



ZIMCODD

ZIMBABWE COALITION ON DEBT & DEVELOPMENT

WEEKEND READER - WEEK ENDING 22 NOVEMBER 2019

Implications of water scarcity on women

There is widespread scarcity of water around the world owing to inter alia, effects of climate change, poor water infrastructure, growing population, agricultural intensification as well as urbanization (United Nations, 2005). Zimbabwe is no exception whenever the water crisis issue is mentioned. The dire crisis in the Southern African country negatively affect women especially those from poor backgrounds. Access to safe and clean water and sanitation services is a basic necessity for every human being; however, in Zimbabwe this has remained a pie in the air for the majority of women. This short piece seeks to establish how women are affected by the scarcity of water and poor sanitation.

The International law sets provisions for the availability of safe and clean water as a basic necessity for all human beings. The Accra Declaration of 2001 affirms that water is a fundamental human right, essential

to human life and to which every person, rich or poor, man or woman, child or adult is entitled to. This is also in line with Sustainable Development Goal number 6 which aims at reducing the number of people without access to clean water and sanitation by 2030. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women explicitly states that rural women have a right to "adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to . . . water supply." Furthermore, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, provides for the right to a general satisfactory environment favorable to peoples' development, which is unattainable without access to water and sanitation. These are just but some of the international statutes which provide for access to safe and clean water as a basic human right.

Bringing it closer home, Chapter 4 of the Zimbabwean Constitution and domestic law is explicitly clear that every person has the right to safe, clean and portable water. It goes on further to state that the

state must take all reasonable legislative and other measures within the limits of the resources available to it to achieve the progressive realization of this right. However, this clause is retrogressive as it is used as an excuse by duty bearers who when asked about their failure to provide safe and clean water to citizens points out to limited resources.

Implications of water scarcity on women

Notwithstanding a very progressive constitution in the context of Zimbabwe and international declarations guaranteeing every person's right to water, this has not been the reality on the ground. The deteriorating situation calls for urgent action from government. The scarcity and unavailability of safe and clean water negatively affects women in diverse ways including increased the burden for unpaid labor, tremendous health effects and negatively affected women's socio-economic



Zimbabweans queueing for water as water crisis hits Harare.

Source - Reuters Media

activities as they need to look for alternative sources of water.

According to the World Health Organization (2002), in Africa alone, women spend 40 billion hours every year walking for water. This is also supported by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UN MDGs) Report of 2012 which states that 71% of the burden of collecting water for household use falls on women and girls in Sub Saharan Africa. The above assertions remain true to Zimbabwe especially in most cities of the country where residents are experiencing massive water shortages. It is women who spend hours walking long distances in quest for nearest alternative sources of water for example wells and boreholes. This is also costly especially for poor women with multiple roles like taking care of their families.

The dilapidated infrastructure which was constructed at pre-independence period and the unavailability of chemicals to treat water rocking Harare has serious health implications on citizens. The recent outbreak of communicable diseases like cholera and typhoid can be well attributed to the shortages of both clean water and poor sanitation. According to the World Health Organisation, as of 3 October, 2018; about 8,535 cumulative cases of communicable diseases including 163 laboratory confirmed cases and 50 deaths were reported. Of these 8535 cases, 98% (8341) cases were reported from the high-density populated areas, the most affected areas being Glenview and Budiriro. These are together with other high-density areas, the hardest hit by poor sanitation.

Moreover, carrying cans of water for long distances affects the spinal cord and causes many women to experience back pains at tender ages. Medical research by HABITAT, (2000) has recorded cases of permanent damage to women's health attributable to carrying heavy cans of water. The health problems range from chronic fatigue,

spinal as well as pelvic deformities.

Another important angle to look at the shortage of water is its implications on the socio-economic activities of most poor women. In Zimbabwe, as the economic crisis continue to deepen characterized by unprecedented unemployment rate, a lot of people especially women have resorted to the informal economy for example vending in order to sustain their families' lives. The projects they thrive on to put food on the table to supplement their families are disrupted as they need to dedicate some to find alternative sources of water. In line with the above, the economic cost of the water crisis can be very severe for women in low income societies whose activities and income revolve around water.

Does the 2020 National Budget Statement present any ray of hope?

The effort by the government as articulated in the 2020 National Budget to restore basic water supply and sanitation services through maintenance, rehabilitation and upgrading of infrastructure is a welcome development. The allocation of ZWL\$400 million to Gwayi Shangani Dam, ZWL\$128 million to Causeway Dam and ZWL\$192 million to Chivhu Dam among others are critical developments if they sail through. This will help alleviate water challenges the Zimbabwe is currently faced with. However, it remains the responsibility of citizens to continue with accountability monitoring to ensure that if the budget proposal on water infrastructure is approved, these funds are not abused and diverted for unintended purposes.

Due to the social contract that exists between government as duty bearers and citizens as right holders, government and stakeholders that are involved in the provision of water particularly local authorities must acknowledge that water is a basic human right and must take all reasonable measures to guarantee the avail-

ability of water to citizens. Adequate provision of potable and safe water to citizens is a vital cog for the attainment of sustainable development.

What's HOT!!!

1. Govt on electronic tax

Government has increased the minimum taxable amounts for intermediated money transfer tax (IMTT), better known as the 2 percent tax, to \$100 from \$20 per transaction for individuals as it sought to ease the burden on low income earners. The review takes effect from January next year. "[READ MORE](#)"

2. Treasury ups insurance capital threshold

FINANCE minister Mthuli Ncube has reviewed upwards the minimum capital requirements for insurance entities to \$75 million to ensure that they are well-capitalised to protect value for policyholders and pension members. "[READ MORE](#)"

3. Mthuli to expend 5% fuel levy on Chirundu Highway

Finance and Economic Development minister Mthuli Ncube has allocated 5% of the excise duty revenue collected on fuel towards the construction of the Beitbridge-Harare-Chirundu Highway as international financiers remain elusive. "[READ MORE](#)"

4. Catch and release label worries ZACC

THE Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Corruption (ZACC) yesterday said it is concerned about the public perception that suspects are only arrested as a window dressing measure and is working with partners to improve its services. "[READ MORE](#)"



Women queuing for water at night in Zimbabwe (Source:VOA News)