

CIVIL SOCIETY FOR POVERTY REDUCTION



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PRESS RELEASE

Strong Political Will Key to Increased Allocations for Poverty Reduction

The Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) maintains that the fight against poverty can only make significant headway if it is strongly driven by Political Will. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) will remain only as an International Financial Institutions (IFIs) conditionality and a pipe dream if inadequate attention is placed on its actual implementation. Government needs to re-orient expenditure patterns in the national budget in favor of poverty reduction programmes (PRPs) if the implementation of the PRSP is to achieve its intended goals.

CSPR has observed that many dimensions of poverty are deeply entrenched in Zambia and are yet to show signs of decline, despite three years of implementing the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

In a recent participatory poverty monitoring survey conducted in June 2004 by the CSPR, Government has scored success in the agriculture sector, especially maize production, due to timely delivery of inputs and the Fertilizer Support Programme. This has led to an improved food security situation in the sites visited.

In the education sector, improvements were noted in enrolment and retention rates partly attributable to the introduction of the free primary education policy.

Similarly, the health sector has registered positive developments in certain sites visited such as decline in infant mortality rates, rehabilitation and construction of health centers, construction of new ablution blocks, decline in malaria incidences and increased HIV/AIDS awareness.

These successes are indeed commendable as they have the potential to put Zambia on track with some MDG targets such as the attainment of universal

primary education, halving the number of people afflicted by hunger, a reduction in child mortality and HIV/AIDS prevalence.

However, the improvements are outweighed by what still needs to be done. Despite the relatively good maize harvest, the communities still face a lot of problems in getting the produce to markets because of the still almost impassable roads. Regrettably, farmers are being exploited by certain buyers who are offering prices far below the official floor price of K36, 000.00 per 50kg bag. The survey further reveals that the agriculture sector continues to experience high cost of inputs, poor road infrastructure (both trunk and feeder roads), and inadequate extension services.

In the education sector, the survey revealed that infrastructure development does not correspond to the high enrolment levels and retentions. Most school buildings are still dilapidated and the construction of new ones is extremely slow. Majority pupils sit on the ground with hardly any teaching or learning materials. Generally, the education sector continues to be constrained by factors such as poor infrastructure (including staff accommodation), inadequate staffing, HIV/AIDS, and few female teachers especially in rural schools. Teachers continue to live in poor, often temporary structures made of grass thatched roofs that leak, turning classrooms and offices into teachers' accommodation, and classrooms that allow wind and rain during the cold and wet seasons respectively. These factors, coupled with below cost of living salaries, were cited as contributing to low teacher morale.

The survey further reveals that community schools have turned out to be more expensive than conventional schools where free education has been introduced thereby denying less fortunate children the right to knowledge. This is because while public schools have abolished fees, community schools continue to pay some amount of money aimed at, for instance, upkeep of the teachers and teaching materials.

Like in the education sector, the health sector is equally beset with dilapidated infrastructure, poor staffing and housing, absence of rural hardship allowances leading to poor medical staff morale and negative staff attitudes towards patients. The survey further notes a number of impediments to the provision of quality health services, including low staffing levels, long distances patients have to travel to access health care. These impediments are coupled with erratic, often expensive and unavailable drugs, and inadequate bed spaces. The surveys also revealed the non-availability of Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) facilities and Anti Retroviral Therapies (ARVs) in rural health centers only found in district hospitals.

In both the education and health sectors, poor staffing levels were mostly attributed to the wage freeze imposed on workers in the 2004 National Budget in an attempt to meet HIPC triggers.

In relation to allocation and disbursement of national resources, the survey notes that no PRP (Poverty Reduction Programme) funding was earmarked for Micro, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMEs) in any of the five districts visited. And yet this sector is key to the promotion of livelihoods of the poor through employment creation as indicated in the PRSP. The same situation applied to small-scale mining.

On HIV/AIDS, the survey found that the pandemic is negatively affecting all the sectors, especially agriculture, health and education by depriving the sectors of the much needed qualified staff and creating heavy burdens on the families, which cannot support the growing numbers of orphans. The survey also notes that none of the sites visited received funding specifically for HIV/AIDS and Gender issues.

The essence of the poverty-monitoring programme by CSMR is to assess the progress being recorded in implementing the PRSP and any other poverty reduction efforts by Government and other stakeholders. The findings of the survey have since been discussed in round table meetings with Government, some members of the international community and Parliamentarians. The 2004 survey was conducted in sites in Luapula, North-Western, Western, Eastern and Southern Provinces, four of which are among the poorest provinces of Zambia. Particular focus was on agriculture, education, health, water and sanitation, industry (particularly Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development), tourism, mining and cross-cutting issues.

While the positive results of the survey points to Zambia's potential to eradicate poverty, CSMR regrets the inhuman conditions in which majority Zambians continue to find themselves. Budgetary allocations continue to fall short of the promises in the plan and Zambia thus requires an economic and political revolution to ensure that the fight against poverty taken with the seriousness it demands. The CSMR therefore calls on Government and other stakeholders to seriously Rank Poverty Eradication 1st for Zambia by taking practical steps and showing greater resource commitments, if the country is to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. The practical steps should, among others, include:

- a. Ring-fencing or protecting resources earmarked for poverty reduction by way of putting in place appropriate legal mechanisms;
- b. Increased allocations, timely and full disbursement of poverty reduction resources, including raising of budgetary allocations to poverty reduction;

- c. Strengthening of institutional capacities of line Ministries, Provinces, Districts and local levels to effectively prioritize, implement and monitor poverty reduction programs and resources.

Finally, CSPR calls on government and other partners, including bilateral and multilateral partners, to respond to the high poverty situation in Zambia by developing policies that are responsive to the peculiarities of the Zambian context. As the country develops the 2005 National Budget, all conditionalities, HIPC benchmarks, etc must be evaluated on the basis of their contribution to the fight against poverty.

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