



PRESS STATEMENT



DO NOT SUSPEND THE COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA

The Comprehensive Sexuality Education curriculum was introduced in 2013 by the government of Zambia, through the ministry of General Education to improve the knowledge and provision of Reproductive Health and Sexuality Education, particularly for young people. The idea behind this development was to equip young people with the skills and knowledge that would empower them to realize the relevance of their health and well being; prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexual violence awareness and prevention of unplanned pregnancy. UNAIDS data from Zambia shows that HIV prevalence amongst adults was 11.3%, with 48,000 people newly infected with HIV in 2018 and 17,000 dying of an AIDS-related illness. UNFPA in 2017 also found high rates of adolescent pregnancy in the country.

There is an urgent and pressing need to address these issues to ensure good quality of life for young people. One of the most effective ways to address issues such as HIV transmission and unplanned and adolescent pregnancy is through comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). CSE is not aimed at promoting sexual activity or encouraging people to have sex at a young age; CSE equips young people to navigate their sexuality and make informed decisions when it comes to sex and relationships, including the use of condoms, an effective tool in combating both HIV and unplanned and adolescent pregnancy.

It is also crucial to note that the CSE is designed to be age appropriate, culturally acceptable, and falls within the confines of the national constitution. This is knitted closely with best practice in healthcare, which leads to young people being able to navigate sex and relationships in a way that is sensitive to their culture.

The PACT reached out to Precious Kaniki of Phenomenal Youths Association in Zambia, a group working for a society free from stigma and discrimination associated with HIV, she has acknowledged the fears that people have: “Adolescents and Youth are going to have so much knowledge about their sex life and they're going to want to experiment with all.” However, she also notes that CSE “it will help prepare the Teenagers and Youth at large with information as they undergo transformation through [adolescence] to adulthood to help make right decisions in life towards sex.” Evidence does show that CSE in fact does lead to adolescents to delay when they have sex, contrary to the fear it will lead to early sexual activity.

Therefore, we write to stand against all opposition to CSE in Zambia, and stand with our Zambian colleagues in fighting the misinformation circulating saying that CSE is an avenue to indoctrinate or lure young people into losing cultural and moral values. A huge effort to implement CSE since 2013 cannot be simply dismissed, when there is a long line of evidence that has indicated that the provision of CSE has drastically reduced the rate of teenage pregnancies, child marriages, and increased young people's knowledge of HIV and HIV prevention across Zambia. These are far more important than vague assumptions that will put the sexual health and rights of young people at risk. The Zambian government, in partnership with grassroots organisations, must safeguard the provision of CSE under its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 3, which cannot be reached without good sexual and reproductive health.

1.UNAIDS Country Data, Zambia. Available from: <https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/zambia>

2.UNFPA. Adolescent Pregnancy in Zambia. Available from: <https://zambia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdfAdolescent%20Pregancy%20in%20Zambia.pdf>

3. Guttmacher Institute. Available from: <https://www.guttmacher.org/news-release/2012/sex-education-linked-delay-first-sex#>

With this in mind, the PACT opposes any attempts to diminish or reduce CSE provision in Zambia. These myths are extremely distant from the objectives and goals of CSE in Zambia, and fly in the face of evidence that shows CSE having a positive impact on young people's lives. We are calling on the government of Zambia, through the ministry of General Education to initiate new strategies such as reaching wider stakeholders to create conversations, dialogues and meetings to further attend to the misunderstanding and misconceptions around that CSE is suffering from in Zambia. We stand in solidarity with our Zambian membership in protecting and advocating for the right of young people to access safe and quality comprehensive sexuality education.

You can sign a petition to stop the suspension of Comprehensive Sexuality Education here: <http://chnng.it/FhMvcYP5kb>