realize the rights of boys and girls under the age of 18. The reason for having a specific approach like this is that children have their own special

needs and vulnerabilities (Save the Children Alliance, 2005). UNICEF (2014) suggests that, investing in children is both an obligation and an opportunity. It is an obligation because poverty, malnutrition, poor health and other deprivations undermine children's abilities to develop to their full potential. It is an opportunity because the gains achieved (through better nutrition, primary health care, education and protection for children) are likely to be far greater and longer-lasting than those in almost any other area of development.

Elements such as child participation have proven to be essential in child-focused developmental initiatives. Creating an environment in which child participation is effectively realized has been challenging for all governments. Most societies throughout the world have viewed children as the property of their parents or as subject to the authority of elders within their community, with scant recognition of any entitlement to their emerging autonomy (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). Participation promotes civic engagement and active citizenship. Through the experience of direct participation in matters of concern to them, children acquire the capacity to contribute to the creation of peaceful and democratic societies that are respectful of human rights (Hart et.al, 2004). Thus active participation by children in programmes aimed towards improving the community's standards of living has lasting and sustainable results.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2008) narrates that, from afar, Sidojiwe Flats appear habitable, with tiny kitchen gardens spread around the main structure. A closer look exposes the crumbling facilities of a dilapidated building. Most of the windows have been covered with cardboard and plastic sheets to give some protection from the weather to the more than 150 families crammed two to a room in the three-story block. Barefoot children chase each other along the grimy, narrow corridors past the doorless communal bathrooms, where there is no running water or electricity. Residents have to fetch water from a neighbouring apartment block, in most instances, children are tasked with this responsibility and this increases their state of vulnerability. The utilisation of CRP mechanisms towards addressing inadequate living standards within communities is highly recommended to ensure a holistic form of development, particularly for the Sidojiwe community.

## **1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study assumed a qualitative approach and through this, the research took the view that it is difficult for researchers to stand back and be objective since they are part of the research process. Saunders et al (2012) contend that one may argue that the world of business is too complex to lend itself to theorizing by definite laws in the same way as physical sciences.

The study deliberately targeted the children residing within the Sidojiwe Hostels community as numerous reports indicate the absence of child protection systems and inadequate housing standards have exposed children to deplorable and less than average standards of living in Sidojiwe. The research assumed a post positivist or interpretive paradigm that assisted in discovering the underlying meanings of events and activities that affect the children. As the research was mostly qualitative, it employed semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observation and content analysis as data gathering tools. This study employed key informant interviews to collect vital information about housing constraints and the wellbeing of children subjected to the conditions affecting the Sidojiwe community.

Key informants included a Bulawayo City Council (BCC)Mzilikazi Housing Officer, aMzilikazi Social Worker, the Councillor of Ward 6 in the Bulawayo South constituency, a Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) Victim Friendly Unit Donnington Constable, an official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, a representative from a nongovernmental organization operating within Sidojiwe. The scheduled interviews with the key informants were conducted in the language the respondent was most comfortable with, to avoid the distortion of the information, and this was mostly in English, Ndebele and Shona.

Interviews with minors were structured to fit their understanding (Child friendly) and for ethical considerations and protocol, the parents or guardians of the children were notified as to how and when the interviews will be conducted. The interviews were also held in the presence of a parent or guardian due to the sensitivity level of the research objectives and questions. The consultation was done with the guardian emphasised on the need of having the responses of the children being independent and uninfluenced by interests of the parents particularly through cohesion or intimidation of any sort.

The theme guided Focus Group Discussions (FDG's) assisted mostly in producing coherence with the answers derived from the interviews. Information drawn from the FDG's was uncompromised as respondents took time to state their concerns and they managed to correct each other on pertinent issues that were either misunderstood, or omitted by other respondents. A focus group discussion with the parents and guardians of the children was conducted to gather how children have been affected by the conditions within the hostels.

Secondary data was collected to highlight what has already been discovered by other researchers to avoid repetition of findings and already studied problems on inadequate housing and children's rights violation issues within the community. This allowed the researcher to present primary unidentified data that may not have been discovered or minimally documented to increase the validity of the research. The secondary data

composed of journal articles, documents, textbooks, the internet and records concerned with urban housing and children's rights.

Through observation, the researchers assessed and evaluated the lifestyles of children being raised within the community. The researchers' first-hand visualization of the living conditions of the Sidojiwe community was also a testimony of the unsuitable living conditions that expose children to rights violations.

Concerning the qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 96 residents of the Sidojiwe Hostel (84 children and 12 adults). A Stratified Random sampling system determined the interviews basing on each floor of the three-story hostel as a subpopulation or strata. Simple random selection was employed to reduce bias and increase precision without increasing cost, but also hoping to consider views from child headed households, Orphans and Vulnerable Children, single parents and the elderly. Data gathered was thematically analyzed in such a way that the contextual character remained undistorted.

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

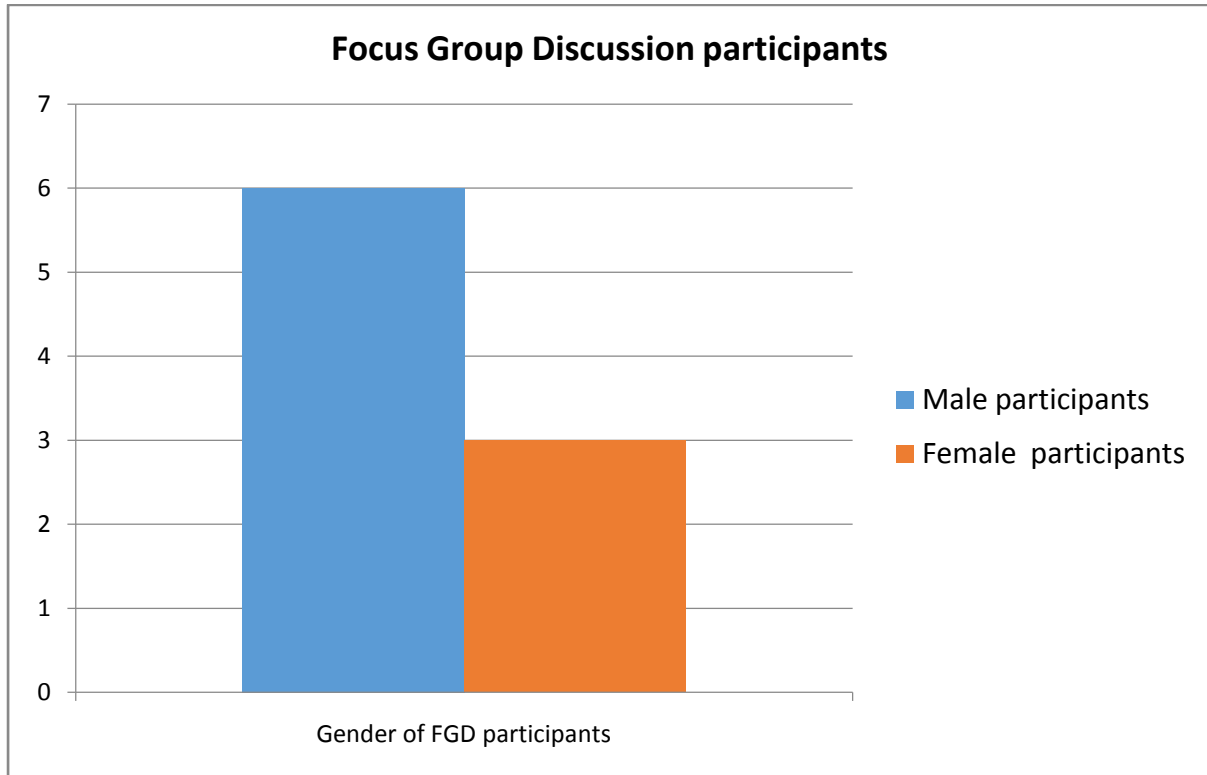
The data was collected from 84 children through interviews, a focus group discussion with 12 parents, participant observation and a review of secondary data. The key informants included the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare officials in Bulawayo, ZRP Donnington Victim Friendly Unit, Mzilikazi Housing officer and Social Welfare Officer, the Ward 6 councilor and the Sidojiwe residents organizing secretary.

**Table 2.1: Age group, gender and number of respondents. (Source – Field Study, 2018)**

Respondents age group	Males	Females	Number of Respondents
2-5 years	8	12	20
6-12 years	12	19	31
13-18 years	12	21	33
Total	32	52	84

The age of child respondents ranged from 2-18 years and these were all inhabitants of the three flats identified as Sidojiwe and ranged in age from 4-18. It was mandatory to have clearance from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and consent from the parents to conduct interviews with children. In some instances, some interviews with children were conducted in the presence of a parent or guardian. The need to establish the welfare and experiences of the children within the community was crucial thus interviewing them was pivotal for the credibility of the research. All the respondents were aged between 4 and 5 years of age and they partly managed to respond to questions, but their contributions were essential in the shaping of the study.

With the assistance of the Sidojiwe residents organising secretary, the researchers managed to conduct a 15-minute focus group discussion with parents and guardians. The discussion consisted of 3 female and 6 male respondents (Figure 2.1).



**Figure 2.1 Focus Group Discussion Participants.**

The dominance of the number of male over that of female participants has an impact on children's welfare as mothers are more inclined to be the more direct caregivers for children as compared to fathers. The low attendance of the mothers could be attributed to either disinterest, domination by fathers on who should attend the discussion, domestic roles and responsibilities, occupation, or church attendance as it was conducted on a Saturday. If this is the turn out to all forums concerning child protection, the challenges faced by the girl child may be side-lined and not given much attention as their problems can mostly be understood and explained by mothers.

Table 2.2 summarizes the responses to how many children were in the respondent's family.

**Table 2.2 Number of Children in Respondents family**

Number of Children in a family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	N/A
Number of Respondents	3	11	5	11	10	9	5	8	1	1	20

A total number of 64 children responded to how many children were in their family. It was critical to establish family sizes of the respondents, particularly the number of children. This was to get a picture of the adequacy of space for children. Most of the children below the age of 4 were not capable of answering thus their responses were not applicable (N/A). With the majority of respondents indicated that there were at least 5 to 8 children in their family, it showed that the huge family size overwhelmed the available space. Lack of privacy exposed the children to adult sexual acts. The huge size of families could be attributed to the lack of knowledge or interest in family planning methods resulting in a shortage of basics, hence increasing poverty levels that also heightened the vulnerabilities of children. Overcrowding also increased the rate by which diseases spread within the family and the community as a whole. Observed was that, confined setting of the living arrangements affected the sleeping dynamics of children. All children indicated that they sleep on the floor, under tables and the beds. It was evident from the results that children do not sleep comfortably and this had serious health implications for their cognitive and social development.

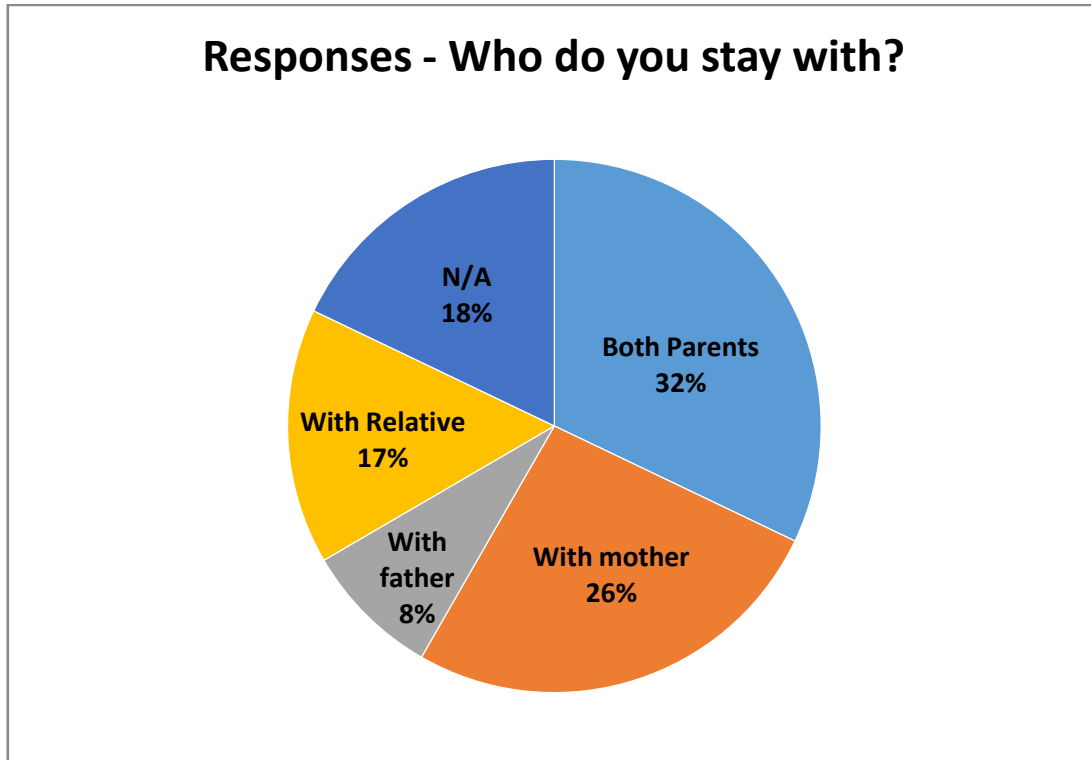


Figure 4.2 Household caregivers.

Some children stayed with and both parents, with mother only, with father only or with a relative, 18 % were the 0-5 age range and did not participate hence they are identified as not applicable (N/A) (Figure 4.2). Children living with both parents were likely to be less exposed to abuses compared to those living with either a single parents or relatives. There were no Child headed households within the community. When children live with a single parent, they are likely to be exposed to abuses in the absence of their caregiver or may be manipulated by the caregiver to assume responsibilities that infringe their rights. The key informants indicated that most children were involved in car wash activities, selling eggs in town and were associated with robberies. Most of these were from families with either single parents or living with relatives.

### 2.1 Children's rights to an adequate standard of living within the Sidojiwe hostels

The UNCRC Article 27 reiterates the importance of the children's right to an adequate standard of living. Children have the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental development. Naturally, the main caregivers for children are the parents or guardians and they are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that the children live under decent and commendable conditions. In the case of Sidojiwe, parents and guardians faced challenges as a result that included economic meltdown that has not only impacted negatively on them but have left them extremely vulnerable and poor. Most residents in the hostels were mainly there due to the consequences of Operation Murambatsvina/Hlalanikhuhle, Rural-Urban migration and poverty, thus they had ultimately been subjected to the deplorable living conditions. Children find themselves in deplorable conditions because of the hardships their parents and guardians are facing. The Councillor argued that... *"it is not by choice that these families are living under these conditions, but it is mostly political and a result of maladministration on the part of the government"*.

The challenge of an inadequate standard of living has often resulted in conflicts between the residents and housing authorities (Bulawayo City Council). A major contestation is an issue of residents of Sidojiwe accusing the city council of allegedly charging them exorbitant rates and refusing to give them title deeds to houses that were built for them by an Australian donor agency. Such issues have repeatedly been reported in the press as having worsened the plight of children who are now viewed as victims of political maladministration.

Children have the right to be protected from discrimination of all forms. In the hostels, the majority of children acknowledged being discriminated against at school because of where they stay and the quality of their housing. By being labelled at school as "those that were picked up", their self-esteem has lowered, resulted in low performance at school and some have dropped out of school as a result. This negatively affects their prospects of breaking the vicious circle of poverty in which they are trapped. The children are confined to limited opportunities in life because of their situation when compared to their privileged peers, thus this has the potential of isolating them and increasing their socio-economic challenges.

Most child respondents had this to say "...we accept where we stay". Further probing revealed that, given the opportunity, they would like to leave the hostels and stay in rural areas because they have once lived there and they prefer the rural conditions compared to those in the hostels. Some preferred to live in the Western townships like Cowdray Park and Emganwini because they heard some families were relocated and benefited from housing programmes in these areas. Some friends at school always tell them of how comfortable and better it is living in suburbs like Barham Green, Ilanda and South World. Some identified a Children's home as better than where they currently reside.

The inadequacy of a good standard of living is also worsened by individual causalities as revealed by the focus group discussion. Some individuals benefited from the housing scheme programmes who are still residents within the hostels. They reported that there are families who have opted to rent out the houses built for them by a collaborative initiative by NGO's and council and still live within the hostels to make an income. This has violated the children's right to an adequate standard of living as they continue to be exposed to the effects of inadequate housing. Some residents were said to have their own homes but still preferred to benefit from rentals being paid by their tenants while living for free in the hostels.



**Figure 4.3 Deplorable state of Block 1 -Sidojiwe hostel.**

Source - Field Study, 2018.

The challenges faced by children, due to the effects of inadequate housing, is a factor of both council inefficiencies and residents' themselves. Some residents have decided to move into the hostels perfectly knowing the conditions they would expose their children to. The residents have also played a role in the destruction of what is left of the buildings thus creating more threats to children's lives.

## **2.2 Inadequate housing and how it has affected Children's Right to Life, Survival and Development.**

The major tenants of adequate housing consider the availability of dependable delivery of services, habitability of the shelter and location of the accommodation. As the second objective of the study, these principles are pivotal towards determining the adequacy of housing at the Sidojiwe hostels and how they impact child wellbeing and rights.

Adequate housing must provide more than four walls, a roof and a decent floor yet those at Sidojiwe hostels have fallen victim to excessive vandalism. The Mzilikazi Housing Officer reacted thus: "*The hostels are dilapidated mainly due to the lack of ownership of each unit and also due to the fact the residents are unable to pay a \$12 rental fee to BCC thus council is unable to maintain and renovate the hostels that have been exposed to vandalism*". He went on to add that the main cause of the inadequacy of housing is mainly due to the residents themselves who overcrowd their places of residence. He argued that "*...the failure of the residents to adopt family planning methods increases children's vulnerability rights violations*".

Through observation and according to key informants, each unit has one room and most housing units accommodate two families that divide the room with a curtain. A resident explained, "*Each unit can be home to a maximum of 20 people with as much as 14 of them being minors resulting in children being familiar with the parent's sexual activities*". Early sexual exposure and potential exploitation have severe and long term effects



on all aspects of a child's development. In particular, children subjected to such abuses are susceptible to experiencing depression, low self-esteem, loss of trust, anger, poor social skills, substance abuse and various forms of physical harm. This robs children of their right to development to full potential and resultant negative implications for a society's development (Delaney, 2005). A social worker from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare narrated a case that took place in June 2017, of a minor who was raped by the father of the other family behind the curtain. The child got pregnant. The culprit remains at large as he escaped to South Africa and police efforts to locate him were further made difficult as the man did not have any form of national identification. The Councillor for ward 6 strongly emphasised that the hostels are not a suitable place for children and the government should make efforts to improve the housing conditions at the hostels.

### **2.2.1 Delivery of Social Services**

BCC has managed to ensure that the residents of Sidojiwe have access to safe and clean potable water just like every other resident in Bulawayo. The housing officer noted that the Sidojiwe community has become their social responsibility and therefore, they are not expected to pay rates or bills to access water. Unfortunately due to vandalism and theft, taps and pipes have been compromised and in most cases have been stolen by residents to resell. It is only in June 2018 that the residents benefited from a generous donation from ZANU-PF Bulawayo South constituency aspiring candidate that was directed towards the refurbishment and installation of new flush toilets, showers, renovation of laundry rooms, and replacement of broken window panels and repairing of the lighting system at the three blocks. This will hopefully see the living standards of children residing within the hostels improve and reduce their exposure to water and sanitation challenges that result in health epidemics. The Sidojiwe residents organising secretary expressed gratitude for the kind gesture by the aspiring candidate and went on to lament on how for a long time the community had been neglected and socially excluded. Although the donation may have assisted the community, there are still many water and sanitation challenges to be addressed such as broken pipes and blocked drainage systems.

The community has also had challenges in accessing electricity particularly in Blocks 1 and 2. These blocks hardly have electricity and this has resulted in residents using firewood in the hostel's common kitchens subjecting the children to extreme emissions exposing them to diseases such as flu and tuberculosis. From the 84 children interviewed, 63 have been taken to a clinic or hospital after being affected by smoke inhalation related infections. The case is different though for residents of block 3 that have benefited from a more constant supply of electricity. An interview with one of the residents from block 2 revealed the availability of electricity in block 3 could be because the block mainly houses War Veterans who are ZANU – PF affiliated and thus they seem to benefit more from donations more than the other blocks. This could be because, even within the poverty-stricken community, they viewed themselves to be more privileged than those from other blocks. This in a way has the potential of causing conflicts within the community and the children themselves. Discrimination issues were quite evident in the hostels. While focusing on housing adequacy, the issue of food storage and refuse disposal were other variables the study investigated. In most of the units, families store their food in cupboards and other places they deem safe from theft and contamination, but it is the refuse disposal that is mainly of concern for the community. Their plumbing system is damaged beyond repair and may be considered as non-existent. Leakages can be observed from the roofs, windows and the wall of the entire building particularly the kitchens, bathrooms and the laundry rooms on each floor. The disposal points initially designated for refuse collection have not been used in a while as it has been filled with waste that has not been collected in a long time. The residents organising secretary also noted this as a huge concern for the community.

### **2.2.2 Habitability of the Hostels**

Housing is not adequate if it does not ensure physical safety or provide adequate space, as well as protection against the cold, dampness, heat, rain, wind and other threats to health and structural hazards. Overcrowding affects the mental development of a child and it may lead to hostile tendencies. More so, communicable diseases spread faster in overcrowded areas and children are affected most. The Sidojiwe hostels are home to approximately 180- 200 families, and the number of children in each family ranges between 2-10 children. Considering that each unit (one room) houses 2 families, this denotes that one room accommodates between 4- 20 people with a large number being children. The focus group discussion revealed the dissatisfaction the parents and guardians had with the conditions their children were being raised in pointing out that children were exposed to diverse cultures, behaviours, practices and activities that endanger and compromise their social development. This also was supported by the BCC Social Worker who indicated that most children were rude and vulgar and can easily be considered as misfits or unruly elements in society.

Results from the focus group discussion indicated that hostels also fail to cater to physically challenged children. "*AbantwanalabathwalanzimaukhughansalokhuyehlaamaStezi retorted on guardian in IsiNdebele*" (meaning it was difficult for disabled children to move up and down the stairs). Housing is not suitable for the specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups of children.

In 2001, the Bulawayo Council resolved to close down the hostel and transferring the tenants to low-cost "Millennium houses" in Emganwini Township but this was never accomplished as funds for the scheme were exhausted before the completion of the houses. Renovations and repairs to damaged water and sewer pipes were negated. No alternative accommodation was found for hostel residents.

Through a collaborative effort between an NGO called ShelterSol and the BCC Housing Cooperative of Sidojiwe, the residents were afforded loans and have recently started constructing their houses in Cowdray Park, Bulawayo. The construction process is expected to take two months and the beneficiaries are expected to have occupied their houses as soon as they are completed. The members of the cooperative are temporarily staying in Sidojiwe Hostels under the authority of Bulawayo City Council and the majority of them are informally employed. This project has given the members a quick housing solution and they are expected to pay back the loan within five years.

### **2.2.3 Location of the Sidojiwe Hostels**

The location of housing is also crucial in ensuring children's access to childcare, schools, health care and other services. If settlements are far away from schools, or if the transport is either non-existent or too expensive, it is hard for children to get education or health care (UNHABITAT, 2008). The proximity of the hostels to the nearest schools and clinics is beyond three kilometres. The Housing Officer noted that this crisis is not unique to Sidojiwe hostels alone as in other western suburbs children walk long distances to access such services. Housing is not adequate if it is cut off from transport routes, health-care services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities. The hostels located in the industrial area are exposed to pollution from the industries, and according to BCC, the Sidojiwe community is located in a high health risk zone.

#### **2.2.3.1 Right to Education**

Most of the children of school-going age, were all attending school. The majority of the school-going children attend Maphisa primary school in Sizinda, Barham Green primary school in Barham Green, Montrose high school in Morning side, Founders high school and Intutha primary school. Learners at Maphisa School highlighted that it usually takes approximately an hour to get to school and there have been cases of children being robbed along their way to school. The walking distance to Barham Green primary school takes approximately 1 hour 30 minutes and there have been cases of children being hit by cars on their way to school. Intutha primary school is also 1 hour 30 minutes' walk away from the hostels and children explained that the road they use to get there is very dangerous. Schools are available for children that live at Sidojiwe, it is the accessibility that is a challenge as children have a difficult time attending or registering with the schools due to their distance.

#### **2.2.3.2 Right to Health care**

Children have the right to good quality health care (the best health care possible). They are entitled to safe drinking water, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help them stay healthy (UNCRC, 2009). The children from Sidojiwe have been deprived of accessing quality affordable health care as there do not have a clinic or hospital within their proximity. Those who have been sick and taken to a health facility all said they had been taken to Mpilo hospital, while others resorted to unhygienic methods to mitigate their ailments. One respondent replied: "*Mina indlebeyamiyakheyababuhlungu, ubabawangithelaamafuthaendlebeni*" (I had an ear problem and my father simply poured some cooking oil into it). Another said "*ikhandalamijayeleukhubabuhlungukhodwangiyahambangeyehlalaelangeni*" (I usually have headaches or migraines but a just go and sit in the sun for sometime). The most-reported ailments were flu, stomach-related problems, pneumonia, nose bleeding, eye problem, sore/ wounds, headaches and vomiting.

#### **2.2.3.3 Right to social security and protection**

Child protection structures within the Sidojiwe community are extremely limited and close to being non-existent. Many children mainly depend on their parents for protection but in most cases that were reported to the Police Victim Friendly Unit, parents or guardians were found to be perpetrators of children's rights abuses. Article 26 (CRC, 2005) stresses the importance of social security for children. The Article further highlights that children (either through their guardians or directly) have the right to help from the government if they are poor or in need. The Zimbabwe Children's Act (1972) [Chapter 5:06] concurs by emphasising the issue of ill-treatment or neglect of children echoing that, if any parent or guardian of a child assaults, ill-treats, neglects, abandons, or exposes him/ her or allows, causes him/her to be assaulted, ill-treated, neglected, abandoned or exposed in a manner likely to cause him unnecessary suffering or to injure or detrimentally to affect his health or morals or any part or function of his mind or body, he shall be guilty of an offense. Cases of

rape and sexual exploitation come with high sensitivity resulting in these cases being disclosed mostly by the Key Informants. Children could not open-up to them.

It is the government's responsibility to remove children from dwellings such as Sidojiwe that increases their vulnerability. As reiterated under part 14 of Zimbabwe's Children's Act (1972), any police officer, health officer, an education officer or probation officer may remove a child or young person from any place to a place of safety. The Social Worker from the Department of Social Welfare indicated that they have intervention programmes such as the child institutional placement programme that places abused children in homes of safety. He highlighted on a particular child, explaining:

*"takambobvisamwanaaishungurudzwanehamatakamupapekugarapakanaka. Pa 6 monthsmwanauyuangaavekutotaridzakuchinjamafungiro, maitironechimirochakechaicho"* (We once rescued a child from abusive relatives and allocated her a place of safety. Within 6 months the child's mentality, behaviour and physical appearance had improved).

The Social Worker from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare indicated that the government lacks resources thus it is increasingly difficult to support the social welfare department resulting in children from hostels such as the Matapi flats in Harare and those of Sidojiwe, Vundu and Burombo hostels in Bulawayo being subjected to such atrocious conditions. Perhaps besides the food distribution programme, that rarely comes, the government has not done much to assist vulnerable children. The minimal allocation of funds to Child Welfare fund has seen private partners such as NGOs and philanthropists assist the children in the community. Also through individuals initiatives such as the forming of community-based working groups, the children have benefitted from their assistance.

The Officer at the Police Victim Friendly Unit expressed that *"poverty has largely contributed to increased cases of early child marriages as the girl child is either driven by socio-economic challenges into finding someone considered as having a stable source of income to provide for her or forced by her parents or guardians into a forced marriage. This arrangement is recommended by the family as it reduces the size of the family while they benefit from lobola and an extended sphere of dependency"*.

#### **2.2.3.4 Children's right to rest, leisure and recreation**

Children have the right to relax, play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities. Through participant observation, leisure and recreation within the community have also been negatively affected by the inadequacy of space notably by the lack of a safe playing area. Land (2007) suggests that recreation is a part of a child's learning process that helps him or her to grasp key concepts and principles of life and society and thus helps in forming a wholesome and self-reliance.

Most of the children highlighted that during their spare time they usually play soccer and netball at a field close to the hostels designated for them. It is the safety of the playing field that is not commendable. The grounds are in a bushy area and there are broken bottles around the area. Councillor for Ward 6 emphasised that the children do not have the space, freedom and safety within the available recreation space as that available to a child from the eastern suburbs.

#### **2.2.3.5 Children's right from Sexual exploitation and abuse**

The children have been exposed to the sexual activities of adults and this has mainly been facilitated by the overcrowding within the hostels and in some cases has seen them being victims of sexual abuse. The ZRP Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) office also highlighted the fact that the children's right to privacy is extremely violated and has resulted in early childhood pregnancies and a high number of children being HIV positive. The Constable on duty elaborated that sexual violence is rife at the hostel and their office has documented cases but unfortunately not all the sexual exploitation cases get to their office. The Officer had this to say about the issue in the local Shona language: *"Vanavanotivakabatwachibharovanononokakutaura case yachosakanguvayekuvabatsirakubvisanhumbuyachoinengenyapfuurazvichizoitaktivazochengetapamuiripacho. Vamwevanogumisiravakunosvotoranenziradzisidzozvichizovakanganisahutano"*. This meant that when children are raped, they usually report the case when it is too late to get assistance to safely terminate the pregnancy. This results in some of them resorting to unsafe ways of aborting and this compromises their health and wellbeing.

Most cases go unreported as children fear being castigated by their families and community. The high magnitude of sexual exploitation cases within the hostel can also be attributed to the lack of knowledge of children's rights amongst the parents, guardians and children themselves. Mainly, these cases are resolved at a family level to try and maintain relations but this has negative effects physically and psychosocially on the minor and, in the end, the child faces the consequences alone.

### **2.3 Child Labour issues**

Most children spend their time either at school or playing. When they partake in roles and responsibilities that require them to assist the family it is usually minimal labour work such as cleaning in the house, washing clothes, cooking and babysitting. There have been isolated cases of what may be considered as

Child Labour submitted to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the BCC Social Welfare offices where children from Sidojiwe are found in the Bulawayo CBD earning an income through polishing car tyres, selling boiled eggs, begging, selling maputi and some get involved in criminal activities. The ZRP Donnington Victim Friendly Unit Office highlighted that it is worrying that some of these children are in town doing these jobs during school hours.

Article 32 of the CRC (CRC, 2005) informs that, the government should protect children from work that is dangerous or might harm their health or education. While the Convention protects children from harmful and exploitative work, there is nothing in it that prohibits parents from expecting their children to help out at home in ways that are safe and appropriate to their age. If children help out in a family farm or business, the tasks they do are safe and suited to their level of development and comply with national labour laws. Children's work should not jeopardize any of their other rights, including the right to education, or the right to relaxation and play. Every child shall be protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.

### **III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is an urgent need for government and private sector intervention through the strengthening of Public, Private Partnerships by the financing of housing scheme programmes. The welfare of children should not be left for parents and guardians alone, but as highlighted by the UNCRC and the ACRWC, should be a role played by government. The need for the responsible authorities to take up a proactive role in policy formulation and children's rights advocacy and lobbying should be prioritised to improve child protection initiatives. The Zimbabwean government should consider creating a ministry that is dedicated specifically to children's affairs that will only focus on the protection of children's rights specifically. Currently, there is the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare and the Ministry of Labour and Social Services, that played roles of child protection.

The communities living under the same conditions as Sidojiwe need to be educated on children's rights and the importance of the protection of children's wellbeing. Children's rights protection mechanisms and awareness programmes should be implemented to inform the communities on the dangers of abuses. More organisations that are dedicated to child protection should be introduced into these communities and this should be accompanied by government efforts and will power.

A Child Welfare Fund is critical towards addressing issues surrounding child protection. The fund has the potential of improving opportunities and capabilities available to children, thus, creating a highly competent human capital base for the country. Skills training and allocation of resources into children's sports and education is critical in child development and deprivation from such opportunities may create an overwhelming dependency syndrome on social services and become a burden on the fiscus.

There is also a need for further research into the problems of inadequate housing and its impacts on children's rights. This is essential in the crafting of effective policies that may be used in evaluating issues of housing and child development. This will go a long way in providing well informed and comprehensive legal instruments that are fundamental in the protection of children's rights. Data collection should be widespread and should include all communities affected by the same negative impacts of inadequate housing identified from the Sidojiwe community by researches such as this one.

The need to build nearby education and health facilities cannot be ignored as children have faced difficulties and dangers while attempting to access these. Although the hostel boasts of having community health care workers, these individuals lack resources to attend to pivotal issues affecting the community such as medication for HIV/ AIDS infected residents of the hostels. Other health concerns related to water and sanitation need to be urgently addressed as the situation at the hostel is critical and may easily result in an epidemic. Community health programmes such as public outreaches, advocacy campaigning and roadshows to ensure that the communities are knowledgeable about the negative impacts of inadequate housing.

It is, by all means, important that the government should come up with poverty reduction strategies and focus on job creation for those living below the poverty line. Investment in industry development will create employment resulting in improved standards of living for communities such as those in the Belmont area. Employment contributes largely to the betterment of human lives thus the government should come up with proactive strategies to deal with problems that come with unemployment as prevention is better than cure.

The findings showed that the hostels being converted into family housing tended to present challenges on the lives of the children living within the Sidojiwe community. Addressing the issues of housing should be made a priority by responsible authorities.

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