



## **PRFT**

### ***May Policy Brief***

Urban residents' socio and economic livelihood challenges: Why social accountability must be at the centre of poverty reduction strategies and sustainable development in Zimbabwe?

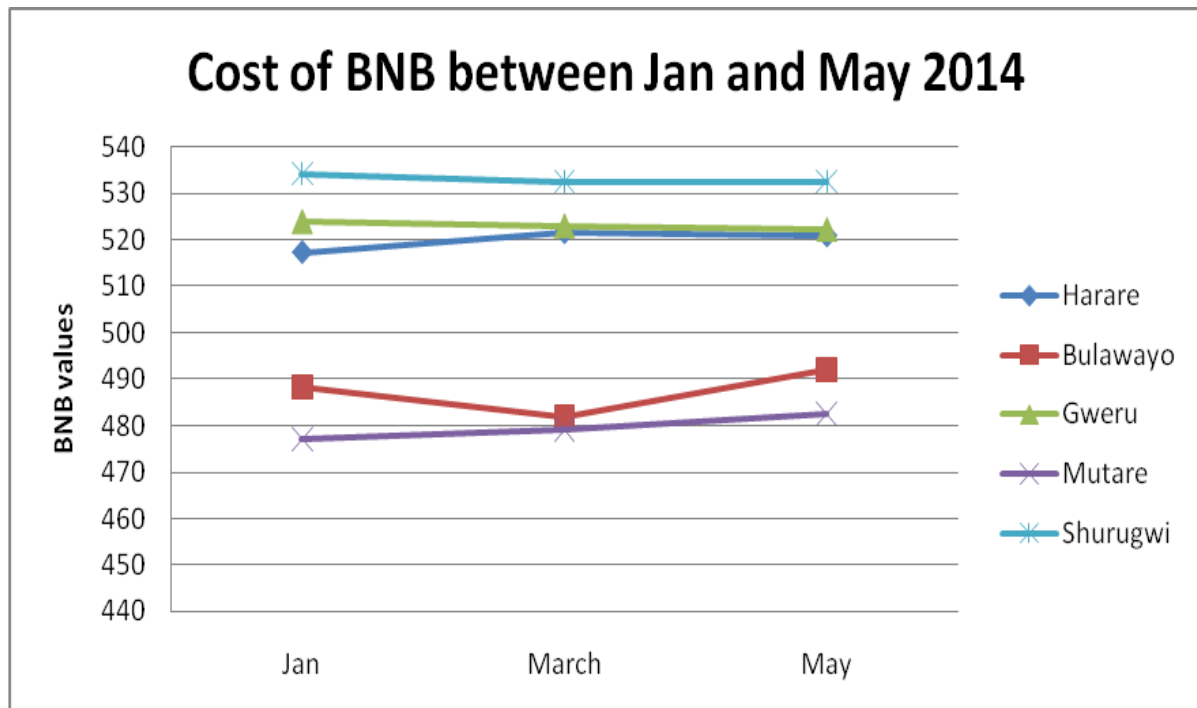
#### **Introduction**

There is an increasing demand by ordinary residents that duty bearers should be held accountable following a continuation of deteriorating service delivery by the local authorities and public institutions across sectors coupled with high levels of corruption. At the time when the economy is shrinking with most people struggling to pay their bills, city councils have been involved in corruption scandals and mismanagement of public resources. Recently, news from the media have revealed that Harare City Council (HCC)'s management has converted part of the US\$144, 4 million Chinese loan meant for water and sewer reticulation to buy top of the range cars at the time when residents have continued to experience erratic supply of water in their suburbs. Due to weak transparency and social accountability in public institutions, resources that could have been directed towards reducing the plight of residents have been abused and diverted to enrich few individuals. Poverty eradication has remained a major challenge for the government as ordinary people are struggling to afford basic services such as food, clean water, health care and education.

#### **The Basic Needs Basket (BNB) and the struggle to afford Basic life**

The Poverty Reduction Forum Trust conducts Basic Needs Basket Surveys with the aim of generating regular and reliable statistical information of the basic cost of living for ordinary residents and push for policies and programs that cushion vulnerable urban households. PRFT's Basic Needs Basket is a monthly estimate of the cost of basic food and essential non-food items required by an urban family of five to live a decent and dignified lifestyle. From the BNB surveys conducted in May 2014, the average cost of Basic Needs Basket was \$520, 92, in Harare, \$492, 06 in Bulawayo, \$482, 55 in Mutare, \$522, 21 in Gweru and \$532, 58 in Shurugwi. On average, the cost of BNB in the five urban areas was approximately \$510, a figure which is close to the Zimstats's Poverty Datum Line (PDL) income which is currently

pegged at \$505. During the same month, an analysis of the households under PRFT's sentinel survey has revealed that the average household income was \$444 in Bulawayo, \$338 in Mutare, \$459 in Gweru and \$186 in Shurugwi.



A close comparison of these cost of living figures (which excludes the cost of transport, education, health, personal care, etc.) with average household monthly incomes reveals the extent to which most ordinary residents in these urban areas have to struggle to meet their essential needs for decent human survival. For example, if we consider the following;

- Residents who are not in gainful employment (for example vendors) who make an average profit of \$ 40 in a good month and still have to pay their monthly rental of \$50 on average per room,
  - Ordinary residents who have to spend a huge amount of their hard earned income on seeking health care services after falling sick due to poor sanitation,
  - City council workers who have gone for several months without being paid due to corruption and mismanagement of funds,
  - Widows who are supposed to send their children to school while at the same time they are duty bound to bring food on the table for their families,
  - Households who have to balance between the cost of adequate food requirements and meeting the cost of utilities such as water despite poor service provision, etc.
- How are they managing to survive?

A widow in Shurugwi town had this to say in connection with her socio and economic situations, “My husband is late and I’m finding it very difficult to take care of these children

because I'm not formally employed. I have to pay schools fees for children to go school and bring food on the table out of few dollars I get from chikorokoza (gold panning). I am really suffering. We are skipping meals in order to cope with the unaffordable cost of basic needs".

### The role of Social Accountability in Service delivery and Poverty Reduction.

Social accountability demands that the ordinary citizens, the powerless, possess the right to ask questions about the decisions that affect them and are heard and that those in power, the duty bearers, listen and respond efficiently to the plight of the vulnerable groups of the society. A strong social accountability structure provides a platform for residents, public institutions and companies to find mutually beneficial ways of sharing the developmental space as well as holding each other accountable. One of the key indicators of an improvement in social outcomes for the poor is improved service delivery, which depends on the efficiency utilization of public resources and good public accountability structures.

### Policy Recommendations

Realising the vulnerability of ordinary urban residents as a result of corruption, PRFT calls for strengthened social accountability initiatives in all local authorities and public institutions. Given the limited resources that local authorities are generating, it becomes important that every cent that accumulates is accounted for and allocated to areas that address the needs of most residents. To realise this, PRFT recommends effective community participation which is key to promote good governance and development. PRFT believes that the formulation of broad based and sustainable policies requires wide consultations with the people. According to PRFT's recent publication on poverty in the Great Dyke, it has been revealed that mining companies lack effective community engagement in designing their social responsibility programs. Mining communities still feel that their needs have not been addressed as they are not taken aboard effectively to air out their specific priorities in CSR programs.

Local and public institutions should ensure that people's socio- economic rights are met as enshrined in the new constitution and this can happen if every citizen's constitutional right to demand accountability and participate in public decision making processes are respected. PRFT advocates for social accountability framework that is demand driven and that which includes the direct participation of women, disabled, children and people living with HIV and AIDS. In PRFT's view, the livelihoods of people can be improved if there is an effective and constructive civic engagement that strengthens governance in our public institutions.

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