



PRESS STATEMENT BY THE ZIMBABWE GENDER COMMISSION ON NATIONAL YOUTH DAY (21 FEBRUARY 2025)

Theme: “Empower Youth, Secure the Future”

On the occasion of National Youth Day, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) joins the nation in celebrating the vitality, resilience, and potential of Zimbabwe’s youth, who constitute 62% of the population under the age of 25, according to the 2022 Census. Under the theme “Empower Youth, Secure the Future,” we reaffirm our commitment to advancing gender equality and inclusive youth development as cornerstones of national progress and development.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe enshrines the rights of youth and the imperative of gender equality. Section 17 mandates the state to promote gender balance and ensure the full participation of all citizens while empowering marginalized groups, including youth. Section 20 specifically ensures that youths have access to education, vocational training, employment, and participation in national development and decision-making. Section 56 guarantees equality and non-discrimination, including on grounds of age and gender. These constitutional provisions lay the foundation for gender equality and youth empowerment, both of which are critical to the development of Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe has made notable strides in empowering its youth. The introduction of a youth quota in local councils and parliament is a significant step towards including young people in governance. While the political will to implement these quotas exists, challenges remain in ensuring their effectiveness and meaningful youth participation. The Youth Empower Bank has created financial inclusion and entrepreneurship opportunities, while the expansion of vocational training centers, universities, and colleges has increased access to education. Growth in youth-led innovation hubs and digital literacy programs is also commendable. However, systemic barriers persist, especially for girls and young women. Despite progress in primary education, gender disparities remain, particularly in STEM fields, where girls represent only 32% of tertiary students. Additionally, the rise of drug and substance abuse, with 40% of youth in urban areas reporting exposure to illicit substances, is a growing concern, as highlighted in the 2023 National Drug Survey.

The above challenges require urgent action. Gender gaps in education continue to widen due to poverty, patriarchal norms, so called early marriages, and inadequate infrastructure. Drug abuse is on the rise, threatening the health, productivity, and social cohesion of young people. Economic exclusion remains a major issue, as many youths, particularly women, having limited access to finance for entrepreneurship capital and unequal access to formal employments.

To address these challenges and secure Zimbabwe’s future, the Commission urges prioritization of STEM education for girls by allocating STEM scholarships and resources to female students and launching mentorship programs that pair young girls with women in STEM professions.

Combatting drug abuse requires strengthening of community rehabilitation centres, funding nationwide anti-drug awareness campaigns, enforcing stricter penalties for drug peddling, and providing psychosocial support for affected youth. Youth economic empowerment must be scaled up by expanding the Youth Empower Bank's reach to rural areas, lowering interest rates for women-led enterprises, and incentivising private-sector partnerships to create apprenticeship programs. Policy reforms should focus on eliminating gender barriers by implementing the Education Amendment Act, which criminalizes the exclusion of pregnant girls from schools, and integrating gender-responsive budgeting into all youth-focused initiatives.

Investing in youth is not optional, it is a constitutional and obligation. As a nation, we must dismantle barriers for girls, combat the drug crisis, and create pathways for every young Zimbabwean to thrive. The Zimbabwe Gender Commission remains committed to working with government and other stakeholders to create an environment conducive to a future where every young person has the opportunity to reach their full potential, be a productive adult and contribute to national development.

For Gender Equality

For media inquiries and further information, please contact ZGC Chairperson, Commissioner Margaret Mukahanana Sangarwe 0712214203/ 0772869214, or Chief Executive Officer Virginia Muwanigwa 0712899543/ 0772327955