



PRESS STATEMENT: 24 JANUARY 2020

On the Global Protest to Fight Inequality

Inequality is increasingly becoming a cause for concern globally and Zimbabwe in particular. The disparities in access to equal opportunities and rights including health, education, water and sanitation and even information are too high to ignore. The rich are becoming richer whilst the poor are becoming poorer. The imbalances in terms of rights, status and opportunities have created a world of the haves and the have nots and it calls for global concerted efforts to bridge this gap.

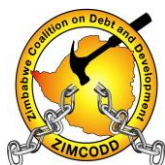
The adverse effects of inequality on individuals and national development cannot be over-emphasised. The effects include, erosion of human dignity, social disharmony, mistrust, societal violence, economic regression and the deepening poverty.

As under one percent of the world population is gathered in Davos, Switzerland for the World Economic Forum to discuss means on increasing their profits and wealth, civil society members have been mobilising under the banner of the Fight Inequality Alliance to garner support against inequalities.

People from across the globe are using protest marches, rallies, street theatre, art tax haven tours, music and digital campaigns to collectively say enough is enough to greed. They are also proposing organic solutions to inequalities in their different contexts.

The Global Protest Against Inequality coincides with the World Economic Forum to draw attention from governments and other responsible authorities around issues of inequality.

It is in the same spirit that progressive Zimbabweans, activists and faith based organisations who are members of the Fight Inequality Alliance, convened by the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD), participated through various initiatives to commemorate the worldwide Fight Inequality



Week of Action. This press conference is affirming our commitment to fighting inequality as we seek to raise our concerns and proffer recommendations.

Manifestations of inequality in Zimbabwe

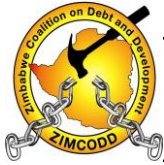
Austerity and inequality

- The austerity measures implemented in 2019 against the backdrop of deep socio-economic woes did not help the situation, rather they cultivated an enabling environment for inequality to thrive. Budget cuts in public service delivery in areas such as health further relegated ordinary citizens to abject poverty. The huge tax burden as highlighted by the infamous 2% affects the rich and the poor disproportionately as it is the latter who feel the heat.
- The austerity measures further widened the income gap between citizens that has seen low income households disproportionately bearing the cost of cuts on social protection programs which are meant for elderly persons, people with disability and beneficiaries of other social safety programs.
- The 2020 National Budget offers no hope for tackling inequality. The fact that the word **social** appears “39 times” in the 2020 National budget is not sufficient enough to convince citizens that social inequalities will be addressed. For example, the ZWL\$5,8 billion health allocation constituting 9.9% of total government revenue is way below that of the Abuja declaration of 15%.

The implication is that healthcare inequalities will persist as highlighted below:

Unequal access to healthcare

- Poor rural areas lack adequate healthcare, nutrition and access to water and sanitation compared to their urban counterparts. However, visible signs of inequalities exist in urban settings with Southern Suburbs of Harare, for instance, prone to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as cholera and typhoid.
- The Herald of 5 September 2019 carried one of the most disturbing stories that reported that a pregnant woman died together with her child at Parirenyatwa Hospital allegedly due to negligence by medical staff manning the maternity ward. It is disheartening that the unfortunate



incident happened at one of the biggest referral hospitals in Zimbabwe. What is most worrying is the fact that it is ordinary citizens who depend more on these public health institutions while the elite and those who have seek quality health services abroad, why not use those resources to build our own institutions for the benefit of all?

- Despite the commonality of Public Private Partnerships in the health sector across the globe, their effectiveness is yet to be realised in Zimbabwe. The initiative is perpetuating inequalities in the health sector with most of the essential services now being offered by private players. In the case of Chitungwiza Central Hospital, mortuary services are now run by Doves whilst radiology department services are provided by the Baines Group. This privatisation of public health services disproportionately affects the poor as they do not afford the fees charged by private service providers.

Unequal access to quality education

- Hyperinflation against stagnant salaries has drastically eroded citizens' already pathetic disposable incomes such that most parents are finding it difficult to make ends meet to afford their children some education. It is regrettable how standards in public education institutions have tremendously gone down and this has seen the financially able parents resorting to private schools for quality services. What then is in store for the poor?
- The opening of the 2020 academic year has exposed the worrying effects of income inequality on the poor. the picture of an adult man who was caught shoplifting stationery was circulated on the same platforms is one such manifestation of the inequalities in society. This was no laughing matter as it showed the extent to which income disparities affect children's access to quality education. The parents' level of income determines the quality of education they can afford for their children.
- The educational inequalities have also been exacerbated by the hikes in school fees with families finding it difficult to afford all the educational requirements. Private schools with better facilities have remained a preserve of the few of a better socioeconomic status.

Gender disparities



- According to the United Nations Development Programme, Zimbabwe ranked 126 out of 162 countries in the Gender Inequality Index of 2018. This reflects the serious disparities between men and women in the country with men being at the top of the social ladder. The gender structures are perpetuated by gender and social norms which disempower women relegating them to second class citizens not fit to control or acquire assets or assume influential positions of power on their own. The disparity between female and male representation in the Parliament of Zimbabwe is glaring. Out of the 350 National Assembly and Senate Members, only 122 are women who constitute 35%.
- The economic inequalities between men and women globally are worrying to the extent that the monetary value of unpaid care work globally for women aged 15 and over is at least \$10.8 trillion annually, Oxfam International Report reveals.
- According to the report, the 22 richest men in the world own more wealth than all the women in Africa.

Climate induced inequalities

The effects of climate change are most felt by the poor and marginalised as witnessed in the 2019 Cyclone Idai where vulnerable groups that include women and children were hardest hit. UNICEF stated that of the people affected by Cyclone Idai, 48% were children. The affected communities are now exposed to extreme poverty.

FACTS

- According to the World Bank, extreme poverty in Zimbabwe is estimated to have risen from 29% in 2018 to 34% in 2019, an increase from 4.7 to 5.7 million people. The World Bank attributes the increase to economic contraction and the sharp rise in prices of food and basic commodities. The preliminary findings of Oxfam in Zimbabwe and UNDP Inequality Report reveals that in 2018, the richest 10% of Zimbabweans took more income than the poorest half of citizens. In 2017, the Zimbabwe's expenditure Gini coefficient was 0.44, representing an increase from 2011 after years of decline. The Gini Coefficient measures the degree of inequality in the



distribution of family income in a country. If income were distributed with perfect equality the index would be zero, and if income were distributed with perfect inequality, the index would be one.

- The World Inequality Database reveals that the top 10% of Zimbabweans took 33.8% of the total income, compared to a global average of just over half (52.1%), while the bottom 50% of Zimbabwe's population accounted for just 22% of income, compared to a world average of around 10%.
- The recent Oxfam International's Report "Time to Care" published ahead of the World Economic Forum revealed damning details about inequality globally including that;
 - The world's billionaires, only 2, 153 people in 2019, have more wealth between them than 4.6 billion people;
 - The combined wealth of the world's 22 richest men is more than the wealth of all the women in Africa;
 - The world's richest 1% have more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people.

Key Asks

- A healthy nation is a productive one. It is therefore critical for the Government of Zimbabwe to put in place policies and measures to resuscitate the ailing health sector to ensure that quality healthcare is guaranteed to all in line with Chapter 4, Section 76 of the Constitution. If the inequalities in the health sector are not addressed at national level, Sustainable Development Goal 3 of ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all, at all ages, will remain a pipe dream.
- Assess the effectiveness of Public Private Partnerships in the health sector as PPPs have proven to be widening social inequalities gaps as in the case of Chitungwiza Hospital where all essential services like mortuary services are now run by private sector players who are after profit at the detriment of the poor.
- Invest in social services and deliver free public social services including health, education to ensure that the poor and marginalised are catered for.



- The government must abide by the High Court ruling on the illegality of 2% in order to protect the social and economic rights of the poor and marginalised.
- The urgent need to address the issue of unpaid care work to ensure economic empowerment of women.
- The government must create pro-poor and inclusive policies that take into consideration aspirations of young people. This includes incorporating youths in land and natural resource extraction value chain.
- The government should invest in climate shock reduction measures and ensure that the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund is well resourced in order to alleviate severe climate change damages.
- Polarisation and corruption are vices deepening all forms of inequalities breeding mistrust and violence. The poor and marginalised are suffering the effects of misuse and diversion of key resources that are crucial for the delivery of public services such as health, education, water and sanitation. Restoration of the rule of law and drastic measures to combat corruption are therefore essential to ensure that every citizen live a decent life.
- The solution to Zimbabwe's deep and complex social, economic and political challenges require a holistic process of reflection and reimagining for nation building. Such a process must deliver a shared national vision that provides a new social contract.

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