

SITUATION ANALYSIS

In a 2014 survey by Zimbabwe's National Statistics Agency one in three of children whose parents are incarcerated are undernourished. Thus, despite the large and increasing numbers of incarcerated parents, the children become a forgotten population, with their special needs inadequately understood or addressed. Nearly 15 000 of Zimbabwean children under the age of 18 have a parent in prison and an estimated 46 000 or more have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lifetimes and hence a burden economically. Parental incarceration increases family instability, unemployment, socio-economic disadvantage, early pregnancies substance abuse, poor education attainment and mental health problems.

Jedidiah Trust seeks to complement efforts being made by the government through ZPCS (Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service and the Department of Social Development).

This strategic plan seeks to address some of these challenges being faced by children left behind and those that serve sentences with their mothers in prison. Harare Metropolitan has five (5) prisons and beneficiaries will be drawn from these prisons.

According to the statistics published in March 2020 by the World Prison Brief, Zimbabwe's prison population currently stands at 22 000 inmates. However, official capacity of the prisons is 17 000 inmates and there is an over capacity of 29.4%. Our current occupancy level based on official capacity is 129.4%. Zimbabwe currently has 46 main prisons and the prison administration is manned by the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service under the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary affairs.

With this knowledge, we estimate that more than two thirds of inmates have children between 0 and 24 years. On average, we are looking at approximately 22000 or more children affected by their parents being incarcerated.



The Zimbabwe Government is dedicated to assisting the inmates and hence the establishment of the ZPCS body. The body was initially named the Zimbabwe Prison Service but was later changed to the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service to include the element of rehabilitation that the government also provides to inmates. However, as indicated above, the government can only do so much as the prisons are overcrowded, with a capacity of 17 000 the government is now faced with an over capacity of 22 000 inmates which means they need to cater for an extra 29.4% of people. ZPCS does not have direct support that it offers to the affected children and this requires organizations such as Jedidiah to take up the initiative and assist vulnerable children.

Jedidiah seeks to support the government in its efforts to rehabilitate inmates and provide family centered support to assist the parent, caregiver and the children improve their quality of life.

The Situation faced by children born in prison

Some female inmates are allowed to be incarcerated with their children for the duration of their sentence. This has serious consequences in shaping up the child. This is heart wrenching to say the least. The children stay in the cells with their mothers and are exposed to all sorts of behavior which will form part of their growth.

Despite all the initiatives by the Zimbabwe Government to mitigate the plight of children born in prison, the situation faced by them remains dire. There is need for basic baby essentials such as clothing, formula, nappies, food, cleaning materials, stationery, detergents and toiletries. The prisons were built to accommodate offenders and do not have the capacity or “softness” required to raise a child. The environment is not suitable for children as they are subjected to being imprisoned themselves for a crime they did not commit.. The Zimbabwe prisons are overwhelmed with the number of people being incarcerated on a daily basis. Various anomalies which include overcrowding, hunger, unhygienic conditions are some of the issues faced inside the prisons and do not impact positively on the children.

A survey taken by ZACRO in 2008 revealed that most of the institutions countrywide faced equally the same problems.

There are preschools available for the children but they do not have adequate equipment such as learning material, reading material, toys and recreational material. Pregnant mothers are also not spared as essential maternity packs are not available due to the prevailing economic conditions.



The Situation faced by children left behind by inmates

Majority of offenders inside prison are parents and /or breadwinners by the time they get incarcerated. Once caught by law for their crimes, their dependents are left vulnerable to a lot of anomalies and the economic situation in Zimbabwe does not help matters either.

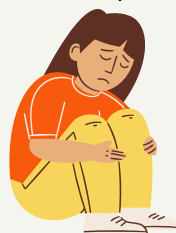
The following are some of the challenges faced by these children:

1. Social Exclusion/ Discrimination: In most cases, once a parent is labelled a criminal, the children face discrimination from their peers, neighbours and even some family members. This leads to a susceptibility of the child following in their parents' footsteps



Orphanages that some of the children are sent to also face their own challenges especially of overcrowding. The children are left vulnerable as they also do not get counselling to fully understand and deal with their situation.

2. Inability to attend school: for kids left behind, they are usually left with poverty and are unable to even afford school fees, stationery, uniforms as well as exam fees. They are a vast majority of drop outs amongst COIP and this leads to risky behaviour such as abuse of drugs, early child marriages and prostitution.



3. Gender Based Analysis – During an inmate's incarceration, various people are affected. The girl child is affected and is exposed to various anomalies such as prostitution, sexual and reproductive health problems as well as early pregnancies. The girl child can engage in various activities to fight poverty and is also exposed to early marriage. They also are the first to drop out of school due to lack of funds to pay for school fees as we still live in a society where some people still believe in educating the boy child first before the girl child. The boy child is also affected by a parents incarceration. Boys as young as 8 years old will be expected to provide for their siblings and these children end up engaging in dangerous drugs and other anomalies as a coping mechanism. Grandparents are also affected in this scenario as they are the ones who are usually left with taking care of children left behind. Most grandparents are pensioners who also require financial assistance to survive.