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## Water Woes in Harare, Zimbabwe: Rethinking the Implications on Gender and Policy

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**Abstract:**

*Rampant and acute water shortages in Harare's high density suburbs have caused untold suffering to women and children – who are mainly the managers of water at household level. This paper examines the implications of rampant water woes in Harare on gender and policy. In addition, the role of women in water supply management at different levels is also assessed. The study is grounded in qualitative methodology. Unstructured interviews were used to collect data from key informants (Harare Water and Residents Associations) as well as women and young girls living in Glen Norah and Hopley high density residential areas. Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted so as to augment rich qualitative data obtained from interviews. It emerges from the research, that water governing bodies are dominated by mostly men as compared to women. As a result poor women continue to be more vulnerable and they are the ones with the weakest voice in decision making. The situation is aggravated by low representation of women in local governance structures – that in turn make decisions pertaining to water management. It is recommended that water governing bodies/institutions should devise strategies and mechanisms that encourage women to freely participate in decision making at the local and national levels respectively.*

**Keywords:** *Water shortages, water supply management, gender parity, public participation, good governance.*

### 1. Introduction

The increasing global water crisis has become a burden to mainly poor women and girls living in developing and water stressed countries. According to Bigas (2012, p. 3) "One billion people on earth are without reliable supplies of water, and more than 2 billion lack basic sanitation". Alternatively, Nayar (2013, p. 76) argues that, against a global investment in water of over \$15 billion, 1.1 billion people are without clean drinking water, 2.6 billion people lack adequate sanitation and 1.8 million people die yearly from water-related diseases. This quandary is aggravated by climate change currently experienced the world over. Thus, according to Singh and Singh (2015, p. 376) "...climate induced-challenges are not gender neutral...responsible for providing water for their families, increasing water scarcity or even flood implies increased burden on women and girls who will have to spend more time and effort to carry, store and purify potable water". This clearly shows that at a global level, the impact of water shortages are felt differently by men and women, thus the need to focus on the implications on women and young girls who arguably constitute a bigger percentage of the global population.

Africa is one of the continents facing increasing water scarcity. According to Besada and Werner (2014) nearly 51% of the people in Sub-Saharan countries lack access to safe water (p. 122). This is against efforts by African nations to half the population of those without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015 – a goal that most countries failed to achieve. Apart from that, it is vital to note that poor women in Africa are still marginalized as far as the management of water is concerned. It has long been recognized that "...the exclusion of women from the design, planning and decision-making of water supply and sanitation projects in developing countries is a major obstacle to the improvement of their well-being (World Bank as cited in Aureli and Brelet, 2004, p. 6). Despite this observation, women are still sidelined in water supply management, thus our argument that there is need to seriously rethink women's involvement in water management the world over.

The exclusion of women in decision making has had a major blow on them especially at grassroots level. In light of this, a number of international and regional conventions were held aimed at addressing the gender inequality between men and women in different aspects including decision making. The SADC Gender Protocol of 2008 for example, was aimed at achieving 50/50 men and women in decision making by 2015. Almost halfway in 2015, there is no meaningful change that has taken place in Zimbabwe. This is despite the fact that,

...women and girls are often the primary users, providers and managers of water in their households and are the guardians of household hygiene. If a water system falls into despair, women are the ones forced to travel long distances over many hours to meet their families' water needs (Water and Sanitation Program, 2010, p. 9)

Zimbabwe, like many other African countries is a patriarchal society and efforts are being made to empower women through gender mainstreaming in the public sector. However, Zimbabwe is still lagging behind in achieving gender parity thus the need to examine the implications of water woes on gender and policy.

The impacts of water shortages were reviewed in this study from a gender perspective. In addition, a review of policies and legislation was done to assess their provisions for gender parity, and an analysis focusing on inclusion of women in public decision making bodies was undertaken. The essence is to proffer policy suggestions that will enhance gender parity in as far as water management is concerned.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

The study is dominantly guided by the governance and gender concepts. Despite the fact that the meaning of governance is elusive and equivocal, there are attempts by various scholars to define it. For example, Hyden and Court (2002) on one hand posit that, "governance refers to the formation and stewardship of the formal and informal rules that regulate the public realm, the arena in which state as well as economic and societal actors interact to make decisions" (p. 19). On the other hand, Rogers and Hall (2003) argue that, "governance relates to the broad social system of governing, which includes, but not restricted to, the narrower perspective of government as the main decision making political entity" (p. 7). These two definitions show different conceptualizations of governance. However, Rogers and Hall (2003) further posit that the concept of governance '...encompasses laws, regulations and institutions but it also relates to government policies and actions, to domestic activities, and to networks of influence, including international market forces, the private sector and civil society' (p. 4). Emanating from this, governance can be classified as good or poor. Thus, good governance elements are summarized by Africa Community Publishing and Development Trust – ACPD (2006) as, strong participation of citizens, responsiveness, transparency and accountability, improved service delivery, consensus on local government policy, and peace and tolerance in communities. These elements are vital to consider. However, participation/inclusiveness is more applicable to this study thus, the concept of participation is also given due cognizance.

Gender can be defined as a concept that refers to the roles, duties and responsibilities that are culturally or socially ascribed to women, men, girls and boys (Southern African Development Community – SADC, 2008). In light of this, gender becomes a very sensitive issue since it relates to power and dominance (Aureli and Brelet, 2004). Furthermore, Aureli and Brelet (2004, p. 8) posit that "...the term gender points out the relations between men and women as a social construction through which all human beings organize their work, rights, responsibilities and relationships – in short their culture, and their civilization". From such conceptualizations, it shows that gender as a concept gives a 'higher status' and power to men in some societies as compared to women who are subjected to domination. This is bolstered by Water and Sanitation Program (2010, p. 9) which opines that "...these distinct roles and the relations between them may give rise to gender inequalities where one group is systematically favored and holds advantages over another". Thus, inequality produces vulnerability and poverty amongst women since they are not able to exercise their democratic rights and also participate in decision making at the local level.

## 3. Research Methodology

The study is dominantly qualitative in nature and utilised both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through in-depth structured and unstructured interviews targeting residents in Harare's high density suburbs of Glen Norah and Hopley. The sample was purposively chosen, giving preferences to poor women and girls in these high density areas. Data were also collected from key informants – Harare Water and Combined Harare Residents Trust. In addition, observation was also used in gathering data for the study. Focused group discussions (FGDs) were utilized to solicit the experiences of poor women and girls and their perceptions on water supply management in Harare. Apart from primary data, secondary data were mainly obtained from published and unpublished articles including books, journal articles, reports and newspapers. These tools and techniques provided rich qualitative data from selected respondents since there was room for probing and paying particular attention to gestures as the respondents were interviewed. Data were analyzed through content analysis and form the basis of the issues discussed in this paper.

## 4. Presentation of Findings and Discussion

Findings are presented and discussed using major themes derived from collected data. The themes include, impacts of water shortages – a gender perspective; gender balance – a policy perspective; and women representation in decision making bodies. However, the discussion will start by focusing on the current water shortages in Harare in order to give an insightful background of the prevailing water situation. It is vital to note that pseudonyms were used in the presentation of data in order to protect the respondents from any harm arising from their participation in this research.

### 4.1. Water Shortages in Harare – A Brief Review

Water shortages in Harare have been experienced dating back to late 1990s. Major causes of the shortages can be summarized as, highly polluted water source; capacity of the water treatment plants that is outstripped by demand; worn out distribution network that causes excessive underground leaks; shortages of financial resources to purchase adequate water treatment chemicals – 8 different chemicals needed since the water is heavily polluted; to some extent population growth in the city; and arguably poor water

management. These factors have greatly affected the relationship between daily demand and supply of water in the city. According to Gambe (2013), water demand in Harare is now between 1200 and 1400 megalitres per day against a daily supply of 600 megalitres (p. 272). These statistics show that the problem has been worsening since 1990s.

Efforts over the years to reduced water shortages in Harare have proved to be fruitless. It emerges from the research that the construction of Kunzvi Dam in Murewa is expected to greatly improve the water situation in Harare. However, the current economic crisis has negatively impacted on the progress of work on the dam. The study also revealed that the completion of the dam alone does not guarantee improvement of the water situation. This should be supported by water infrastructure refurbishment especially water treatment plants and the distribution network. Despite the replacement of water pipes in some part of the inner city, the distribution network needs more work since some parts of the city are still characterised by worn out water distribution network.

#### 4.2. Impacts of Water Shortages - A Gender Perspective

The study revealed that the impacts of acute water shortages are felt more by women as compared to men. In both Glen Norah and Hopley, it is difficult to access piped water during the day. The challenge is worse in Hopley where there are no individual stand taps but only communal taps and boreholes. Women and girls wake up as early as 2 am to fill their containers with water before it is disconnected at around 6 or 7 in the morning. Sometimes they have to wake up at midnight in order to enjoy better pressure – which decreases as more and more people start accessing water. In some circumstances, water will be disconnected for more than one day and mostly respondents are caught unaware. Although Harare Water (a department under City of Harare that manages water supply) gives notices before disconnecting water for days, these notices do not reach the majority of residents. Perhaps this is caused by the media that is used to convey the message. Mostly, televisions, radios and newspapers are used. However, due to excessive load shedding most locals do not get the message in time and some do not afford to buy newspapers daily. Thus information dissemination becomes difficult if not impossible.

The exercise of fetching water for the family is so demanding that it has affected the performance of mainly women at work and girls at school. One of the respondents, Chipo has this to say,

Mazuva ano hatisi kana kumborara mufunge zvenyu. Mvura yacho iri kuuya pakati pousiku yobva yatoenda kuma 3 mangwanani iwayo. Zvino tiri kurara takamuka kuitira kuti mvura yacho painozoenda tinge tapedza kucheredza zvigubhu zvedu. Tikasadarwo inenge yave nhamo zvekare yekuzonotsvaga mvura kuchibhorani uko kunenge kuine mitsara yakareba kwazvo. Nekuneta kwatinenge takaita uku pakunozwedza hapana zvizhinji zvatinokwanisa kuita muswero wese wezuva zvikuru sei kuchikoro, iko zvino ndave kudzikira. (these days we are having inadequate sleep due to a changed water supply timetable. We are now getting supplies from around 12 midnight to 3 o'clock in the morning hence we have to fill all our water containers before supplies are cut off. Failure to do so will result in queuing for a very long time at community boreholes in order to access water. With the fatigue associated with these activities, it is difficult to be productive on that particular day hence this is affecting my performance at school).

Chipo's sentiments show the burden that is shouldered by females in most high suburbs in Harare. Inadequate sleep has negatively affected the performance of females at work or at school. Consequently they are bound to perform poorly as compared to their counterparts who will be asleep whilst others are busy fetching water for them. This perhaps explains why the top jobs in Harare are taken by men and not women who do not have adequate time to perform to their maximum due to arduous household chores.

The failure by women to wake up in the middle of the night to fetch water will result in long queues the following morning at community boreholes. These boreholes – shown in Figure 1 - were sunk by UNICEF in 2008 after one of the worst cholera outbreaks in Zimbabwe. From that time onwards, the boreholes have offered relief to high density residents in times of acute shortages. However, the community boreholes are usually dry during hot seasons as the water table might have gone below the pumping level. Apart from that, some of the boreholes have broken down due to lack of maintenance hence some women will have to travel longer distances to reach the next closest borehole.



Figure 1: Community Borehole in Hopley Suburb  
Source: Fieldwork (2015)

In Hopley high density suburb we found out that these community boreholes are managed by committees involving people staying around the borehole. The leader of the committee that manages the borehole shown in Figure 1 is a woman who stays some 50m from the water point. This old lady (*Mbuya va Precious*) complained about the reluctance of those people benefitting from the borehole to contribute money towards its maintenance. Although the borehole in Figure 1 is managed by a woman, it is the lack of adequate resources that is worrying. Besides, the lady revealed that she sometimes feel helpless when people do not co-operate hence her belief that she needs the assistance of men in controlling the affairs of this particular borehole. This shows inferiority complex on the part of women when given the opportunity to manage water issues. This is in line with the argument presented by ACPD (2006), that some vulnerable and disadvantaged groups sometimes lack confidence in themselves when given an opportunity to manage their affairs. The type and size of containers used when fetching water are different depending on the types of the water point. When fetching water from a community borehole, the containers are usually bigger for example 20 – 50 litre containers as shown in Figure 1. Usually the containers have a bigger opening at the top as compared to those with smaller openings. This has got implications on the time taken to fill up the container. Containers such as those shown in Figure 1 fill up faster as compared to those shown in Figure 2, that are mainly used at private water points. The opening of the container is also influenced by the level of activity at the water point. Community borehole are mainly characterised by a large number of people impatiently waiting to access water hence containers shown in Figure 2 are not suitable for that environment. Serious conflicts usually break out if an individual spends more time at the water point at the expense of others. All these tribulations are faced mainly by women as opposed to men. These findings are similar to those of Remigios (2011), who revealed that in Kadoma, water points have become a social point of interaction characterised by possible tensions and dangers.



*Figure 2: Some water containers used by residents  
Source: Fieldwork (2015)*

Fetching water is sometimes done by men and young boys. The study revealed that while young boys usually accompany their sisters and mothers to community boreholes men rarely accompany their wives and daughters. It is only in difficult times when men – usually using bigger containers (such as 200 litre containers in small trucks) – are involved in fetching water. Young boys make more trips and use wheel barrows to carry the containers while men make fewer trips and usually use cars or hand carts. The comparison across the gender divide shows that women and young girls have the bigger responsibility as their trips to fetch water exceed those of their counterparts by far. Their plight is exacerbated by the fact that while their counterparts use wheel barrows, hand carts and cars, they mostly carry the containers on their heads and/or in their hands.

The temporal aspect of the activity of fetching water is also vital to consider. It emerges from the research that women spend more time as compared to men. Small containers (2 and 5 litre bottles) such as those shown in Figure 2 are usually used by women to fetch water. Depending on the water pressure, women spend more time as compared to men. Thus, the activity of fetching water is more demanding and strenuous to women as opposed to men. This observation is supported by Aureli and Brelet (2004) who argue that, women “...have a greater responsibility and suffer more than men from water scarcity and pollution, particularly in developing countries” (p. 8).

Household hygiene in Glen Norah and Hopley high density suburbs is the responsibility of women. In instances when water is disconnected, women have to make sure that adequate water is available for all household chores and water to flush the toilets. Women end up recycling water for the purposes of flushing the toilets as shown in Figure 3. This means water that is used during laundry is stored and later used in toilets. Dirty water in two buckets shown in Figure 3 is meant for use in flushing toilets whilst water in other containers is usually used for other household chores such as washing dishes, washing hands after visiting the toilet, mopping the floors and even bathing.



Figure 3: Water storage for household chores  
Source: Fieldwork (2015)

In both suburbs the respondents revealed that there are some times when water is disconnected for close to, or more than a week. In such circumstances, when the household water reserves run dry, women have no choice than to turn to Mukuvisi River in Harare for laundry purposes. This endangers their health as the river is considered heavily polluted. Part of the river course and drying clothes are shown in Figure 4. The river passes through the industrial areas in Harare, thus industries deposit their wastes into the river thereby polluting it. The pollution levels are worsened by sewage from nearby suburbs that flows into the river and also fertilisers from surrounding agricultural fields. Although men are sometimes seen bathing along the same river, it is mostly women who are exposed to polluted water in Mukuvisi River. If any member of the household gets sick, it is again the duty of women to take care of the sick and not men. Thus the impacts are felt more by women than men who are mostly not concerned with how the women are managing.



Figure 4: Laundry along Mukuvisi River in Harare  
Source: Fieldwork (2015)

The study revealed that efforts by mainly women to grow vegetables within their plots have been hampered by acute water shortages in Glen Norah. Due to economic difficulties experienced in Zimbabwe most high density residents have small vegetable gardens in their backyards. Although some household members/heads are gainfully employed, their salaries are mostly not enough to cater for the dietary needs of the family for the whole month hence, it is the duty of the women, young girls and sometimes young boys to grow vegetables in order to augment whatever the working members are able to bring back home. However, the vegetables are wilting as shown in Figure 5 due to water scarcity. This presents huge dietary challenges especially to households with members living with HIV/AIDS since these members require balanced diets. In the event that these household members fall ill, it is again the duty of mainly women and girls to look after them under the home-based-care programmes.



*Figure 5: Effects of water scarcity on vegetables*  
 Source: Fieldwork (2015)

#### *4.3. Gender Parity in Water Management – A Policy Perspective*

Zimbabwe is committed to the achievement of gender parity at all levels of society thus, it is a signatory to international and regional conventions aimed at achieving gender parity. At a global level, Zimbabwe is a signatory to a number of conventions which include among others, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women CEDAW (1991) and the Beijing Declaration on the Platform for Action (1995). On the regional level, Zimbabwe subscribes to many conventions on gender such as SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) and COMESA Gender Policy among others (Government of Zimbabwe – GoZ, 2013a). As a member of various conventions at both global and regional levels Zimbabwe has shown the dedication to the achievement of gender justice in all sectors and in the society at large.

At a national level, Zimbabwe has made different adjustments to its legislation and policies with the view to address gender issues. However, like other countries, Zimbabwe has failed to meet gender parity - 50/50 men and women in decision making by 2015 though efforts are made through different policies to achieve this target perhaps in 2030. The new constitution adopted by Zimbabwe in 2013 has provisions that try to address gender imbalances. Section 17 of the constitution stipulates that it is the duty of the state to promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society. This can be achieved through, full participation of women in all spheres of the society; ensuring that both men and women are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government; and ensuring that women constitute at least half the membership of all commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies (GoZ, 2013b). Apart from that, the constitution also stipulates that the state should take measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances that were created by past practices and policies. Thus, in terms of addressing gender imbalances through policy Zimbabwe seems to be in line however, it is the implementation that is usually poor.

In terms of equality, the supreme law of Zimbabwe does not allow discrimination on any basis since all people are equal before the law. As provided for in Section 56 subsection 2, ‘Women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres’ (GoZ, 2013b). This clause puts women and men at par in terms of opportunities however, the practice on the ground is still lagging behind. The work place – especially at City of Harare is heavily dominated by men at the expense of women. It is vital to note that the key posts such as the mayoral, town clerk and Harare Water directorate are all occupied by men. Furthermore, the water distribution section under Harare Water is headed by a male engineer. This scenario hampers all efforts by grassroots women to effectively participate and influence water supply and management. As long as their participation is limited to very low levels where decision making is minimal, their plight will remain difficult to address. Thus, there might be need to craft local level policies guided by the constitution.

The Zimbabwean National Gender Policy (2013 - 2017) provides a framework for tackling gender issues in the country. Of specific interest is Section 5.3 which focuses on creating a supportive environment for gender parity in politics and decision making positions (GoZ, 2013a). Various strategies are listed that will enable the achievement of this objective however, progress on the ground remains very slow. Adherence to provisions of policies and legislative documents leaves a lot to be desired. It emerges from the study that women in both Hopley and Glen Norah suburbs believe issues of gender are articulated on paper only but there is no proper committee on the ground to implement gender policies and legislations. The majority of men at grassroots level still enjoy domination of women thus are not willing to create adequate space to allow women participation in decision making. This is evidenced by the utterances of Mr. Mukoko who believes that, “...vakadzi havadi kupiwa mukana wekutungamirira mwachewe...chavanogona kuwononga zvinhu. Hutungamiriri hwavo hwakasiyana nehwevarume” (...women should not be given any opportunity to lead...they are good at causing chaos. Their leadership style is inferior to men’s). This opinion shows that there are men who are still not willing to afford women the opportunity to take part in local and national decision making especially at leadership level.

#### 4.4. Women Representation in Decision Making Bodies

Representation of women in decision-making bodies is still very low hence compromising full participation of women in the making of decisions that affect them. At a national level, the demotion of the first and only female vice president shows back tracking on part of government in as far as equal representation of men and women in top positions is concerned. The hope that women had when the female vice president was sworn in was suddenly thwarted by the act of her demotion. This move showed that Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society that views politics as a profession for men and not women. Despite the arguments posed by some critics, that ousted female vice president betrayed her fellow comrades, we argue that if government was committed to gender parity there was need to replace her by another female candidate. We believe that seniority in party politics took its course in the recent appointments of two male vice presidents. However, our argument remains, that there are women in the ruling party that are capable of shouldering the role of a vice president thus, on gender basis there was need to appoint a female vice president to replace the ousted female vice president.

The uneven political ground in Zimbabwe has also greatly influenced the participation of women in parliamentary elections. This low participation has indirectly perpetuated the over-dominance of men in decision making. It is vital to note that, in the last parliamentary elections held in 2013, only 85 out of 270 parliamentarians are women while 39 out of 80 senators are women (Zhangazha, 2014). Furthermore, in Harare the current number of female councilors is six against forty six male councilors (Dube, 2015). These statistics show that the voice of women in decision making is still overshadowed by men. Their participation in parliament does not yield much especially when decisions are made by a majority vote. This has a direct impact on the urgency that is rendered to water shortages by Harare Water. As long as the number of women in decision making bodies remains low their concerns will never be adequately addressed. Apart from that, it becomes difficult for poor women to have a voice in water supply and management issues.

The impact of inadequate representation of women in decision making bodies affects women differently according status in society. If women in Harare are categorized based on areas of residence, then those who are more affected by the current water woes are the residents of high density areas who are mainly poor and struggling women. Their predicament is aggravated by the fact that those women who find their way into politics and top management jobs are mainly from medium and low density areas who do not experience the impacts of acute water shortages on a daily basis. It is our argument that, the majority of women in politics and top management jobs are out of touch with the realities that are faced by poor women thus, they do not adequately represent their actual needs.

It emerges from the research that there are different factors that hinder the participation of poor grassroots women in politics. Mrs. Muroyi has this to say,

“Isu takaona kuti hatingarwisane nevarume mukukwikwidza kupinda mukanzuru nekuti politics ibasa revarume kwete revanhukadzi. Varume vedu havatibvumire kuti tikwikwidze nokuti vanofunga kuti zve politics zvinoitwa nepfambi kana vanhu vasina kukwana. Uyewo hatina mari yacho yekutambisa kukambeina nokuti tiri kutotsvaga mari yevana yechikoro. (We have realized that we cannot contest in council elections because politics is a man’s job. Our husbands do not support our participation in politics because it is associated with prostitution and people with ‘loose’ morals. Apart from that, we do not have the financial resources needed for campaigns as we are struggling to raise our children’s school fees).

Mrs. Muroyi’s assertion brings out three vital factors that hinder women participation in local politics. Firstly, women sometimes feel that they cannot contest against men in elections. This shows that some women suffer an inferiority complex or are still trapped in the belief of the past that women cannot compete with men - who are viewed by local cultures as superior to women. Besides, most men do not allow their wives to participate in politics especially if the men are not involved. Political participation has been associated with prostitution and women with ‘loose’ morals. Whether this assertion is correct or not, this is subject to debate. However, it is vital to note that the political arena in Zimbabwe is heavily dominated by men hence in most instances women who are politically active are believed to be abused by men who are mainly their ‘bosses’. In light of this, we are arguing that not all women involved in politics are of ‘loose’ morals. Some are victims of rape or sex in exchange for political favours or high political posts. Either way, women are victims of male dominance. The third hindrance is lack of adequate financial resources to run successful campaigns. The majority of poor women do not afford to financial support their political ambitions. Besides, their main worry is that of raising enough funds to survive and being able to send their children to school.

#### 4.5. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Broad conclusions and recommendations are presented in the following paragraphs focusing mainly on, the water situation in Harare; a gender perspective on the impacts of these water woes; gender parity in water management and the representation of women in decision making bodies.

The daily supply of domestic water in Harare is far outweighed by the daily demand. The supply is further reduced by high percentages of non revenue water, high pollution levels of the water source and the capacity of the treatment plants which is now less than the daily demand. In light of this, it recommended that the construction of Kunzvi Dam be fast tracked followed by the expansion of the water treatment plants in Harare. Apart from that, heavy fines should be imposed on the polluters of water focusing mainly on industries and urban residents who are the major culprits. Urban residents should be encouraged to be environmentally sensitive and conserve natural water bodies for the benefit all residents.

The burden of water woes in Harare is mainly shouldered by women and young girls as compared to men and young boys despite the fact that the later are sometimes involved in the exercise of fetching water for the household. It is also the burden of females to care for the sick when water shortages cause disease outbreaks. Thus, there is need for a paradigm shift in the gender distribution of

household chores. Men and young boys should be equally responsible for providing or fetching water for the household hence behaviour change is needed in that respect. Zimbabwe is a signatory to many international gender conventions and has passed legislations/policies at a national level in order to address gender imbalances. However, implementation of these remains poor thus there is need for serious engagement at all levels of governance, seeking better implementation of policies or legislations that address the current gender imbalances especially in water management. A task force should be set up that oversees the implementation of these policies from the national to the grassroots levels.

Representation of women in decision making bodies is still very low in Harare. Besides that, Zimbabwe as a country has failed to achieve gender parity in terms of 50/50 men and women representation in decision making bodies. Men are still enjoying dominance at the expense of women participation. This has partly been caused by cultural beliefs that are still enslaving some urban residents as a result perpetuating the exploitation of women in general. Emanating from this, it is recommended that complete change is required that will achieve equal representation of men and women in the decision making bodies. Apart from that, women should come together and unite against discrimination by men in terms of access to decision making bodies. In addition, confidence amongst women to contest in local and national elections will also greatly improve the situation. Women should have courage to contest against men without fear or regarding themselves as inferior. On the other hand, men should be gender sensitive and allow women to have free participation space in both local and national decision making. Men should regard women as their equal partner at workplace and in decision making. This will greatly assist in achieving gender parity.

Finally, there is great need to improve the number of women in water decision making bodies in Harare since they are the household managers of water. Their participation at all levels of decision making will provide vital insights as far as the addressing water woes in Harare is concerned. This is high time for municipality departments such as Harare Water to consider employment of women in the top managerial posts. However, this should be based on academic merit and should be done progressively.

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