



MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY

APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have supervised, read and recommend to the Midlands State University for acceptance of dissertation entitled: Violation of Children `s rights by Varembe cultural practise in Mberengwa District 1980-2013 submitted by Nokuthula Bula-Bula in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in History and International studies Honours Degree

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DECLARATION

I, Bula-bula Nokuthula (R103446R), certify that this dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Bachelor of Arts honours degree in History and International Studies at Midlands State University has not been submitted for a degree at any other University, and that it is entirely my work.

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to unpack the cultural practises and social way of life of the Varemba in Mberengwa. The Varemba ethnic group in Mberengwa practise is a distinctive group which practise cultural practise such as Komba initiation school for girls and Murundu known as male circumcision for boys, virginity testing, Female genital Mutilation (fgm),son preference, inheritance. In this group all boys and girls should undergo traditional initiation school to graduate into manhood and womanhood respectively. It will be demonstrated that children in the Varemba have been seriously affected by cultural practises which result in devastating effects such as health problems and also hinder development capacity of the district since many children do not proceed to secondary school. It will be demonstrated that cultural practises have devastating effect on the well being of a child and child development. The government also introduced the Victim Friendly Unit under ZRP to deal with child abuse cases and BEAM to cater for school fees for the poor and girls who will be sacrificed to get married so that the boy will go to school. The study will also highlight the efforts by the NGOs to curtail violation of child rights through cultural practises and also address the issue of gender inequality. It will also unravel the effectiveness of all these foundations and the role of the community, religious leaders in supporting the laws that are passed to protect children from harmful cultural practise.

ACRONMYS

ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children
AIDS	Aquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BEAM	Basic Education Assistance Module
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
F.G.M	Female Genital Mutilation
HIV	Human Immune Virus
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children
UNDHR	United nation declaration on human rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children`s Funds
VFU	Victim Friendly Unity
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The study focuses on the Varembe ethnic group and their social way of life and cultural practices that violate children's rights in Mberengwa District. The study will mainly focus on the impact of the Varembe cultural practice on the attainment of gender equality and its effects on children and also effects of cultural practise. The issues of gender inequality has gained attention in different parts of Africa, however the Varembe ethnic group in Mberengwa are in sharp contrast and fall short as far as realizing the achievement of a gender blind society is concerned. The cultural practices in the Varembe ethnic group fosters inequalities as far as gender is concerned. The duties or roles between males and females are defined along socially contracted cultural practises. In education there is an issue of son preference and the boy child is seen as the head of the family tomorrow, so he has great values as compared to a girl child, in marriages and economic set up all means of production are in the hands of males. The study will mainly focused on children because they are the most vulnerable and have been tremendously affected by cultural practices. So the issue of inequality has its roots in the Varembe ethnic group.

Culture is dynamic and changes overtime to suit modernity and civilities², however the wave of time has not resulted in the total change and modification of various cultural elements of the Varembe ethnic group as they still practice ancient cultural practices. The study will also focus on the impacts of bad cultural practices that are practised by Varembe ethnic group. It needs to be demonstrated that Varembe cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, male circumcision, Komba initiation rite, virginity testing, early or child marriages, appeasement of

avenging spirits disputable by settling with a virgin girl, inheritance, gender inequalities between males and females violate the rights of children in Mberengwa

The above mentioned practices have negative impacts on the social lives of Varemba children mainly, Children have no say over everything because they are in the hands of parents they are even subjected to harmful cultural practices e.g. circumcision, Female genital mutilation at a tender age ,elongation of clitoris applying herbs during the practise. Girls in particular can be forced into a marriage with an old man in the exchange for food in the times of economic hardships. It is worth to note that there is no freedom of choice and children`s voices are not heard their decisions are passed by their elders in the Varemba ethnic group.

It needs to be demonstrated that these cultural practises violate the right to education in Mberengwa. MDG number 2 states that “achieve universal education and make sure that all the boys and girls should complete a full course of primary schooling..”³ In the Varemba girls does not have the opportunity to finish school, the children in this ethnic group are disturbed by the initiation rite that is held during the course of the term and most of them girls in particular will not return to school.

There is no attainment of universal primary education, gender inequality is rampant in Varemba in Mberengwa, in most cases after such a scenario boys will only continue with school. The Varemba culture is also biased towards males in terms of education.

On the research done by the Save the Children foundation and Ministry of Education both showed that a quarter of the children who return to school after initiation rite are boys⁴. this clearly shows that there is poor development due to reasons such as son preferences, early or child marriage and economic hardships. the above mentioned practices have subjected children

in Varembe to unprecedented challenges and vulnerability, children's rights have been infringed their development capacity curtailed and also girls has been subjected to gender inequality.

There is need to assess the impact of Varembe cultural practices on the attainment of development in Mberengwa and Zimbabwe. Children in an African set up have remained victims of patriarch and also have continued to be trapped in a cultural trench that seeks to perpetuate male dominance and instil passiveness into the female sex.⁵ Most of the children in the Varembe ethnic group do not even finish primary level ,this have a negative impact on the development of the district and the country as a whole.

The effects of cultural practices on children hinder development in Mberengwa District. The Varembe people constitutes a large percentage of the population in Mberengwa district so due to their cultural practices that disturb education they hinder development. Previous studies mainly focused on the cultural practices without exploring its effects on children and also the relationship between cultural practices and violation of children's rights and also gender inequalities. This group can contribute to broader development of the district and subsequently Zimbabwe at large.

The study targeted the Varembe ethnic group in Mberengwa because the district is densely populated with the Varembe . Under Chief Mposi there are four villages namely Musindazi, Mlemba, Machena and Mtesvu and these villages are occupied by the Lemba people. Theresearcher is also a member of the Varermba ethnic group, so she witnessed violation of children's rights by cultural practices.

1.2 Literature Review

There is a lot of literature on the Varembe and their cultural practices but most of the literature does not focus on cultural practises that violate children's rights and the effects on development and gender inequality.

Socialization and the right of passage are very common in Zimbabwe for example the Lemba people⁶. Toubia in his study mainly focused on Komba initiation rite that is meant to graduate young girls into womanhood. As soon as they commence their menstrual cycle they are considered to be ripe "kuibva"⁷. Very little research has been done on the children's rights. The study will add and point out some gaps that were left. On Komba initiation rite young girls at the age of ten and above are forced to attend the initiation school, a boy at the age of seven and above are forced to attend the initiation school. This means that there is no freedom of choice in the Varembe. Those who refuse to send their children will be seen as outcasts and normally a surprise attack is held during the night and all small boys and children are recruited to go in the forest in a secluded place⁸. The children will be forced to go against their will just because it's a customary belief that the ethnic group believed or practiced for many decades. This has a negative impact on development in the sense that children are disturbed to go to school.

P. Hoskens focuses on Female Genital Mutilation or elongation of clitoris he notes that the process is a requirement for marriage eligibility in the Varembe⁹. The aspect of genital mutilation involves elongation of clitoris applying herbs. This is most prevalent in Africa the above mentioned researcher turned a blind eye on the negative effects of elongation of clitoris using herbal concoctions. It is an old aged tradition and also practiced in Africa, some Middle Eastern countries and in immigrant communities in Europe, North America and Australia¹⁰.

During the process girls are given herbs to apply on their private parts so that the clitoris will be long. Such practices results in health problems and have short term and long term complications. The practise cause cervical cancer due to herbal concoctions applied. The study echo the same sentiments with the WHO which also did a research on bad cultural practices that causes diseases and found out that Female Genital Mutilation can cause severe pain .¹¹

Female Genital Mutilation is one of the traditional practices that may directly impact on cervical cancer and other diseases. These customs and rituals are harmful as they often have huge impact on the health and well being of people engaged in them and they usually violate their human rights. Even though supportive laws that discourage Female Genital Mutilation and harmful practices are put in place in order to be effective, legal approaches need to be coupled by community approaches.

Mubuwa classify the Komba initiation school as an instrument to perpetuate male chauvinistic of patriarchal¹². These cultural practices have become more dominant in African countries and predominantly patriarchal. The research goes in line with the theorist of patriarch who have directed their attention to the subordinate status of women and found their explanation in the male need to dominate female. Even though the government enacted bills criminalising in development of children in early marriages, bad cultural practices, incest's and rape¹³, little has been done to ensure that all is curtailed. Such practices are still practiced in Mberengwa rural areas, Mposi area in particular in wide scale. The family as an institution has also facilitated abuse of children, exploitation by some of the cultural practices and customs as survival tactics.

E. Chirenje mainly focuses on the male initiation rite which is known as Murundu. This is normally known as male circumcision and is done in winter so that the wounds will heal

faster.¹⁴The process is whereby the foreskin of the boy's private parts will be removed using a sharp object. The process is painful and can take long to heal or cause erection problem in future. This is done unprofessional leaders known as "Nyamukangas" and they will be using the same object to circumcise all the boys. This has devastating effects of causing spreading of blood transmitted diseases. The process can even cause death if not performed properly in many parts of Africa many boys died because of wrong circumcision. This demonstrates that even the male child's rights are violated in Mberengwa

There is need to focus on the effects of male circumcision which was neglected by Foto. Male circumcision tend to be disastrous if performed by badly in South Africa after wrong circumcision led to massive deaths about 33 men died in Mpumalanga after wrong circumcision. This process had negative impacts on children the process can cause horrific rotting penises, septicaemia and inadvertent castrations and also put the boys at risk of contaminating HIV

Shoko T. focuses on virginity testing and its purported benefits of the exercise that by far fall short of the risk that are attached to it. He turns a blind eye on the violation of the rights of children. However, it is likely that any practice that involves transferring blood carries significant infection risk. The virginity testing is crucial at Komba school. The study differs with Shoko in the sense that he did not mention the issue of spreading of diseases on the process whereby the elders will be inserting their finger on the girl's vagina to check if the hymen is still intact and no penetration before. At pass out non virgins will be tied with a cloth with a hole on the centre and these ones will be condemned by their parents to the extent that they will be given to old people or married man. However this result in early marriages and violate child rights as they are exposed their status/degraded in front of the community.

A renowned scholar on the history of Lemba Tudor Parfit dwelled much on the origins and cultural values of the Lemba but he turned a blind eye on the violation of child rights by cultural practise. Traditional practices that may directly impact on the spread of HIV and AIDS are early marriages and polygamy, sexual cleansing, scarification etc. on harmful practices very little research has been done to establish a firm link between harmful practices and HIV transmission on the Varembe and their cultural practices. most of the practices involve involuntary or premature sex and this put children particularly girls at risk of getting infected by HIV and AIDS. Mostly it is girls who are vulnerable to go under traditional practices which undermine their health.

Mary Douglas focus on inheritance among the Varembe as a common practise there are two types of inheritance :wife inheritance and taking the position of the sister or aunty either she is barren or dead. The scholar failed to realise the negative impact inheritance have on children especially the spreading of HIV and AIDS. At times a small boy is forced to inherit his brother's wife or a girl is forced to marry an old man as a way of maintaining relations with the son in law, such cultural practises have devastating effects on the rights of children as they are subjected to harmful practises hence increase in school droupots especially girls are more vulnerable

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Various methodologies were used to gather information in Mberengwa district .In conducting the research both primary and secondary sources were used to gather an indepth understanding of human behaviour and investigate the why and how of decision making. The study depended on various instrument such as interviews ,questionnaires ,books journals and others focus group to obtain data .

Interviews were used to gather data that can be analysed in a precise way. They were mainly used to access information from stakeholders that provide services to the people of Mberengwa District and some members of the Varembe .The interviews were helpful as they provided the chance to collect data that is comprehensive and in depth than anticipated as an interview, the interviewee is basically the main focus. Open ended questions were also put into the discussion and this helped the interviewee to have a leverage to reveal whatever they have in mind and this benefited the researcher because she managed to obtain more information.

Disadvantages of theinterviews is that the interviewer was not able to interview a large population .it was difficult because most of the children in Mberengwa did not finish primary level so they cannot read or write and also the elders could not reveal some of the information they select what to say because it is a taboo in their culture to publish their information

Questionnaires were used to collect specifically primary and raw data. Two structured questionnaire were designed to suit various target groups, boys and girls. The questionnaires were distributed a total number of 40 people, 10 girls and 10 boys of the Varembe tribe with an average of 5 girls and 5 boys per village who have been directly or indirectly affected by the various cultural practices and the rest were distributed to cultural leaders men and women,district

education officers ,the mberengwa ZRP . The people who responded to questionnaires were very few as some of the people could not read and write since they did not finish their primary school.

The questionnaires were not very effective data collecting instrument as they provided the researcher with limited information and some of them were not returned to the researcher. This was possible as respondents were asked open ended questions that are often specific; hence they helped in guiding the respondents within the context of the study. Questionnaires were also a time saving instrument especially self-administered ones as they were distributed to respondents simultaneously. However questionnaires have their own loopholes because people tend to provide biased information

Self-administered questionnaires also reduced chances of influence to the respondent by the researcher to answer in a certain manner, since they are no verbal or visual clues to influence the respondent. Also there was basically no influence from other members of the society. The other factor was that the respondents felt comfortable responding to questionnaire especially with regard to issues of sexuality and reproductive health as such things would not have been discussed directly as the culture of the Varembe regard it as taboo to discuss such issues with any who is a stranger.

However working with the elderly was a bit tough as they failed to understand some structured questions. They need further clarification / to translate the questions in suitable language. In case the interviewee provided vague information the researcher would ask again in a different way and keep the conversation within the relevant confines of the study.

Participant observation was another method used, researcher becomes a working member of the group or situation to be observed. The aim was to understand the problem from inside or from

the view points of the people in the situation shares the same experiences as the subjects and this was effective in small group .The identity and purpose of research was revealed to other group members so that the researcher could gather important information .

Random sampling was another method which was used to collect data. Young boys and girls were selected at random from a choice of subjects. Few children were chosen in different villages to provide information. This was not effective because some did not want to expose their cultural practices to the strangers.

Stratified sampling within Mposi Danga area these were particular sections of the targeted groups. This was conducted using numbers/counting targeted group members based on the percentage of the total group that shares the same characteristics.

Purposive sampling -this type of data collection enables the researcher to use her own judgment to choose people that are present or are available that best meet the objectives or target. The researcher did this in Baradzamwa Ward. 6 members were used to collection information, District Chairpeson, Ward Focal Person, Senior Staff in Mberengwa District Office Education department responsible for student affairs, field Save the Children Child Protection Officer and Health Centre. These provided information as they work with children in the district.

Event sampling, used the opportunity presented by a particular event for example Save the Children conducts workshops for 2 – 2 days. The researcher took advantage of this to gather needed information at the event. At this point the children were free and to air their views against their culture or bad practices they face.

END NOTES

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CHAPTER ONE

2.1 Cultural practises of the Varemba ethnic group in Mberengwa

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the cultural practises of the Varemba ethnic group that distinguishes them from other ethnic groups that are scattered around Mberengwa district and also to explain their cultural practises which have a significant bearing on their values and norms to present day. This chapter begins by tracing the origins of the Varemba and also the cultural practises such as male circumcision(Murundu),female genital mutilation,komba initiation rite,viginity testing,son preference,early/child marriages, endogamous process .

Origins of the Varemba

There are several scholars who wrote about the origins of the vaRemba ethnic group . Scholars who include Chigwedere , Beach , Thompson,Le Roux , Tudor Pariffit Foto and Mandivenga have contributed in tracing the historical origins of the Varemba tribe. The above scholar have the literature which have similarities on the origins ,they believe that the ethnic group has Islamic origins. The scholars base their argument on the similarities in certain practices between the Islamic religion and the Varemba people .Le Roux notes that the Varemba people are offspring of the Jews and gentile woman.They are believed to be one of the descendants of the twelve sons of Israel. They mention the existence of names and known Hebraic semantic words in the Varemba tribe such as Hasane, Sadiki and Haji,Hamisy ,sulamani circumcision, the food taboos, which are also practiced in the Islamic culture.¹ Lemba practise strict food rituals laid down in Leviticus 11 .they slaughter their meat using Kosher style and eat meat slaughtered by their fellow tribesman. However scholars like Tooke and Le Roux have reached a consensus

where they agree that the Varembe people might possibly be of African origins they argue that in the 19th century and early 20th century Lemba people were highly esteemed by surrounding tribes in the Zoutpansberry region of South Africa for their mining and metal work skills. Lemba's medical knowledge earned respect among tribes in South Africa². However this has been explained by other scholars who argue that their ancestry are of Islamic origin and they moved into parts of Africa due to different reasons such as trade until they reached different places where they are settled today. In several ethnographers' accounts various groups of the Varembe tribe originally constituted one large group that migrated from North Africa through Kenya and Tanzania and eventually dispersed in different directions. Some groups settling in South Africa (Lemba), Nyasaland (Anyemwe) and Mozambique, one other group migrated to Southern Rhodesia in the 19th century through South Africa and they are believed to have moved to Zimbabwe settled in Mberengwa formerly Belingwe in the Southern parts of Zimbabwe.³ The Varembe people mainly settled in Danga, under chief Mposi in Mberengwa West constituency though there are others who are scattered around the District. There are of the *Zhou* (Elephant) totem and the Varembe tribe associate their power with that which the elephant possess in the jungle.⁴ There is a generally agreed notion that culture is dynamic and changes overtime, to suit modernity and civilities⁵, however the wave of time has not resulted into the complete alteration and modification of various cultural elements of the Varembe tribe, as they still practice various ancient cultural practices and beliefs.

According to Damen, culture bears with its teachings of respect, life skills, encourages unity and helps in grooming and preparing young generations for the inevitable task ahead of continuation even after their elders are gone⁶. Amongst other beneficial elements of the Varembe culture include aspects of teaching life skills such as cooking, beer brewing, hygienic practices

during menstruation, the use of traditional medicine, discouraging prostitution and also maintaining a high degree of morality. One of the most valued teachings is that of understanding the menstrual cycle and hygienic practice during the cycle. The problem however arise from the fact that in the Varembe ethnic group menstruation is regarded a very sensitive process and during this period a women is deemed dirty and unfit to an extent that they are not allowed to cook or brew beer for ritual purpose.

The Varembe ethnic group is engaged in socialisation or initiation process,komba school is a socialisation school .Chirenje postulates that socialisation is a process through which individuals learn and accept roles⁷ ,it works to encourage wanted and discourage unwanted behaviour. These practises are crucial aspects in the African traditional religion .The main reason behind is that during this initiation ceremony fundamental custom values,morality,human life skills and expectations are taught during this period

2.2Komba initiation ceremony

The Varembe tribe practise various initiation rites but for the girls there is Komba initiation rite and is basically meant to graduate young girls to become women .This process also encompass women who would like to marry Varembe man, and the non Varembe are called Vashenji. As soon as these young girls start their menstrual cycle they qualify for the Komba school .Hannan defines komba as “Kuibva” which means ripe.⁹Normally at the age of 12 is where menstruation cycle begins and this means at this age many girls are enrolled into the initiation school because they are considered to be mature for marriage and child bearing. The komba school is very important in the Varembe`s social life, Mbuya Nyanye/Chinoni is the elder women whose role is to teach young girls into the riteof passage (Komba).The girl will select an elder women of her

choice, she then bring a bundle of firehood and a cloth to the women she will be automatically recruited to be part of the family .

The girls at the initiation school are taught to understand the process of menstrual cycle and hygiene, they are also taught socio cultural norms that involve ,dating, sexual conduct, beer brewing how to handle men in bed and after that recite the husbands totem as a way of appreciating the job well done. They are also taught how to apply certain herbs on their private parts they believe that there are certain herbs which increase appetite for sex and increase satisfaction in bed .The Varemba girls are taught to obey and to be submissive to their male counter parts.Menstruation is a sensitive process among the Varemba once the process starts the women is suppose to keep it secret and is restricted to do some duties,entering a cattle kraal or cooking food in the kitchen . At the Komba School they are taught to be strong women to work in the fields and do all domestic work. During night they go to the river and they are dipped into water for a number of hours thus where they will be using soft stones (*hurungudo*) in the river to pull their clitoris. They believe that virgin girls do not catch colds, those who will be shivering are suspected not to be virgins. If the break the rules they are beaten by their elders.

2.3 Male circumcision/Murundu

The ceremony is normally done in winter for both girls and boys but in separate places. The boys are recruited at the age of 10 every one is suppose to go through the process of male circumcision to be regarded as a man.The male initiation rite is called Murundu,this take place in a forest in the mountain called Dumbwi in Mberengwa where they camp for about two months, the boys are circumcised using a sharp object to remove the fore skin¹⁰ . The process involves the

removal of foreskin, they will use (*munzwa wenjenje*) to uplift the vein on the head of the penis and cut it and will now pull the foreskin and cut. This is done by the Nyamukanga the elder man and after that they will apply herbs so that the wound will quickly heal . During this period the boys are not allowed to eat food with salt because they believe that salt cause erection hence disturb or cause pain on the circumcised part. At times they even smoke the herbs so that they won't feel the pain and they are given beer to drink. After circumcision the boys are taken to a place where they commence the ritual process, the elders put a clay pot with mixed herbs underground and the boys will stand on top if he fell it means his parents has something to do with witchcraft so they parents are called to confess or else the wound of the boy will not heal. The boys will not heal the wound if his mother is a witch or prostitute until she come and confess if she doesn't the boy can even die .The circumcision is done by a traditional surgeon before sunrise then the boys will be taken to the river to reduce pain in cold water¹². The boys will spend the whole day lying with their backs on a special position with their knees up during the time of healing boys are taught traditional history, cultural practises and how to handle family matters as a father of the family.

During these activities women play a major role ,they brew traditional beer and during male initiation rite (*Murundu*) girls as little as 13 years and other women spend up to two months together with their male counter parts, as they will be cooking and fetching firewood for them, among other duties as may be prescribed by their mentors. When girls attend the male initiation ceremonies they are not allowed to mix with the boys, they use songs to communicate, thus when they bring food they sing a song at a distance then immediately leave before the boys arrive, also the boys will sing a song to notify that they have received the food and that is the cycle for the period until the process is over. In the case that girls or women delay to vacate the

food dispatch point they face punishment, they are either beaten or in extreme case they are made sex training instruments which is tantamount to rape.

2.4 Virginitly testing

Shoko.T on the issue of virginitly testing argues that these young girls are believed to be pure virgin and innocent ,the testing is crucial in Komba schools .The process involves the inserting of finger into the female virginal to check if there has not been penetration and if the hymen is still intact therefore the girl is considered to be virgin¹³ .The girl will lie down with her knees up and then the Mbuya Nyanye will insert two fingers inside the virgina to check if the hymen is still intact. They also use breast and the innocence of the eyes to detect if the girl is still virgin. At the pass out ceremony non virgins will be tied on their heads with a red cloth with hole at the centre and the virgins will be tied with white cloth. The non virgins are condemned by their parents to the extent that they are given to married man because they believe that they are dirty and cannot marry young boys or males of their choice.Those who get married to the boys their husband will pay little lobola.

2.5 Female Genital Mutilation

In the Varembe infibulations is a prerequisite for marriageeligibility the aspect of genital mutilation involves elongation of female external organs .¹⁴Amongst the Varembe ethnic group the act is performed at the age of10 - 12 at the Komba initiation school. The girls are taught to pull the libia minora.They should not be too long .They believe that the function aims at giving the husband a better feeling and facilitates child birth.¹⁵

Female genital mutilation entails partial or total removal of the females 'external genital organs.¹⁶ In Mberengwa among the Varembe elongation of Clitoris is the common one .the girls

are taught to pull their labia minora either using soft stone found in the river called *hurungudo* or a herb extracted near the rock which is burnt and mixed with oil. The herb is believed to have a shape which the clitoris is supposed to take the same shape. There are various forms of mutilations practiced in different countries depending on their culture¹⁷

There are many reasons that have been cited by various communities and cultural groups that exercise FGM, amongst the Bambara in Mali it is believed that if the clitoris touches the head of a baby during birth the baby dies and also that the clitoris is viewed as a male characteristic of a woman; in order to enhance her femininity the male part should be removed. The age when FGM takes place varies with countries and cultures, in Eritria girls who are 1.8 years are eligible for FGM, compared to 6.3 years in Mali and 12 years in Sudan.¹⁸

2.6 Sexual Socialisation

The African Traditional culture accommodates a practise where young girls are subjected to a sexual treat or orientation by elderly men but without necessarily engaging into sexual intercourse. The exercise involves fondling of the girl's tiny breast, buttocks and touching of the private parts. In the Varembe ethnic group, the custom is known as "*Chiramu*" and is described as "aimed at socialising children through the touching of young girl's private parts"¹⁹ The *Chiramu* act is normally performed by uncles, who would be the sister's husband. This act is considered a sexual socialisation aspect, where girls will be caressed and have their private parts touched, however the act does not entail indulging in sex.

2.7 Intermarriages

Mandivenga notes that an endogamous society is one which forbids people of a particular society or culture to marry into or be married to another culture.²⁰ The Varembe ethnic group has

endogamous marriage patterns they do not want intermarriages they regard non Varembe as vashenji meaning to say outcasts. A woman who want to get married in tribe must learn and practise the lembe religion ,dietary rules and other customs in order to be a member of the Lembe especially women ,you will be taken to the river and they built a shelter made of grass then it is set on fire while you are inside before the person is burnt they will throw her into the river this means that the person is cleansed from Mushenji can now join the group .The women should not bring any cooking equipment from her house and should shave her hair to start a new life as a Murembe. The girls are taught several rules governing sexual behaviour and every women should have a knowledge on medicines and how to take care of the husband and children.

The Varembe ethnic group practice an endogamous marriage pattern whereby the Varembe are not allowed to marry non- Varembe. Non Varembe are called Basetse in Sotho, Vashenji in Zimbabwe , just as Jews are discouraged to marry non Jews. The Lembe traditional practices are similar to those of the Semitic people (Arabs)²¹. It is impossible for non Varembe to become a member of the clan even if he is circumcised. For the women who would like to marry Varembe they should go under Komba initiation and agreed to live according to the dietary rules and other customs to be a member. In earlier days one could be a Lembe by birth, but nowadays they have adapted some of the ethnic group's culture and encooperated²². No one can be a Lembe through circumcision and joining in customs and beliefs also food taboos.

2.8 Early marriages

Child marriages or early marriages are common in the Varembe ethic group. There are various reasons that are attributed to the prevalence of child marriages in Mberengwa, some are married

off early to compensate family debts, in times of economic hardship the parents can give a girl child to an old rich man in exchange for food. Other reasons include a situation where if an older sister is barren and the husband is rich and needs children, the girl's family gives the girl child to replace, so that they maintain good relations with the rich in-laws. Soon after the Komba initiation ceremony those girls who are not virgins are also given to the elderly, this promotes polygamy. Early marriage is considered a way of providing male guardianship to daughters, protecting them from sexual assault, avoiding pregnancy out of marriage, extending their childbearing years. Early child marriages are a part of the Varembe cultural practices that have been practised for years.

2.9 Inheritance

The Varembe ethnic group in Mberengwa preserve its cultural practices they have practised for decades regardless of changes that happen. Inheritance in Varembe is an important issue and it applies to both men and women and it simply means to replace the deceased. In the case of boys if the brother is dead the young brother to the deceased is supposed to take the place and act as a father and take care of the wife and children this known as (*kugara nhaka*) inheritance. If the wife of the deceased refuses she will be sent back to her family because she has violated the cultural practice of the group. Same applies to the young brother of the deceased he is not allowed to refuse the wife if she is bigger than him. If he fails to do so the boy is called for disciplinary hearing at the traditional court by the elders. For girls they are also supposed to replace their sisters or aunts if she is either barren or dead, this is done to maintain good relationship with the husband and the wife's parents. In some cases if the girl's parents were satisfied by the lobola paid they can give their son in law another young girl to marry as a sign of appreciation especially if the person is rich.

2.10 Testing fertility

The Varemba strongly believe in indigenous knowledge systems in their day to day lives the still use herbal medicines up to present day. When the boys reach the puberty stage they are suppose to get tested if they are fertile .They are taken to the river by their elders and they are told to get into the water and masturbate until they discharge the semen into the stagnant water if the semen float on top of the water it means you have high chances of being sterile and if the semen sink it means you are fertile. The elders will then inspect and give some herbs to those who have their semen float in order to help the reproductive system of the boys to be fertile. The girls are also tested they are given uncooked egg to drink. If you vomit it means you have low fertility rate so the Mbuya Nyanye will give you some herbs mixed with porridge.

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CHAPTER TWO

3.0 Violation of Children's Rights through traditional practices of Varemba in Mberengwa

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the cultural practices of Varemba that violate children's rights and the impacts they have on children. Traditionalists believe that the cultural practices are beneficial to the Varemba. Male circumcision is believed to be beneficial and preparation for manhood. Human rights activists argue that the practice is harmful to the wellbeing of a child when performed badly. It will be demonstrated that some of the cultural practices are harmful and cause long lasting effects. The Komba practice is also believed to be a socialization process for womanhood and marriage. Thus where virginity testing, elongation of clitoris is done. Child rights activists believe that the above mentioned practices violate children's rights and also cause health problems such as cancer due to use of herbal concoctions. There are also traditional cultural practices such as virginity testing, early marriages and forced marriages, son preference, inheritance all these have negative impact on children's rights.

3.1 Violation of child rights through Female Genital Mutilation

The process of Female Genital Mutilation is mainly practiced by the Varemba people in Mberengwa. F.G.M is also known as elongation of the clitoris and is done at the Komba initiation school whereby the girls are taught to pull their clitoris to be long applying different herbs. The use of herbal concoctions by the girls violate children's rights as they put ashes and oil on their private parts and this is believed to enhance girl's sexual performances to please

husbands requirement for F.M.G includes the beliefs that it is a necessary right for a woman to graduate into womanhood enhances sexuality and facilitates child birth.¹The process is criticized by the CRC who believe that the practice cause health problems such as cervical cancer and complications in the future.

The process has negative effects on children as they are forced to practice such harmful cultural practices because it's their traditional beliefs and customary. Elongation of clitoris by Varembe as a customary belief violates children`s rights as this is performed against their will. Chipiwa Mposi pointed out they will just give in because after the initiation ceremony those who have attended the ceremony will be given presents and gain respect in the ethnic group and also will get married to circumcised men. The graduates will also become marketable and ready for marriage². The women who did not attend the initiation will be discriminated and not allowed to attend some social gatherings.However article 5 (9) of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) advocates for total eradication of social and cultural practice that violates human rights either for customary or superiority of either these sexes or stereotyped roles for men and women.³

The Female Genital Mutilation process is practiced at different ages depending on the belief of the ethnic group. In the Varembe ethnic group the process is done at adolescences graduating the girls into womanhood. The ACRWC advocates for such cultural practices to be performed at the age of 18 where the child is able to pass meaningful decisions. F.G.M is a continued process in Varembe and continues to violate children`s right as the elders are the ones who decide for their children and pass final judgment without considering their views. There is a generally agreed notion that culture is dynamic and changes over time to suit modernity and civilities⁴; however, the wave of time has not resulted into the total alteration and modification of various cultural

elements of the Varembe ethnic group, as they still practice various ancient practices which violate children's rights. The Varembe ethnic group goes on passing information from generation to generation practicing cultural practices that violate child rights because it is customary.

It needs to be demonstrated that such cultural practices have negative and devastating effects on children. The girls in Varembe ethnic group have no freedom of choice as they are forced to practice harmful practices and applying herbs on their private parts. The herbs they use some of them are dangerous and can cause infections on their private parts and also cervical cancer. Most of the girls have complications and sometimes suffer from cervical cancer due to herbal concoctions they apply trying to pull out their clitoris.

3.2 Male circumcision and the violation of child rights

Male circumcision reduces developing penile infections or cancer. Male circumcision is a ritual practice mainly practiced by Varembe ethnic group in Mberengwa the process involves the removal of the fore skin of the penis. Varembe ethnic group believes that circumcision is associated with maintaining hygiene and religious issues. Circumcision violates the children's as it is done at a tender age and everyone is forced to participate regardless of their views it must not be a choice. There is no freedom of choice in Varembe ethnic group as the children are forced to do things against their will. The Varembe ethnic group believed to be part of the Muslim so they base their arguments with those of Muslims, who believe that circumcision is a covenant with God as instructed in Leviticus 11 that a baby boy should get circumcised⁵. Male circumcision results in health and erection problems. In an interview with Rashid Zvinowanda he noted that.

I am one of the initiates who underwent male circumcision at Dumbwi. I had serious complications after circumcision the process is painful. I was held by three strong men then the Nyamukanga removed my foreskin using a sharp object the process was painful. The wound did not heal and could develop sores until the pass out .I was then treated by the surgeon called Dr. Dongijena who further treated for botched circumcision at his surgery in Kwekwe.⁶

The initiate also highlighted that they are not allowed to run away, if they escape they will be given hard punishment .according to Varembe culture people who pass the circumcision age could be forcibly circumcised as a way of rehabilitation.

The practice has both positive and negative effects. However, various organizations goes against the Varembe cultural practices as they violate children's rights. The disadvantages of male circumcision over way the advantages of circumcision if done by traditional surgeons who have limited knowledge especially nowadays where there are diseases that caused by sharing sharp objects, it is done before puberty and it is a requirement. The views of the little boys are not even considered at all. This demonstrates that cultural practices also affect males in Varembe ethnic group.

In addition the circumcision is done by traditional surgeons who have little knowledge on proper circumcision and the after effects. Muhammed Seremani pointed out that,

We were told to lie with our backs and the knees up so that we won't disturbed the circumcised part and feel the pain. The Nyamukanga will come and check at night and if you put the knees down you will be beaten as a form of punishment. We spend a number

of days naked . The practice is painful and at times the boys suffer from infections because their wounds are not covered or treated properly.⁷

From the above interview it clearly shows that are abused by their elders and their wound are not dressed to the extent that they suffer from infections . They are given herbs to smoke as pain killers and some to apply on their wounds. The wounds will not be properly dressed hence causing infections and this can lead to rotting penis and develop complications.

Children suffer gross invasion of their rights as they are forced to practice such practices in order to graduate into manhood. In South Africa where the practice is also done 33 men died in the Sekhukhune land in the province of Mpumalanga due to wrong male circumcision⁸. And it is also noted that several children are rescued from traditional surgeons after they are recruited for the practice. Elizabeth Zhaume argues that the Varembe cultural practices violate children's rights.

my husband died and have two sons,the first son was recruited at the new Msasa near Machingwe and when he came he had complications his penis was swollen and could hardly pass urine. this time they I tried to hide the small I was harassed and beaten ,I went to Mataga police station and presented my case. The police then went and rescued the young boys.⁹

The male circumcision can cause death if conducted badly and disfunction of the penis. The traditional surgeons do not consider all this they just circumcise because it's a customary belief that every man should get circumcised. The process has negative impacts on boys who will be disadvantaged.

Furthermore, the boys experience mental and physical torture, trauma and can also develop complications which require surgical incision. The Varemba people believe if the boy did not heal or develop some complications to the extent of rotting they blame the evil spirits. They even consult the parent so that they can come and confess if they have something to do with witch craft or prostitution. The child can even die if they do not confess. This is done by the Nyamukangas who put a clay pot with some herbs and consult the spiritual fathers for guidance throughout their ritual practices⁹. If the parents' boy possesses something they should confess so that the boy should heal. However, one can note that such cultural practices violate children's rights as they become victims of the circumstances. The International Human Rights covenants underscore obligations of UN member states to ensure the protecting and promotion of human rights, including the rights to non discrimination to integrity of the person and to the highest attainment of physical, mental health. This can cause mental and physical torture and trauma for the rest of the life of a child. The process can take a long time to heal or at times can cause erection problems in the future and long lasting complications.

3.3 Komba initiation school and violation of child rights

Komba initiation rite involves the recruitment of young girls into the Komba School. The process is done between June and July (in winter period). They believe that virgins do not shiver or get colds after they have been deeped in water during the night. Tshakalani pointed out that after the Komba pass out she had continuous flue and could feel pain in her bones until she went to Jeka Rural hospital. She was diagnosed of Anemia which is a result of colds¹⁰. Some of the cultural practices of Varemba are harmful to the human body. They also contaminate water borne disease during the time they will be in water. However, this has been criticised by child rights activists such as Save the Children, Zimbabwean Law, CRC arguing that any child below

the age of 18 is a child and should not be exposed to harmful cultural practices.¹¹ Most of the girls will suffer from bilharzia and their body penetrated with germs and infections caused by snails .

The Varembe children are caught between a hard surface and a rock by their cultural practices as they are forced by their parents and the entire community go through the initiation school . They leave about two months to attend Komba and some to cook for their male counterparts at Murundu (male circumcision). After the process of Komba few girls will return to school most of them will get married. Even the parents can give their girl child to the old man as they have been equipped with marital roles. The process deprived the boys and girls in Mberengwa from attaining primary universal education. The ministry of Education, Sporting and Culture do not tolerate this, it states that a person who is absent for eight days should be cancelled from the register and if he or she exceed up to one month should repeat the same level next year. Many children after the practice do not return to school as Tarisai Musindazi pointed out that she was disturbed for three years repeating the same level due to cultural practices. At first she said she attended the ceremony then the second and third time she was going to cook for the males¹². This hinder development in Mberengwa and most of the children will not understand the concept of repeating the same level because of disturbances so they quit school.

In addition, the practice violates children's rights and degrade them in front of the community after the whole process of learning the Nyanye will arrange a day to present the girls to their parents. Those who are still virgin will be tied on their heads with a white cloth representing that they are still intact. Those who are not virgin will be tied with a cloth with a hole at the centre meaning to say they have broke the rules. They are humiliated in front of their parents and they are also condemned by their parents to the extent that they are given to married men hence perpetuating the issue of polygamy. This has negative impacts to girls because they are forced to

marry even if they do not want. Girls are more vulnerable than boys in the Varemba ethnic groups in Mberengwa. However, the act is rather degrading and abusive to those who are found not virgins.

Mabuwa classify Komba initiation school as an instrument to perpetuate male chauvinistic agenda and dominance¹³. This whole thing corrupt children's minds and is abusive to the children as they are taught things that do not concern them as they are still young. Such cultural practices affect children's mindset and child development actually it's emotional abuse. UNCRC notes that children should not be exposed to sexual acts, because this has devastating effects on both child development and even general development of the nation¹⁴. The children who underwent sexual orientation have high chances of getting married at a tender age as they would like to put into practice what they were taught. Girls are more vulnerable in this case. Article 22 of the UNCRC notes that The protection of children against performing work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education.....¹⁵, thus cooking for males during their initiation ceremony as a socially presented duty to work carried out by women greatly infringe the girls right to attain education. It is worth to note that during the process they will be cooking food for their male counterparts. They use songs to communicate so that the "vadhahi" or intermediators between women and girls will come and collect food." If the women delay to vacate the place they will be punished by rape or beaten" said Tafanana Zvinowanda¹⁶. This violates the rights of girls and women because the practice undermines the rights of girls forcing them to have sex as a punishment.

3.4 Early or child Marriages and forced marriages

Early Marriages or child marriages in Varemba ethnic group is a common practice. It is the marriage of girls below the age of eighteen years. Agnes Masarira notes

I was forced to get married to an old man which I did not like the process was arranged by my parents .the husband had four wives and I thought I was the last but to my surprise two more came and they were just under age like me.I got pregnant and when I went for delivery I was ravaged by STIs and I got tested I was HIV positive¹⁷.

The Varemba culture violates children`s the young girls do not have the power to make decisions and their decisions are made by their elders. In some cases the marriages are even done before the baby is born. Early marriages are form of gender based violence as young girls do not have the power to make decisions, their decisions are made by their elders. They also perpetuate male dominance hence marginalizing the women and children in the society. They also suffer degrading and ill treatment but they have no say because they should keep secrets and respect their husbands. The Varemba cultural practices have negative impacts and are a society dominated by males violating children`s rights.

Most of these child marriages are a disadvantage to young girls because she will be second or third wife and face stiff competition and stress at a tender age¹⁸. The girl is treated like a slave whereby the older wives will give her too many jobs. One can note that Varemba cultural practices violate children`s rights, for instance the girls have no freedom of choice to choose their own life partner. The marriage arrangements are performed without the knowledge of the girls involved and it is performed while the girls are still young. However, most of the girls in

child marriage have no chance to go to school because she should be focusing on house duties and take care of the husband and children. This infringes the girl child's rights to freedom and life. Traditionally, girls are married before puberty by older men who test them manually for virginity¹⁹. This clearly shows that the practice perpetuates early marriages and polygam.

There is also gender inequality in the Varembe the traditional practices only test women and degrade or announce the results in front of the community. The practice marginalises girls at the expense of men. It is worth to note that even girls are subjected to rape by men because some believe that sleeping with a virgin cure all evil spirits and misfortunes. In most cases girls are sent to another family to appease the avenging spirit.

3.5 Virginity testing and violation of child rights

Virginity testing is a common cultural practice in the Varembe. It is done at the Komba initiation school and is an important aspect so there is no way the girls can overcome such patriarchal practice . After the test the non virgins will be punished and beaten. It is worth to note that such cultural practices are a forced and direct arbitrary attack and degrading physical examination. It violates article 5 of the UNDHR which states that no one shall be subjected to torture or cruel in human or degrading treatment or punishment. Furthermore, most of the practices involve involuntary or premature sex and this put children particularly girls at high risk of being infected by HIV²⁰. The practices undermine children's rights and cause health consequence also violating universal international human rights law.

Family, culture or child's community has also facilitated the exploitation and abuse of children, by some of cultural practices and customs as survival tactics. Virginity testing has been used as a way of intimidating females. When the girl is suspected not to be a virgin she will be punished at

times they use breasts, innocents of the eyes and also fingers to taste. There is no explanation except beating and the girl is forced to tell the name of the person who broke the virginity so that he will pay to the parents.

3.6 Inheritance and the violation of children`s rights

The Varemba ethnic group has ancient cultural practices they still practice because it's customary and they had practiced it for many years. The issue of inheritance is still practiced in Mberengwa. Usually a girl child is used as compensatory payment in interfamily disputes as well as in the appeasement of avenging deceased spirits. The boys are also forced to inherit the women after the death of his brother this further accelerates the spread of HIV ,in this case they do not even check what caused the death of the brother so that they prevent HIV. If the women refuse to get married to the young brother she will be chased away and leave the children without anyone to take care of them .at this juncture one can point out that children will suffer because they will be left at a bare ground without anyone to take care,such cultural practices have negative impacts on children Janet Magomo pointed out that

I was chased away after i refused to be inherited with the elder brother who had his own wives. The children and property were distributed among the relatives and my children are suffering and no longer go to school. ²¹

In such a scenario childrens are victims of the circumstance, children are suffering because of the decisions of the elders who do not even consider the life of children without mothers. A boy as young as 17 is forced to take his brother`s wife and take care of the children. In many cases the wife will be bigger than the little boy but they don`t even consider it .It is of greater importance to note that inheritance has negative effects on boys and girls of Varemba. Simba Mupereri 17

years argues that he was told at the traditional court to inherit the wife of his brother whom he witnessed that he died because of HIV. The boy ran away to find a job at a nearby growth point Mataga. The issue of inheritance in Mberengwa especially under chief Mposi led many children to run away from their homes and dropping out of school to find jobs somewhere. This also hinders development in the area as many children drop out of school. Girls are also given to their sister's husband to maintain relations in case the sister is dead or barren the young girl is given to the old man to replace. This violate the children's rights as girls are forced to marry aunt's husband.

These traditional cultural practices have devastating effects on children in particular because in the case of avenging spirits if the deceased was a male the spirit is compensated with an opposite sex and vice versa. The children are the ones who are used to compensate without their knowledge they are also sent while they are still young . Those who are given the child will either marry if she is a girl, this also cause child marriages and polygamy, or wait for her to grow up so that they hold the dowry after bridal price and use it. Therefore it is worth to note that there is no freedom of choice and decision making in the Varembe ethnic group all decision making are made by elders.

Most of the Varembe cultural practice have negative impacts on children .male circumcision ,virginity testing also cause health problems such as rotting penises ,spread of HIV and AIDS also elongation of clitoris using herbs cause cervical cancer. The cultural practices violates children's rights in the sense that children has no decisions or their views are not considered. The elders are the ones who have the final decision. Children are subjected to ill treatment, physical and emotional abuse by some of the cultural practices. child rights activists such as the

UNCRC,CEDAW,Zimbabwean Law,UNICEF advocates for total eradication of cultural practices that violate children`s rights.

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CHAPTER 3

4.0 Intervention strategies to curtail the violation of children's rights through cultural practices

INTRODUCTION

Despite the existing challenges in redressing harmful traditional practices that infringe upon children's rights, certain strategies and tools have been applied to reduce the severe impact on the victims. The government and the non-governmental organisation came up with strategies that both promote the concept of universal human rights and community values. At a national level the government introduced the Children's Act which contains a set of prescribed rights of children. Among all, the act defines a child as anyone below the age of 18. The government imposed stiffer penalties on child abuse case and attempted to promoted the universal primary education through Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM).The government also established a department called Victim Friendly Unit of the Zimbabwe Republic Police to deal directly with violation of children's rights. Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) play a crucial role in campaigning against child abuse, introduced Free Help line for children for example Child line, provide free legal services for children to protect their rights. Intervention strategies by the government and NGOs have done much but not enough to effectively eradicate or minimize violation of children's rights in Mberengwa.

Intervention Strategies by government

The government introduced pieces of legislation that promotes the rights of children. Among all, the Children's Act directly provides special laws meant to protect children. The act defines a child as anyone below the age of 18 with prescribed rights that protect him/her. Every child has the right to food, shelter, clothing, parental care, education, freedom of association and expression, right to protection from harmful cultural practices. These laws helped to curb abuse of children on the pretext of cultural practices for some offenses became liable for prosecution¹. Cultural practices such as child marriages or early marriages became a criminal offence which is punishable by long prison sentences. The practices such as "*kugara nhaka*" inheritance where by a child is forced to marry an old or any man without her concern became punishable as it undermines the fundamental rights to the child. Child marriages among the Varembe have diminished but it is still remains a common practise and inheritance became few after independence in the Varembe. Some people consider it as part of their cultural practise and social way of life. Many cases has gone unreported in many areas in Mberengwa.

Government introduced stiffer penalties to cases related to child abuse. Some cases though treated as relevant to cultural practice becomes a crime. For example child marriages are treated as statutory rape, the perpetrator is sentenced not less than ten years. Hence in imposing such sentences the government protects a child from harmful cultural practices as stipulated by the Children's Act.² However initiation programmes continue to encourage young girls to get married early soon after the initiation ceremonies.

4.1 BEAM and the right to education

In an effort to promote the right to education for every child the government introduced the Basic Education Assistance Module(BEAM). BEAM is the government social responsibility handled by the department of social welfare to provide basic assistance to children by providing school fees, uniforms, books and food. This addressed the gender disparities whereby when a parent failed to pay fees for his/her children a male child was given the first preference at the expense of a girl child³. So BEAM as a government measure chipped in to address all those challenges. Also this measure reduced the issue of early or child marriages. According to the study Jonas the Varembe culture had this practice of son preference and marrying a female child so that the lobola paid would be used to settle education bills for the male child⁴. So with the introduction of BEAM government reduced the impact of that harmful practice on the right to education for every child. However BEAM like many other government programs has largely remained underfunded as poorly administered. Many girls continue to be forced to dropout of school because of financial constraints.

4.2 Victim friendly unit under ZRP

To promote freedom of expression and association, the government introduced a department of Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) under Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) to handle child abuse cases. It is the interaction platform between children and the law enforcers (police). Experienced child counsellors and psychologists comprised the team at VFU⁵. Children abuse report cases are referred to the VFU where they will be able to relate their cases freely without fear.VFU

Mberengwa district police officer Nyamutsamba confirmed that programme is effective but hes not done enough to reduce cases of child marriages. Also they have received a number of child marriage cases in the district which in some instances were settled at the court of law and others at the traditional courts or family courts. This police department works hand in hand with community at large to curb the increase of child abuse cases perpetrated in the ploy of cultural practices. Since the introduction of the VFU, the child abuse cases became limited in other areas. Hence it was a move by government to curtail the violation of children's rights through cultural practices.

Strategies by non-governmental organisations

4.3 Child Rights Awareness Campaigns

Various ways to curtail the violation of children's rights by traditional cultural practices have been carried out by NGOs nationally. As mentioned earlier in the study the Varembe tribe is scattered all over the country apart from them being found in Mberengwa. For coverage sake the NGOs have held campaigns country wide to accommodate all cultures in the country. Child rights awareness campaigns were held and even at present organizations working with children are doing those campaigns against traditional harmful cultural practices. They help people interpret the constitution mainly clauses related to children and educate them on child rights instruments such as UNCRC, ACRWC and Children's Act. Various platforms to educate adults and children are created. Some organisations held workshops specifically for children and others for adults.

4.4 Child Protection Committee (CPC)

Save the Children in Mberengwa district worked hand in hand with Child Protection Committees (CPC) in protecting the welfare of children. Child protection committee is comprised of women and man from different wards in the district. They undergo training about child rights issues and they become the watchdogs of the organisation in every ward. They are the one who identify child rights violations in the area and report the cases.

The organisation conducted child rights campaign in schools. They sponsor debates, drama, plays, games, and the main theme being to raise awareness about children rights. For example

Plan International held campaigns in school with theme “*our rights, our future*”. According to the report many children began to know their rights at finger tips and many cases of abuse were reported. Most cases reported were rape mainly by adults and due to cultural beliefs they was resolved at family court and family member escape imprisonment. One interesting story was that of an orphan in the village who stayed with her aunt and the aunt’s husband raped the girl (12). Instead for the family to seek justice in the court of law they accused the girl of reporting her husband to the police.⁶ (Culturally *babamukuru* (aunt’s husband) is referred to as a husband to aunt’s brother girl child and she can inherit from her aunt.) their belief doesn’t allow a family member to make another one imprison since they believe that their tradition courts promotes harmony and unity in the family than state courts.

Moreso, some organisations held campaigns in the community such as “*Know your Rights Campaign*” in which they educate the community members, leaders, school authorities about children’s rights. Flyers, poster, pamphlets, brochures and books were distributed to the people. T-shirts with different rights description were distributed.⁷ Television programs and adverts are still broadcasted to promote children’s rights. These campaigns helped few families in many parts of the country where these cultural practices affect the livelihood of children who have T.Vs. Hence it was one strategy by NGOs that helped to curtail the violations of children’s rights through cultural practices but its not effective because the headman, chief, religious leaders do not want to get involved hence they are the one who violate the rights of children.

The nation engaged with traditional leaders, church leaders, and Ministry of Education through trainings to educate these people in order to convince these people to stop harmful cultural practices that violate child rights. In Mberengwa UNICEF in conjunction with Save the Children conduct workshops to curtail practices that violate child rights. The Ngos such as SAVE ,MASO,MACO,UNICEF and also NAC dispatch pamphlets, books and articles raising awareness to child abuse, bad cultural practices and the effects to try and do away with violation of children. The NGO also provide information on how to get the information if the child is abused and what to do and it helps to provide information on how to prevent abuse either by parents, community or cultural practices. It needs to be highlighted that the NGOs held the campaigns and meetings but for a change all members of the community should participate. The community is not even interested in the meetings so the work by the NGOs is not seen since violation of children`s rights is still witnessed in Mberengwa

4.5 Awareness campaign for the Chiefs and Religious leaders

In 2007 training was held to ensure more than 300 chiefs and head men were reached with information on how they can apply and interpret to the act, offer support to victims in their communities and to stop abuse⁸. This also reached chiefs in Mberengwa and Mposi in particular. Stand up and speak campaigns and phsco- social support workshops has been done to awaken the children. The family or the community especially in Mposi area there are perpetrators of child abuse through cultural practices. The (NGO) Save the children which is working with children has its own strategies to curtail violation of child rights through cultural practices such as awareness campaign, pscho-social support, child protection committee, electing junior councilors these are members or young people who are selected to represent others to air their

views in different communities, programs like Young People's Network (YPNZ) also take part in trying to curtail violation of child rights

4.6 African charter on the rights and welfare of children in dealing with forced marriages

Child protection and Adoption Act of Zimbabwe deals with child marriages and forced marriage. The government of Zimbabwe and the ACRWC defines a child as anyone below the age of eighteen.⁹ The above foundation discourage all the marriages below 18 years and it is seen as rape. The Varembe practice child marriages in Mberengwa most children are married between 13 and 15 years sometimes by old man. The cultural practices violate children's rights especially the girls they are more vulnerable. Most children after campaigns they run away from their forced marriages. In many cases the children in Mberengwa are caught at Beit Bridge border post trying to run away from their forced marriages and inheritance . The implementations of child protection committees in rural areas is just a half baked cake because it doesn't have power to control the parents of the children therefore it should be noted that it takes time for a social change to occur especially one that is built around culture and beliefs¹⁰. The NGOs try by all means to curtail harmful cultural practices that violate child rights in Mberengwa but the Implementation and the laws are not followed because of cultural backgrounds, values and norms of the Varembe.

4.7 Child Welfare and School drop outs

The Save the Children Child Welfare officer also noted that it is difficult to implement some of the laws on the people in Mberengwa due to their cultural beliefs¹¹. The ministry of education sports and culture report on school dropouts echoed the same sentiments in the case of child absenteeism during June and July, the Varembe do not even consider that they hinder child

development by disturbing the children during school term. Also the government emphasized MDG 2 which state universal primary education to everyone¹². This becomes problematic as the Varemba do not follow or give priority to education they believe that the Komba School is best for their children. On such a scenario where the elders give priority to traditional school there is no way the NGOs or government can implement the laws and become effective. If their children refuse to go to the traditional school they become alienated or seen as outcasts. If there are disputes concerning child abuse/forced marriages in most cases there are settled at a traditional court.

4.8 Stand up and Speak campaigns

The issue of campaigns like “stand up and speak out” in the Varemba cannot be effective in Mberengwa the culture does not want people to expose their cultural practices to the outsiders. In that case there is no one who can stand up and speak out that the children’s rights are violated. Hence it is worth to note that laws enacted by the child rights activists and the government need the community to participate for a change.

African Charter on the rights and welfare of children (1990) article 21 states that to eliminate children from harmful cultural practices which are bad to their health and those that discriminate child from the rest of the community.¹³ On the issue of Komba initiation school or male circumcision, those who did not attend the school are seen as outcasts and are discriminated from others. The government and the NGOs on their campaigns should also involve the elder people because they are the backbone of the culture. The ACRWC advocates for elimination of harmful cultural practice but the NGOs should deal first with the elder people because they are the ones who perpetrate violation of the child rights.

The ministry of Education Sport Art and Culture also teach children about culture. Culture becomes problematic when children practice harmful cultural practices that violate their health, education and also degrading treatment and torture, physical and mental abuse. Teachers were also trained to deal with children who are victims of cultural practices. The teachers will pass the information to the headmaster and then to the VFU the issue is then dealt with at the court. In most cases the children are not free or do not want to expose what really happened because they will suffer the consequences of revealing cultural values and beliefs to strangers. Even if the teacher try to persuade, most children not to expose the information because it's a taboo. However, the issue of eliminating cultural practices does not work properly because limited information is gathered and the children had not guts to speak out.

Most children who do not want to attend the initiation school flee to Sandawana and Inyala mine for wage labour. This also hinder development of the district due to the harmful cultural practices that violate child rights resulting in children running away from their families. Save the Children in conjunction with the ZRP Mberengwa (Substation Mataga) will follow and arrest employers who employ under age children¹⁴. Many children from Sandawana and Inyala mine are taken and the social service will then provide school fees, uniforms and books for the children.

4.9 Water harvesting to combat economic hardships

Mberengwa is one of the area which experience series of droughts .The economic hardships results in violation of children`s rights mainly girls who will be given to rich people in exchange for food. NGOs introduced water harvesting system in which they have projects drill boreholes and establishing gardens and irrigations. The NGOs are trying to do away with food shortages in Mberengwa since there is low rainfall. The Varembe ethnic group has a cultural practice known

as Kuzvarira. The poor family will give their daughter to the rich man so that they receive food. This culture see girl child as economic asset in times of economic failure or hardship. Boreholes gardens and irrigation schemes were established so that the community will have gardens to cultivate and reduce poverty among the Varemba families. They will also sell their produce; have money to pay school fees for their children. The NGO also provide fence and other material to facilitate in irrigation schemes. Near chief Mposi's area where Varemba people are densely populated there are two irrigation schemes which can help the area to survive in times of drought. There is Mundi Mataga Dam which also have an irrigation and also Chimwe dam creates economic activities that help the people in Mberengwa supplement with the food they have harvested.

The issue of irrigational schemes creates yet another complex situation where by the vulnerable group children will work in the irrigation schemes while the males go to Inyala, Sandawana, Mataga Growth Point to look for piece jobs. The patriarchal nature of the Varemba culture will always violate rights of the vulnerable groups mainly children in particular. Even if the NGOs try to help and advocate for development by introducing irrigation schemes to situation goes back around to the exploitation of children by elders.

4.10 ACRWC and the CRC Advocacy Programmes

ACRWC which was adopted in 1990 article 21, (2) states that child marriage and the betrothal of girls and boys shall be prohibited and effective action, include legislation shall be taken to specify the minimum age of marriage to be 18 year and make registration of all marriages in an official registry compulsory.¹⁵The government also adopted the CRC and put it into full implementation in 1999. In Varemba ethnic group the issue of child marriages are settled in a

traditional court. The boys and girls have no say the decisions are made by the elderly. Children are vulnerable they cannot stand up and fight against harmful social cultural practices.

4.11 Girl Child Network and the Opharns and the Vulnerable Children

There is also the Girl Child Network which advocates for equality between girls and boys. The Girl Child Network in Mberengwa is not that effective since the girls who are abused, ill treated had no zeal to stand up for themselves due to cultural reasons that continue to suppress their views. The attainment of equality in education with regards to the ration of girls to boys has been greatly affected by the cultural practices of the Varembe. The Varembe value boys more as compared to girls in all aspects. In the issue of education they believe that boys are better than girls. In an interview with Takalani Seremane said, “She flee from her first marriage where she was given to an old man with two wives to be the third one. She said she ran away and reported the issue to the Save the children coordinator where she was given to a volunteer (one of the CPC member) and the fees was provided by the Orphans and Vulnerable children program. She is now an outcast and is currently studying at Bulawayo Polytechnic”. It is worth to note that the girl was awakened by the awareness campaigns by the girl child network at Chegato High School. This therefore shows the extent to which girls have been denied access to education, owing to a greater based and patriarchal system in Mberengwa.

In addition primary and secondary school in chief Mposi recorded a large number of schools dropouts between grade 7 and form 3 due to cultural practices and economic hardship and pregnancy. In an interview with the headmaster at Ruzengwe Secondary and Mposi High school the headmaster stated that they enroll a large number of students at form one but when they reach forms 4 most of the girls dropout during form 1 and form 3 due to pregnancies and economic

hardships and also to join initiation school. However, it is worth to note that the issue of economic hardship maybe valid to a certain extent, but the cultural practices gives son preference whenever the resources are not available to cater for everyone regardless of gender or sex.

However, the Ministry of Education Sport Art and Culture in collaboration with Gender Affairs allowed pregnant girls to continue with school to reduce school dropouts and and promote MDG 2 to pay fees for everyone to attain universal primary education. In such a scenario where the girl is impregnated the boy will go on with education and the girl is forced to dropout of school hence increasing the number of uneducated women in Varembe and Mberengwa as a whole. This again shows inequality between boys and girls in terms of education in their community because they fear discrimination and it's a taboo to go against cultural practices as they are told by their elders. Therefore the victims do not come up unless they are identified by CPCs but in most cases they do not reveal what really transpired. This becomes problematic as the appropriate information on how children are being abused is not exposed. At times e.g. in case of child marriages, the girl child refuse that she was raped or forced into the marriage so in such a case the government do not have power . The situation of early marriages is exacerbated by cultural practices such as virginity testingand Komba School.

Fact Paper sheet 22, on harmful cultural practices try to eliminate such cultural practices which violate child rights. Most of the acts are just laws on paper much has not been done in areas such as chief Mposi's area were bad cultural practices are still practiced. Varembe people do not appreciate formal education even though MDG 2 states that children should attain primary universal education. Their traditional school is important this hence perpetrate violation of children especially in impoverished families.

4.12 National Strategic Plan

The strategic plan of action seeks to fulfil the right to education for every child in Zimbabwe. It works in conjunction with OVC Policy and NAP and the Gender Policy, CEDAW and also CRC; ACRWC advocates for promoting the best interest of the child and respect their views, compulsory education for every child. This created a society in which girls and women to take charge of their lives participate fully in national development. Children are protected by various laws particularly under the convention on Marriage; Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages has clearly stated that marriage should not be under 18 years. Some of the laws do not even reach Mberengwa district's remotes areas where cultural practices are done. The government should intervene some of the NGOs do not reach the areas due to rules and regulations passed by the chiefs. It is clear to point out that for the law to be effective it needs the community and the government to work together to eliminate such bad cultural practices.

The factors such as culture and economic gender dynamics of power give domestic violence to take place. When dealing with domestic violence there are certain aspects that should be put into consideration, the family, community, civil society and the state also the stakeholders such as international organisation¹⁸. Family as an institution violates children's rights. Take for instance the Varembe family, due to their cultural practices they usher domestic violence of children since they are under parents they have no freedom. Children through education organisations empowered children through education regarding domestic violence and also recovering the lives of the victims and protecting them. The government also put piece of legislations to deal with perpetrators of domestic violence and how to seek information if the child's rights are violated.

4.13 Childline

There is also the child line free toll which is for free. Children who have been educated on abuse, domestic violence and ill-treated are advised to call the child line. Many Varemba children are not exposed to such information and those who have knowledge are afraid to report their cases. In Mberengwa rural there is limited access to communication such as cellphones but the government tried by all means to establish or put ZRP suggestions box on each and every school so that children will report their cases. This is not that effective since the police VFU will not follow to collect the cases in the suggestion boxes. The family should also be educated and given knowledge on how to take care of the children and listen to their views so that they won't violate the rights of children.

The community play a pivotal role on the violation of child rights in the Varemba ethnic group. The community elders and religious leaders are the ones who still practice cultural practices which violate the rights of the Ministry of Health and PSI tried to educate the religious leaders of the Varemba culture to use one razor at each person and also to treat the wounds.¹⁹ But this was not effective since some of the religious leaders are not educated and do not even take into consideration the issue of spreading diseases. They base their argument that they long practice the process and the PSI are trying to steal their information. However, in Mposi there is a surgeon called Dongijena who owns a surgery in Kwekwe those who do not want their children to be circumcised in the forest are done at hospital but will still go to the forest to get equipped or taught traditional history and other cultural aspects. The PSI programme targeted the religious leaders to re-examine their cultural practices so that they will not violate human rights.

The children's act was enacted by the government of Zimbabwe to protect children against abuse social and harmful cultural practices that violate children's rights. The requirement of consent and the right of refusal to participate in cultural practice are just laws that are on papers. The laws that are encompassed by the children's act do not offer adequate protection to protect children from harmful cultural practices.²⁰ The children's act is not effective since the religious leaders and the community argue that they were not consulted or the international organisation has nothing to do with their culture. The government and UNICEF tried to print papers and books which give children rights to freedom of choice. However the effort by the government is in vain it does not rescue children from harmful cultural practices because they are still under the parents who do not recognize the children's act as a useful law to their culture they are the ones who perpetrate violation of children, in an interview with one of the religious leaders he noted that "the child act prohibits our cultural practice and giving the children power refuse our traditional culture it is impossible". They are just laws passed by people who do not know or have little knowledge about our culture. The act discourages our communities to exercise our customs and beliefs which are the backbone of the Varembe.

From the above discussion, the Varembe people especially the leaders do not even take into consideration the laws enacted by the government to curtail violation of children's rights. This clearly shows that the Acts are just on paper and the laws do not rescue children from bad cultural practices. The elders believe that passing decision and practicing cultural practice help their children. The children's act prescribed the age of circumcision and female genital mutilation to be 18, why, because thus when a child is mature to make a resounding decision. Traditionalists opposed this basing their arguments on religious purposes where they believe that a male child should be circumcised as cited in the bible in Leviticus 11. This reflects the pressure children have

on participating in cultural practices. The problem with the laws particularly in the culture like Varemba ethnic group who have deep rooted cultural practices is that the laws enacted/ implemented do not have support or are dismissed by the elders hence the law is not going to be effective

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CONCLUSION

The study focused on various traditional cultural practices of the Varemba in Mberengwa. The study was carried out in Mberengwa district where the Lemba are densely populated under chief Mposi. In my first chapter the study focused on the objectives of the study and explaining them. It mainly focused on the effects of the cultural practices and how they violate children's rights and hinder development capacity in Mberengwa. There is also the issue of gender inequality the roles of males and females in Varemba children, the effects of cultural practices on children. Many books were consulted, journals, articles and internet sources to present the work that have been written by other scholars. The study filled in the gaps that have been left by other scholars. Various methodologies were used to gather information in the field; interviews, questionnaires and other primary sources were used.

The second chapter focused on the cultural practices which include komba initiation, male circumcision (*Murundu*), this is done in a forest in winter where girls and boys go for initiation school. Virginity testing is an important aspect in the Komba school. The elder women will check the hymen if it's still intact. There is also the issue of son preference where the Varemba culture value boys than girls in all aspects. FGM or elongation of clitoris is a common practice which is believed to enhance sexual pleasure of the males. The practices also include early marriages and child marriages, inheritance among others. The Varemba people believed to be the same with the Muslims some of their cultural practices are similar such as the endogamous marriage patterns, killing of meat using the haalal method, circumcision basing their arguments on Leviticus 11 in the Bible that a baby boy should get circumcised.

The research focused mainly on the effects that the above mentioned traditional cultural practices have children`s welfare with particular attention to the attainment of human rights, development and gender equality. Some of the Varembe cultural practices violate children`s rights. cultural practices of the Varembe in suppressing and denying children freedom to human rights as they are encompassed in the Universal declaration of human rights, the UNCRC , ACRWC , the Child Act and other child rights activists. The basic rights such as the right to education, health, freedom of choice, life and protection from all forms of abuse.

The government ratified international laws to curtail violation of child rights through cultural practices. In Mberengwa most of the laws are not applicable due to the cultural practices of the Varembe who do not support them to be effective. Unicef and BEAM was introduced to help children who cannot raise school fees. This was done to reduce illiteracy level in Mberengwa since many children especially girls do not have the privilege to continue with school after primary level. This did not help many children since the community is still overshadowed by the patriarchal ideologies that after initiation girls should go for marriage. Other foundations like UNCRC, ACRWC, UNICEF, Save the Children held campaigns advocating for total eradication of social and cultural practices that hinder development in Mberengwa. After all has been done the children`s rights are violated,the community and the family are the perpetrators of this due to their beliefs and customs.the children in this ethnic group suffer gross invasion of their rights.

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