

Are we there yet? - An overview of Gender and women's concerns in the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) goal 7¹

Focus on Zimbabwe's housing, water and sanitation context



Dedication

This article is dedicated to the women and men in Zimbabwe and in Africa as a whole who are making a difference in providing shelter for their families and especially for the poor, those both on the ground and those who are constantly engaging with the policy makers at all levels in ensuring that women and men have access to decent shelter water and sanitation in their communities. Despite the fact that the region has been intensely affected by HIV & AIDS, poor governance and representation as well as poverty, this does not stop these courageous women and men in ensuring that every person regains her /his right to adequate shelter, safe water and sanitation.

Abstract

This article highlights the challenges that civil society and government face in ensuring that all people have access to clean and safe water and sanitation, clean environment, decent and adequate shelter for their families. The MDGs also provide a framework in which member states around the world assess their progress in eradicating poverty by ensuring that the habitat is safe and conducive for humanity³.

However, realising that there has not been such discussion around assessing the country's progress in MDG 7 at country level, this article addresses the key issues to be addressed in this goal, the efforts that civil society and government is engaged in to ensure that people have access to decent

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² Members of the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation celebrating their 10th anniversary of their existence in Zimbabwe in July 2009, Epworth, Harare, Zimbabwe. www.sdi.org (Slumdwellers International)

³ For more information on the MDGs ,visit the website: www.undp.org/mdgs

shelter and safe water and sanitation, as well as addressing the alternatives that are already existing taking into account of the global crisis that has affected the efforts of the international community namely the global financial crisis and climate change.

MDG goal number 7: Ensuring environmental sustainability and reality on the ground

The MDG goal number 7 states that member states by 2010 should ensure environmental sustainability.

Targets

- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources
- Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss
- Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation
- By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers



It is a fact that the above stated targets cannot be met without involving women and men on the discussion table. Focusing on access to safe drinking water and sanitation, as well as ensuring that a clean and safe environment is in place by addressing the improvement of people living in informal settlements, Zimbabwe needs to address gender concerns in all these aspects. Taking into account of the fact that 52% of the population are women, surely this is not a time to ignore the fact that out of the 52% of the population, approximately 40% do not have access to decent and adequate shelter, of which this should be addressed as of yesterday.

It is also not clear as to whether the national Gender policy and National Housing policy addresses issues related to equal access to safe water, sanitation and adequate shelter for both men and women, especially within the MDG framework. In a situation where the inclusive government is making so many efforts in addressing basic social service delivery against other national pressing needs, the voice of women should be equally heard among policy makers.

⁴ A dumping site for litter just outside the Mbare hostels-Harare. Women resident in the Mbare hostels who also network with Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation have been tirelessly engaging with the local authorities so that they can address the poor service delivery in their communities but nothing much has yielded from their engagement, hence the perpetual risk of contracting diseases by the community.



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The situation in most high density suburbs in main city centres and towns across the country, especially in Harare shows the need for local government to speed up in their resource mobilization to address blocked sewer pipes, overflowing litter, improving social amenities (schools, clinics, community centres, etc) and constructing more houses for the needy.



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⁵ some of the families who have settled on their land (as members of a District Housing co-operative Union affiliated to ZINAHCO)in the outskirts of Mutare city centre after having been evicted in one of the suburbs in Mutare,Zimbabwe.ZINAHCO(Zimbabwe National Association of Housing Co-operatives) is a partner organization supported by Swedish Co-operative Centre in addressing housing delivery for the low income groups,

⁶ Some of the temporary shacks in Kariba , where ZINAHCO is assisting its members in building their own homes

Having been part of a research team collecting data on the number of women and men still on the housing waiting list at the local municipal offices in Harare with some of my colleagues some months ago, I realised that the data is not readily available, hence it becomes difficult in assessing whether the country is on the right track in achieving the MDGs.

The ideal situation is to ensure that in the national environmental, water and sanitation and housing policies, gender concerns are integrated, though the reality is yet to be achieved. The inclusive government through the Ministry of Finance has prioritised housing, water and sanitation in its macroeconomic policy-STERP (Short Term Economic Recovery Plan), though it is not clear as to how the government will finance the specific issues that need to be addressed within this area⁸. The outcomes of the National Housing symposium that was held in Harare in May 2009 organised by the government in partnership with UN HABITAT also reiterated the need to address gender concerns when addressing housing delivery in both urban and rural areas.

With specific reference to adequate shelter where my current work is focused on, gender equality within MDG 7 cannot be achieved without reviewing current land policies and laws that still restrict women from accessing controlling land for their habitat processes. In most cases, women are expected to register their housing in their husbands' name and not in their own name, though this situation is not prevalent in the urban communities. nevertheless, during the interaction that I had with members from various housing groups in Harare, I learnt that the processing of registering your name on the housing waiting list is cumbersome as the municipal offices would want proof of livelihood(payslip) of which 90% of the women are informally employed

Linkages between the MDGs

Addressing water and sanitation as well as housing challenges cannot be done in isolation of the rest of the MDGs. These interlink and should aim towards fighting poverty at the end of the day. For instance, improving maternal health and reducing child mortality can only be achieved if the government has provided adequate infrastructure in the community with enough water and sanitation facilities. The same applies to achieving goal number 6 on ensuring that HIV & AIDS, Malaria and other diseases are mitigated. Research has shown that if people live in overcrowded habitat, there are greater chances of women and girls being sexually violated and in the process contracting HIV & AIDS.

MDG	What it intends to achieve
MDG1	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
MDG 2	Achieve universal primary education
MDG 3	Promote Gender equality and empower women
MDG 4	Reduce child mortality
MDG 5	Improve maternal health
MDG 6	Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases

⁷ Ibid

⁸ For more information on STERP, log on to : <http://www.zimtreasury.org/downloads-sub.cfm?SubID=15>

MDG 7	Ensure environmental sustainability
MDG 8	Develop a global partnership for development

It also has not been clear as to whether Zimbabwe is constantly submitting its progress report to the United Nations regarding its status in achieving the MDGs, coupled with loose coalition of civil society organizations attempting to develop its own shadow report regarding the MDGs. Coupled with that is a fact that not many civil society organizations have been capacitated in tracking government's performance in as far as achieving the MDGs is concerned. An alternative is for civil society to co-ordinate vigorously its efforts in ensuring that the MDGs are interlinked and coming up with an objective report on how the country is fairing on all the MDGs as well as being capacitated on how to effectively monitor government's progress in implementing the MDGs.

Alternatives to the housing crisis in Zimbabwe

Women and men are proving that they can provide shelter for their family, through daily and monthly savings through savings groups and co-operatives. Testimonies of women from the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation and Zimbabwe National Association of Housing Co-operatives (ZINAHCO) show that despite the harsh economic realities that had affected the country for about 9 years, evidence still shows that the communities, especially women have been able to save some cash to purchase building materials for their housing⁹.



Regional and global outlook

Within SADC and AU, with elections having taken place in the recent past year and part of 2009, it is hoped that the new administrations and the re elected administrations should start prioritising housing ,water and sanitation alongside health, education and food security .Events taking place in South Africa for the past 3 weeks where the poor have been protesting to the local government in relation to poor service delivery clearly shows the struggle that lies ahead of the Zuma administration.¹¹

⁹ Interviews with female members from Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation and from ZINAHCO (Zimbabwe National Association of Housing Co-operatives)-Kariba District Housing Union between June and July 2009

¹⁰ Some of the housing co-operatives initiatives taking place in Kariba, Zimbabwe under the guidance of ZINAHCO and HPZ (Housing People of Zimbabwe) (SCC-Swedish Co-operative Centre's partner organizations)

¹¹ www.sabc.co.za , www.unhabitat.org

2009 is also a watershed for SADC to ensure that the heads of state domesticate the SADC Gender protocol into their national laws and policies, of which would ensure that both women and men have access to decent shelter, water and sanitation services¹². This can only be done through critical engagement with the women's movement and organizations, civil society, local government associations, private developers, research institutions, among other critical masses.



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It is also my hope that 2009 becomes a preparatory year for the SADC heads of state to make their strong submissions to the AMCHUD (African Ministers Conference on Housing and Urban Development). In consultation with the civil society since 2010, the AMCHUD will be taking place (though the venue is yet to be advised). The reasons why forced evictions, increasing housing backlogs, decrease in quality of water and sanitation service in the SADC region has to do with the SADC Heads of state not having a common forum that they can discuss housing and habitat issues within the Southern African region. Thus organised housing groups, social movements, like minded NGOs and women's movements in the region should start coming together and advocate for a Housing, Water and Sanitation protocol that will push our governments in providing shelter, water and sanitation for the poor, and in that way ensuring that MDG 7 is achieved.

The Obama administration still needs to clearly address its strategy in addressing adequate shelter for the poor around the world, especially when the official commemoration of the annual World Habitat Day takes place in Washington DC, United States of America on the 1st Monday of October, which will be the 5th of October 2009¹⁴.

Furthermore, the global financial crisis has left many people homeless not only in the global North but across the Global South as well, hence chances of global finance institutions and well wishers pouring in funding to assist the poor in building their homes are futile. Nevertheless, the international community should not ignore the plight of the poor who do not have access to shelter simply because the financial crisis has affected the world, hence the need to prioritise the global needs such as food, health, reviving the economy etc.

¹² www.genderlinks.org.za

¹³ Some of the temporary shacks in Kariba , where ZINAHCO is assisting its members in building their own homes

¹⁴ www.unhabitat.org

Current typhoons, hurricanes, earthquakes and other natural disasters are a clear sign that climate change is here to stay and global policy makers, especially the UN has to address housing needs within its strategy to address climate change. In those processes, the voice of women should also be heard in sneering that gender concerns are factored in when world leaders tackle the climate change crisis

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Efforts carried out in addressing gender disparities in housing ,water and sanitation by civil society such as Dialogue on Shelter Trust, Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation(ZIHOPFE) , ZINAHCO, HPZ,ZILGA (Zimbabwe Local Government Association),CHRA,Urban Councils Association of

¹⁵ Interviews with Mrs Sheila Magara from Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation and Mrsfrom ZINAHCO-Kariba District Housing Union between June and July 2009

¹⁶ Members of a savings group from Mbare affiliated to the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation raising their voices in advocating for the right to adequate shelter

¹⁷ Members of the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance who have been advocating for the domestication of the SADC Gender protocol into their countries after it was ratified in Johannesburg, South Africa, 2008 by most member states.

Zimbabwe(UCAZ), Zimbabwe Institute of Rural and Urban Planners(ZIRUP),Civic Forum on Housing, UN HABITAT,Sida ,Local authorities , the government ,media, academia, among others should continue and be commended.Furthermore, female councillors have major role to play in as far as ensuring that basic service delivery including housing, water and sanitation, health, education and recreational centres is achieved and ensuring that the women's voices should also be heard in policy engagements at all levels. Furthermore, the above stated civil society and stakeholders have an important role to play in sensitising he broader civil society on how it is important in addressing human settlement agenda within the broader MDGs context, for in so taking such a task, poverty can be eradicated by 2015.