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**GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL WELFARE: The Experience of Zimbabwe in
achieving the MDGs**

Presentation made

by

Judith Kaulem¹

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¹ Judith Kaulem is the National Coordinator for the Poverty Reduction from in Zimbabwe and ICSW Regional President for East and Southern Africa.



Introduction

The presentation is going to focus on social welfare as it relates to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by Zimbabwe.

The emphasis of social welfare is the protection of people against the vulnerability induced by poverty. The MDGs are the global compact that provides a roadmap for all nations that acceded to them for the reduction of poverty. However, given the economic meltdown happening in Zimbabwe at the moment, achieving the MDGs targets by 2015 present a number of challenges. To that end, I argue that addressing people's welfare needs can not be confined to a time period. It should be an on-going focus for every democratic government.

Goal 1; Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

There are two perspectives to the definitions of poverty. The monetary perspective which defines poverty as falling below a certain income threshold. The UN defines all people who live below 1 US\$ per day as being poor. Then there is the Human development perspective which defines poverty as being deprived of those opportunities and choices that are essential for a long, healthy life, freedom, dignity and decent standard of living.

The majority of the African people, Zimbabweans in particular are poor by both definitions. The 1US\$ per day indicator is not appropriate in many ways. In Zimbabwe currently 1US\$ translates to Z\$100,000 at the official market. A loaf of bread costs between Z\$100,000 and Z\$200,000. This therefore begs for going beyond the US1 dollar per day and focus on the quality of life offered by the dollar to the different individuals.

The human development perspective is also challenged in many ways. More than 80% of Zimbabweans live below the Poverty Datum Line making the achievement this goal by 2015 is unrealizable.

More than 70% of the population resides in rural areas with poor infrastructure and social services provision.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Zimbabwe has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa. While this is very commendable and the enrolment levels are high, these can not be used as a proxy for high completion rates. The reality on the ground is that the completion rates drop especially at high school. This situation is compounded by a number of challenges. The cost of education has gone beyond the reach of many. With the introduction of Structural Adjustment



Program, subsidies especially in social services were removed and a number of people were retrenched from their jobs. Ten years down the line, Zimbabwe has not been able to recover from the effects of the World Bank and IMF Structural Adjustment Programs. The high drop out rate is also compounded by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Zimbabwe is one of the countries in Africa that are at the epicenter of the epidemic. The country is home to approximately one thousand children who have been orphaned by the HIV and AIDS. Of these children some of them are double orphans. The country has no adequate social safety nets to cushion these children.

The country has a Basic Education Assistance Program (BEAM) targeting vulnerable children. However, the management of this assistance is faced by many challenges. Key among the challenges is that identification of the vulnerable children is manipulated by those in positions of authority. Secondly the disbursement of the assistance is delayed to the extent that sometimes schools the children's allocations well after the end of the term or year. Other realities on the ground are that:

- Per- capita grant to children living in institutions is \$250 000 per month (Enough to buy one and a half loaf)
- Public assistance per month Z\$ 250 000
- Public assistance per child per month - Z\$ 125 000
- Bread basket is pegged at Z\$ 52 million

The education sector has been one of the sectors heavily affected by the massive brain drain as professionals cross borders in search of greener pastures as a result of the harsh economic situation prevailing in the country.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Women constitute 52% of the Zimbabwean population. The Government is making effort to have women in decision-making positions. The country is one of the few with a female Vice President. However, proportional representation of women in decision-making positions across sectors is still very low. Patriarchy still plays an important role and influences the attitude of most policy makers- who are mostly men. The influence of patriarchy is evidenced by the lack of access to land (which is an empowering asset) by most women. Zimbabwe has gone through a land redistribution exercise and the land audit show that an insignificant percentage of women accessed land through this process in their own right.

Goal 6: Combat HIV and AIDS, Malaria and other diseases

Southern Africa and Zimbabwe in particular is at the epicenter of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Though the HIV and AIDS prevalence rate for Zimbabwe is reported to have dropped from 33% to 23%, on the ground one is glared in the face by decimations of families, increase in the number of orphans and child-headed households as a result of HIV and AIDS related deaths. The country is challenged by both the unavailability and unaffordability of the Anti-Retro-Viral drugs. The country's Health Service Delivery



system is crippled in terms of being able to meet the health services demands of the population by both lack of drugs and human capacity due to brain drain. While Zimbabwe is one of the few countries that have instituted an AIDS levy, the management of the funds is poor deeming the levy a double burden to the tax payers. The funds hardly reach the intended beneficiaries as a result tax payers contribute to the fund but still look after their HIV infected and affected relatives.

Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between poverty and environmental sustainability. The higher the poverty levels the bigger the threat to the environment as people seek to make a living by exploiting the resources at their disposal. In most cases this is done with very little regard for sustainability.

Zimbabwe has just gone through a process of land redistribution. The redistribution has been undertaken as an effort to redress the historical colonial imbalances that existed whereby 1/3 of the white population owned ¾ of the fertile land, pushing the black majority to the dry, unproductive lands. Unfortunately, despite the noble idea with the redistribution, the exercise has brought about a number of challenges. The new resettled families embarked on indiscriminate cutting down of trees and burning of grass as they cleared their pieces of land for agriculture. This had grave consequences for environmental sustainability. The land redistribution exercise has also resulted in wide condemnation mostly by the international community and subsequent isolation of the country. It is the ordinary people who mostly feel the negative impact of the isolation of Zimbabwe by the international community and as the economy goes on a free fall.

Conclusion

At the heart of the Millennium Development Goals is the understanding that fighting poverty is a collective undertaking and that all countries have a stake in its results. In pushing forth this undertaking, countries must be put the welfare of the ordinary people at the center and the decisions they make political or otherwise, must be informed by the need to protect the plight of the ordinary people. Zimbabwean people, more now than ever before, need all the support they can get from neighbours and the international community to address the plethora of challenges that confront them in terms of meeting their welfare needs.