



Investing In People for Social and Economic Justice

WEEKEND READER

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Women hard hit by poor public service delivery



With her baby strapped on her back and the other three children hanging around her, one Mrs Kapanga from Norton narrated how poor public healthcare and acute shortage of safe and portable water has made life a living hell for her, the case with many women living in urban and peri urban areas.

“All my children have a running stomach, and I cannot go about my normal daily business as I have to attend to them. This is all because we are consuming dirty and contaminated water from boreholes that have been sunk near sewer tanks. I cannot afford commercialised boreholes which have become the only source of clean and portable water in Norton.”

As if the water crisis is not enough, Mrs Kapanga expressed discontent at public health service delivery as she went to the nearby local clinic to get medical attention for her children only to be advised to go and buy expensive medication which she and her unemployed husband cannot afford.

Kapanga's story is just one but an example of how the revolutionary ethos have been dumped. History has it that revolutionary leaders who led Zimbabwe into independence repeatedly emphasised that “For the revolution to triumph in its totality, there must be emancipation of women.” How-

ever, four decades down the line, promises of the ruling party are yet to see the light of the day. The quota system for women representation in Parliament is a piecemeal solution to improve the conditions of women and has not done enough in as far as the needs and aspirations of an ordinary Zimbabwean woman is concerned, neither did it bring women emancipation in general.

Institutionalised corruption, rampant abuse of public funds, high unemployment rate and lack of public accountability among other socioeconomic woes bedevilling Zimbabwe have contributed to the plight of women in the mineral rich the Southern African country reflecting a typical natural resource curse.

The aforementioned socioeconomic crises thrive at the expense of public service delivery and it is women who bear the brunt. The writer almost went in tears as she listened to the heart-breaking stories of different women on the side-lines of Social Accountability Monitoring Training Workshops conducted by the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development in Norton and Chivhu on Wednesday and Thursday respectively.

The discourse around gender mainstreaming in the whole governance chain has proved to be a talk-show that has not yielded tangible results for the benefit of an ordinary woman who is wallowing in poverty and deprivation. Poor public service delivery is really taking a toll on residents. Amai Sarudzai, a widow who survives on running a small market stall also lamented poor waste disposal in their area which is a health ticking time bomb.

“We don't have a proper sewage system in Ward 13 such that we use septic tanks. However, the major challenge is that those tasked with emptying the tanks dispose the waste anywhere even behind our houses and playground for the children. They even wash their drums near our sources of water and this is posing hygienic and health risks for us as residents.”

The absence of social safety nets for the elderly has also spelt untold suffering for the country's senior citizens. ZIMCODD interfaced with one of the senior citizens in Norton who narrated her ordeal as she survives on bread crumbs from well-wish-

ers. “All my children died, I have no one to look after me. I depend on well-wishers for food and I have a very small garden in front of my doorstep where I grow crops like pumpkins which I later on sell for my upkeep.” Asked if it is not high time for her to rest, laughingly she said “Zvino ndikazorora ndoita sei, ndorarama nei?” (What will become of me if I rest, for me to live I have to work,” said Gogo Matambo.

All this is happening alongside the existence of a very progressive Constitution which obligates the government to provide decent welfare for the elderly people. Chapter 4, Section 82 (c) provides that people over age of seventy have the right to “receive financial support by way of social security and welfare.” It is regrettable how the country's senior citizens have been turned into “hustlers.”

Given this background, ZIMCODD is engaged in massive Social Accountability Monitoring training for women in social networks. Social accountability is a concept that can be understood as a mechanism that bridges the gap between public service providers (duty bearers) and public service users (citizens) for them to

collaborate on identifying challenges and proffering probable solutions to public service delivery related challenges.

Zimbabwe is one of the countries still lacking proactive duty bearers who exercise public accountability, therefore there is need for citizens to take various and constitutional means to demand such. In the trainings, the coalition is helping women with tools they can use to demand public accountability from duty bearers.

It is ZIMCODD's belief that because women are the hardest hit by the current socioeconomic quagmire, women must be at the centre of the economic governance process not as passive recipients of services but as active players in the whole process. That way, women's living conditions can improve.

