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ZIMBABWE COALITION ON DEBT & DEVELOPMENT

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Polarisation stalling service delivery in Chivhu, a pointer to the national crisis

Four decades after the attainment of independence, Zimbabwe remains a politically fragmented society particularly along the prominent political parties.

The fall of long serving leader Robert Mugabe from power in November 2017 did not bring results in as far as ushering in a new era of a united country is concerned. Ordinary Zimbabweans are bearing the brunt of the obtaining political landscape as they cannot demand accountability from authorities who are “protected” by their political hats.

Public service delivery has thus been sacrificed as authorities either play a political blame game or hide behind their political affiliations to avoid being answerable to the people they serve. This was brought to light by residents in areas where the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) conducted Capacity Building Workshops on social accountability for Residents Associations (RAs) and Social and Economic Justice Ambassadors (SEJAs). In basic terms, social accountability entails citizens, in their different capacities, demanding accountability from public office bearers on the use of public resources.



Capacity Building Workshop for RAs and SEJAs - Mutare

On Wednesday 29 January 2020, at a capacity building workshop in Chivhu, ZIMCODD came face to face with the discontent residents who accused local authorities of taking political refuge in their political parties at the expense of public service delivery.

“Despite us as citizens meeting our tax and rate obligations, we don’t receive adequate public services. The problem we are facing is that when we lodge our complaints with the town council, we are viewed from political lenses and labelled as enemies of the ruling party, as such most of the people are afraid of questioning poor public service delivery,” remarked one member of the Chivhu Residents and Ratepayers Association (CHRRRA) who declined to be named.

He further highlighted that they

once picketed at the town council in protest over uncollected refuse after which some of the participants were tracked and advised not to engage in such actions again.

Speaking at the same event, CHRRRA Secretary General, David Marufu said the birth of their resident’s association was met with resistance by the local authorities who labelled them as agents of regime change belonging to opposition political parties. He said CHRRRA was formed upon identification of the gaps in public service delivery fuelled by the abuse of public funds. At one point, the town council failed to account for the monies from corporate social responsibility with citizens failing to demand answers due to fear of victimisation.



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Like their counterparts, councillors from the opposition political parties once refused to embrace the resident's association suspecting that they are from the state central intelligence.

“At some point, as CHRRA, we demanded critical answers from opposition political party councillors and they gave us a cold shoulder as they thought they are immune to public scrutiny. They said that we are from the central intelligence unit and therefore urged their allies to avoid any contacts with us,” said Marufu.

This, therefore discourages citizens from demanding social accountability which forms a critical component of democratic governance. Social accountability can be done in different ways including but not limited to the use of scorecards, petitions and other constitutional means of demanding answers from duty bearers. Citizens' voices and active participation in both local and national governance processes are a critical ingredient for sustainable development.

Nevertheless, politics has proved to be a major hindrance to the progressive realisation of citizens'



Capacity Building Workshop for RAs and SEJAs - Chivhu

social and economic rights and this is mainly due to the heavy politicisation of social accountability initiatives. Most public officials in Zimbabwe and Africa at large do not want to be subjected to public scrutiny. The politicisation of social accountability by the authorities has cultivated a breeding ground for abuse of public resources and rampant corruption in Zimbabwe. Consequently, the Southern African country's public service delivery is in shambles characterised by incapacitated public health institutions, poor infrastructure, scarcity of portable and safe water among other social woes.

It is against this background that

ZIMCODD undertook capacity building for residents' associations and SEJAs in Harare, Chivhu, Mutare and Gwanda so that the two groups become vibrant and perform oversight in public finance management at local and national level. With the aim of creating resilient grassroots-based social movements, the workshops equip RAs and SEJAs with social accountability monitoring tools that can be used to demand accountability from solution holders.

If public finance management is to improve in Zimbabwe, it is critical for authorities to depoliticise social accountability and start viewing it as a national developmental tool and not a political one. It is also imperative for citizens to set aside their political differences and join forces in as far as public resources governance is concerned because development knows no political boundaries.



Capacity Building Workshop for RAs and SEJAs - Harare

