

THE ADVOCATE

FOR CHILDREN | WITH CHILDREN



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Concerns Over Initiation Schools

- Lack of laws regulating the administration of Initiation Schools leads to children enrollment in the same.
- Worry that children are still too young for the Initiation Schools' activities and may come out sick or late.

GIFT Rangoajane

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SYMPOSIUM ON

Eliminating Harmful Practices Affecting Children:
Progress on Policy & Practice since 2013

DATE: 16th June, 2022

VENUE: Maseru

TIME: 08:45- 16:30

Concerns Over Initiation Schools

The absence of legislation regulating Initiation Schools remains a grave concern amongst the children concerned over the wellbeing of their peers who may fall prey to the rogue initiation schools whose chief end is to generate profits and influence for their owners.

“Initiation of children into manhood remains a harmful practice affecting children because, out of the pressure and interest of being initiated, some children drop out of academic school to enroll into initiation.

“Upon their return from the initiation school, they are often not able to continue with their academic studies because, sometimes the bursar would have withdrawn their funding towards that child. This is in the event that one child was funded by an entity other than their parents,” said a child advocate from Mohale’s Hoek - Gift Rangoajane during an interview with this publication.

Rangoajane hopes to represent children

at the symposium organised by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and African Union body to monitor the implementation of the African Children’s Charter.

The symposium is scheduled for Thursday 16th June, 2022, the day when the world will be commemorating the Day of African Child (DAC) themed - Eliminating harmful practices affecting children: progress on policy & practice since 2013.

The race towards ensuring the presence of a legislation for regulating initiation schools has long started, and child safe organisations such as World Vision have since joined the bandwagon.

The general view which prompted the need for an act regulating these schools was that when children return from initiation schools they do not want to go



GIFT Rangoajane together with children from Lesotho South deliver a presentation to World Vision Lesotho leadership on children’s perspective on World Vision’s work

back to schools, they get married early, and render the tradition of initiation disrepute. Such children are also related to numerous criminal activities.

INITIATION SCHOOL Related Articles

Signaling the child protection risks linked to initiation schools in Lesotho

// It took a day to agree on the decision to join the initiation school. News about my enrollment at the initiation school reached back home. My uncle who himself was initiated came and fetched me before my friends and I joined the rest of the initiates”, Seephephe recounts.

It is in the evening after school hours. Community boys aged 12 to 24 years old are gathered at a sports field where they usually meet to hang out, play soccer and sing songs. Girls from around the community join in to watch. There is a song and a dance.

As always, during the games, a group of boys who were initiated into manhood separate themselves from the rest; “Come, let’s step aside and discuss issues of men”, they say. It is this that often left Seephephe (not his real name) feeling the need to prove he is man enough amongst his peers since he

had not been initiated yet.

The pressure to fit in amongst his peers caused Seephephe and his four friends to leave their homes and join the initiation school that was enrolling on the mountain overlaying their community. “We made the decision to go in 2017. Two of us were aged 17, one was 16 and the other 15 years old”, he recalls.

Life-changing decisions often take months to make, even years but not for these four. “It took a day to agree on the decision to join the initiation school. News about my enrollment at the initiation school reached back home....[read more](#)



Reitumetse Tsitsa addresses those in attendance during the Day of African Child held in the districts of Quthing - 2019

THE PUBLIC WEIGHS IN: Harmful Practices Affecting Children



LETSEMA MPAPEA
Ha Ntsi, Nazareth

// In my opinion some of the harmful practices involve ambushing girl children as they walk long distances from school or to access services, by us herd boys or those who want to take advantage with the intention of pressuring them into relationship or sometimes rape. Others sometimes pressure girls into engaging in sexual activities and after that when they are pregnant deny the responsibility."



NKOMO MBUIZOA
Ha Leqele, Maseru

// One of these practices includes giving the responsibility of tendering livestock to children at the detriment of their academic welfare. Most of the children, especially in the rural are sent far away into the mountains where they remain throughout Winter watching over the animals. It is believed that this toughens a boy child, but I think it does more harm than good. Children must allowed to be children and substitutes for adults."



ANONYMOUS (requested to remain anonymous)

// Parents must find a healthy means to resolve their differences amongst themselves and protect their children from witnessing any form of violence. I have witnessed a case where parents were constantly fighting and children would scatter at night for refuge.

The course of the fight was usually because the husband was not pleased with the wife looking for a job. He believed the wife was being unfaithful each she found a job."

As A Hunger Crisis Looms Girls Are At Greater Risk

WARNING: This story contains disturbing content that some readers may find distressing.

// He tried to sleep with me and I refused," she says, but the man, who was much older and stronger, would not take no for an answer. "He forced himself on me, pressed me up against the wall, covered my mouth and raped me."

*Matseliso's family was desperate for food - when COVID-19 forced schools to close, her mother,*Dineo, lost her job as a cook at a local school in southern Lesotho. The work had ensured Matseliso and her three siblings got at least one nutritious meal each day - but Dineo's children were among thousands of children cut off from their source of daily meals and sent home to families already struggling to put food on the table.

So when Dineo found out that relatives in another village had extra provisions of maize meal, 15-year-old Matseliso was glad to go fetch the food. It was a trip she had taken plenty of times with her mother before, and she knew what to do and where to go. No one imagined the danger that Matseliso was in, or the devastating turn her life was about to take.

Last year, the United Nations estimated that the pandemic would double the number of acutely food insecure people to more than 270 million by the end of the year. This year, more countries are on the brink of famine than there

has been in the last five years. In Lesotho, one in three people across the country have been food insecure since the drought of 2015, and the pandemic has pushed many of them over the edge.

But there is another, less talked about, element of hunger crises: the crushing effect they invariably have on women. Women and girls, who have lower social and economic status than men and boys and face greater pressure to care for their families, carry a much heavier burden and will often eat last, least or not at all.

But the danger girls face runs even deeper than hunger. In a crisis, when their usual protection networks and community structures are in turmoil, they are more at risk of other threats like child marriage, exploitation, gender-based violence, and sexual assault.

"The village was a far walk so I stayed for a few days," explains Matseliso. She stayed with relatives, never dreaming she wouldn't be safe. However, at night, things took a turn for the



"I told him repeatedly that I was pregnant. But he denied it was his child. I stayed for weeks hoping that he would do something but he just told me to abort." Matseliso weeps as she narrates her ordeal.

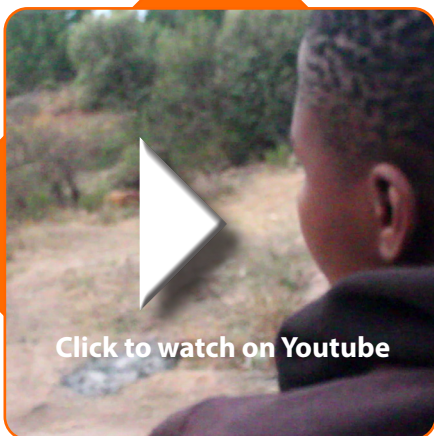
worse.

"There was a man there that I used to date," she says. When he found out Matseliso was in town, he preyed on her vulnerability and broke into her room.

"He tried to sleep with me and I refused," she says, but the man, who was much older and stronger, would not take no for an answer. "He forced himself on me, pressed me up against the wall, covered my mouth and raped me."

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THE REALITY OF: Harmful Practices Affecting Children



Click to watch on Youtube

BACK TO SCHOOL AFTER THE RAPE THAT LEFT HER SCARRED

WARNING: This story contains disturbing content that some readers may find distressing.

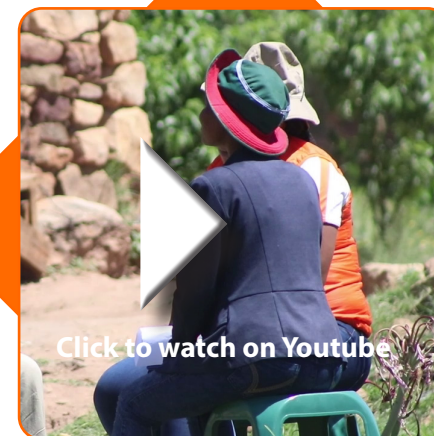
This is a video story of a child who got pregnant during the COVID-19 induced lockdown, which restricted movements even to schools. With more time in her hands she was drawn closer to the man who sexually abused her. She tells her own story.



Click to watch on Youtube

I WAS MARRIED AT AGE 13 | HER STORY THREE YEARS LATER

In some contexts children are forced into marriage, but at Mapharane and some parts of Lesotho, children decide on their own to elope with their age mates or older in hopes to begin families. Other children with the exposure provided by World Vision, see the dangers of child marriage through the lense of the law and are inspired to study law at university level. Meet Retsepile sharing her child marriage story two years later, and Mampiti from the humble beginnings of children's parliaments with a dream to defend girl children.



Click to watch on Youtube

EMPOWERED CHILD RESISTS ABDUCTION INTO MARRIAGE

A vulnerable child was deceived by those closest to her, hooked her into an even more vulnerable state, where she was to meet her would be forced husband. She is driven hours away from community into a forest in the dark of the night so she could easily consent into marriage. She comes out on top. She cites training from World Vision against Child Marriage her reason for not giving into early marriage.

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As A Hunger Crisis Looms Girls Are At Greater Risk

The dreadful ordeal paralyzed Matseliso with fear. In the nights that followed, she was terrified the man would come back at any point - but she was also too scared to return home to her family, ashamed and terrified they would find out what had happened.

Days passed, and then weeks, and Matseliso developed another fear. After a month, Matseliso knew her fear had become a reality: she was pregnant. Alone, confused and scared, Matseliso was desperate to get support so she bravely visited the man's family.

"I told him repeatedly that I was pregnant," she says. "But he denied it was his child. I stayed for weeks hoping that he would do something but he just told me to abort."

More weeks passed and Matseliso's mother grew anxious at the disappearance of her child and decided to travel to the village to find her. When she discovered Matseliso was pregnant, she was so overcome with anxiety and stress of another mouth to feed that she became sick and was in bed for days.

Eventually Dineo and Matseliso gave up hope of receiving any support from the man or his family and they returned home.

"To this day, that family have never checked on us," says Dineo.

It was only when Matseliso arrived at a World Vision food distribution months later that she started to receive help.

World Vision worker Motlatsi Taaka noticed an underweight young girl and was shocked to see she was so heavily pregnant at such a young age. Concerned, he took her aside.

"I learnt that she was raped by an adult, so I advised my World Vision colleagues who helped us report it to Law Enforcement," says Motlatsi. Since then, the perpetrator has been apprehended and prosecuted.

While Matseliso's recovery has only just begun, there is hope in her future. She is sponsored by a family, giving her the care and long-term support Matseliso needs to get back on her feet. Matseliso has given birth to a healthy baby boy.

He is six months old and Matseliso has been able to return to school. Her grandmother looks after the baby during the day while Matseliso continues her studies. Together, the family is looking to the future, despite the day-by-day challenges that the last year has forced them to overcome. **END**



Matseliso returning home to her daughter after spending a day school.



World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Our vision for every child is life in all its fullness.
Our prayer for heart is the will to make it so.

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