

# Gweru Dialogue Meeting Report

*Mkoba Hall*

*13<sup>th</sup> February 2014*



## **Background**

In light of the urban poverty which is an emerging reality in Zimbabwe, the Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT) has been guided by its Poverty Watch Flagship to carry out research, dialogue and policy advocacy on poverty related issues. As part of its Poverty Watch Flagship, PRFT has been conducting Basic Needs Basket (BNB) Survey initiative project in major towns of Zimbabwe such as Harare and Mutare and Bulawayo since 2010. In order to realize a broader picture on poverty situation in mining towns for policy advocacy, the BNB survey project has been scaled up to Gweru and Shurugwi in October 2013 through the support from Christian Aid. The BNB project is being implemented in response to the lack of comprehensive and accurate up to date picture of poverty in both the urban and rural areas of Zimbabwe to allow policy interventions for improved access to basic goods and services such as food, decent housing, water, and health care by the marginalized and vulnerable citizens of the country.

Following the BNB consultative meetings which were held in October 2013 to sensitize residents about the BNB Survey project and engage them in developing Basic Needs Baskets for their respective communities, PRFT has already started to produce BNB reports accompanied by policy briefs in Gweru and Shurugwi. However, in order to come up with an in depth analysis of the socio and economic problems which are affecting the ordinary residents, PRFT went a step further to conduct a residents' public dialogue at Mkoba Hall on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February in collaboration with the Gweru Residents and Ratepayers Association (GRRRA). This report presents the deliberations from the Gweru dialogue meeting.

## **Workshop Proceedings**

### **Introductions and Welcome remarks**

The Dialogue meeting was opened with a song and a word of prayer from Mrs Mathukutela (Mkoba resident). Thereafter, the workshop facilitator, the Gweru Residents and Ratepayers Association Chairperson Mr. Colineous Selipiwe, led the introduction process. Among the twenty six (26) Mkoba and Ascot residents who were invited to the dialogue meeting included GRRRA members and the ward 9 councilor. The introductions were followed by opening remarks and a brief background of PRFT and Its Basic Needs Basket Project from the PRFT's Programs Officer.

## **Opening Remarks, Background of PRFT and the Basic Needs Basket Project**

In his opening remarks, PRFT Programs Officer, Mr T. Chiremba welcomed all participants to the dialogue meeting. Thereafter, the programs Officer went further to give a brief overview and background of the Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT)'s work.

The PRFT is guided by the Poverty Watch Flagship, which encompasses research, dialogue and influencing formulation of pro-poor policies. The organization's current work is premised on its experience in producing the Zimbabwe Human Development Reports (1996-2007), and most of PRFT's work is currently focusing on urban poverty which is an emerging reality. The PRFT's goal is to influence the formulation of pro-poor policies through carrying out research on poverty-related issues, engaging with policy makers, promoting broad-based consultative dialogue and processes as well as advocating for sustainable human development in Zimbabwe. Among its initiatives, PRFT conducts regular Basic Needs Basket (BNB) Surveys, a tool that measures the basic cost of living for an average family of five. The BNB provides evidence for lobbying local and national government for affordable and accessible services; housing, water& sanitation, energy and food hence, it is a pro-poor policy advocacy instrument. It can also be used by employers as a challenge to promote the common good of all employees by narrowing the gap in income between the lowest and highest paid workers in any enterprise. The BNB presents a factual representation of the living conditions faced by an organization's employees at home. At household level, the BNB acts as a guide to household budgeting and tool for understanding how different policies such as a minimum wage can affect a family's basic needs. The tool can also be used by policy makers for linking local, national and policy to the household needs of Zimbabweans.

In his background presentation, Mr T. Chiremba highlighted that PRFT's BNB project has been quite useful to advance the organization's evidence based policy advocacy work. Through the BNB project, PRFT has been able expose the socio and economic challenges that ordinary urban residents are facing in a way to hold the policy makers at national or local level to account. From the three BNB reports which have been produced in Gweru and Shurugwi since the introduction of the project in these two mining towns, the figures have shown higher disparities between the average amount of money required for a family of five to live a basic life and the households' disposable incomes, indicating livelihoods challenges that residents are facing. The programs officer indicated that PRFT has already started to challenge the new government to be more responsive to socio-economic challenges facing the nation, through its monthly policy briefs that have received regular wider coverage in newspapers.

Apart from providing information for promotion of broad based policies, the Programs Officer reiterated that the Basic Needs Basket project can effectively spearhead the dialogue process between residents and policy makers on issues affecting residents' livelihoods. According to Mr. Chiremba, the formulation and implementation of long term and sustainable policies should be made based on wide consultations to make the policies people driven hence residents dialogues on the livelihoods issues affecting them are key. The Programs officer highlighted that the residents dialogues are important as they provide an opportunity for residents to unmask socio-economic issues that can call for public dialogues with duty bearers for improved service delivery.

After a brief background of PRFT's work and its BNB project, the Programs Officer proceeded to give the participants the objective of the dialogue meeting. The objective of the dialogue meeting was to provide a platform for residents to unmask poverty related challenges and to reflect on the changes which they wanted to see in terms of service delivery and access to basic social services in their communities.

### **The plenary**

After the background presentation by the Programs Officer, the dialogue was opened up and a number of urban livelihood issues were raised. The following is a summary of key socio-economic issues that emerged during plenary discussions;

#### **➤ Service delivery**

During the discussions, residents expressed great concern over the city council's failure to perform its duties such as the provision of water, repairing of streets lights, timely collection of refuse, maintenance of public toilets, monitoring sewer blockages and water leakages among others, despite the residents receiving bills every month. The participants highlighted that water service delivery has worsened since the last year's bill- write offs. According to residents, the lack of access to clean water has exposed residents to health diseases such as typhoid and cholera. What emerged during the dialogue process is that residents are bathing in bedrooms rooms avoiding the toilet facilities due to unavailability of water. One of residents who participated indicated that erratic water supply in homes and the use of bucket flushing system has since affected her family's social life as they are encountering quarrels with their landlords.

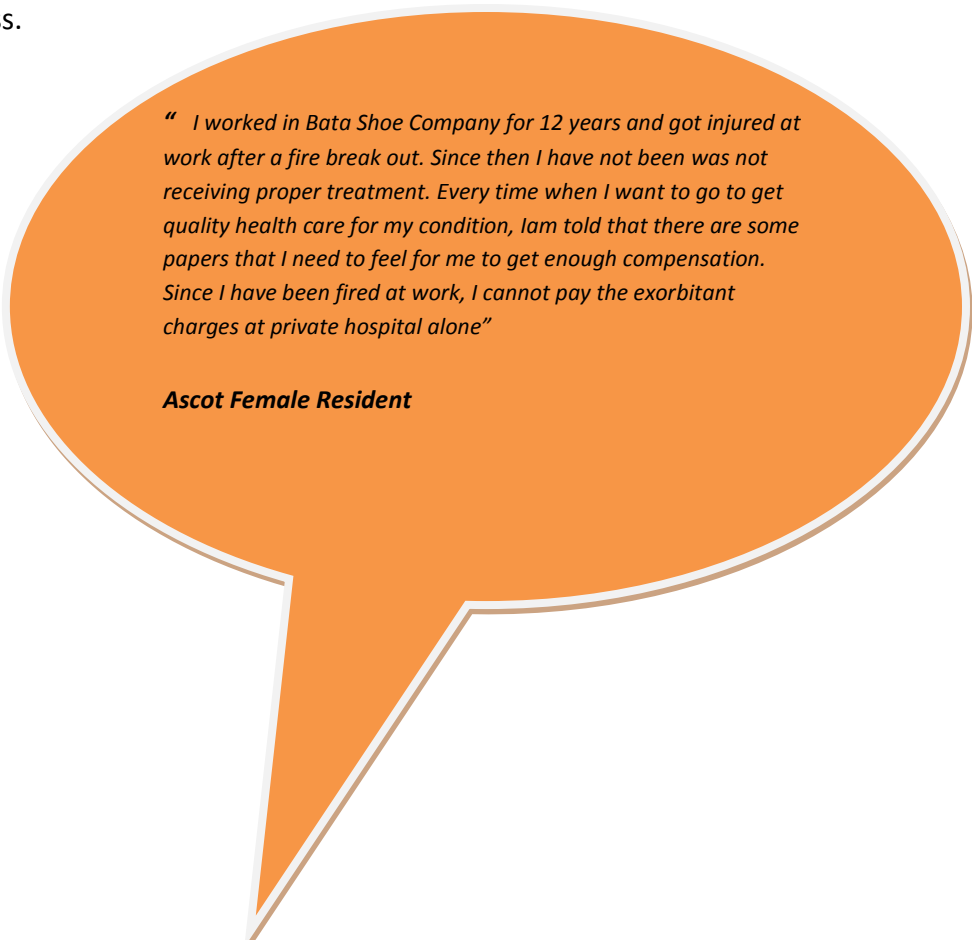
The participants bemoaned the overcharging of public utilities through bill estimation by the city council. According to the residents, the calculation of water bills basing on estimation is not fair on their part considering that most of the time, the service is not always available and people are struggling to make ends meet.

The residents also raised concern over the city council's failure to protect the environment through its activities. According to the residents, the city council is leaving so many trenches unfilled and this has resulted in loss of lives. Two death incidences were cited as a result of people falling into the trenches. The residents indicated that the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) is not imposing any penalties to the City council for causing such environmental hazards.

During the discussions, residents also indicated that the road infrastructure is deteriorating with the all the roads full of potholes causing a lot of accidents.

➤ **City council pension payments and compensations from employers**

One of the key issues that the participants raised during the dialogue process was that the council workers are failing to access their pensions despite having worked for the council for so many years. What emerged is that following the separation of local authorities (councils) and the government, the council is no longer paying funds to pension funds. According to the residents, the City of Gweru has been diverting the funds which are supposed to be channeled towards pension schemes. Besides failure to get their pension funds, residents also cited cases where they are not getting adequate health care compensation from NASSA funds after work related illness.



*" I worked in Bata Shoe Company for 12 years and got injured at work after a fire break out. Since then I have not been was not receiving proper treatment. Every time when I want to go to get quality health care for my condition, lam told that there are some papers that I need to feel for me to get enough compensation. Since I have been fired at work, I cannot pay the exorbitant charges at private hospital alone"*

**Ascot Female Resident**

### ➤ Accommodation

Due to the demand which is outstripping supply of accommodation in Gweru, residents have indicated that they are paying rentals which are beyond their reach. In some suburbs such as Senga and Nehosho, households are forced to fork out at least \$70 every month as rentals. According to the residents, the owners of houses in Nehosho and Senga are taking advantage of the increasing demand of accommodation by Midlands State University (MSU) Students to charge exorbitant rentals which are not commensurate with the quality of the houses.

According to the residents, the problem of accommodation has been accelerated by the failure of the city of Gweru to provide cheap stands to the ordinary residents. One of the concerned women said the following in her vernacular language;

*“Kanzuru haisi kupa vanhu ma stands akachipa kuti vanhu vavake dzimba dzekugara. Tiri kutambura mwanangu nenyaya yekuroja iyi. Hakuna pekugara kwevana vari kukura. In mwana wangu anobhadharwa \$150 kubasa kwake asi anobvisa rent ye \$75. Ma stands emuno anovakwa ne vanhu vanobva ku Harare, vane mari kwete isu. Isu chembere tinonzi tinofanira kuwana mari yevanhu vakura kubva kuhurumende, hapana chatiri kuwana”*

### ➤ Council workers' salaries

During the dialogue meeting, it was revealed that most council workers have gone for some months without receiving their salaries despite reporting for duty every day. What emerged is that council has a backlog in terms of payment of its workers' salaries and there are no sufficient funds from the city council. According to the residents, the failure by the city council to pay its workers has compromised service delivery and promoted corruption activities as the disgruntled workers are trying to earn a living. One of the participants whose husband is a council worker indicated that they are having problems with their landlords due to failure to pay their rentals on time. The Mkoba resident narrated her story as follows;

*“Isu hatichakwanisi kugara nema landlords edu zvakanaka nenyaya yekuti tinononoka kubhadhira rent. Dzimwenguva murume wangu anowana mari musu wa 59 wemwedzi. Taakungogara takatakura zvinhu tichitsvaga pekugara tadzingwa ne ma Landlords nekuti vashandi havasi kubhadharwa. Tine nhamo pakutsvaga pamwe pekugara nekuti ukaudza landlord kuti murume wako mushandi weku Kanzuru haakupe imba yekugara nokuti vanoziva kuti vashandi veku council havasi kubhadharwa ma Salaries. Zvinotishungurudza chaizvo pamagariro edu. Mari ve Kanzuru vanayo nekuti vari kuzvitengera mota dzavo”*

The residents reiterated that there is mismanagement of funds as the money which is supposed to pay workers and service delivery is diverted to other uses such as buying luxurious vehicles and management perks. It has emerged that the Gweru City Council is operating with only 2 ambulances which is not enough to cater for the needs of the people.

### ➤ **Employment opportunities**

According to the participants, there are very few employment opportunities in Gweru as most companies are closing. Youth unemployment is devastating as most jobless graduates from the local university (MSU) are found selling airtime in the streets and some are involved in risky gold panning (Chikorokoza). As a result of high levels of unemployment and limited income sources, most households indicated that they are facing high cost of living. Most households acknowledged that they are involved in street vending to earn a living. However, the residents indicated that they always face a danger of being criminalized and their wares taken because vending is considered illegal.

What emerged from the dialogue is that residents are limited to do their small businesses because it is difficult to access the licenses for them to operate legally. As an example, one resident cited that it takes a long period for an individual to get a liquor license since the licenses are processed in Harare. The residents bemoaned the centralization process which delays the processing of the papers. Apart from the slow application process, the residents also highlighted that the lack of capital to finance income generating projects is also another major problem. From the residents, another challenge which is constraining employment creation is the lack of enough space such as market stalls where residents can do their small businesses. According to the participants, there is lack of market stalls especially for the less privileged and vulnerable women.

### ➤ **Education**

The participants bemoaned the withdrawal of government support to help the vulnerable children through BEAM. According to the residents, the move by the government will increase the livelihood challenges that most parents are facing as most parents are not able to pay the school fees being charged at government schools. In particular, one participant, a widow narrated her story as follows;

*“Ini ndiri shirikadzi. Handisi kukwanisa kubhadhara mari yechikoro nekuti handishandi. Iyevzino takatonzi tibhadhare mari yechikwereti ye Schools fees yeterm yapfuura nekuti hanzi hurumende haina kubhadhara mari ye BEAM kuchikoro. Dai Kanzuru yakwanisawo kutipa mikana yekuita ma income generating projects kuti tikwanise kuriritira mhuri, kunyanya isu shirikadzi. Vana vatogara havachakwanise kuenda kuchikoro nekuti hatina mari yeschool fees”*

The participants have indicated that they are facing challenges to pay school fees for their children because they are already wallowing in poverty. In particular, the residents raised concern over unaffordable primary school fees. For example, the participants indicated that that school fees for zero grade pupils is currently pegged at \$150 per term at some government schools.

The residents also reflected that they are parting with their hard earned income to pay for extra lessons for their children which is a double jeopardy.

#### ➤ **Health care services**

According to residents, the health care delivery in most public health centers is very poor. It has been established that government medical facilities are not equipped with the essential drugs and inadequate health staff. Poor service delivery in government hospitals has forced the majority of households without medical insurance to pay high hospital bills at private health facilities.

The participants also indicated that council workers are not benefiting from the medical aid scheme as they are always asked to pay their hard earned cash up front to get health care services. According to the participants, the root of the problem is that the city council is not remitting the employee contributions to the medical Aid Insurance despite the fact that the council workers' pay slips always indicate monthly medical aid deductions. What emerged from the discussion is that some families have fallen victim of the abuse of the medical aid insurance funds and have lost their relatives after their failure to raise money for the treatment.

#### **ZRP services**

A concern over the failure of police officers to provide quality services to the residents was raised during the discussions. For example, it was revealed that the police officers are asking the complainants, the residents to bring their suspects/ accused in a cases of robbery or domestic violence. The residents indicated that the police officers are demanding bribes for them to do their work and this is disadvantaging those who cannot afford to pay the bribes to get the services. The discussions also revealed that the neighborhoods police services which used to be there are now dysfunctional.



### **What changes residents expect to see?**

Below is a summary of some of the key advocacy messages that were generated during the meeting.

- The availability of cheap housing stands which can be accessed by everyone including the poor and vulnerable.
- Improved service delivery especially on water provision, refuse collection, street lights road maintenance and electricity.
- The installation of enough market stalls and business space for less privileged and vulnerable to do their businesses.
- Establishment of income generating projects by the city council especially for the widows for them to earn a living and sent their children to school.
- Transparent and accountability in the use of the ratepayers' money.
- Timely accessible pension money for the retired and the revival of other social benefits such as grants for the elderly.
- Increased accessibility of health care services through improved availability of basic drugs and health staff at government health facilities.
- Timely payment of council workers' salaries.
- Revival of industries and creation of employment opportunities for the youth.
- Revival of neighborhood police services.
- Improved billing systems by the city council.

### **Revenue generation ways**

To improve income generation by the Gweru City Council, the residents came up with some of the following policy measures;

- Resuscitation and proper management of bear halls to raise profit base
- Maintenance and upgrading of council halls so that can be used for workshops, weddings to generate more income
- Extraction and selling of sand which has accumulated in council dams

## **Closing Remarks**

The Ward 9 councilor, Mr Fundira gave the closing remarks. The councilor acknowledged the service delivery issues that the residents raised during the discussions. In his remarks, the councilor indicated that the last year's bill write offs has compromised the city council's revenue base and service delivery. However, the councilor indicated that the council is making efforts to improve service delivery and the welfare of council workers. Mr Fundira assured the residents that their voices will be considered during the city council's current plan. He also urged the residents to report cases of any irregularities in the billing system, water leakages, sewage pipe bursts so that follow ups can be done. The councilor also encouraged residents to take part in improving service delivery by paying their bills and making sure that the city is clean.

In his closing remarks, Mr Corlineous Selipiwe, the chairperson of the Gweru Residents and Ratepayers Association (GRRRA) thanked all the participants for the time they had devoted for the dialogue workshop. The chairperson also appreciated the collaboration between GRRRA and PRFT that had provided a platform for the ordinary residents to raise their livelihood challenges that are affecting them. The workshop was officially closed with a song and prayer from Mrs Mathukutela.

## Gweru Advocacy workshop in Pictures









### Dialogue meeting participants

Name	Organization /suburb	Designation	Contact details
A. Chikwadzi	Nkabazwe Community Radio Station	Worker	0775127314
J. Divala	Maso	Worker	0773706343
A. Tumbare	Mkoba	Resident	
E. Madziva	Mkoba	Resident	0775588511
M. Mathukutela	Mkoba	Resident	0775500376
C. Mathukutela	Mkoba	Resident	0778 938362
N. Madzikupa	S.C.M.Z	Worker	0772654006
N. Gwatidzo	Mkoba	Resident	0775 147104
C. Mataruse	GRRA	Member	0776000277
E. Ndlovu		Resident	0774 995901
D. Muzondo		Resident	073 8374643
S. Kumalo	Ascot	Resident	0772 789 362
J. Zimwara	Ascot	Resident	0735 329907
G. Fundira	Mkoba	Ward 9 councilor	0773594259
A. Chidhumo	Ascot	Resident	0775146485
T. Mango	Ascot	Resident	0775160995
J. Gwatidzo		Resident	0735959644

B. Mabena		Resident	0774 502259
M. Sibanda		Resident	0775566083
A. Dube	GRRA	Member / Resident	0775303499
A. Kapfidze		Resident	0773510642
C. Magwenzi	Ascot	Resident	0774 08086
D. Mataruse	ZRP	Police Officer	0712 023147
G. Mushongahande	ZRP	Police Officer	0773 481 268
C. Selipiwe	GRRA	Chairperson	0773 013266
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