

Commitment for Life

Spring Update Zimbabwe

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

Open secret

Childhood should be a sacred time filled with innocence and curiosity. However, for many young girls in Zimbabwe, this is far from reality.

Despite laws prohibiting child marriage, the practice remains widespread. Over 34% of girls are married before their 18th birthday, and 5% are married before they turn 15 years old.

For these young girls, early marriage brings immense responsibilities and severe health risks related to childbearing. Domestic violence is also prevalent in such marriages. According to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 40% of women aged 15-49 reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in 2019.

Yet, even in the face of these challenges, the church is seeking to be a light in the darkness—bringing hope and change through advocacy and training.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), with support from Christian Aid, is taking a stand against these harmful norms. Recognising the vital role of the church in addressing these challenges, ZCC advocates for the dignity and rights of all people as bearers of God's image. Through their work, they have trained over 70 faith leaders—both men and women—and 350 lay volunteers to champion

women's rights in their communities. These leaders and volunteers raise awareness in places of worship, including in Christian churches, Apostolic gatherings, and mosques these faith leaders and volunteers raise awareness about the illegality of child marriage and domestic abuse. They also support women facing abuse, helping them report offenses to the police.

Chantelle Ganduri is one of the trained champions. She is passionate about bringing hope to women who have experienced abuse, she shares:

*"Often, when a woman is beaten regularly by her husband, the community will know about it—it will be an **open secret**. Yet, the community blames the woman for failing at her marriage. Even if she is eventually killed, they still blame her."*

Despite this culture of victim-blaming, Chantelle remains unwavering in her commitment to see change. She says:

"I'm happy to be making a difference. I'm happy to help women speak up for their rights."

It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches is part of that



Chantelle Ganduri Youth Champion with the SRH project. Gwanda district, Zimbabwe
Credit: Christian Aid/Lisa Fagan

village and seeking to make sure that children can be children without taking on adult responsibilities of marriage.

Through your support you are also helping to form part of that village protecting children from potential harm. Together, we can support champions like Chantelle as they work to bring change to their communities.

Thank you for your support through Commitment for Life which is championing rights of women and children.

Prayer points

- Pray for God to bring justice for women and girls in Zimbabwe. May they be treated with dignity as your image bearers.
- Pray for Zimbabwe Council of Churches that they will have courage, strength and resources to raise volunteers who can share your light in this situation.
- Pray for Champions like Chantelle, that you will renew their strength as they do this noble work

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