



Newsletter Dec 21

NO BARRIERS EDUCATION FOUNDATION: We assist children and youth in rural Zimbabwe to overcome barriers to education, encourage their learning and create opportunities for them to thrive



Inside This Issue

- P2: School Year 2021**
- P3: Our Initiatives at our partner schools:**
 - P3 School Meals
 - P4 Menstrual Health Initiative
 - P5 School Fees Support
- P6: Impact: What has been achieved so far**
- P7: Plans for School Year 2022**
- P7: How you can help**

School Year 2021: lockdowns challenged school attendance

- School meal initiative encouraged return to school after COVID lockdowns
- Student numbers at our partner schools increased

NoBarriers' school meals initiative is credited as a strong factor in the performance of our partner schools in pulling students back to school after the delays brought by COVID-19 lockdowns. Student numbers increased compared to those at the end of School Year 2020.

This is remarkable given the interruption to learning and the expected loss of students from the school community when attendance is disrupted and they are deployed to domestic and agricultural work.

The school meals initiative, which involves the provision of daily meals with the assistance of local communities was especially appreciated at a time when Mashonaland Central experienced food shortages

What happened?

Hopes for an early start to the school year to 'catch up' time lost to COVID lockdowns were dashed with the imposition of a new lockdown in January. Schools did not re-open till April, only to be closed down by a further lockdown in June. Re-opening occurred again in September and have continued since.

What is the impact of lockdowns in rural Zimbabwe?

Students and their families around the world have had to contend with the challenges presented by COVID lockdowns. In rural Zimbabwe the impact to learning and to long term attendance at school is felt even more.



Impact on learning

Students at our partner schools in Mashonaland Central cannot access alternative methods of learning: on-line learning is not provided as neither schools nor students have the necessary computing equipment and online network access. Even "old fashioned" book-based learning is rarely possible, as schools don't have the textbooks needed for children to study at home.

This has severe and wide-reaching impacts on the lives of students at our partner schools. Not only are they missing a significant part of their secondary education, they are also expected to sit the same final year examinations as their peers from more privileged private schools and to compete with them for the very few formal employment opportunities available to school leavers.

Threat to future school attendance

Students in lockdown are expected to contribute more to the family income through increased domestic or agricultural chores or by accompanying family members on the search for seasonal work in other parts of Zimbabwe. Three girls at our partner schools, all under 18 years old, got married / "eloped" during the lockdowns (one pregnant). These girls are unlikely to ever resume school given the community now perceives them as "adults" with "adult responsibilities". Every time, when school resumes after a prolonged lockdown, some students fail to return to school.

We were relieved when schools finally resumed in September and pleased that our partner schools could increase student numbers relative to those at the end of the previous school year.

School Meal Initiative

- Daily meals at school for 606 students and 30 teachers
- 8 tonne of maize delivered for start of initiative in April
- Popular response leads to upgrade in nutrition offering

NoBarriers' aim is to help overcome the barrier that poor nutrition presents to students' ability to concentrate in class, and to encourage school attendance through the provision of daily school meals. This can "pull" students back to school, particularly given the food shortages experienced in the province due to drought.

We followed up the positive response with consultation with school communities. Feedback reinforced the value of the initiative and an opportunity to use it to meet nutrition needs that local communities have been struggling with due to shortages and the effects of inflation. An upgraded meal offering to address this is to commence in 2022.

What happened?

The beginning of the school year saw NoBarriers commence its school meal initiative in partnership with the local school communities. Volunteers from the communities prepared the meals and provided locally grown produce to supplement the



daily serve of "sadza", a thickened maize porridge and a staple in Zimbabwe, for all students and teachers at our partner schools:

NoBarriers School Meal Initiative benefits on a daily basis 304 girls, 302 boys and 30 teachers.

NoBarriers supplied 8t of maize. This volume was originally estimated to be sufficient for two out of the three terms of school. The closure of schools during lockdown meant the maize will last the 2021 school year.



With the resumption of school in September we sought feedback from the school communities. We learned the communities were struggling to provide sufficient locally grown produce for nutritious, varied meals. The cost of cooking oil required for preparation had also become a financial burden.

We responded with a modification to our School Meals initiative, arranging for supply of vegetable proteins (800kg of beans and soya chunks) and cooking oil to last until the end of the School Year.

For the new school year we will, in consultation with the school communities, investigate avenues to support the schools to grow protein rich produce such as beans and / or small livestock.



For videos of the School Meal Initiative, see:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUBZYdbb1f8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrRX7hDWz34>

While the impact of the school meal initiative needs to be tracked over time and in an environment less interrupted by school lockdowns, a recent survey (Sep 21, 410 students and 17 teachers) identified that 77% of students and all teachers feel "knowing that at school they are providing food makes me / students want to come to school".

Menstrual Health Initiative

- Initiative commenced in May, with distribution of sanitary kits to 304 girls
- Workshops on hygiene, sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Sewing workshops for skills transfer
- 78% of girls in initiative feel better equipped to manage their menstruation

The aim is to ensure girls do not miss out on school several days each month because of menstruation. NoBarriers' Menstrual Health initiative is conducted with the help of its implementation partner Sanitary Aid Zimbabwe.



What happened?

We provided sanitary kits consisting of reusable pads, underwear and toiletries (soap, detergent and petroleum jelly) to all 304 girls attending school at Muzarabani High and Hwata Secondary. A workshop followed to teach good menstruation management practices, and to empower girls to feel confident and to not allow themselves to be embarrassed when menstruating.

In September we provided all girls with a set of replacement toiletries. Workshops on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights attended by boys and girls, were conducted to destigmatise menstruation, create awareness of their rights and responsibilities in sexual health and reproduction and empower them to recognise potential abuse / sexual assault and to report it to the appropriate authorities.

In November, we returned for Term 3-Menstruation Health, replacing toiletries and conducting a sewing workshop to teach 65 final year girls how to make reusable sanitary pads. All participants received a kit with the tools and materials needed to produce several sets of pads.

We hope the skills taught, and the materials provided will empower them to take care of their future sanitary needs, to pass on this skill to other female members of the community and potentially, to market handmade pads to generate some income.

Time is needed to reliably gauge the impact of the Initiative on girls' school attendance and them completing their education. For now, we know that 78% of girls participating in the initiative feel "they are now better equipped to manage their menstruation" (Survey of students, Sep 21, 210 girls).

For videos of the Menstruation Health Initiative, see:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZXJYBj_pjc
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_Q6gJZ3e04
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6ENLY-N3tl>

No Barriers Education Foundation acknowledges with gratitude the generous financial support of the Adelaide University Rotaract Club via its Cultural Night 2021 Impact Grant in delivering the Menstruation Health Initiative

School Fee Support Initiative

- Initiative commenced in August
- 90 students being supported

NoBarriers School Fee Support initiative aims to encourage school attendance for girls and boys from vulnerable families who otherwise would not be able to pay required fees. Without the payment of school fees students will not be eligible to receive graduation certificates and recognition of their learning.

The commencement of the School Fee Support initiative has seen NoBarriers commit to pay the school fees 54 girls and 36 boys from vulnerable families, who cannot afford to pay the school fees for their children's education.

The families selected as being most in need were identified in conjunction with school communities and typically include:

- children living with grandparents, because one or both of their parents are deceased. The grandparents often are too elderly to generate cash income for the payment of fees.
- children with parents with severe chronic health / mental health problems or disability; and
- children, who live with their siblings or alone without any adult guardian.

The initiative covers school and examination fees until students complete their secondary education with either O- or A-levels. It ensures, the students are allowed to attend school, sit examinations and receive all the relevant school reports and certificates. At present, only 5% of all students progress to A-levels. We hope this initiative will over time, encourage more students to aim for graduating with A-levels.

We plan to measure the impact of the initiative by analysing the long term school retention and drop out rates of students on the initiative. At least 12 months will be needed before we have sufficient data to do so. But we know in the meantime, that the students at our partner schools are highly motivated:

- 97% of students state *"they like coming to school"*;
- 79% of students *"feel confident that they will pass their O-Levels and graduate"*
- 87% of students state *"they would like to do A-levels, if possible"*

Survey of students, Sep 21, 210 girls, 200 boys.



For videos of the School Fee Support Initiative, see:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tXPH0Ny1x8>

Assessing Impact

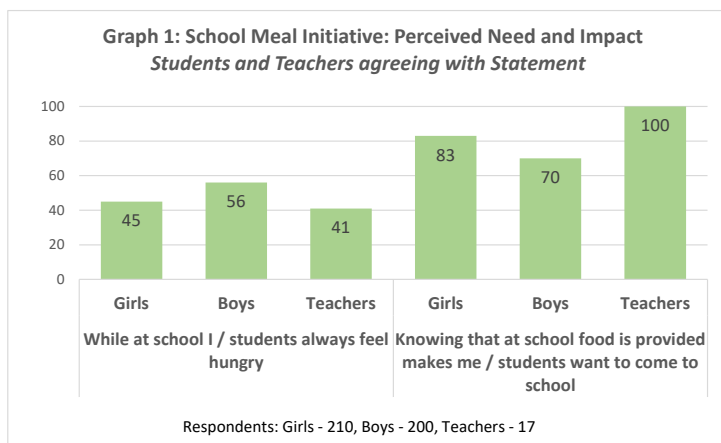
- Assessing results in a disrupted time
- Survey conducted in September with 410 students and 17 teachers

The disruption to schooling and therefore to our initiatives from lockdowns has made assessment of our impact problematic. Measures we would have used, such as enrolments, attendance, school performance are unstable and heavily impacted by the lockdowns.

So NoBarriers conducted a survey across our two partner schools in September. The results have provided affirmation of the needs recognised in our initiatives and the dividends that we expect from their implementation

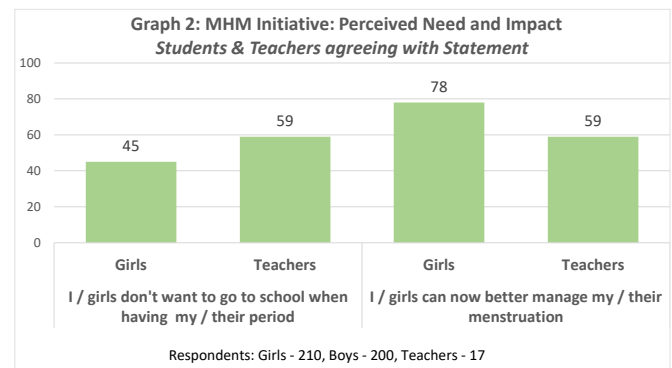
School Meals– Graph 1

- The initiative addresses a nutritional need at school: around half of all students and 40% teachers feel that students are hungry while at school. Note: for practical reasons, school meals are provided during the midday break; the reported feeling of hunger is believed to reflect on students state earlier in the day / when arriving at school.
- School meals are proved to be effective in enticing students back to school: three quarters of students and all teachers feel that school meals “makes students want to come to school”.



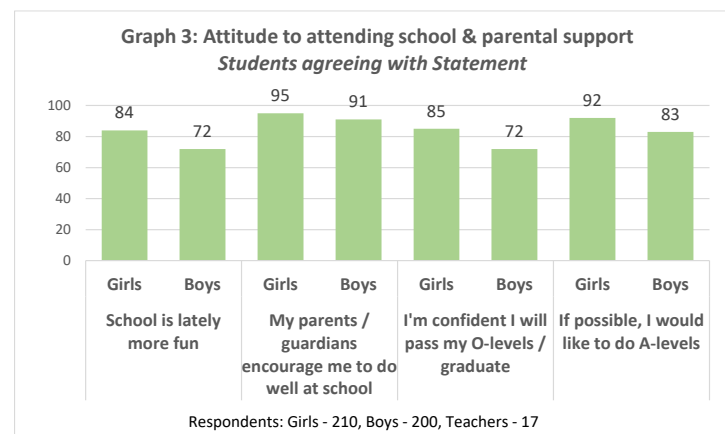
Menstrual Health Initiative – Graph 2

- The initiative seeks to assist girls who do not feel confident while menstruating: in the September survey 45% of girls still stated that they don't want to come to school while having their period (*Note: this does not mean they do not attend school; teachers report since distributing the sanitary kits, that girls very rarely stay at home; if they do, it is typically for 1 day only and because of period pain*);
- More than three quarters of girls report feeling better equipped to manage their menstruation since the Menstruation Health Initiative was introduced at the schools.



Attending school & parental support–Graph 3

- Students demonstrate a strong commitment towards attending school, a high confidence that they will be able to complete their education and aspirations of advancing their education. They also feel encouraged by their parents / guardians.
- It follows: students who stop attending school or have a low attendance, are not held back because of any personal negative attitudes or those of their parents, but because of barriers of an economic or physical nature, e.g. inability to pay school fees, long distances, fatigue.



Plans for School Year 2022

NoBarriers considers School Meals, Menstruation Health and School Fee Support as core initiatives, which need to be bundled and delivered together to create the impact needed to bring down major barriers to education for students at our partner schools. Because of this, we are committed to continue providing these initiatives in the longer term.

In addition, we are considering implementing the following initiatives during School Year 2022:

Learning materials / textbooks: We intend to commence a program of supplying textbooks in accordance with the Zimbabwean syllabus for key subject areas based on priority needs identified by each school's administration.

The September survey identified the lack of textbooks as a major barrier to learning: two thirds of all students felt their ability to study is restricted by the very limited access to textbooks: the few books available have to be shared by too many students.



Bicycles for commute to and from school: many students have to walk 10+km to school (one way). This long walk not only makes them feel fatigued in class, but also leaves them with very little time to study. We intend to provide 60 bikes to these "long-distance" students to overcome the barrier of fatigue and lack of time to study. We also hope, that the bikes will encourage learning as students can sign a "graduation pledge": if they graduate the bike becomes their property.



NoBarriers at work

School Meal Initiative:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUBZYdbb1f8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrRX7hDWz34>

Menstruation Health Initiative:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZXJYbJ_pjc
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F_Q6gJZ3e04
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6ENLY-N3tI>

School Fees Support:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tXPH0Ny1x8>

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How you can help

NoBarriers' work during School Year 2021 has been made possible through the generous financial contributions of supporters – private donors and a community group, Adelaide University Rotaract Club.

To continue our work in bringing down barriers to education for the 606 students at Muzarabani High and Hwata Secondary School, we appeal to you once more for your generosity.

To donate directly to NoBarriers please follow link:

<https://tinyurl.com/4yu8r2fm>

You can also donate via our website:

www.nobarriers.org.au

Thank you for your interest in NoBarriers' work and thank you for your support.

No Barriers Education Foundation is a charity registered by the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission - donations received are tax deductible.