



## THE WEEKEND READER

"Your Weekly Read on Debt, Development & Socio-Economic Justice"

### AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DAY 2022: OBSERVING THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON HUMAN AND PEOPLE'S RIGHTS FOR SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development (SADC) joins citizens, activists, civic organizations and the rest of the continent in commemorating #AfricaHumanRightsDay 2022 while making a deliberate call to governments in the bloc to submit to the dictates of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Of major concern is the continued shrinking of democratic space particularly seen in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which stifles the achievement of social, economic, cultural and political rights of citizens. From the thwarting of student activism in Eswatini to the threat to Civil society via the Private Voluntary Organizations Amendment (PVO) Bill, there are significant concerns on the ability of citizens to enjoy their socioeconomic rights, especially the most vulnerable in society. Following, the occasion of Africa Human Rights Day is an opportunity for governments on the continent to reflect and allow the enjoyment of the said rights.

#### **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)**

*"The African Charter helped to steer Africa from the age of human wrongs into a new age of human rights. It opened up Africa to supra-national accountability. The Charter sets standards and establishes the groundwork for the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa."*<sup>1</sup>

ACHPR makes it a shared concern for all to demand accountability from our leadership from a background where the dignity of one affects the dignity of the whole. We are all equal and should then enjoy the same public services such as health, education, transportation, security etc. Below are the key concern areas in the Zimbabwean context.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.achpr.org/legalinstruments/detail?id=49>

## **Of Concern**

### **Debt & Corruption**

Rising public debt continues to reduce the ability of citizens to enjoy their socioeconomic rights. The recently declared public debt of US\$17.9 billion has become unsustainable and imposes an unnatural burden on the economy. Furthermore, it is contrary to legal provisions as it is over 60% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as stipulated by the Public Debt Management Act (2015) and the SADC benchmark of no more than 70% of GDP. Furthermore, the state of corruption over the years around public funds has given rise to concern that some of the debt has been accrued for projects that have not benefitted citizens. As such, it is critical that a debt audit is conducted to ascertain how much is really owed, to whom and importantly, where it was spent. Citizens should not be made to pay for odious debt!

### **Poor Public Services**

Article 13 (3) of the ACHPR states that each citizen has the right of access to public property and services in strict equality of all persons before the law. However, the current state of service provision in Zimbabwe leaves much to be desired in that effect. For one, People with Disability (PWD) continue to suffer challenges in terms of public transportation and access into public buildings. As a result, they are unable to participate in economic activities as the redundant act of getting into town is nearly impossible through public transport and services such as most banks have no ramps for those that use wheelchairs. It is crucial then that leadership directs attention to sectoral challenges for citizens especially the most vulnerable in society.

### **Increasing Poverty**

Citizens continue to face runaway inflation of their incomes with those earning in the fragile Zimbabwean dollar getting the short end of the stick. Meanwhile service providers are pegging their products in United States Dollar (USD) terms. This is even more concerning because amongst those pegging in USD you will find public institutions such as hospitals and the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC).<sup>2</sup> The most vulnerable are effectively excluded and left behind. Government should make it a point of policy consistency then that if fees are pegged in USD, so too shall salaries.

### **The PVO Amendment Bill**

Beyond threatening the operation of Civil Society which has contributed to improving livelihoods of citizens, the bill presents threat to freedom of association, a provision that should be safeguarded by the Universal Declaration of human rights and the ACHPR itself. The PVO bill threatens the freedom of association of Human Rights Defenders through its vagueness as it dictates penalty on civic actors found associating with those operating in the political space. How then shall an organization that seeks to provide legal support to human rights defenders do so if they can be judged to be engaging in political action and sanctioned?

2. <https://www.sundaynews.co.zw/zimsec-announces-exchange-rate-to-be-used-for-examination-fee-payments/#:~:text=Students%20sitting%20for%20their%20advanced,pay%20US%2448%20per%20subject>

## **Recommendations**

In light of the following, we proffer the following recommendations:

- Parliament and Ministry of Finance and Economic Development should institute a Debt audit to know the true debt burden and its legitimacy. Further, Parly should ensure capacitation of relevant authorities such as the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission to pursue meaningful prosecutions of those that engage in graft with public funds.
- Consistency on fiscal policies such as the currency issue. Paying civil servants in the local currency while pegging user fees in USD erodes the value of citizen's incomes and further entrenches poverty. Ministry of Finance and Economic Development should align their policy to the local currency or USD. This will ease the pressure that poverty exerts on the vulnerable.
- Devolution remains a key solution to correcting unequal service provision across the country. Ministry of Finance and Economic Development should ensure timely disbursement of funds to designated localities so they develop and 'catch up'.
- The PVO Amendment Bill, as it stands, threatens democracy and human rights. As such, it should be adopted to respect guaranteed provisions such as freedom of association and equality found in the ACHPR and Universal Human Rights Declaration.