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BREAKING THE POLITICAL GLASS CEILING.

Lydia Banda



In the vibrant landscape of Zimbabwean politics, a stirring wave of change is reshaping the traditionally male-dominated spheres of power and leadership. The narrative of women gradually shattering the political glass ceiling in Zimbabwe is one that resonates with resilience, determination, and a quest for gender equality in governance.

Historically, Zimbabwean politics has been predominantly dominated by men, with women often confined to supporting roles or marginalized positions. However, recent years have witnessed a notable shift as more women step forward to challenge these norms and claim their rightful place at the decision-making table.

One of the key catalysts propelling this transformation is the concerted efforts of women activists, civil society organizations, and political leaders advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment in politics. These trailblazers have been instrumental in raising awareness about the importance of diverse representation in

governance and the invaluable contributions that women bring to the table.

Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD), plays a major role in driving change for women's political leadership and inclusive governance in Zimbabwe. Having empowered urban and rural women in Bulawayo, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South, the organization has recorded a significant number of success stories since its inception through its Mentorship school and Women Voices Matter, programs whose main endeavor continues to capacitate aspiring women political leaders with skills development, effective communication, and psychosocial support among others. Having made so much progress in empowering women political aspirants with education and leadership skills, challenges still persist on the journey to breaking the political glass ceiling in Zimbabwe. Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, limited access to resources and networks, and institutional barriers continue to hinder the full participation of women in politics. Additionally, cultural biases and stereotypes often create formidable obstacles for women aspiring to leadership positions.

Sithokozile Sibanda from Gwanda a beneficiary of the Mentoring school and Women Voices Matter said: I have always wanted to stand for my community and represent other women particularly the ones with disabilities. However, I have faced so much negativity by my male and female counterparts. This did not affect my performance alone by my mental health as I have to deal with bullying and name calling from my own family and community ever since I started this political journey.

While Zimbabwe faces challenges with women's political participation, it's not alone. Exploring other countries like Kenya reveals similar hurdles but also inspiring efforts. Honorable Marther Karua, a 2013 Presidential Candidate and a Minister of Resources, Management and Development between 2003 and 2005, speaks out on the effects of patriarchy and its impact on divorced or unmarried women. Karua emphasizes on the need to shut out acts against violence, propaganda, slander and hate speech. Karua encourages stakeholders across all sectors to support women who want to pursue politics and venture into leadership positions by availing access to equal funding and economically empower women. Karua speaks highly on gender equality, however she highlights that women and girl's voices are too easily excluded from national decision making processes which is why it is a challenge to achieve gender equality. This means that a woman's voice is her ability to become a leader in her sphere of influence and the wider the landscape is the deeper the foundation for the achievement of sustainable development.

To address these challenges and foster a more inclusive political landscape, a

multi-faceted approach is essential. This includes implementing gender-sensitive policies, ensuring equal access to political opportunities, promoting mentorship and capacity-building initiatives for aspiring female leaders, and engaging men as allies in advancing gender equality in politics. This also means that, there is need to develop training manuals, create situation rooms and raise public awareness on educating and sensitizing the society on the importance of inclusion of women, girls and people with disabilities in decision making processes. This perpetuates positive consciousness on women's political and leadership activities hence promoting generation of data and research.

The impact of increased women's representation in Zimbabwean politics cannot be overstated. Women bring unique perspectives, priorities, and experiences to governance, enriching decision-making processes and amplifying the voices of marginalized groups. By breaking the political glass ceiling, Zimbabwe stands to benefit from a more inclusive, equitable, and effective political system that truly reflects the diversity of its population.

Chipo Dube said her passion to drive development and make a difference in her community inspired her to pursue politics.

“I have a passion for my community and am committed to be fully involved in its growth and development. In 2014 there was a high case of armed robberies exposing communities to distress and uncertainties of their safety mostly because there was under service of logistical infrastructure to at least maximize safety of community members. I felt compelled to have a conversation with the then councilor in my ward about maximizing safety in our area and encouraging the legislature of the constituency to also engage law enforcers in mobilizing safety measures for the community at large. At that point I initiated a successful community mobilization drive towards a community policing forum and was approached by my community members to represent them in various platforms. That is when I took up the request and started my journey in politics in 2015.

Asked what challenges she has faced in her political journey Sibanda said: “It has mostly been institutional challenges, like leadership crisis that would be authoritarian, limited representation of all demographics concerned leading to policies that would not speak to everyone involved, gender dynamics that exposed mostly women to sexual harassment, cyber bullying and power struggles. I personally overcame these by seeking authorities with relevant powers which still was not easy to do and achieving of which I would say is still work in progress for everyone who does not have influence and power to do so.

Sibanda encouraged women who want to pursue politics to be bold and courageous. “It is important for women who want to be politicians to be strong and be bold. It’s not always easy. Sometimes you will be rewarded with boyfriends you have never heard or seen as part of tactics meant to degrade you. Stories will be written and told about you that you’ve never been part of as a means to make you quit, but you have to be strong and stand your ground in face of challenges and obstacles. Mostly, know your purpose and role in your journey.

As women in Zimbabwe continue to fight towards a more inclusive and gender-balanced political landscape, the resilience and tenacity of women leaders serve as a beacon of hope and inspiration. By collectively championing the cause of gender equality in politics, we can collectively pave the way for a brighter and more equitable future for all Zimbabweans.

Resettlement Reversals and the Plight of Women and Children in Nyamandlovu, Zimbabwe

By Jacqueline Ndlovu

In the heart of Zimbabwe's Nyamandlovu district, a dark cloud hangs over resettled communities facing the threat of displacement yet again. Twenty years after being relocated from their ancestral lands during the fast-track land reform program, families are now on the precipice of another upheaval, their hopes for stability and security dashed. This renewed instability, however, bears a particularly heavy burden on the most vulnerable members of society – women and children.

The narrative surrounding the land reform program is complex and contested. While it aimed to address historical injustices and empower marginalized communities, its implementation was marred by irregularities and accusations of political manipulation. In Nyamandlovu, many resettled farmers invested their heart and soul into building new lives on unfamiliar land. They cleared fields, built homes, and established themselves within the community.

Now, facing eviction notices, their dreams are once again in jeopardy. The reasons behind the proposed removals are multifaceted, ranging from claims of procedural irregularities in the initial allocations to potential land grabs for commercial ventures. Regardless of the cause, the human cost is undeniable, most finding their homesteads burnt having nothing to retrieve.



For women in Nyamandlovu, land is not just a plot; it's the foundation of their livelihoods and identities. They are the custodians of food security, tilling the soil to feed their families and generating income through small-scale agriculture. Dispossession not only disrupts their economic activities but also severs their connection to the land, a source of cultural significance and spiritual connection. 'Sitshelwa ukuthi uhulumende uthi sisuke endaweni esahlaliswa khona ngo 2003 siphawe amalanga ayisikhombisa, asazi ukuthi sokwenzenjani labantwana. Sikhangele ukuthi izulu liqale silime silezifuyo leli yilo ebese kulikhaya lethu. BesiCampaigner ensukwini ezidlulileyo akekho obetshilo ukuthi sizaxotshwa. Kubuhlungu lokhu.' Marvis Moyo said

Children are especially vulnerable in these situations. Uprooted from their schools and communities, they experience significant disruptions to their education and social development. The stress and uncertainty of displacement can also manifest in emotional and psychological problems. Witnessing the struggles of their parents only adds to their anxieties. The potential reversal of resettlement in Nyamandlovu is not just a violation of human rights, but a recipe for a humanitarian crisis. It is crucial to consider the long-term implications of displacement, particularly on the most vulnerable members of society and a whole new set of challenges associated with displacement including statelessness and documentation.

The new order comes at a time when Zimbabwe has a backlog of more than 1.25 million housing units across Zimbabwe, with these evictions enacted this will result in rural to urban migration putting pressure on the already heavily populated cities.

The Tax Burden: A Daily Struggle for Zimbabwean Women

Yollander Millin

In the busy streets of Zimbabwe, women always rise earlier than the sun. Their days will already be loaded with responsibilities. As they navigate the complexities of life, there is an invisible weight that presses upon them - the burden of taxes. In a country where economic challenges persist, taxes have a profound impact on women's lives, shaping their choices, opportunities, and well-being.

The Gendered impact of Tax



1. Income Tax: A Disproportionate Load

Zimbabwe's tax system is based on source rather than residency. This basically means that whatever one gets is taxes, be it from the informal or informal sector. All income earned within the country is subject to taxation (*even when you sell tomatoes on the street corner, you will be taxed*). This affects both men and women. However, the gendered impact is stark. Women, especially those in the informal sector, often face lower incomes due to patriarchy, societal norms and limited access to education and resources. When income tax rates rise, it excessively affects women who are already struggling to make ends meet.

2. Value-Added Tax (VAT): A Regressive Strain

VAT, a consumption tax, impacts everyone who buys goods and services. Yet, its effects are felt more acutely by women. Why? Because women tend to allocate a

larger portion of their income to essential items like food, clothing, and household goods. As primary caregivers, they bear the brunt of household expenses. When VAT increases, it directly affects their ability to provide for their families.

3. Unpaid Labor and Opportunity Cost

Women in Zimbabwe contribute significantly to unpaid labor—caring for children, tending to crops, and maintaining households. This invisible work sustains communities but often goes unrecognized. When women spend hours fetching water, cooking meals, or caring for sick family members, they forego income-generating opportunities. The opportunity cost of unpaid labor is immense, perpetuating economic disparities.

The Path Forward

1. Gender Mainstreaming Mechanisms

Zimbabwe has made strides in promoting gender equality through its national gender machinery. Institutions like the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender Focal Persons, and the National Gender Commission work to elevate women's status. However, more targeted efforts are needed to address the specific tax challenges faced by women.

2. Financial Inclusion and Empowerment

Empowering women economically is crucial. Initiatives supporting women-led micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) can alleviate the tax burden. Access to financial services, training, and mentorship can equip women to thrive in business and contribute to the economy.

3. Advocacy and Awareness

Raising awareness about the gendered impact of taxes is essential. Women need to understand their rights, deductions, and exemptions. Community workshops, educational campaigns, and simplified tax information can empower women to navigate the tax landscape effectively.

FINANCIAL LITERACY A TOOL TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

By Jabulile Siwela



Financial literacy is referred to as the ability to understand and effectively use various financial skills, including personal financial management, budgeting and investing. In a world pushing for gender equality in socio-economic and political front, it is equally important to place emphasis on the need for women to be financially empowered and ultimately empowering them with financial skills and knowledge. Financial literacy plays a pivotal role in women empowerment as it equips one with the knowledge to make informed decisions, leading to greater monetary stability, less stress and a higher quality of life.

Debunking old cultural norms that confine women in the kitchen and taking care of children, while men go out to provide for the family is paramount. The perspective has changed now and we are seeing women occupying the economic landscape, taking over the role of bread winners and climbing higher the corporate ladder. However one can have a source of income and have access to funds and streams of income and yet be financially illiterate. It is therefore important to empower women with financial skills to allow them

to realize their full potential.

The current Gender Based Violence scourge that has seen many social media platforms awash with news of women being emotional, physical and even economically abused can be addressed when women are empowered and independent and freed from high dependence from their male counterparts. Ms Andiswe Mhlanga, believes the key to women empowerment rest upon equipping women with financial skills.

“The call has to be made to all stakeholders, development partners and civil society organizations focusing on women empowerment to prioritize equipping women with financial skills and knowledge to spend their money. Financial freedom entails the ability to spend your money well as you can have money in your bank account and fail to use it wisely hence we can conclude that one is financially illiterate. With women being equipped with financial skills, many societal ills like domestic abuse and disputes of money will be curbed in the society,”

Ms Andiswe Mhlanga, a secretary of Young Pumula Residents Association underscores the importance of women equipping one another with business and financial knowledge.

“All we desire is to have financial freedom, equipped with skills to become better citizens in the society. We decided to come together as young women in Pumula South, we don’t want to heavily rely on anyone for our economic survival. A majority of us are into trading, we decided to form this association as a means of empowering one another. The challenge we face as young women in business is mainly separating money for business and personal use,” said Mhlanga.

Surely good tools at the hands of a poorly skilled carpenter are of no use, this comes to the point alluded by Ms Mhlanga that access to streams of income is of no use when one lacks skills to manage his/her finance. Financial literacy is a tool that can help a bleeding nation and cure the scourge of gender based violence as it entails women being financially independent and knowing how to manage their finances well without having to rely on anyone for economic survival and this will ultimately results in more women being empowered.

The association is also actively conducting Internal Savings and Lending Schemes (ISALS) where they bring together their funds in one account, the members are then allowed to borrow either for capital to start business or to boost their already existing business and they return the funds with interest and this boost their coffers, the funds will then be shared equally amongst the association members at the end of the year.

“We also do ISALS, this has been a game-changer for us in the association, and no business can collapse in our watch. We have enough funds in our coffers and when members borrow they return with interest, we were advised to open a savings account with the local bank to avoid hearing stories of one crossing to foreign land with our funds,” said Mhlanga jokingly but also emphasizing the strides they are making as young women in the far-west suburb of Bulawayo.

Women can fully realize their maximum potential, they are capable of being leaders in all fronts of the economy, rightfully so such developments makes one to concur with different academics that women are better leaders. Equipping women with financial skills can bring out the potential in many women and ultimately lead to women empowerment.

Don't Delay: Give Your Child Identity with a Birth Certificate

Lorraine Phiri

Many parents in Zimbabwe postpone registering their children's births until the last minute, often due to a lack of awareness, missing documents, or frustration with long queues at the civil registry office.

Gugulethu Gumede is among the parents who made a decision after WILD's access to documentation (ADT) community awareness outreach in Makokoba to take a birth certificate for her daughter. “I am excited that we finally registered our daughter for a birth certificate. While the queue was long and we had to wait 22 days to collect the birth certificate, me and my husband are excited to have taken this important step,” said Gumede.

She encouraged other young parents not to delay taking birth certificates for their children and register while there was time.

“Parents must not wait until the child is at a school going age. It is important that as parents we register our kids so that they have an identity and enjoy the benefits of Zimbabwean citizenship,” said Gumedde.



Kevin Mudenda, another parent who obtained a birth certificate for his daughter, echoed the sentiment: "As a young parent, I'm overjoyed. It was my first time registering a birth certificate, and despite the queue, everything went smoothly. I encourage other parents to do the same, because delays can lead to higher costs and complicate the process.

This emphasis on timely birth registration is crucial, especially with the recently gazetted 2024, SI 7 on birth and death registration fees, which states that initial birth certificates for persons six years or younger will remain free of charge while for those above six, it will be \$5. A certified copy of an entry of birth or death certificate will cost \$5. An urgent birth or death certificate will cost \$10. Importantly, failing to register a child's birth within 42 days in Zimbabwe can lead to fines and even imprisonment under the Births and Deaths Act [Chapter 5:02].

The WILD ATD community awareness outreach serves as a vital reminder for parents to prioritize birth registration for their children. It's not just a document; it's their identity, their right, and their key to accessing essential opportunities such as education and health services.

23 Safe Houses for Gender-Based Violence Victims Built Across the Country

Princess Thandeka Tshuma



The government, working with civil society and development partners, has set up 23 safe shelters to address gender-based violence (GBV). This program provides a safe space for victims and highlights the importance of initiating societal transformation from the ground up. Inclusion of GBV education in school curricula and the establishment of specialized courts for GBV cases are vital steps towards fostering lasting societal change.

In a world shadowed by gender-based violence, survivors are showing strength and resilience as they refuse to be silenced by their past traumas. Against this backdrop, significant progress was achieved on February 16, 2024, with the joint efforts of the government, civil society, and development partners in launching 23 safe houses nationwide. Led by Minister Monica Mutsvangwa, this initiative not only offers refuge to victims but also stresses the urgent need for societal transformation at the grassroots level. Monica Mutswanga stated that, “With regards to the recommendation that the Government put in place safe houses in every ward and constituency, the ministry notes that it is ideal that the Government establishes safe houses in every ward, in all constituencies as highlighted.

The issue of safe houses is very critical she said

We want our women and children ,when they are abused ,to be able to know that they can move out.

You cannot expect them to just go to the police and they go back to the perpetrators .The issue of safe houses is critical.

We have already done a lot in that area but much more needs to be done.”

23 Safe Refuges established in areas such as Muzarabani, Mbire, Murewa, Buhera, Bocha, Mutare, Hurungwe, Masvingo, Bikita, Gutu, Mwenezi, Mazowe, Gweru, Bulawayo, Gwanda, Tsholotsho, Hwange, Gokwe, Harare, Chivhu, Umzingwane, and Bubi. Monica Mutsvangwa emphasized the necessity of specialized courts to address sexual offenses.

Cholera Situational Analysis:15 February

According to the Ministry of Health and Child Care, as of 15 February 2024, Zimbabwe recorded 24 682 suspected Cholera cases, 2 586 confirmed cases, 24 009 recoveries, 71 confirmed deaths and 460 suspected deaths.

Province	Cumulative Suspected Cases (New)	Cumulative RDT+ for Screening (New)	Cumulative Culture Confirmed (New)	Cumulative Recovered Cases (New)	Cases (In-Care)	Cumulative Culture Deaths (New)	Cumulative Suspected Deaths (New)
Bulawayo	29(0)	15(0)	5(0)	27(1)	1	0(0)	1(0)
Chitungwiza	1 872 (11)	304(2)	54(0)	1 836(9)	3	9(0)	24(0)
Harare	8 277(54)	8(0)	772(29)	8 200(52)	9	4(0)	64(0)
Manicaland	6 010(5)	40(0)	1147(0)	5 836(8)	20	35(0)	119(1)
Mash Cent	2 251(46)	282(0)	107(0)	2 115(35)	54	2(0)	80(2)
Mash East	950(5)	529(1)	147(0)	935(5)	6	2(0)	7(0)
Mash West	1 191(10)	733(10)	108(0)	1 135(9)	13	3(0)	40(0)
Masvingo	2 749(17)	105(0)	39(0)	2 633(15)	27	11(0)	78(0)
Mat North	268(0)	67(0)	30(0)	260(0)	2	0(0)	6(0)
Mat South	450(0)	85(0)	155(0)	442(3)	0	5(0)	3(0)
Midlands	635(7)	90(0)	23(0)	590(10)	7	0(0)	38(0)
Total	24 682(155)	2 258(13)	2 586(29)	24 009(147)	142	71(0)	460(3)

Illness and Symptoms of Cholera

Cholera is an acute diarrheal illness caused by infection of the intestine with *Vibrio cholerae* bacteria. People can get sick when they swallow food or water contaminated with cholera bacteria. The infection is often mild or without symptoms, but can sometimes be severe and life-threatening.

About 1 in 10 people with cholera will experience severe symptoms, which, in the early stages, include: profuse watery diarrhoea, sometimes described as “rice-water stools”, vomiting, thirst, leg cramps, restlessness or irritability.

Health care providers should look for signs of dehydration when examining a patient

with profuse watery diarrhoea. These include:

- rapid heart rate
- loss of skin elasticity
- dry mucous membranes
- low blood pressure

People with severe cholera can develop severe dehydration, which can lead to kidney failure. If left untreated, severe dehydration can lead to shock, coma, and death within hours. The profuse diarrhea produced by cholera patients contains large amounts of the infectious *Vibrio cholerae* germ that can infect others if swallowed. This can happen when the bacteria get on food or into water. To prevent the bacteria from spreading, all human waste from sick persons should be thrown away carefully to ensure it does not contaminate anything nearby.

People caring for cholera patients must wash their hands thoroughly after touching anything that might be contaminated with patients' feces (poop). When cholera patients are treated quickly, they usually recover without long-term consequences. Cholera patients do not typically become carriers of the cholera bacteria after they recover, but they get sick if exposed again.

Source: Africa CDC

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Bulawayo will be rolling out a new polio vaccine from the 20th to the 23rd of February targeting all children under the age of 10. Visit your nearest Municipal clinic/ Central Hospitals/ Mater Dei, Creches and Primary School to get your child vaccinated. Don't delay, safeguard your child's health!

WILD
Women's Institute for
Leadership Development

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