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ZIMBABWE COALITION ON DEBT & DEVELOPMENT

WEEKEND READER - 17 JANUARY 2020



Source: New Zimbabwe

Understanding the Past, Shaping the Future: Is There Any Ray of Hope in 2020??

The dark side of austerity measures in Zimbabwe

Austerity measures implemented in the yesteryear yielded no results both for the government and ordinary citizens. Austerity has not only been an economic but also a social failure as most of the social services and human development indicators deteriorated in 2019 where massive cuts in social spending, health care and education have been imposed. Subsequently the number of people facing difficulties in accessing basic social services increased significantly. Visible indicators of the failures include a sharp rise in the annual rate of inflation from 5.4%

in September 2018 to 230% in July 2019, a slump in Gross Domestic Product by 6.5% and a sharp rise in extreme poverty from 29% in 2018 to 34% in 2019 (World Bank 2019). The situation was further worsened due to shortages of foreign currency, fuel, electricity, severe drought and Cyclone Idai. The period under review was also characterised by weak domestic demand owing to job losses and hyperinflation which eroded people's disposable incomes whilst fiscal austerity compelled government to cut on social spending. The unresolved impasse between the government and medical doctors, unavailability of medical equipment and supplies bear testimony to a collapsing health sector. The anti-poor policies left indelible marks on the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans and no one would want to experience the same in 2020.

Zimbabwe's socio-economic situation is deteriorating rapidly as the country is facing a myriad of challenges ranging from chronic poor governance, deeply entrenched corruption and mismanagement of public funds as well as a lack of political will. The economic challenges bedeviling the country fueled turmoil amongst citizens as the government is failing to make strides and provide for basic services such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation among others. This has ultimately compromised the full realization and enjoyment of socio-economic rights of citizens particularly the right to healthcare, education, water and sanitation not underestimating the right of vulnerable groups including the rights of women, people living with disabilities and the elderly as enshrined in Chapter 4 of the national Constitution. Going forward, there is no commitment on the part of government in the 2020 National Budget to ensure that citizens and particularly marginalized groups are sufficiently cushioned from the current socio-economic shock. As the new decade starts, the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development remains resolute and committed towards contributing to the country's sound public finance management system and the struggle for social and economic justice remains unabated.



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Public hospitals remain a death trap



Source: [Mbare Times](#)

The health sector remains the most critical sector and the dire situation calls for urgent attention and action from the government. The situation is dire despite the present government's promises for affordable quality healthcare which remain a pie in the air. The continuous deterioration of health services comprising of shortages of basic essential health drugs and medical supplies as well as poor maintenance of medical equipment has negatively deprived citizens of their right to basic healthcare. The situation has been aggravated by the striking doctors who are demanding an increase in salaries as well as equipment in public hospitals. Regrettably, the government did not take on board concerns of the doctors and instead fired some of the striking medical doctors which has greatly impacted on the majority poor. Government efforts through the 2020 National Budget are not enough in addressing the situation. The health sector was allocated ZWL\$5.8 billion which constitutes 9.9% of the total government revenue and this remains way below the Abuja target of 15% of the total annual budget. Moreover, considering that the population in the country is mostly rural constituting 68 percent of the total population, only 6% was allocated to Rural Health Centre and Community Centre which is

insufficient to cater for the rural population. Thus, there is need for government to allocate more resources to rural and district health centres to cater for the majority of citizens. Considering the state of public health systems in both rural and urban health centres, the ZWL\$5.8 allocated is insufficient to cover basic health care guaranteed by section 76 of the constitution, especially looking at the fact that the budget is supposed to cover health infrastructure as well. Looking at this through gender lenses, women are the hardest hit by the impact of poor healthcare services. This is fueled by the fact that without disposable incomes, women are unable to access their health rights particularly reproductive health care and when healthcare services are unaffordable, it is the women who bear the burden of providing home-based care to their families as well as providing care for the elderly. Government has also hiked maternity fees to ZWL\$600 for normal delivery and ZWL\$1000 for C section deliveries which is way beyond the reach of the majority poor.

State funded education remains a pipe dream

The Constitution which is the supreme law guarantees every citizen basic state funded education which the state through reasonable legislative and other measures must make progressively available and accessible. However, it is a sad reality to note that instead of the government meeting this obligation it is the parents who are struggling and finding it difficult to



Myth behind free primary education - Source: [The Zimbabwean](#)

send their children to school. The new curriculum on its own has demanding learning materials that parents need to acquire and this has left many parents stranded as prices of most requirements have soared leaving most schools with no option other than hiking tuition fee to keep up with the soaring prices of commodities. In the 2020 National Budget, higher and tertiary education was allocated ZWL\$3 billion whilst primary and secondary education got the second largest budget of ZWL\$8.5 billion. However both budgets still fall short of the Dakar Declaration threshold of 20% of the National Budget.



Source: [The Herald](#)

Water and sanitation remain dire

Despite international and domestic laws providing for citizens' right to portable water and sanitation, the scarcity and unavailability of safe, clean water and sanitation is a major challenge in most of the cities and this has affected citizens particularly women in diverse ways.

The crisis has increased the burden of unpaid care work as women spend most of their time walking long distances in the quest for nearest alternative sources of water that is wells and boreholes. This is also costly especially for poor women with multiple roles like taking care of their families. Moreover, the time that they spend collecting water also deprives them from attending school especially the young girls.

The dilapidated infrastructure which was constructed before independence and the inadequacy of chemicals to treat the water has seen the development of severe health implications on residents. The continuous outbreaks of communicable diseases like cholera and typhoid can be well attributed to the shortages of both clean water and poor sanitation. According to WHO, as of October 3rd 2018, 8535 cumulative cases 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 Glen View and Budiriro. These areas are most affected by the situation because of their poor sanitation. Poor sanitation and hygiene have also negatively impacted on maternal and newborn health. Efforts by government as articulated in the 2020 National Budget to restore basic water supply and sanitation services through maintenance, rehabilitation and upgrading of infrastructure is applaudable. For example, the ZWL\$400 million allocated to Gwayi Shangani Dam, ZWL\$128 million to Causeway Dam and ZWL\$192 million to Chivhu Dam among others. This will help in curbing the water leakages which according to Water, Sanitation and Development is contributing to about 70% of wa-

ter lost through leakages. However, citizens are keen to know how the government intends to raise the revenue and the prudent use of resources. It remains the responsibility of citizens to continue with accountability monitoring to ensure that these funds are not abused and diverted for unintended purposes.

What is there for vulnerable groups?



Source - IPS News

Mindful of the socio-economic meltdown characterised by over 80% unemployment rate, there is need to cushion vulnerable groups. Section 30 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe mandates the government to “take all practical measures within the limits of the resources available to it, to provide social security and social care to those who are in need”. Thus, specific fund Accounts such as The Disabled Persons Fund, The Older Persons Fund Child Welfare Fund among others have been created to safeguard and fulfil the rights of special and vulnerable groups. However, the ministry responsible for enhancing the provision of social protection services to these vulnerable and

special groups in Zimbabwe has a known record of diverting resources from these fund accounts. Government has made some effort in ensuring that people living with disabilities are cushioned by proposing that labour constrained households which include people living with disabilities shall receive free food handouts and assisted healthcare under the Assisted Medical Treatment Orders (AMTO). However, there is need for government to think and act beyond and create empowerment programmes that guarantee sustainable livelihoods among this special group.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ZIMCODD wishes to see a fiscal year that is anchored on prudent financial management practices to guarantee social and economic justice for the people of Zimbabwe. Government should sufficiently execute its mandate in terms of socio-economic rights so that they respect, protect and fulfil people’s rights by taking practical actions to ensure that such rights are realised in practice. Government spending towards social service delivery is significant and valuable in advancing such rights. If the president is true to his words, a listening government would leverage on people’s voices in expressing their aspirations. By so doing, public trust will be restored and buy-in from citizens guaranteed. Improving public services is crucial in the realisation and fulfillment of women’s rights to education, livelihood, health care including reproductive health care, water and sanitation, transport and human dignity. It is therefore the government’s responsibility to ensuring gender responsive public service provision in 2020.

Equality Is Key To National Development

#Equality4Prosperity

Global Protest to #FightInequality 18 - 25 January 2020