

# SAVE OUR EDUCATION DURING COVID



## Voices of School Students in Mining Communities



Community Monitors Activist Training

This booklet is part of a series emanating from the 2020-2021 Bench Marks Foundation Community Monitors Activist Training Programme.

The programme was re-orientated to respond to the challenges posed by the Coronavirus pandemic and the harsh impacts on communities living near mines.

Activists through a process of discussion in their local communities identified the following key issues for action to be dealt with in issue groups:

- Covid and the disruption to school education
- The food crisis due to an escalation of job losses and price increases
- The health problem of communities living near mines
- The escalation of violence against women

The booklets document the work done in the different issue groups.

We acknowledge and appreciate the support of the following organisations:

Bread for All - Switzerland  
Bread for the World - Brot  
Church of Sweden  
Diakonia - Sweden  
Ford Foundation  
Norwegian Church Aid  
Raith Foundation  
Steel Workers Humanity Fund - Canada

The views expressed are our own, and not those of the funders.

April 2021

Issued by



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

**This booklet focuses on the devastating disruption to education for school-going youth arising from the coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns. The voices of school students living in communities near mines in North West Province, Limpopo and Gauteng are documented. We record their challenges, fears and expectations.**

Their voices are reflected in the pages of this booklet through essays, poems and posters composed and drawn by the students involved. Photographs taken by cell phones visually introduce the reader to the students and the world in which they live. Another focus of the booklet is on educational messages for students and their parents on ways to keep safe from the coronavirus while attending school.

Education is key to success. But with the coronavirus things have changed, including how our children receive education. The booklet aims to raise awareness for all people, young and old, because if education of learners is in trouble, everyone is affected, including the economy. When the youth are in trouble many things can go wrong in their lives, including more young girls being abused and ending up pregnant.

This booklet is part of the Bench Marks Foundation Community Monitors Activist Training Programme. At the outset of the coronavirus pandemic the focus of the programme was reoriented to the pandemic and its harsh impacts on communities living near mines. A number of problem areas were selected for investigation as part of the Programme.

**What led us as community monitors to choose the disruption of school education by Covid-19 as one of the focus areas?**

Since the lockdown was announced on 26 March 2020, we have seen a lot of learners roaming the streets. As activists, we needed to find out why. They were supposed to be safe at home and busy with schoolwork! That is when we realised there is even greater inequality in the education system. Even after schools reopened the learners were still in the streets, in groups and some not adhering to the Covid-19 safety rules. We realised that there is a huge problem affecting the education of learners.

Do we know the challenges of their parents, and of leaders and government in this time of Covid-19? Do we have a plan to help them? What if the pandemic continues? Do we shut down the schools? What can we do to make sure that schooling is not disrupted? What about the future of the youth? What kind of leaders will we have in future? Do we wait for this pandemic to shatter their dreams?

An Issue Group was then formed focusing on this problem area, consisting of community activists living in different communities across North West Province, Limpopo and Gauteng. They were tasked with setting up groups of students at local schools, who in turn were asked to reflect on and write about their experiences and feelings as students struggling to survive and learn under the pandemic. Videos were also made of the key messages students wished to project.

**The work was documented so that the world can see what is really happening with schooling in mining-affected communities, and to create awareness about the pandemic. The booklet is produced in particular for all the students at schools around the country, along with their parents, who are struggling to keep learning under very harsh conditions.**

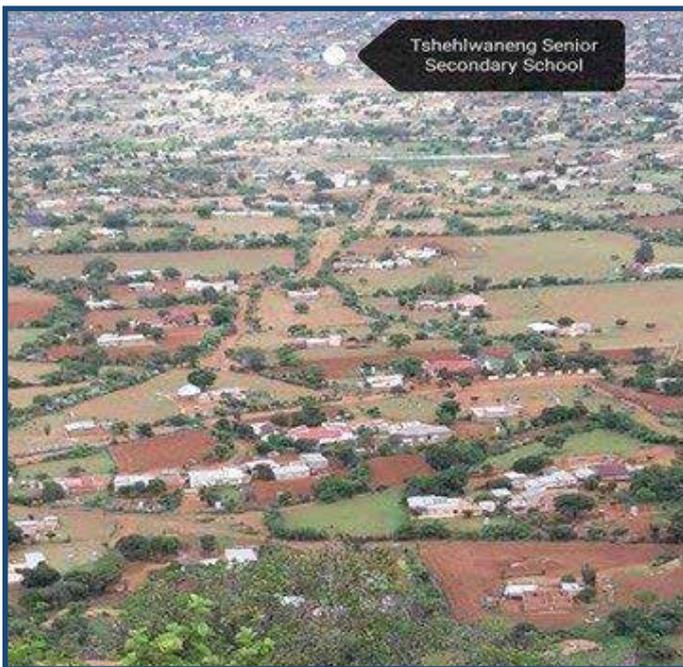
**A case study of steps taken and challenges faced in carrying out this project**



*Student group from Tshehlwaneng Senior Secondary School.*

We community monitor facilitators faced many similar challenges in carrying out this project. The steps I took are examples of how we organised to overcome these challenges and complete our tasks.

I worked with learners from Tshehlwaneng Senior Secondary School, the school I matriculated from. It gave me great pleasure to work with students from the school I had attended.



*Location of Tshehlwaneng Senior Secondary School, Tshehlwaneng.*

*Tshehlwaneng is an area in Makhuduthamaga, on the outskirts of Polokwane. It was named after the Tshehlo plant (*Tribulus terrestris*), a kind of morogo (spinach) that grows in that area and which is eaten by most Bapedi people. The area is also called Magnet Heights because certain parts of the area have a black stone that has magnetic qualities, called 'Setsompiri'. Tshehlwaneng is divided between wards 12 and 13 of Makhuduthamaga. Ward 13 has the following villages: GaMogashoa Dithakaneng, GaMogashoa Manamane, Mabonyane, Phase 4, Sehlatzi, Mashengwaneng. Ward 12 consists of Makgane, GaMakgeru, Mmirika, Matekane, Maboneng, Makgorong, Mabilwane and Mashengwaneng villages.*

I approached the school principal of the school and discussed the idea of working with learners, and she agreed. The school was the safest place as I know that meeting in my own village was a disadvantage for learners from other villages. I did not have the thermometer gun and enough sanitiser. The school was a better option because they have these facilities. It was also good to meet face-to-face as I would be able to ask questions and not worry about bad network signal or data.

Students attending classes on different days were one of the many challenges in carrying out the exercise. It was difficult to organise the learners. The school principal asked one of the educators to assist. The teacher did a good job by organising a group of Grade 11 students whose school days were the same.

We had to have our meetings at the school even if it was not their school day, because they are from different villages. I remember one parent calling her daughter to come back home while we were having a meeting. I had to buy food sometimes because not all learners were able to eat lunch at school because of the menu. If they have milk at school for everyone, there is no other option for those who don't drink milk. One student said she doesn't like fish on the day we were having a meeting and as a result, I had to make a plan to avoid students participating with empty stomachs.

I had to walk to the school for meetings because some of the learners had no data or smartphones and it was costly on my side to call them using airtime. Some of the students stay far away from school. This reduced the time we had for our meetings because they don't have transport and have to walk one hour or more to get home.

**We would like to thank all the students and community monitors who participated in producing this booklet and the video that goes with it. We would also like to encourage students at schools across the country to keep learning and challenging inadequate and unequal education.**

*Mmabore Gladys Mogashoa*

## 2. MEET THE COMMUNITY MONITOR ACTIVIST FACILITATORS

Here are the Bench Marks Community Monitor activists who carried out this project and the contributed to the making of this booklet. They tirelessly went about engaging and supporting school students to reflect on and write about their lives. They also provided the students with the necessary information and gathered the visuals. Much of the work had to be carried out remotely due to the pandemic, posing many challenges.



**MMABORE GLADYS  
MOGASHOA**

Co-coordinator of the Schools and Covid Activist Issue Group, GaMogashoa village (in ward 13, Makhuduthamaga Local Municipality, Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province).



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**THOKOZILE MNTAMBO**

Thulani Snake-park (Soweto, Johannesburg Metro, Gauteng Province).



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## **GAUTENG PROVINCE**



### **Palm Springs (Emfuleni Local Municipality, Sedibeng District) and Thembisa (Ekurhuleni Metro)**

*Facilitator: Rapule Moiloa*



*Kutlwano Faith Phetoe; Lebohang Nyembe; Rebone Kgobodi - all in Grade 12  
Lakeside Secondary School, Palm Springs (Emfuleni Local Municipality, Sedibeng District).*



*Paballo Moiloo, Grade 11  
Bokamoso High School, Thembisa (Ekurhuleni  
Municipality, East Rand).*

## **Going to school is better than online classes**

When Covid-19 started we had to do online classes. Online classes were interesting at the beginning, but now we think going to school is better. We could only see the face of the teacher at online lessons, eyes were getting tired and you miss the human interaction. But it was good that the exams were cancelled.

Now we are back to school. My friends got taller in this period. We are happy to return to school because we can see the people and talk to them. We are having fun at break time, but we all remember that we must be careful. We have to avoid getting the virus or transferring it. Yes, we have lots of homework, but I don't complain. We like school and we are happy to be back.

If the online lessons are back, we don't know what we will do because going to school is better than online classes. But to top it all we would prefer that the spread of this Virus would stop totally so we could go back to not wearing masks anymore and to also not have to sanitise every once in a while.

*Paballo Moiloo*

## **The Battle Continues**

This enemy did not factor love  
Kindness or Goodness  
The ignorant people do  
The blatant, the followers

Raging it's fear  
Drifting along in an uncertain worldly capsule  
Too large to comprehend  
Until time shrinks it's magnitude  
To the history of peoples burden  
Long forgotten by living life  
But immensely judged by all across the divide

Humanity heals strength in connection  
Nature restores  
The battle continues  
A Futile fight  
For this enemy

*Paballo Moiloo*



Street scene in Thembisa with Paballo Moilola in the foreground.

## Everything has flipped over because of the Coronavirus

Covid-19 has affected many people including myself. I'm now at home every day and it really is affecting me socially. Not being able to speak to friends and see people I see on a regular basis is hard for me. Also now that I'm not going to school every day as usual, I only go to school three times a week. It has really had an effect on my school life. I'm not used to being at home all the time and watching movies. I'm usually in a classroom surrounded by my peers. However, I'm a human so I will face the journey, but for now it is hard.

Life was Normal, now everything has flipped over because of the coronavirus. I had dreams and hopes but all these have vanished into thin air and have been replaced with hopelessness. I worry first about keeping safe and healthy during this time as well as keeping body and soul together.

Teachers need to make online classes so that when we're at home they can give us some work to do but that will work only for students who have phones. I suggest that the head of school needs to organise tablets for every student at school — tablets with data so that it can be easy for everyone.

## Attend School Safely During Covid-19



Designer: Paballo Moilola

*Kutlwano Faith Phetoe; Lebohang Nyembe;  
Rebone Kgobodi*

### 3. VOICES OF SCHOOL STUDENTS: CHALLENGES, FEARS, EXPECTATIONS

## GAUTENG PROVINCE



### Thulani Snake-park, (Soweto, Johannesburg Metro)

Facilitator: *Thokozile Mntambo*



*Shantel Gasa, grade 9  
Thulani Secondary School,  
Thulani Snake-park.*



*Nhlanhla Mntambo, grade 11  
Thulani Secondary School,  
Thulani Snake-park.*



*Njabulo Diya, grade 10  
Thulani Secondary School,  
Thulani Snake-park.*



*Thembelihle Mntambo, grade 7  
Thulani Secondary School,  
Thulani Snake-park.*



*Amukelani Gasa, grade 11  
Thulani Secondary School,  
Thulani Snake-park.*



*Nhlanhla Motlamme, grade 12  
Thulani Secondary School,  
Thulani Snake-park.*



*A view of Thulani Snake-park with a mine tailings dump in the background.*

## This lockdown excitement did not last long

Going back to school was a big deal for us as students of Thulani Snake-park.

At school we are taught that the coronavirus is a new kind of a virus that causes an infection in your nose, sinuses, or upper throat. But in reality we have seen that the true definition of the coronavirus is that it is the worst kind of enemy because it has come to inflict more poverty and limitation in our lives and that of our families.

Last year the President announced the national lockdown and we were told to remain at home and not attend school. At first this was so exciting, to stay at home with my family and enjoy our moments together. We were very excited to see soldiers around our township since we only see them in movies. This lockdown excitement did not last long. My mother was told she will not get paid at her workplace since she was not working and had to apply for the "UIF". Food started to run out and we waited for food parcels which was also a struggle to get. I started to miss school especially "umalibisi" which is our feeding scheme at school. Home was not a happy place to be the whole day since my mom is a single parent and we also didn't have money to buy electricity; everything was just cold and dark.

Finally, the President announced that the country was ready for level three of the national lockdown. We were very happy to go back at school. We were wondering how they would cope with us since the virus forced everyone to wear a mask and sanitise. This was a big deal for us as students of Thulani Snake-park. In our area we experience toxic dust storms which are caused by mine dump tailings. The schools couldn't supply us with face masks. Only teachers wore them.

When the schools re-opened each student was given two face masks and timetables because our school is over-crowded and we had to social distance. That is why we were separated from our peers.

At first I thought it was cool not to go to school every day, but we are given a lot of work and we also have to study at home in order to catch up. This is so hard for me because I live in a two-room shack with my mother, aunt and my three siblings. I can't cope in a small space with the noise and doing my house chores.

Even worse is that my little sister, who is doing grade 4, also needs to study. Sometimes we have to leave her alone at home or with the neighbours because we are attending school and my parents are at work. One day she burned herself trying to make tea because she was home alone. This was so traumatic for me that I could not cope well at school and my mom had to stop going to work.

Before we enter the school gates our temperatures are tested and our hands are sanitised. I really thought that I was safe with my face mask. One day I came back home coughing. At first I ignored it but at night it got worse; I couldn't sleep. My dad and my brother called an ambulance to come and fetch me. I was so scared because I have asthma, but the pain I was feeling was worse. My heart was beating faster, I had a fever and could not breathe. I was admitted at Jabulani hospital and I was tested for the coronavirus. The test was very painful and uncomfortable. I feel sorry for my school mates because like me they're not safe from the virus.

As the students of Thulani Snake-park we want the Departments of Education and Health to monitor our schools. There are a lot of things that we need in our community, like libraries for us to be able to go and study in a safe and informative environment. We need the Department of Health to sanitise our schools because our schools are surrounded by a toxic mine tailings dump. We want them to make sure that we are safe and rehabilitate the dump because students who have chronic illnesses like asthma and TB are at high risk of serious illness if they are infected with the virus.

*Amukelani Gasa, Njabulo Diya,  
and Nhlanhla Mntambo*

## Ubhubano lezizwe

Safa saphela isizwe  
Yeveli gciwane alikhethi  
Kwaye ali zondi

Ingane seziyizi ntandane  
Omama sebaba abafelokazi  
Labhubha izwe ngisho amakholwa  
Indaba abayazi!  
Nkos' baba thixo somandla  
Sisa cela kuwe phela thina impi  
Asazi sizo yilwa kanjani?  
Makulwa nani bazalawane  
Ngisa cela ningi thandazise phela  
Sengicelela izizwe  
Saphela isizwe yi le Corona  
Nkosi! iba nathi usithethelele izono zethu  
Ukuthi siinqobe lokufa!

*Sihle Tshikilane*

### Translation of the poem

## Who will hear our cry?

Behold our nation is dying of coronavirus  
Who will hear our cry?  
Our children are now orphaned  
Mothers are now widows  
Our nation is ending  
Even Christians have become speechless  
Prayers have become prayer-less  
O Lord! Our father  
We are pleading  
We don't know how to fight this war  
Oh cry our beloved county!!  
Our nation is ending because of coronavirus

## I Corona

Corona corona who are you?  
You came like a thief and  
You stole our joy  
You came like a devil to destroy  
Our lives  
You are like the darkness  
Swept our light away  
Lockdown is our prison forever!  
We are warning you  
Leave us alone!  
Give us back our lives!

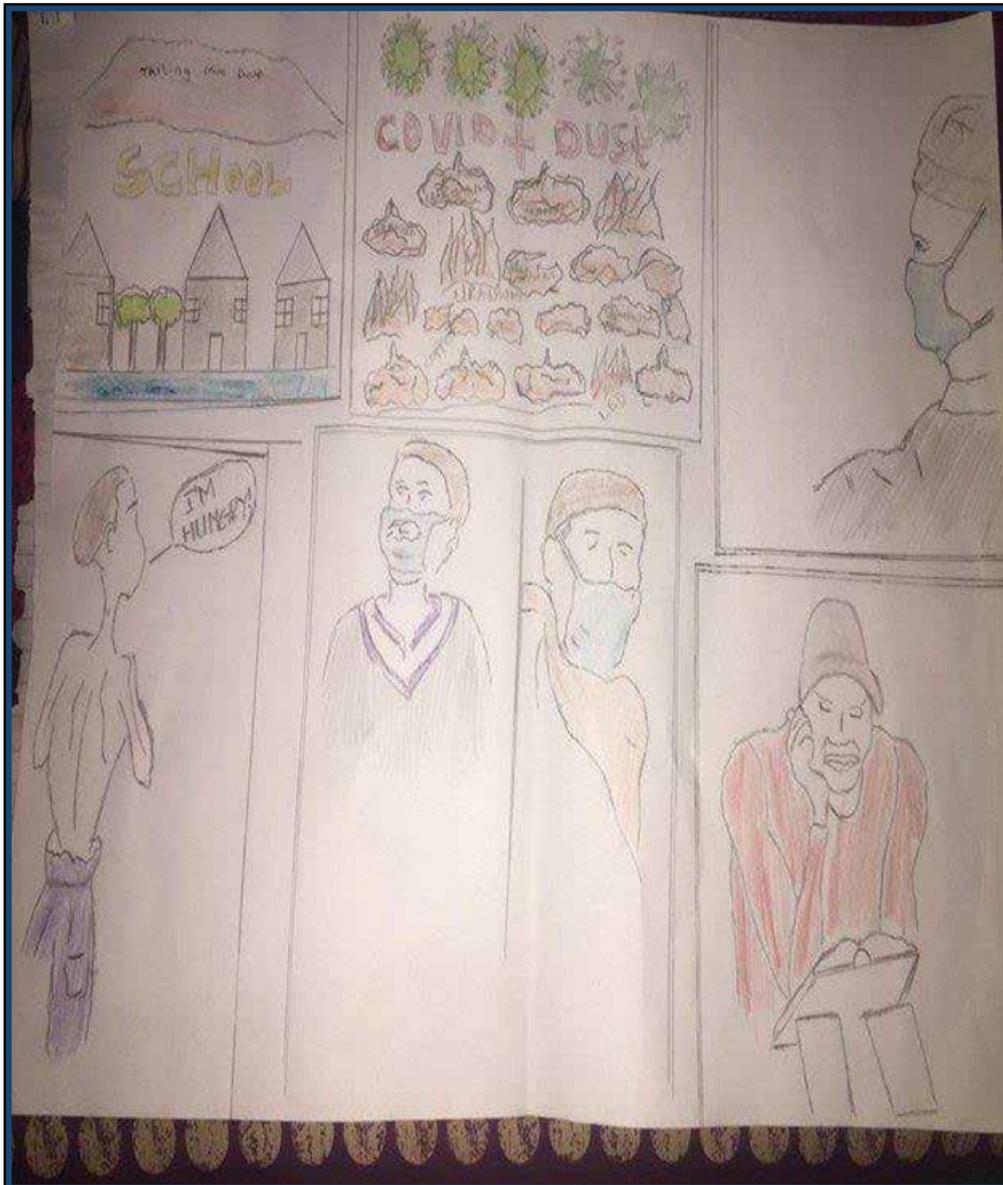
*Buyisile Gasa*

## Face mask

I can't live without you  
I can't breathe without you  
I can't go without you  
I will die without you  
You are my shield my protector  
When I walk in the shadow of Covid  
I fear no corona  
When I walk in crowded places  
I fear nothing, you are my shelter  
I fear no death  
I am nothing without you  
How can I forget you?  
You are my life saviour  
I have become a stranger to my friends  
I don't mind because I have found  
A new friend  
Face mask

*Thembelihle Mntambo*

## Covid and Dust - the Lives of Thulani Secondary School Students Under the Pandemic



*Designer: Nhlanhla Motlamme*

### 3. VOICES OF SCHOOL STUDENTS: CHALLENGES, FEARS, EXPECTATIONS

## LIMPOPO PROVINCE



### Tshehlwaneng (Makhuduthamaga Local Municipality, Sekhukhune District)

*Facilitator: Mmabore Gladys Mogashoa*



*Mogashoa Mogaramedi Ennecia, Mohloba Decorate Mokgabiso, Letageng Lenta Matladi, Malekane Lesley, Tsoka Katlego and Mphela Pontsho  
Tshehlwaneng Senior Secondary School, Tshehlwaneng,  
Makhuduthamaga Local Municipality.*



*Abby Maota  
Tshehlwaneng Senior Secondary School.*

## Education Struggles Because of Covid-19

**We feel that our schools in the rural areas are forgotten**

Tshehlwaneng Senior Secondary school is situated in Makhuduthamaga Local Municipality under Sekhukhune District in the outskirts of Polokwane, Limpopo. It is a school attended by learners from more than 10 villages under 3 traditional leaderships. It is in a rural area that has lots of challenges, like damaged roads and no water. Learners attending the school are from poor backgrounds and because of that they walk long distances to the school. There is no transport for the learners and they walk to school whether it is raining, cold or hot.

When Covid-19 started we never thought things will change from bad to worse. Some of the teachers and learners had to miss classes because they tested positive or had flu symptoms. If a teacher is unable to come to school, we the learners miss a lot and it becomes difficult to finish the syllabus. This affects us in the next grades.

During lockdown we had to stay at home with no schoolwork because our school has no resources for online learning. School was closed and we were not allowed to go to the school premises for Covid-19 safety. This caused a lot of stress to us learners. Our parents bought stationery and we had to sit at home. Some of them are not working and this caused a lot of problems at home. How can we study freely if we have to starve at home because of school requirements? If education is free it shouldn't force our parents to struggle because in the end it is us who suffer. Another problem is food parcels that should have assisted us at home while we get food at school. But they either disappeared before they reached our homes or we were not being told the truth.

Our School has no resources like other schools. The school does have Wi-Fi but when we are at home we have to buy our own data and for those with no smartphones it is a problem. Covid-19 has also affected our friendship as learners. We used to study together and share things but because of the Covid-19 it was difficult. Just a little cough, will scare us into keeping our distance from each other. This affected others badly emotionally.



*A pathway students use to walk to school from GaMogashoa.*

Learners should be able to carry out fundraising by doing activities that can be shown to the community. Our SGB, school principal and leadership from tribal houses should seek donations from nearby mines and business people. Learners need donations in the form of tablets, smartphones and data. Wi-Fi hotspots are also needed. We need to be educated and our school should not be disrupted because of Covid-19. Some of the learners and teachers do not follow Covid-19 rules and this places us all at risk. Proper Covid-19 monitoring should be done and Covid-19 awareness by the government and other organisations might help.

Learners also need extra classes to cover the time lost. Sports and art activities were also put on hold and as young people we need that. We also need food, and for the school nutrition scheme to be monitored as some people help themselves with what is supposed to help learners. When schools close we are unable to study as there are no libraries in any of the villages around Tshehlwaneng Senior Secondary school. Libraries are also needed so that when some learners are attending classes, others can go to the library and study. It is difficult to study at home because some of our neighbours play music loudly and the little ones also play, while we need a quiet place in which to study.

Government should build enough schools because the pandemic has shown us that the school cannot accommodate all students from the villages. This will help the learners to attend with no disruptions. Limpopo's overall school results are poor not because we do not study but because of the many challenges that affect our education. It doesn't

look like the pandemic will be gone soon and proper planning has to be done together with the learners, teachers and government because the quality of our education is affected. Education should be free to all, and all school materials should be easily accessible. We feel that our schools in the rural areas are forgotten and we need quality education like all learners in South Africa.



*Discussing the task to be done.*

## Being a girl child when school is interrupted

In the olden days, educated or not, we knew that a girl will get married to a man who will take care of her, but things have changed. The cost of living is too high and women demand to be involved in more. They must be educated, own businesses and also be part of leadership in the country. Women should also contribute to the economy of the country.

When school is interrupted most of the girls are expected to do house chores like cooking, washing, cleaning, taking care of their younger brothers and sisters etc. This takes most of their time and it is difficult to study at home.

Because of their poor background, some of the girls fall prey to men who leave them with kids at a very young age and shatter their dreams.

Blessers are also a problem. School children are happy about the money they get but do not think about STI's, HIV and other problems when dating people old enough to be one's parents. Some of the reasons girls get involved in these kinds of relationships is because of not having money to buy sanitary towels. Girls need sanitary products every month, as is the nature of women's menstruation cycle. It is frustrating if a girl cannot have the basic things that a woman needs. That is why sanitary towels should be free for all women.

Some girls' rights are abused or they are sexually violated. They are safer when they are at school.

We should have women scientists, engineers, doctors etc. but when school is interrupted it is a problem for a girl child. Not all women are going to be married and they should be able to take care of themselves and their families.

*Mmabore Gladys Mogashoa*

# Covid-19 a Threat to Our Future

## School is Our Last Hope

Coronavirus

I mean you Covid-19

You were just discovered yesterday  
But you took control of everything  
And you are number one threat to our future

How did we get here?  
What have we done to deserve you?  
Education is a key to success  
Why put it at risk?  
And turn our lives upside down?

With a blink of an eye  
You ruined everything  
We've had enough already  
Traumatised and confused  
You are a threat to our future

School is our last hope  
To overcome poverty  
Saving us from hardships of our homes  
A secure place from the dangerous street  
challenges  
Our last hope for a better future

Loneliness is growing inside us

Can't even hug or whisper  
Because of social distancing rules

I walk miles alone to school  
Because of you Covid-19  
We walked together in rainy days  
With one reason only  
To be educated  
Now we attend on different days  
Our schools have no resources

Can't fit in one class  
Cause if we don't follow the rules  
We will lose lives

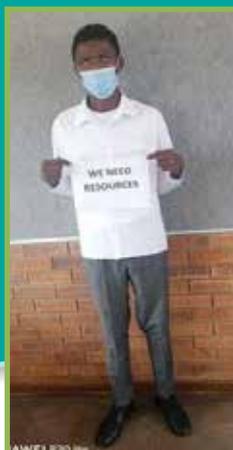
We packed our calculators and mathematical  
instruments  
We were prisoners in our own homes  
Looking at a textbook, my heart bleeds  
If I pass, will I make it in the next grade?

We had nothing to do  
While fortunate ones had school work  
We were excited about 4IR  
But technological accessories are a luxury to us  
Will we survive the 21 century?

Our hopes were high  
Because of 'free education for all'  
And 'Batho pele - people first'  
Is that just a dream?  
We are under enormous strain due to Covid-19

Inequality is making things worse  
Should we give up?  
The next generation will suffer more  
Our future is going down the drain  
We need help

Leaders and business people  
Covid-19 is killing our dreams  
You need to take action now  
We need to be educated  
We need to be safe.



## He Thinks that He is Safe



**Does he even know that he can still get the virus?  
What steps can be taken to ensure that he knows that?  
If there is something bad happening to the person without a mask,  
will the one who has a mask offer help?**

Two people are shown in the poster; one has a mask on but is not wearing the mask properly, and he keeps touching his face and mask. He thinks that he is safe with the mask on but he is at risk just like the one with no mask because the mask is only on his mouth. Does he even know that he can still get the virus? What steps can be taken to ensure that he knows that?

He is looking at the second person who is starving and eating leftovers because of poverty. He judges him because of how he looks. The first person does not want to get closer to the other because he is not wearing a mask and because of the kind of life he thinks the person lives. This means that the Covid-19 virus has divided people; once you don't have a mask on we keep our distance. Lots of people have forgotten about *ubuntu* (humanity).

If there is something bad happening to the person who has no mask, will the one with a mask help him? No! Because he thinks that he will be infected. Why does the other person not have a mask? Does he even have money to buy one? Will the first person offer to give him a mask? Does he know that he can use any cloth as a mask? Who should be providing that awareness or education?

Because he lives in poverty, the only thing the second person is worried about is food, He does not have any means to buy food; he will go to any place he thinks he can get food to fill his stomach. He does not even think of washing his hands. Is there water? If not, why? If he has Covid-19 this means that any of the surfaces he comes in contact with could have the virus and this will put others at risk too.

What happened to food parcels and relief funds that should be helping the people during Covid-19? When you look at the banana and drink, they are on the ground, attracting flies, unsafe to be eaten. But does he have other options? No! If he doesn't eat that he will starve and this might bring on illness.

He then goes to an over-crowded clinic where he spends hours before he gets help, or goes home without getting help. If he dies, what would be the cause of his death? Poverty? The illness he got from eating unsafe food? Or Covid-19? What can be done to avoid all that? Have we concentrated more on Covid-19 and forgotten about other things?

### 3. VOICES OF SCHOOL STUDENTS: CHALLENGES, FEARS, EXPECTATIONS

## LIMPOPO PROVINCE



### Mogalakwena Municipality, Mokopane District

*Facilitator: Margaret Molomo*



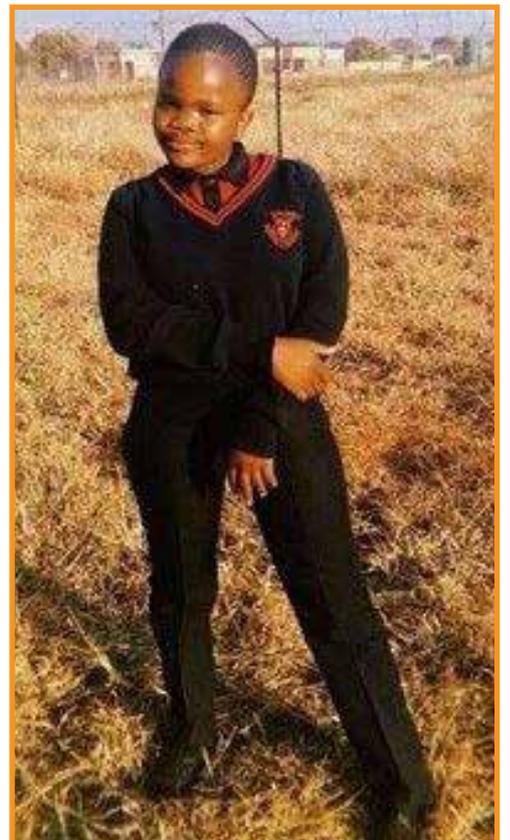
*Dineo Mathobela, grade 11,  
Masodi High School, Masodi Village.*



*Tshegofatso Mmatli, grade  
10, Mmadikana High School,  
Moshate Village.*



*Judin Ramela, grade  
11, Masodi High  
School, Masodi  
Village.*



*Kekana Tecious, grade 10,  
Tetema High School, Moshate  
Village.*



*Cassandra Molomo and Mmatshweni Seretlwa, grade 10, **Ramogabudi High School, Masodi Village** (authors of one of the videos).*



*Jabu Monyebodi, grade 11, **Ntata High School, GaMadiba Village.***



*Moshate Village street scene.*



*Masodi Village street scene.*



*Street scene next to Masodi High School.*



*Schools group hard at work.*

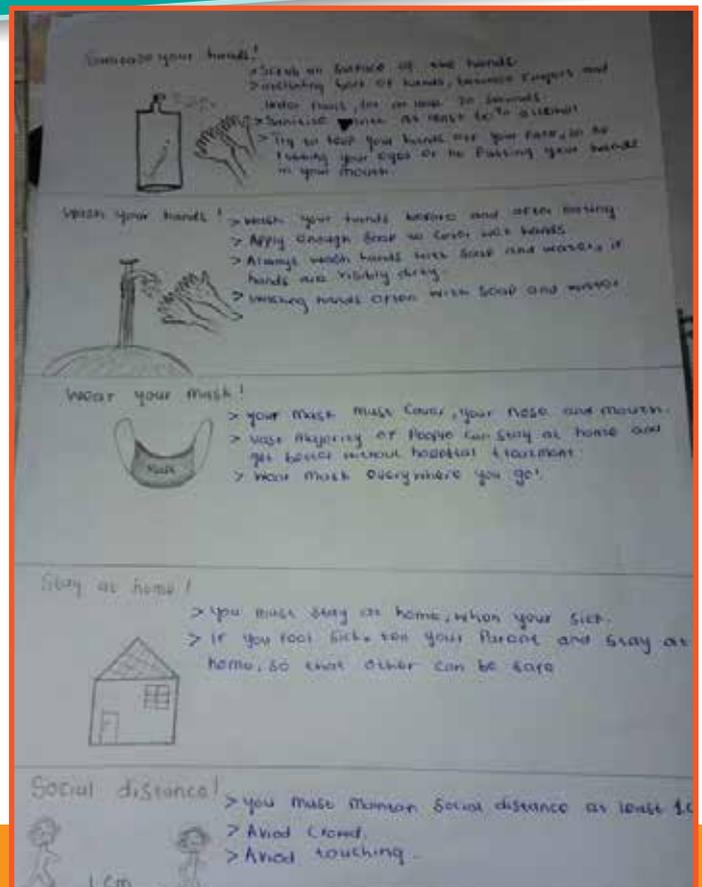
## Hei!! Covid-19! Who Are You?

Have all poems in blocks and specific colours.  
where do you come from?  
you covid-19 you make our life difficult — you take our freedom!  
we are always at home  
we can't visit or hang around with each other  
we can't school properly!  
You, covid virus! I ask you again, where do you come from?  
at home we live with fear

you kill our community members every day  
we are tired of hearing that our grannies, our mothers, uncles and aunts are dying every day!  
you covid-19 you are all over the world  
you covid-19 how long should we wait?  
how many people are going to die?  
we are tired of mourning...!  
covid-19, covid-19, please I beg you go away before you kill my mother's children  
  
covid-19 you are a deadly virus

*Essay and poem by Tshegofatso Mmatli, Dineo Mathobela, Tecious Kekana, Jabu Monyebodi and Judin Ramela*

**We Suggest that People Should ...**



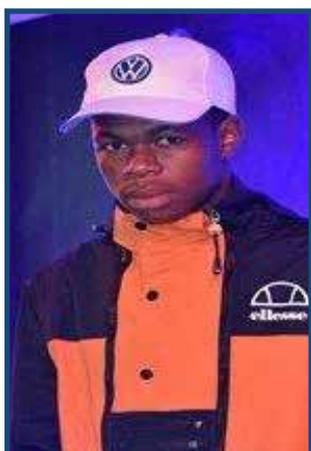
### 3. VOICES OF SCHOOL STUDENTS: CHALLENGES, FEARS, EXPECTATIONS

## LIMPOPO PROVINCE



### Marapong Location (Lephalale Municipality, Waterberg District)

*Facilitator: Hlabiwa Jim Letlhaka*



*Ampfarisaho Mulaudzi, grade 12, Lesiba Agnes Mabulane, grade 12;  
Moloko Moses Selepe, grade 11, Moshe Phago, grade 12  
Phegelelo Secondary School, Marapong Location.*



*Street scene, Marapong Location.*

## We Learnt From Covid-19

One of the hardest things we have ever had to do was learn how to live with Covid-19. We were always afraid of Covid-19, but we decided to follow regulations of Covid-19 correctly. That was important because by doing that we saved more lives. We also thought it would be a simple challenge, but it was difficult until compliance became simple. New situations always affect students and make them nervous.

After we wore masks on our faces for the first time, we felt like we are going to die because we were not able to breathe easily. We were not able to talk. Life changed completely.

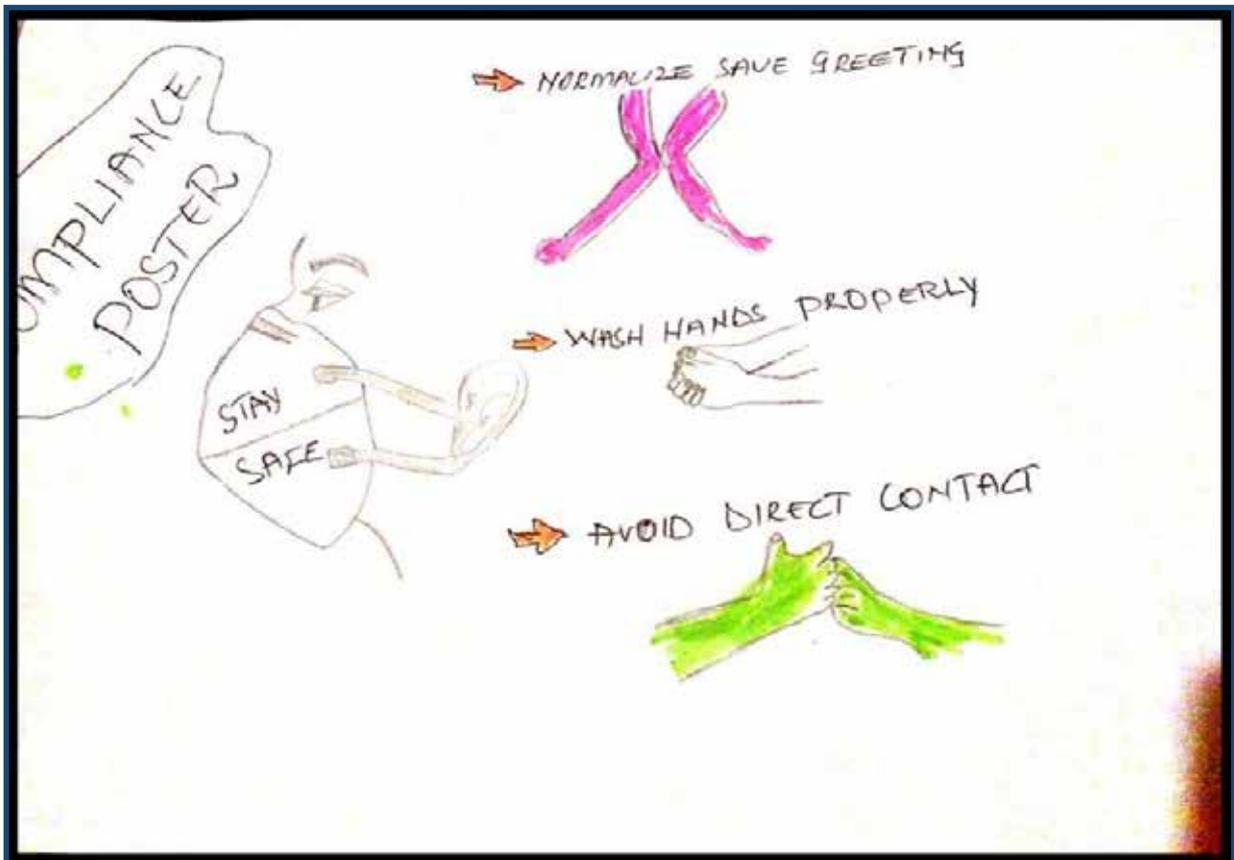
When we tune into radio, watch television and read newspapers, they were and are talking about the deaths and the dead. All nations are crying and we are part of them. Poverty emerged because of Covid-19. Our brothers, sisters and parents lost their jobs. That's what we learnt.

### Save our Students

Covid- 19 the killer  
We are crying  
We are praying  
We are frustrated

Friends and Families journey to the land of dead  
The educational system is broken  
Our mouth speaks the cure  
Where are our ancestors, pastors, politicians and  
God Help us to get a cure  
We are praying for a cure  
Department of Education, Community Champions  
and Politicians  
Please save our Students  
We lost more than enough already.

# Compliance Poster



## LIMPOPO PROVINCE



### GaKgwete Village (Fetakgomo Tubatse Local Municipality, Sekhukhune District)

Facilitator: Donald Mphethi



*Jennifer Kgwetiane, grade 12; Thlologela Boledi Kgwetiane, grade 11 and Surprise Komane, grade 11 Makopi High School, GaKgwete village.*



*Kalvin Kgwete, grade 11; Tharollo Mphethi, grade 10, and Thlologela Boledi Kgwetiane, grade 11, standing in front of their school. Makopi High School, GaKgwete village.*



*A view of GaKgwete village.*

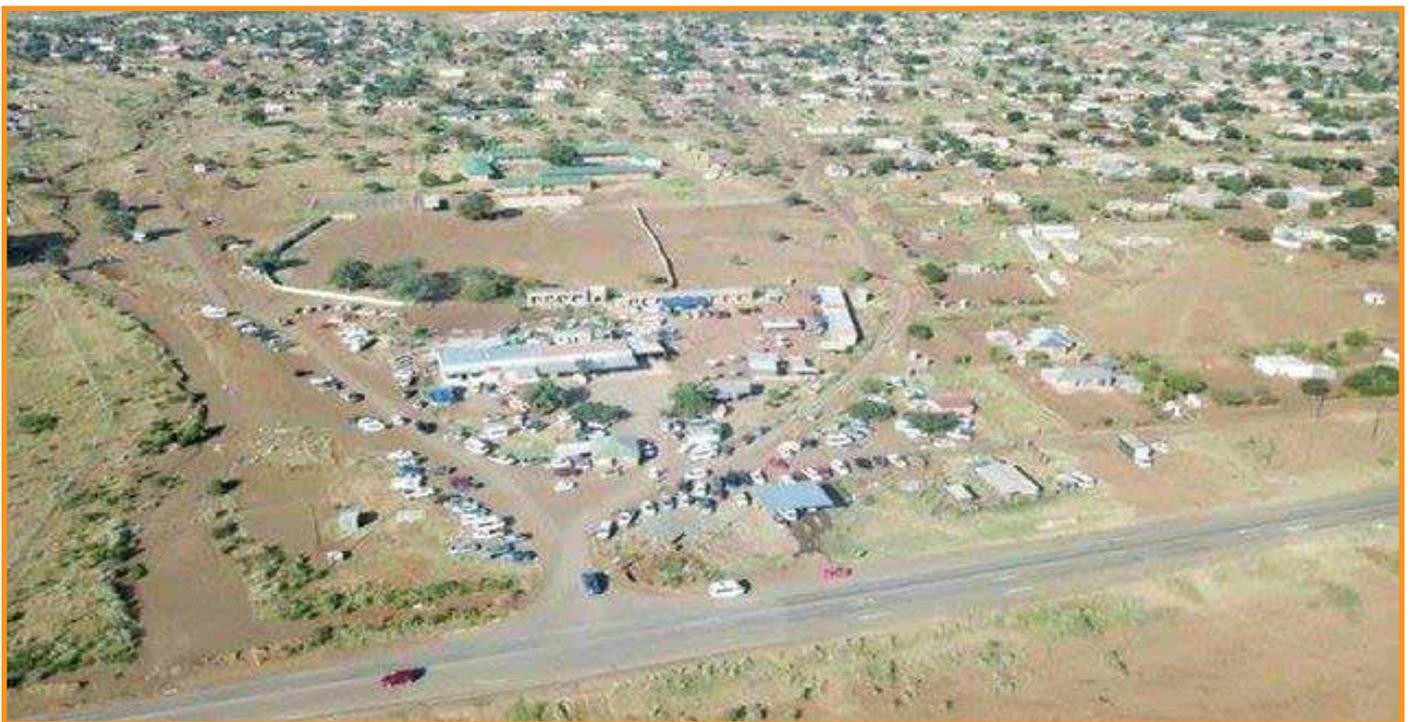
## The Effects of Covid-19 on Learners

Covid-19 is an infectious disease which is transmitted through droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or exhales. This pandemic has affected us as learners drastically. We had to stay at home for a few months as the lockdown was implemented without any means of e-learning. Now we are going to school but it is not like being at school full-time as before the Pandemic.

Wearing a mask might be good but it does affect us badly. It is difficult to breath and is physically uncomfortable. We also exhale carbon dioxide and this means it is risky to cover your mouth and nose the whole day. Sanitising does affect us too, especially in the early morning when we go to class, where there is a delay in the screening and sanitising. Social distancing is also a problem as we no longer have group discussions. We also can't approach our teacher to consult or to clarify things if needed.

So let's wash our hands with soap or use sanitiser, keep to social distancing and wear a mask all the time when in over-crowded places.

*Jennerfer Kgwetiane and Thlologela Boledi Kgwetiane*



*Makopi High School (green rooves), GaKgwete village.*

## We Can't See Her Smile Anymore

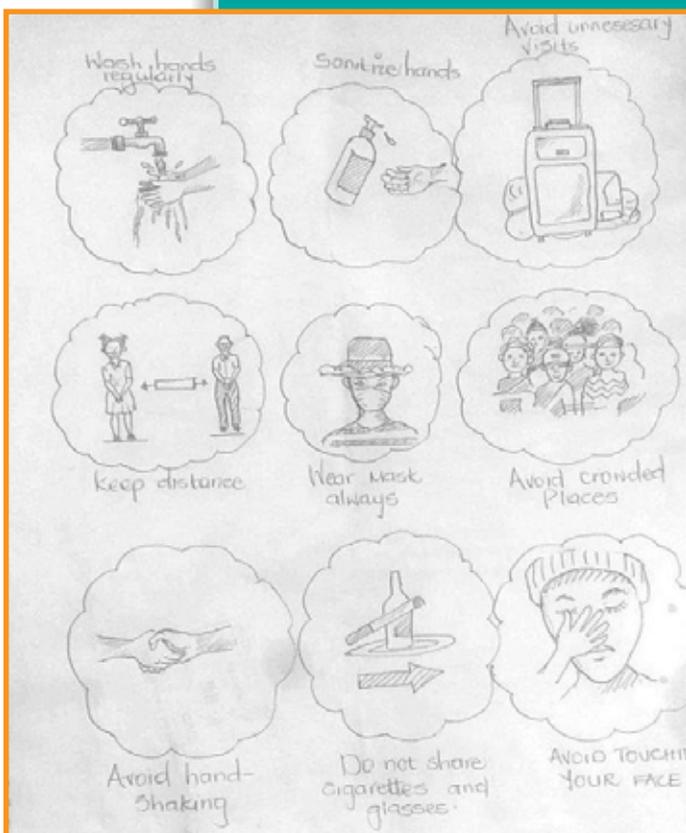
Covid-19 has made our life harder,  
we have lost our parents, families and relatives.  
We can't go and visit some of our friends and families.  
At school we can't see each other's faces anymore.  
Covid-19 is a devil and the worst enemy we have ever seen and heard.

I can't say I don't know what it is, air or a wind – I am not sure what is Covid-19.  
I hate even that name  
because it is hard for us to learn at school  
as some of us look at our teacher's mouth when she is teaching  
as we can't see her smile anymore.

We are living in poor rural areas  
where there is no electricity  
and we don't have smart phones to attend online classes.  
I don't know what is YouTube as I am from a poor family.  
We only light candles when we go to sleep  
just to check if there is no animals that can bite us on our mats.

We pray every day as a family for Covid-19 to go away  
so that my mother can go and look for some piece job  
to provide for us our basic needs.  
Life is rough, I wish I can grow and help my mother to grow my family  
unfortunately Covid-19 is still busy destroying our future.

What have we done, God please forgive us  
this Covid-19 milieu is destroying our peaceful land  
and the future of us, the poor people  
I thank you Lord.



## Coronavirus Stay Safe Tips

## NORTH WEST PROVINCE



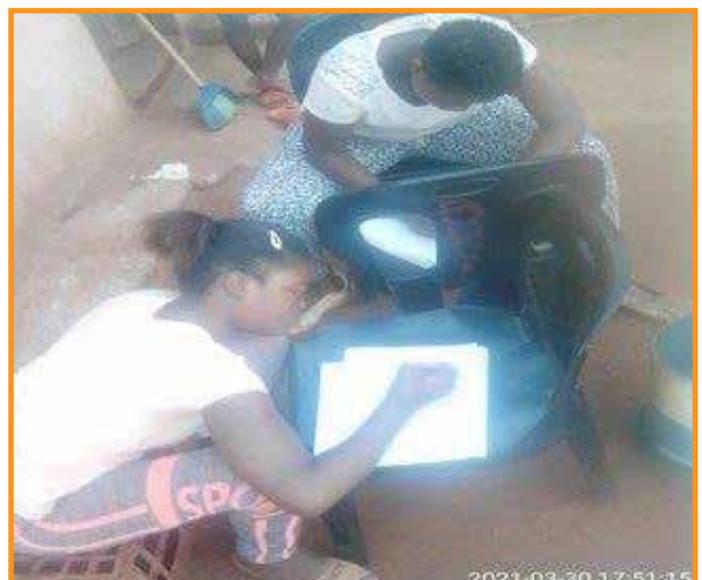
### Mothlabe Village (Moses Kotane Municipality, Bojanala District)

Facilitator: Lentswe Buda



*Gloria Khanyekudana Buda and Keotshepile Nonhlanhla Ramatshego; Atlegang Sefako (not in photo), all in grade 10 Kgalatlowe Secondary School, Mothlabe Village.*

*Hard at work writing essays and poetry.*



## Social distancing is now a normal thing to do when in public

Covid-19 has disrupted our schooling so badly. It is a dangerous virus that has killed so many people throughout the world in a very short time. Once we have a fever or cough, we feel scared and start thinking that we have the coronavirus. Covid-19 has killed so many people, including our beloved teachers, parents and other learners who were our friends. Last year the Department of Education closed all schools because of this virus that started in 2019.

But we only knew about it in 2020 in South Africa when the President said we must have a lockdown from March 2020. No one could go anywhere at all unless if you had to go to the clinic or shops to buy food. Covid-19 was destructive for our education last year because we did not learn enough. Wearing masks and washing hands regularly has become our lifestyle. Sanitisers have become part of our monthly groceries and social distancing is now a normal thing to do when in public.

*Keotshepile Nonhlanhla Ramatshego*

### Codividi

Ge ga a, a, a ke wena?  
O sega, a, a, a Codividi  
O gaila batho jaaka dijo

O mohumanegi kgotsa mohumi?  
O gaile jela  
O tsentse batho tsebetsebe  
O feditse batho,  
Segajaja ke wena

Bolwetse bo bolayang tota  
Batho ba lee bantsi e le ruri  
O tlhaga o iphitlhile ka sehuba,  
Otlhaga o iphitlhile ka mogotlholo  
Oitumela thata fa go le maruru  
O bolwetse tota wa bolaya  
O satane Codividi

*Keotshepile Nonhlanhla Ramatshego*

## The people must follow what the President says

Covid-19 destroyed our schooling. In February 2020 Covid-19 was introduced in our country. South Africa, and all our schools, were closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. All the work that we were supposed to do for last year was left behind because we couldn't attend school. I feel that our school was behind because of that pandemic and I feel that our school should do something about that. But now everything is covered. We managed to catch up with all those things that went behind and we also reopened our schooling this year on the 15 February 2021. Those days that we were meant to be taught and learn were left behind.

What I'd love is that our country must find some medicine that can take this Covid-19 out of our lives for good. The people must follow what the President says because in that way we can save the lives of the people who live in this country. This can be done by washing hands regularly, sanitising our hands and also by also wearing masks when we are in public places, to avoid spreading the virus. We can also get infected when we are together with our parents or fellow students, so we must always stay at our homes to avoid infections. We must also avoid events that are in our communities or other places. When we go to our nearest malls or shopping centres we should avoid taking children along. They are too young to fight the virus.

I feel that for our parents to help us, they must propose to our schools that we should do camping as matriculants because it is really hard to travel an hour with our heavy school bags.

*Gloria Khanyekudana Buda*

### Heela Corona!

Heela Corona!  
Wena bolwetsi jo bo masisi,  
O tsene mo matshelong a batho  
O tsene matshelong a rona re itumetsi  
O tsene matshelong a rona wa tlisa selelo  
Jwale matshelo a rona a fetogile,  
A fetogile ka ntlha ya gago,  
Ka nnete o setlhogo Corona

*Gloria Khanyekudana Buda*

## It was tough for matriculants

Since the coronavirus came to our country we have lost a lot of our family members. Other families have suffered horrible traumas. They had no income because parents or guardians were retrenched from work. President Ramaphosa addressed the nation telling us about the disease that was moving all over the world. He closed schools, taverns, restaurants, dams etc. No one was allowed to visit other countries because this disease affects the old ones more easily and can lead them to death and their graves.

Schools closed for six months and it was tough for matriculants. Angie Motshekga told the nation about dates that we should go to school. Our President told us that if we visit our families we should wear masks and avoid overcrowded places because we might get affected easily. We should cover our mouths and noses with a tissue or an elbow when sneezing or coughing so that we don't spread this disease. Before we leave home to school our parents should make sure that we don't forget masks.

*Atlegang Sefako*

### Tota wena o setlhogo

Corona! Tota wena o setlhogo  
O setlhogo o sa lemose tota  
Malapa a fokotsega ka wena  
E le ruri o sebetse bolwetsi ke wena  
Malapa a salale mang ganne o tsere batsadi  
Ruri Covid o setlhogo  
Bana ba tsamaile nako e so fitlhi  
Dithuto di emi tsi!!joo!  
Bolwetsi ke wena, boela kwa o tlhagang tswee tswee  
Re utlwile go lekane ka wena!

*Atlegang Sefako*



*Mothlabe Village street scene.*

### 3. VOICES OF SCHOOL STUDENTS: CHALLENGES, FEARS, EXPECTATIONS

## NORTH WEST PROVINCE



Phokeng (Rustenburg Municipality, Bojanala District)

*Facilitator: Tumi Mokgatle*



*Koketso Moatshe (L), grade 12, Matale Secondary School, Phokeng; Mpho Moatshe (R), grade 7, Moremogolo Primary School, Phokeng.*

#### **I cannot cope on my own**

I am a learner who understands my schoolwork better when I am being taught by a teacher.

During the pandemic we, the learners, had to adapt to the idea of online learning. The experience has so far affected my studies because I have never had to work alone without my teachers pushing me. I would always procrastinate, not realising that actually my work is piling up. Such a habit would make me want to give up school due to workload as I cannot cope on my own.

*Koketso Moatshe*

## **This virus is unstoppable**

Covid1-9 the virus that made our lives difficult  
When it affects you, you can die  
Try to be a hero, you die  
This virus is unstoppable

This virus started in China  
But mentioned in the bible, many thought it was a  
lie  
Try to be a hero, you die

Our President Ramaphosa took a lead  
As the wave was too high  
Our President wanted to save us by taking us to  
level 5

We started wearing masks and we sanitised  
It was hard for us but [we?] had to be saved  
Even through our parents lived hard and lost their  
jobs because of the virus  
Other people lost their friends and family members  
because of the virus

People were scared  
I could not even see my friend

We missed school  
But we did not quit  
We carried on praying  
God answered our prayers  
Now we are back to school  
But this virus is unstoppable  
We are alive  
Thank you God

*Mpho Moatshe*

## POEM

### Stand Up Activists

Confusion and fear are in the eyes of all  
Our ways of living have changed, yes!  
The suffering has always been there  
'Cause we have forgotten the ways of our  
forefathers  
And corruption is costing us  
It all started in the year 2020  
The year we will never forget  
And 2021 is the same  
Because of the pandemic  
Who knows about it?  
Who understands it?  
'Cause things are not normal  
The poor are getting poorer day by day  
We are not losing hope  
But we are losing our loved ones in numbers  
We are in trouble, unable to put bread on the  
table  
And our children's education is not the same  
The youth, our future leaders swim in confusion  
Will their future be bright? I am asking  
And the conspiracy theories are making things  
worse  
The truth, where are you?  
'Cause our people really need you now  
2nd wave is here  
Will there be 3rd and 4th wave?  
What can be done to save our people?

Is Covid-19 killing us, or poverty?  
Because poverty is like a dark angel  
That does not want to leave our homes  
Water is a problem  
Inequality is a problem  
Gender-based violence is a problem  
And climate change too

Where are you activists?  
You are the ones with a 3rd eye  
Only you can stand up  
Open the eyes of our people  
And advise our leaders

Give voice to the voiceless  
And prepare the world to be a better place  
For our future leaders  
And the next generation  
Because in Sepedi we say 'Montshepetsa  
boshego wa borate, Re mo leboga bosele'  
Stand up  
For our health  
Our environment  
Our rights  
Our land  
Our future  
And justice  
Be the change your community needs

*Mmabore Gladys Mogashoa*



## HOW TO STAY SAFE AT SCHOOL

**Keep to the basics:** wash your hands regularly with water and soap; never touch your face unless you have just washed your hands; wear a mask and wear it properly; keep your distance from other people (not less than 1 ½ metres); when away from home keep outdoors as much as possible and away from crowds.

**When travelling to and from school:** if walking to school, keep to the basics; if going by taxi or bus, make sure all the windows are open even if cold, wear a double mask and try to sit near a window; if you travelling in a car with other children, do the same as for a taxi.

**When at school:** keep to the basics and make sure everyone is keeping to the basics, including your teachers; avoid contact games where you come close to or touch each other; report situations where the school or children are not keeping to this guide; encourage discussions on keeping to the basics.

**When in class:** make sure you are at least 1½ metres apart; do not share desks that bring you closer than 1½ metres; make sure the teacher is also 1½ metres away and wearing her/his mask properly; make sure all the windows and doors are open, even if cold; where any of these precautions are not happening, raise with your class, the teacher, your parents/caregivers and the principal.

**If sick:** do not go to school; get advice and help; if anyone comes to school sick, such as with a cold, including teachers, report it to your parents/caregivers and to your teacher or principal.

**If afraid to report a problem:** ask your parents/caregivers or a friend to help – don't keep quiet!

**Remember:** there is a new type or variant of the virus which is much more infectious than the old type of virus. Please keep to all the guidelines for your sake, the sake of your family and for the safety of your community.

**Be a Coronavirus Activist!**



**No One Is Safe  
Until Everyone Is Safe**