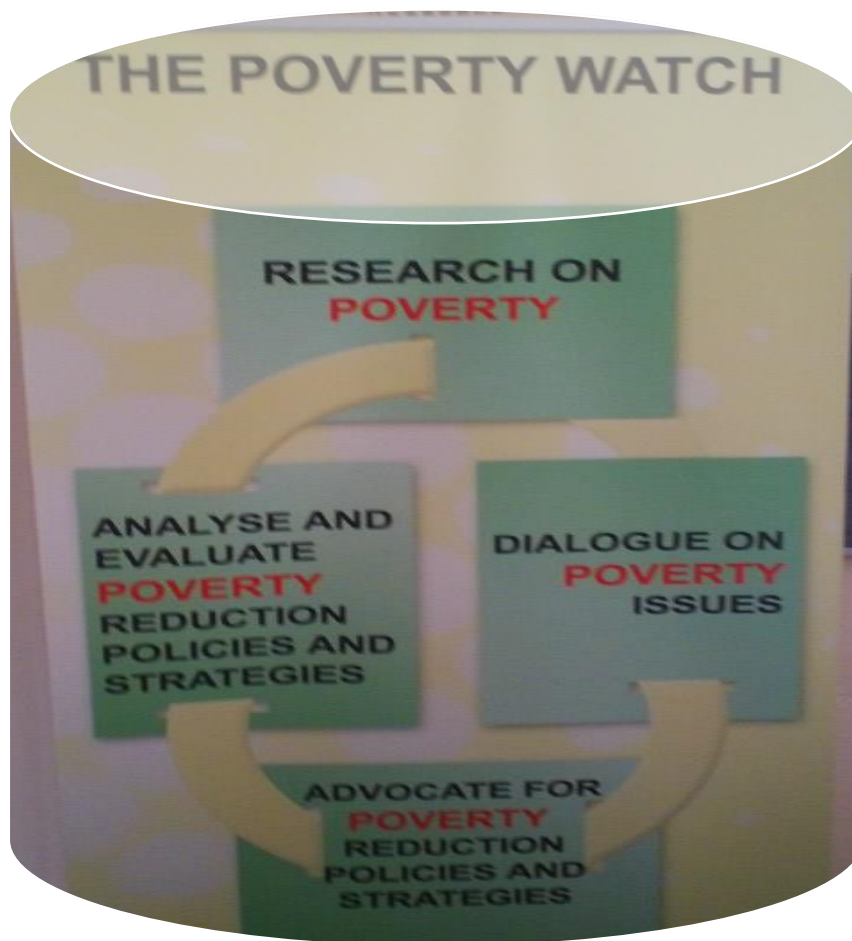




## Half - Year Report: December 2013



## Basic Needs Basket Survey Project

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## **1.0 Executive Summary**

This report provides key highlights of the Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT)'s achievements during the first half of implementing a two year Catholic Overseas Development Agency (CAFOD) supported Basic Needs Basket (BNB) Survey project. The project which is in its second year of implementation is in response to the lack of comprehensive and accurate picture of poverty in both the urban and rural areas of Zimbabwe to make informed policy interventions. The first half (July – December 2013) saw PRFT publishing a study on rural poverty, producing monthly BNB reports accompanied by policy briefs and reaching out to masses through the print media. During the period under review, PRFT has gone beyond publishing monthly BNB reports, to strengthen civil society participation in engaging policy makers in the formulation of viable and sustainable policies through training in advocacy. PRFT also went a step further to conduct public dialogues meetings so as to deepen and widen debates on policy, guide future policy interventions in Zimbabwe and strengthen its work on advocacy.

## **2.0 Technical Description of the project**

### ***2.1 Goal***

The overall goal of the project is to generate regular and reliable statistical and qualitative information of the basic cost of living for ordinary residents, and push for policies and programs that cushion vulnerable urban and rural households.

### ***2.2 Specific objectives***

- To continuously provide up-to-date, reliable and verifiable information on the poverty situation in rural and urban areas of Zimbabwe
- To strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations and residents associations so that they are able to actively engage policy makers and advocate for pro-poor development policies and to guarantee access to services to all layers of society
- To strengthen existing dialogue mechanisms among residents, state and non state actors at local level and to promote the creation of sustainable dialogue mechanisms where lacking

### **3.0 Achievements**

#### ***3.1 Monthly BNB Surveys and Policy briefs***

PRFT continues to conduct monthly Basic Needs Basket surveys in Harare and Mutare. While CAFOD spearheaded the support to PRFT to initiate BNB surveys in Harare and Mutare, the initiative has ignited public interest and has seen a buy-in in terms of support from other funding partners. Christian Aid came on board to support PRFT BNB initiative in Bulawayo and during the period under review, the BNB project has been expanded to Gweru and Shurugwi. For the purpose of the BNB survey, PRFT collects data from 10 sites in Harare, 6 sites in Mutare, 6 in Bulawayo, 7 in Gweru and 3 in Shurugwi. Through the monthly BNB surveys, PRFT continues to provide both qualitative and quantitative data on the behaviour of households' basic needs and provide helpful explanations and insights on socio-cultural attitudes and trends which are useful towards finding possible ways to initiate changes, and ensure that policy interventions and programmes achieve desired objectives. During the period under review, the costs of Basic Needs Baskets in Mutare and Harare have shown upward trends. On average, the BNB values in Mutare and Harare during the first half were \$489.43 and \$522.81, respectively. On the other side, the analysis of households under PRFT's sentinel surveys during the same period has shown that the household incomes have remained very low, well below the minimum amounts required for a decent life (Cost of Basic Needs Basket). The average monthly household income between July and November under the Mutare sentinel survey was \$372.38. Due to stunted economic growth, the economy has been characterised by stagnant salaries and wages. Given a gap between monthly households' disposal incomes and the cost of BNB over the period, there is no doubt that the majority of families are struggling to live a decent and dignified lifestyle.

PRFT has been using results from the BNB surveys to produce monthly policy briefs. In the policy briefs, PRFT has been advocating for sustainable policy interventions addressing the socio and economic challenges that both urban and rural residents are facing. Through the BNB project, PRFT has been able to identify certain government policy interventions which required further analysis through dialogues. For example, PRFT has conducted public dialogue meetings in Harare and Mutare to get the residents' views on the impacts of the bill write-offs that were instituted by of city councils after the July harmonized elections.

The publication and distribution of the BNB reports accompanied by policy briefs has enabled various stakeholders such as parliamentarians, councillors, government ministries, civil society organisations and residents to have a clear picture about the urban livelihood challenges. This is evidenced by welcoming responses and comments that PRFT is receiving from Government bodies such as Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC) and Chamber of Mines of Zimbabwe (CMZ) and other civil society organizations for example the Zimbabwe Coalition on

Debt and Development that have said they use PRFT's policy briefs to champion their access to water campaign.

### ***3.2 Media engagement***

During the period under review, PRFT's work continues to appear in the media. The continuous interaction of PRFT with media houses has strengthened PRFT's reaching out initiatives. The first half saw some of PRFT's policy briefs receiving coverage in the Newsday newspaper. Below are two sample cuttings from a newspaper in which PRFT featured.

# Think-tank seeks revival of social services

**PHILLIP CHIDAVAENZI**  
**SENIOR REPORTER**

LOCAL think-tank Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT) has implored government and other service providers to prioritise revival of the country's social services to curb urban poverty.

In its latest report, the forum – which conducts poverty-related research and promotes policy formulation – said although progress had been achieved in economic recovery, eradicating poverty had 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,” the forum’s report for July read.

The forum noted that many families in Harare and other urban centres were struggling to pay school fees and health care bills as they relied on vending following the shrinking of the formal job market over the past few years.

“Due to high levels of unem-

ployment 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,” it said.

Consultation fees for health service are pegged at an average of \$20, crèche, primary and secondary school fees cost between \$45 and \$80 per child each term on average, figures which the PRFT described as too high for average-earners.

“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 \$373,33 and \$336 respectively,” the report added.

Following Zanu PF’s disputed election victory last month, President Robert Mugabe has pledged to increase civil servants’ salaries, blaming his previous coalition government partners of sabotaging social service delivery programmes.



NEWSDAY WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 9, 2013

ND NEW

# 'Prepaid meters not a solution'

**SENIOR REPORTER**

THE introduction of prepaid meters for basic utilities such as electricity and water will sink poor households deeper into poverty as they may not be able to pay cash upfront for the services, the Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT) has said.

PRFT executive director Judith Kaulem said since many people were already struggling to meet the cost of essential services, prepaid payment systems were not the solution to the power challenges the country is facing.

In notes accompanying the trust's basic needs basket for September which saw the cost of living for an urban family of five in Harare increase by 0,14% to \$525, Kaulem said the new system had so far shown not to be the solution.

While Zesa has already started installing the system, Harare City Council has also indicated that it was considering a similar move for the payment of water.

"If this proposal is going to be implemented, the implications are that residents will soon have to pay for their water consumption upfront, a move which may have some detrimental effects to the poor and vulnerable households," she said.

Kaulem said following the adoption of prepaid meter reading for electricity in Mutare, the city's basic needs basket for a family of five now required an average of \$65 for electricity costs alone, up from an average of \$50.

"Under this prepayment system, residents who cannot afford to pay will increasingly resort to alternatives like using firewood and unsafe water, rendering them more vulnerable to diseases associated with poor sanitation such as cholera and typhoid," Kaulem said.

Under the new system, she said, households no longer have the grace to pay payment plans on debt settlement when accessing electricity and water.

She added that the latest developments have put a damper on the debt write-off plan instituted by the government in July.

Zesa has been battling to supply adequate power to the nation while most urban councils have also been struggling to supply enough potable water to residents due to economic challenges.

The coming of electricity and water prepaid meters will sink the poor deeper into poverty as they may not be able to pay cash for the services



### 3.2 Strengthening civil participation in engaging policy makers on advocacy issues

After conducting an in-depth research to unmask the poverty situation in Mutare during the first phase of the project (2012), PRFT saw the need to equip residents and local leaders in Mutare with advocacy skills so as to improve their capacity to advocate for specific local and national issues and concerns. In response to this, the first half saw PRFT conducting a two-day training workshop where local leaders, including leaders of the Mutare Residents and Ratepayers Association (MRRA), former councillors, women, leaders of local-based civil society organizations and other pressure groups were equipped with lobbying and advocacy skills. During the training workshop, the leaders were able to identify socio and economic problems that were affecting them (including poor roads, unavailability of water, accommodation shortages and inadequate services such as shops and police stations). After coming up with advocacy messages around the problems identified, the leaders also developed advocacy action

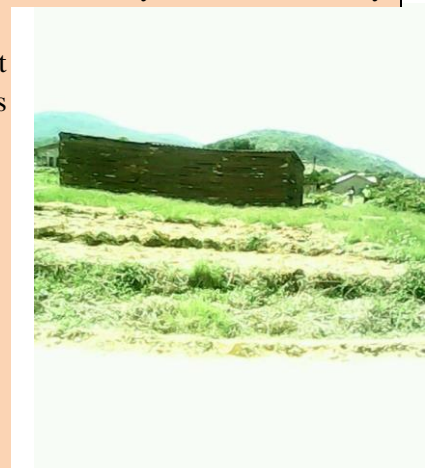
plans which they committed to implement after the training. They also committed themselves to mobilize others and coordinate the formation of advocacy committees who would be responsible for undertaking advocacy responsibilities in their respective constituencies. Due to polarisation of the environment prior and after the harmonised elections some community action plans could not be immediately implemented. Some of the community action plans are still underway. For example, the group which is advocating for improved water access in Dangamvura has submitted their petition to the Mutare City council and follow ups are being done.

After a follow up on some of the community plans, two successful advocacy stories came up from Mutare. Below is a summary of the two stories.

#### **Box 1: Advocacy Message: Police station in Chikanga**

Due to the increasing number of residents in Chikanga, crime became high as well and residents discovered the need to have a police station in the Suburb. During the advocacy training, the leaders and residents from Chikanga suburb developed an action plan with the aim of advocating for a new sub police station. After the training, the residents organised public meetings where they formed advocacy committees.

In their advocacy communities, the residents approached relevant authorities. Their lobbying was successful and a ZRP sub police station is now available in Chikanga (see picture)





### **Box 2: Advocacy Message: New Supermarket in Dangamvura, Area 16**

Prior to the advocacy training workshop, there was a problem of unavailability of supermarket within the proximity of residents living in Dangamvura Area 16. The residents had to walk long distances to do their shopping to the supermarkets in other locations. During the advocacy meeting, the residents who represented the suburb advocated for a new supermarket to serve residents.

After the training, the group implemented its action plan and a new supermarket called “The Link” was built (see picture)



### ***3.3 Promotion of policy dialogues among residents, civil society organizations and policy makers***

In its struggle to inform and influence policy towards poverty reduction and sustainable human development, PRFT continues to extensively use public dialogues platforms to allow residents, civil society groups and policy makers to share their views on different government policy interventions. For example, following the recent bill write-offs which were effected by all city councils as a directive from the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing prior to the harmonized elections held in July 2013, PRFT has organised public dialogues in Harare and Mutare in collaboration with Harare Resident Trust (HRT) and Mutare Residents and Ratepayers Association (MRRA) to collectively reflect on the impacts of the debt cancellation. The objective of the dialogue meetings was therefore to unravel the impacts (implications) of the bill- write-offs with the view of coming up with recommendations that bring about sustainable development. The dialogue meetings provided a platform for residents invited from different suburbs in Harare and Mutare to meet with the city council representatives, share their experiences on the bill write offs and proffer their recommendations to city council on how service delivery can be improved.

As part of the impacts, what emerged from the public dialogues is that the bill write – offs has compromised the city councils’ ability to perform their duties such as provision of clean water, timely collection of refuse, maintenance of public toilets, monitoring of sewer blockages and

water leakages and timely payment of salaries for its workers among others. In addition, the dialogue meetings provided an opportunity for the residents to raise other problems which are compromising the regeneration of income and service delivery besides the bill- write-offs. Some of the issues include poor monitoring systems, corruption and mismanagement of ratepayer's money within the city councils.

During the dialogue meetings, some policy recommendations were generated. Among the recommendations, participants were advocating for measures that should be put in place to curb corruption and promote transparency and accountability and strengthened monitoring system in the city councils. The residents also suggested different resource mobilisation options which can be adopted by policy city councils in order to improve service delivery. At a national level, the residents were advocating for the review of the Urban Council Act which gives more powers to the Minister of Local government.

The public dialogues were very helpful to PRFT's advocacy work. Through the publication and distribution of the dialogue meetings reports, there is an increased awareness on the impacts of the recent government policy intervention among different stakeholders which include residents, policy makers, government ministries and civil society organisations. As a result of these dialogue meetings, PRFT came up with its recommendations for sustainable development. For example, in future pro poor policy interventions, PRFT has recommended that the government should consider long term and sustainable policies that should be made based on wide consultations to make the policies people driven. PRFT also argued that ad hoc and knee-jerk responses to the socio-economic challenges the people are facing are not sustainable. PRFT continues to advocate for the renewal of industries, thereby creating employment so that the majority of people have a secure source of financial support. Writing off debt but not changing the people's economic situation does not bring about long term solutions.

Through the dialogue meetings, PRFT is planning to go a step further to do an objective tracking on some of the recommendations which have been put forward at local level authority.

### ***3.3 Publication of a research on rural poverty***

In an effort to expand knowledge on the poverty story in rural Zimbabwe, the first half saw PRFT publishing a research paper which unmask the characteristics of rural poverty. The study is entitled "*Study on Rural Poverty in Manicaland: The Case of Mutare Rural*". The paper identified the livelihood challenges that rural communities face and offered practical policy recommendations that can be adopted by policy makers to improve the socio- economic livelihoods of these communities. Copies of the report on rural poverty have been printed and distributed to various stakeholders during workshops and dialogues. However, PRFT has delayed dissemination workshop so as to give the incumbent policy makers time to settle. The

dissemination workshop which is scheduled for the next year, will provide a platform for stakeholders to share findings and policy recommendations from the research.

### ***3.4 Engagement with policy makers***

During the first half, PRFT has organised platforms to interact with policy makers. For example, a public dialogue meeting that PRFT conducted in Harare brought together stakeholders such as City of Harare representatives and the residents. The platform gave residents an opportunity to air out their views with regards to service delivery. In the Mutare dialogue meeting, a councillor (Ward 18) was also in attendance among other participants. Through the support of Christian Aid, PRFT has also organized BNB consultative meetings in Gweru and Shurugwi which brought together residents and councillors to discuss poverty issues which are affecting residents. The meetings were meant to develop Basic Needs Baskets in the two towns.

## **4.0 Other Activities**

### ***4.1 COMPASS project***

PRFT participated in the COMPASS research project which employed a participatory approach towards addressing key issues in the post 2015 policy discussion. PRFT successfully carried out the research in Mutare and Bulawayo and added the Zimbabwe voice to the other COMPASS voices from Bolivia, Uganda and the Philippines to the post 2015 discourse. In recognition, PRFT was invited to present the COMPASS research findings at a CAFOD side event during the UN General Assembly in New York in September.

## **5.0 Lessons Learnt from the project**

Through the production of BNB reports accompanied by policy briefs, the BNB project has gained more popularity among stakeholders as evidenced by their positive responses and comments. The regular policy briefs have proved to be an effective way of strengthening PRFT's advocacy work. In the next year, PRFT will continue to produce policy briefs and distribute them to its wider network. In order to reach out more stakeholders, PRFT is also going to expand its distribution list. However, PRFT has realised the virtual distribution of the BNB reports and policy briefs has been leaving out a lot of people without access to internet facilities. To cater for this segment of the population, PRFT will send hard copies of monthly BNB reports to different distribution centres in all the towns where PRFT is operating. The BNB surveys unmask socio-economic issues that call for follow-up debates and dialogues. To this end, PRFT is planning to strengthen its work by organising regular BNB dissemination workshops in areas where it is operating. Already the BNB project has

been expanded to Gweru and Shurugwi during the period under review with the support from Christian Aid

- Public dialogues meetings have helped PRFT to advance its advocacy work. In the next phase, PRFT will conduct more policy dialogues to strengthen its views on government policy interventions. PRFT will make use of its monthly BNB reports to identify topics which need further analysis through public dialogues.
- Continuous partnership with other civil society organizations is critical in PRFT's work. Through the collaboration of PRFT and residents associations such as Harare Residents Trust (HRT), Mutare Residents and Ratepayers Association (MRRA) and Bulawayo Progressive Residents and Rate Payers' Association (BPRRA), it was very easy to implement and achieve the intended objectives of the BNB project during the period under review.
- PRFT has realized that there is need to further strengthen the residents' ability to hold the duty bearers accountable. To this end, PRFT proposes to introduce capacity building in public and social accountability.

## **6.0 Scheduled activities for 2014-2015**

- Organise dissemination workshop in Mutare for the rural poverty study
- Bi-monthly BNB surveys in Mutare and Harare
- Organize dialogue meetings in Mutare and Harare
- Capacity building in public and social accountability
- Joint workshop for civil society, senior government officials and legislators
- Analyse media reports on urban poverty and publish synthesis reports
- Produce and share awareness raising and Advocacy materials