



Social services revival, a key step towards eradication of urban poverty.



According to the recent Zimbabwe 2012 country report on the progress towards attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Zimbabwe still lags behind in terms of eradication of poverty. The current level of poverty in Zimbabwe has its roots in the cumulative effects of the protracted economic decline that the country experienced prior to the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009. Although some progress has been achieved in terms of economic recovery after the formation of GNU, eradicating poverty has remained a mammoth challenge for the government. Urban poverty has been worsened by lack of access to affordable education and health care. The social services sector has not received enough support especially in terms of ensuring social protection to vulnerable residents. Due to high levels of unemployment in urban areas with most families earning their income from flea markets and street vending, the majorities are facing challenges and find it difficult to pay the exorbitant school fees and health care bills as the dollar is increasingly becoming scarce.

To access health care services, families on average pay \$20 as consultation fees and this amount excludes cost of buying drugs. Since most families are not on medical aid, payment on health care is done through out of pocket. On the other side, a family with school going children needs to fork school fees which is on average \$50 for creche, \$45 primary and \$80 for secondary pupils per term. Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT) considers that such amounts are unaffordable especially to the poor families with low levels of income. An analysis of the households under the PRFT sentinel surveys in Bulawayo and Mutare has revealed that the average household monthly incomes for July 2013 were approximately US\$373.33 and US\$336, respectively. Comparing these average incomes with a minimum amount required for a decent life (Cost of Basic Needs Basket) in the respective cities, there is no doubt that the majority of families are already in food poverty. The PRFT's Basic Needs Basket (BNB) survey for July has shown that the cost of Basic Needs Basket for an average family of five to live a decent and dignified lifestyle in Harare was \$524.51 while the cost of the basket for same sized families in Bulawayo and Mutare is about \$499.51 and \$474.33, respectively. High school fees and out of pocket spending on health care impose a burden on poor families who are struggling to afford a monthly Basic Needs Basket.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have identified improvement in access to social services such education and health care as means to alleviate poverty. Investing in education especially primary level and health care positively influence income poverty through human capital development. Due to failure to cope with high bills in education and health care, most families are incurring huge debts. Huge debts have an effect of worsening poverty situation as families are left with no option but to sell their assets to pay the bills.



Due to urban poverty which is an emerging reality, PRFT continues to unmask urban poverty and recommend pro poor policies that aim to cushion the vulnerable families from unaffordable education and health care services. PRFT strongly advocates for social services revival in the process of fighting urban poverty. At policy level, the government should consider policies aiming at increasing social protection to the vulnerable groups in our society that include the aged, orphans and vulnerable children as well as people with disabilities. Implementing National Health Insurance (NHI) policy and increasing resources channeled to the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) are some of the policy measures that can be pursued in this regard.

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