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Soap Dreams Help Girls in Zimbabwe and the US to Survive the COVID-19 Lockdown

Two inspiring girls in Zimbabwe and the US have shrugged off the frustrations of the COVID-19 pandemic and vowed to produce soap together when the crisis ends.

Claire Brophy, 17, a senior at the Wakefield High School in Arlington, VA, is practicing social distancing in Nevada, while Evelyn Sachiti, 21, is locked down at home with her family in Chitungwiza, Harare.



Selfie: Claire under lockdown in Nevada.

They commiserated during a recent skype call set up by The Advocacy Project (AP) which Evelyn described as "the most exciting thing" that had happened since the crisis started.

Evelyn is one of about 40 girls in Harare who have developed their own brand of soap, known

as *Clean Girl*, in the hope of learning a skill and easing the pressure on their impoverished parents.

The program is managed by [Women Advocacy Project](#) (WAP) in Harare with funding from AP, [Rockflower](#) and [Action for World Solidarity](#).

Inspired by [AP's video profile of Evelyn](#), Claire and a group of school friends are determined to produce their own brand of *Clean Girl* soap in the US and send profits to the project in Zimbabwe. Claire was due to meet with a soap trainer in Alexandria before the pandemic struck.

So far, Zimbabwe has recorded only 34 COVID-19 cases, but residents of Harare are terrified that the virus could become uncontrollable if it reaches crowded communities like Chitungwiza.



Selfie: Evelyn and soap at home in Harare.

Zimbabwe's health system is desperately underfunded and the entire country was only able to conduct 392 COVID-19 tests in the first month of the pandemic.

As a result, the lockdown has been fierce. Evelyn told Claire that it requires a letter from the police just to visit a health center. Her parents, both small traders, are prevented from working at markets and do what they can to sell from the house.

Food is running short and the government has not brought in emergency supplies, said Evelyn's father. There had been "battles in the streets" between soldiers and residents.



The soap project survives, however. Two hundred bottles of *Clean Girl* remained unsold when production stopped, and Evelyn is selling them to neighbors as well as promoting the use of face masks (photos above). Evelyn told Claire that she had earned \$60 in just three weeks and that the money would be shared with the other girls.

Constance Mugari, the founder of WAP, has continued to watch over the girls during the crisis. Helped by grants from AP and Rockflower, Constance has made 500 masks at home and shared them among medical centers and the girls. She is also training the girls to sew their own masks by hand using a pattern made by Bobbi Fitzsimmons, who heads AP's quilt program.

Meanwhile, however different the lockdown may look to Evelyn and Claire, they do at least have their phones, WhatsApp, and now soap dreams to keep them going.

