



SADC PROTOCOL@WORK SUMMITS 2020

VoiceandChoice SRHR MEDIA presenter

Gibson Mhaka, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, summit2020

Title of work: Managing menstrual hygiene with pride and dignity

<https://www.chronicle.co.zw/managing-menstrual-hygiene-with-pride-and-dignity/>

(Published 23 JUL, 2019).

SYNOPSIS

▶ **Type of Media: Print**

▶ **Brief description of the item of work you submitted and motivation of why it is a good example of gender awareness and sensitivity in advancing gender equality.**

“Dealing with menstrual hygiene is stressful and difficult for visually impaired women like me. It’s even more difficult for young girls as they are always worried about how to deduce that their period has arrived or how to use products like pads correctly”.

The story is about the challenges being encountered by women and girls with disabilities in managing their menstrual hygiene which sometimes leaves them at the risk of even more health problems. The story also highlights their struggle to attain SRHR and gender equality as they continue to face double marginalisation and discrimination due to the interface of gender and disability.

It is a good example of gender awareness and sensitivity in advancing gender equality as it highlights that misinformation surrounding menstruation hygiene is also contributing to shame, stigma and serious human rights concerns for girls and women with disabilities and their families.

This undoubtedly makes them vulnerable to gender discrimination, violence, poverty and untreated health problems.

▶ **What & why makes the story relevant? What context does it respond to**

The story is relevant in the sense that unlike other stories to do with menstrual hygiene for women and adolescent girls this one exclusively unravels the challenges being encountered by women and girls with disabilities in managing their menstrual hygiene which sometimes leaves them at the risk of even more health problems.

It also highlights that the issue of menstrual hygiene among marginalised groups such as women and girls with disabilities also lacks regional and global attention.

For example, a new gender analysis report – Southern African Development Community (Sadc) SRHR Strategy 2019-2030 makes no reference to the topic on menstrual health. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals just like the Sadc SRHR Strategy 2019-2030 also has no explicit guidelines that promote or enforce governments to provide for menstrual health management.

Contextually, it calls for the availing of information on how to manage their menstrual health or hygiene. For example, there is no information on SRHR in Braille.

BACKGROUND

- **Why did you write the story? What problem or context it is responding to?**

“Even if I go to the clinic like what I did after experiencing abnormal uterine bleeding, nurses can’t speak sign language, so they tell me nothing about menstrual hygiene,” complained,” MS Siziba.

The reason why I wrote the story is to highlight the struggle being faced by women and girls with disabilities to attain SRHR and gender equality as they continue to face double marginalisation and discrimination due to the interface of gender and disability.

I also wanted to put to light how people view women and girls with disabilities in deeply unhelpful and distorted ways, like failing to recognize that they have the same concerns around sexuality and relationships as everyone else.

It was also meant to sensitize the responsible ministry-Ministry of Health and Child Care, that women and girls with disabilities are facing serious challenges in accessing information on how to manage their menstrual health or hygiene, to which the Permanent Secretary, Dr Agnes Mahomva, acknowledged that there was indeed a gap in their programmes especially to do with SRHR services for marginalised people like those with disabilities.

Another reason why I wrote the story is to debunk the myth that gender sensitivity issues like menstrual hygiene cannot only be written or explicitly expressed by female journalists but males can do it also well.

The story is responding to the need to create systems that allowed universal access to healthcare information by persons with disabilities, as enshrined in Section 75 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe on the right to health care which states that every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe has the right to access to basic health care services, including those of a reproductive nature.

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Key Objectives

▶ **What did you hope to achieve with this coverage?**

“The Ministry tries to streamline disabled people in its programmes but realises the gap which still exists,” Dr Mahomva, permanent secretary in the Ministry of Health and Child care.

- ▶ To sensetise the society and government at large, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders in the health sector on the challenges being encountered by women and girls with disabilities in managing their menstrual hygiene which sometimes leaves them at the risk of even more health problems so that they can take action.
- ▶ In a addition to that I also wanted to show that information on menstruation and sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of women and girls with disabilities are sufficiently addressed by authorities in the health sector.
- ▶ And to also show that the issue of menstrual hygiene among marginalised groups such as women and girls with disabilities lacks regional and global attention.

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“First of all, people think women and girls with disabilities are asexual and that’s a wrong perception,” said Ms Mazula whose daughter lives with Down’s Syndrome condition.

Target Audience

- **Who did you hope to reach?**

The public, Social Welfare Department, people with disabilities and also organisations dealing with people with disabilities as well as the Ministry of Health and Child Care, and other stakeholders in the health sector sensitising them on the serious challenges being faced by women and girls with disabilities.

- **Did you succeed in reaching this audience?**

Yes, I succeeded as women with disabilities shared their unique anxieties with me. The Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Health and Child Care Dr Agnes Mahomva, also acknowledged that there was indeed a gap in their programmes especially to do with SRHR services for marginalised people like those with disabilities. Bulawayo City Council Director of Health Services, Dr Edwin Sibanda, also said the city’s health centres are now accessible to everybody who seeks SRHR services.

- **What Evidence do you have to that effect?**

After the story was published individuals and organizations that deal with people with disabilities as well as stakeholders in the health sector phoned me while complimenting that the story was well-researched and balanced.



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PROCESS/METHODOLOGY

▶ **How did you gather data?**

Through interviews, with women with disabilities, organizations that deal with people with disabilities and some online material on SRHR which we were provided with during workshop.

▶ **How many female and male sources did you consult?**

Female sources- six (6)

Male sources –One (1)

▶ **Why did you choose these sources?**

As of individuals with disabilities I chose them because of their different challenges they face in their everyday living and demands according to the category of their disability. Representatives from organisations that deal with disability were also chosen to share the challenges they face in their pursuit to cater for the needs of people with disabilities.

The ministry was also chosen to find out if their programmes also caters for women and girls living with disability. Organizations were chosen to find out how they were coping with issues to do with disabilities.

Why were their voices important?

As of girls and women with disabilities their voices were important because as they shared their different challenges they face in their everyday living and demands. For example, Winnet Moyo (19) who is visually-impaired and who also has a physical challenge. She said dealing with menstrual hygiene is stressful and difficult for visually impaired women like her.

Ms Nancy Siziba (34) who is hearing and speech impaired bemoans the inability of health care staff to speak sign language saying that such inability is detrimental to the well-being of women and girls with disabilities.

Disability organisations acknowledged that women and girls with disabilities continue to suffer violations of their SRHR despite the fact that the Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

IMPACT

What impact did you achieve through your story?

“The issue of menstrual hygiene among marginalised groups such as women and girls with disabilities also seems to lack regional and global attention”.

I managed to bring to attention the fact that when it comes to challenges being encountered by women and girls with disabilities in managing their menstrual hygiene which sometimes leaves them at the risk of even more health problems, there was indeed a gap in Government programmes especially to do with SRHR services for marginalised people like those with disabilities as acknowledged by the Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Health and Child Care Dr Agnes Mahomva.

Another impact achieved by the story is of bringing to light that the issue of menstrual hygiene among marginalised groups such as women and girls with disabilities also lacks regional and global attention. For example, a new gender analysis report – Southern African Development Community (Sadc) SRHR Strategy 2019-2030 makes no reference to the topic on menstrual health. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals just like the Sadc SRHR Strategy 2019-2030 also has no explicit guidelines that promote or enforce governments to provide for menstrual health management.

The greatest impact was when my story was singled out as the best out of more 50 entries submitted at the National Journalistic and Media Awards (NJAMA), which are the biggest awards in the country and they are organised by the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ). I scooped the Best Health Reporter of the Year Award (2019) and the category was being sponsored by Premier Services Medical Aid Society (PSMAS).

How did you use social media to maximise impact of your story? Give evidence

After the story was published, I shared the link on Facebook and Twitter. People liked it and some especially organisations that deal with people with disability phoned me expressing satisfaction and compliments that I had managed to highlight challenges that women and girls with disabilities are facing in accessing information on how to manage their menstrual health or hygiene.

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FEEDBACK

- ▶ Please provide any examples of feedback that you received, including on social media?

When I posted the link of the story on Facebook and Twitter people liked it. Individuals and organisations that deal with people with disabilities also phoned expressing gratitude that the story was well-researched and balanced.

I was also invited to attend workshops organised by organisations that deal with disability issues.

“Thank you, Gibson, for that well researched article. You have managed to show one of the plights being faced by girls and women with disabilities which have been ignored for a long time. It is my hope that after reading your article, government authorities especially the ministry of health will take action to address that,” Soneni Gwizi one of Zimbabwe’s celebrated motivational speaker, broadcaster and disability activist and she is also Action on Disability and Development (ADD) ambassador (+263 777153537).

“I don't remember the last time I read something as good as your story. This was more than enough for everyone to read for himself of herself. This is a good disability and health story that can change lives of people with disabilities,” @dvp_advocacy

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FOLLOW UP

- ▶ How would/did you conduct follow up to your story after it has/was been published?

I wrote other stories to do with gender awareness which includes:

<https://www.chronicle.co.zw/gender-environment-complex-connections-hold-back-prospects-for-sustainable-management/>

<https://genderlinks.org.za/news/zimbabwe-child-marriage-violates-girls-srhr>.

<https://www.chronicle.co.zw/gender-inequality-health-safety-of-women-in-small-scale-mining/>

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