



## The Basic Needs Basket Access and to Health Care

In Zimbabwe, the quality of healthcare delivery has been drastically affected by the broader economic and political conditions. Healthcare, which is supposed to be a fundamental human right, has become a privilege only accessible to a minority. This has been worsened by the introduction of user fees at healthcare facilities, which are quite prohibitive for the poor majority. The Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT)'s Basic Needs Basket surveys conducted during the month of September 2012 show that an average family of 5 in Bulawayo requires a minimum of US\$449.41 per month to enjoy a descent and dignified lifestyle, while the cost of living for same sized families in Harare and Mutare is US\$560.00 and US\$446.36 respectively.

Access to health care remains a surmountable challenge and a major hindrance to achieving sustainable human development in Zimbabwe. While the country has a record unemployment rate of over 90%, an average family of five needs to pay at least US\$45 as monthly contribution for a basic health care plan (CIMAS Basicare package) - a figure far much beyond the reach of many. With monthly earnings for average workers ranging between US\$250 and US\$300, most urban families cannot afford to pay for health care serve for a few who have 'healthcare plans' as part of their employment packages. Expecting mothers pay user fees up to US\$50 at government and municipal facilities, pushing vulnerable and poor women to shun health centers. An estimated 39 % of women are delivering at home as a result, and the number of women dying from maternal complications is estimated to be between 725 and 960 deaths for every 100 000 live births deaths (November 2011). It is sad to note that user fees are forcing expecting mothers to seek unsafe traditional midwifery services, which unfortunately expose them to more risk.

The country's health sector is currently in a very precarious state; deteriorating country-wide water supplies have resulted in widespread outbreaks of diseases like Cholera and Typhoid. The situation has been fuelled by the exodus of skilled staff from government and municipal facilities, eroded infrastructure and lack of essential medicines and commodities. As a consequence, there has not only been pluming inequality in accessing health care, but also the poor and the unemployed, who struggle to afford monthly basic needs baskets, remain at the periphery of getting good health care.

Public health is critical for driving and sustaining the socio-economic development of Zimbabwe, and most importantly, proper and adequate health enables citizens to invest more time in formal and informal activities that help them meet their basic needs baskets. PRFT strongly recommends the government to adhere to the Abuja Declaration pledge of allocating at least 15% of its annual budget to improve the health sector. This would improve infrastructure in public health facilities, help provide essential medicines and improve working conditions for skilled staff in the sector.