

Press Release

10<sup>th</sup> August, 2021.

## **Prioritizing and Investing in Children Must Outlive the August 12<sup>th</sup> Polls**

The economy of Zambia just like that of many other nations contracted sharply due the adverse impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Disruptions brought about by the deadly virus for instance, the closure of schools, continue to affect access to vital aspects of children's lives and wellbeing such as education and health. According to the Zambia Statistics Agency report on Population Projections and Eligible Voters<sup>1</sup>, children account for about 53% of Zambia's population. Yet the entire budget under child specific expenditure functions in the period 2016 to 2020, on average, was allocated 3% of the national budget in the stated period (increasing from K506.75 million in 2016 to K729.88 million in 2020 as per recent findings of a study conducted by the organisation). This is perhaps an indicator of the inadequate attention accorded to matters affecting the lives of children as far as service delivery functions in the social sector, health, education and water and sanitation are concerned. A narrative that is usually not highlighted during events such as campaigns or elections.

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) acknowledges that considerable progress has been made over the years to improve the lives of children in Zambia. To give an idea, reduction in stunting levels, which were estimated at 53% in 2001-2002 and fell to 35% in 2018. Additionally, national statistics have previously indicated that Zambia has nearly achieved near universal primary school completion levels - a completion rate of 91.8 per cent at Grade 7. However, the nation still falls behind in as far as the realization of child rights is concerned. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Zambia notes that about 59.4% of children live in poor households with 45.4% living in extreme poverty. Thus depriving the largest constituent, a chance to live dignified lives.

Take Lufwanyama district as a case in point. Despite being one of the largest districts in the country, it remains an area where children face challenges on a day to day basis. Many children do not access to quality early childhood education and have to cover long distances to access the nearest primary and secondary school facility. For example, children from Ntanga village of Lufwayanma district have to walk over 10 kilometers to get to nearest school being Kapilamiko school. In spite of the many national commitments towards the full realization of children's rights, this has proven difficult to achieve as there has been a significant decline in budgetary allocation towards child sensitive sectors prior to the emergence of the pandemic.

With approximately 2 days left until the nation heads to the August 12<sup>th</sup> polls. It remains pertinent that aspiring candidates continue to highlight manifestos that will promote the well-being of children. It is disheartening that in most instances politics takes centre stage at the expense of issue based campaigns that should demonstrate plans and policies that will improve the lives of children. JCTR wishes to emphasize that while children do not vote nor participate in election campaigns, there is need to

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<https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/phocadownload/Dissemination/Population%20Projection%20and%20Eligible%20Voters.pdf> (based on an average proportion of those aged 18 years and older as at 2010 census)

prioritize their voices and interests, just as much as any well-meaning eligible voter. Remembering that investment and development of childhood capacities has the potential to contribute to improving the quality and productivity of the future labour force in a society.

JCTR therefore calls on all candidates and officials desiring to be elected to public office to demonstrate powerful change for children by prioritizing and investing in children as the future depends on it. Indicatively, beyond the polls there is great need to harmonize the national plans and budgets if children in Zambia are to witness prioritisation in light of the fact that they are owed a fair share of the resources in the country.

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