

Beware the Zvimba Queens!



“Women and men experience and are affected differently by the services they receive from local authorities. It is critical that Zvimba RDC take practical steps to embrace the diversity of local communities to achieve gender equality, equity and justice in its policies and service delivery.” - Zvimba RDC Gender Policy, adopted in December 2012.

COUNTRY	Zimbabwe
Baseline score	64%
Latest score	80%
Population	230,703
Characteristics	Farming and mining area
Contact person	C.T. Mugabe
Designation	Gender Champion
Contact details	0772700891

If you find yourself in Zvimba district in the Mashonaland West Province of central northern Zimbabwe, you might just meet the Zvimba Queens. No they are *not* beauty queens! The Zvimba Queens are the council’s newly formed women’s soccer team with a budget of \$3990 out of the \$28,580 allocated by the Council to promote gender equality in the 2013 budget. For a rural council, this is a small fortune, and a firm indicator that it’s no longer business as usual where gender is concerned!



Checking the facts: Fainesi Shamhu, GL Country Manager Priscilla Maposa and CEO Colleen Lowe Morna. Photo: Tapiwa Zvaraya.
http://gemcommunity.genderlinks.org.za/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=32966

Zvimba became a Centre of Excellence for Gender in Local Government in October 2011. In less than two years, the Council’s gender score has risen from 64% to 80% (this score will be independently adjudicated at the March 2013 SADC Protocol@Work summit). During GL’s verification visit, Gender Focal Person Fainesi Shamhu presented a fat file of evidence that included a gender policy and action plan (formally adopted by the Council in December 2012, a gender statement to go with the 2013 budget, gender disaggregated employment statistics, job adverts encouraging women to apply, minutes of community meetings,

“There has been notable change to my life, this council and the community that I can bear testimony to,” says Denicah Makota who works for the Parliamentary Constituency Information Centre as an executive assistant.

Makota recalls how she became aware of the Council's gender action plan through Shamhu talking to colleagues about the SADC Protocol in 2012 after attending and participating at the GL National and Regional Gender Justice and Local Government Summit. "She was explaining governance issues and women's political participation and decision-making," Makota recalls. "I got a copy of the SADC Protocol which I am now using to talk to the communities I work with. I believe the Protocol has opened up our minds as women. I am more conscious about gender issues."



Cll Tsitsi Mugabe (right)= Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna
http://gemcommunity.genderlinks.org.za/gallery/main.php?g2_itemId=14818

The council combines a strong evidence and policy-based approach with visible and practical interventions that involve women and men. Gender Champion Tsitsi Mugabe, who also represents rural women in the Women in Local Government Forum, provides political leadership. Mugabe and Shamhu went through the COE Training of Trainer process. They conducted their own situation analysis of the Council.

In a relatively short space of time, the Council can point to several "before" and "after". Before the Council had no gender policy. Many other COE's have gone straight to an action plan without a policy. Zvimba has customised the Zimbabwe Local Government Association (ZILGA) Gender Policy to its needs, with many references to the provisions of the SADC Gender Protocol.

For example, the policy quotes the SADC Gender Protocol target of 50% women in decision-making by 2015, through affirmative action measures if necessary. The council is unique in that it has a relatively high proportion of women – 38% (the overall average of women in local government in Zimbabwe is 18%).

There has not been an election since the adoption of the gender policy, and women still only chair two of the seven committees (28%). However, women now constitute 42% of the vice chairpersons. The Gender Committee has recommended that Council adopt a 50/50 rule for chairing of committees, and that where the chair is male, the deputy must be female.



Stirring the pot: Mugabe (left) and Hoshiki (centre). Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Presently, Mugabe chairs the strategically placed planning committee, while Councillor Margaret Hoshiki is vice chairperson of finance. Women in management have increased from 25% to 33% over the last year. The council now

encourages women to apply for posts (evidence provided) and the gender committee is involved in selection processes. Recently the Council recruited a female manager to run its Banket Town Board.



One of the most visible achievements concerns ensuring that women and men gain access to land (evidence provided) and keeping sex disaggregated data on land. "Due to GL and gender mainstreaming initiatives, council has taken affirmative action steps to register houses/ stands in both spouses' names. The housing application forms are now sex disaggregated. This is just an example I have noted among many other things the council is doing," said Makota.

Women councillors pointed to many well documented examples of issues they have raised in the Council, as well as those raised by women in the community, as examples of women's participation in decision-making. ZRDC has photocopied the pamphlet on the provisions of the SADC Gender Protocol many times over. From the initial stage three village community workshop, the SADC Gender Protocol is now mentioned at all community gatherings. Minutes of council meetings, budget consultations and other gatherings show gender responsive governance at work in concerns over water, sanitation, roads, boreholes, dams, schools, deforestation, electrification and mining.



Councillors in ward seven and nine have initiated garden projects to empower women. During a late afternoon visit, the women members of the Tirivamwe (we are one) Co-operative demonstrated how they have reclaimed a once empty bush and turned it into a garden under crop rotation. Produce is sold, and some used to feed orphans and vulnerable children.

GL Zimbabwe Country Manager Priscilla Maposa (left) and DFID's Caroline Hoy (right) sample the produce from Ward Seven gardens. Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna



Lighting the way: Women in ward nine sew uniforms and make candles.
Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

A unique feature of the Council is that it is cross-referencing its gender policy with other council policies, and setting aside a budget for this purpose. For example, Zvimba has allocated \$500 for this purpose. In ward nine, women have won contracts to provide Okay bazaars with candles, and to sew school uniforms. The council often rents out the community hall for weddings. Women in the community do the décor and catering, earning extra income. Their favourite slogan is “down with poverty, forward with knowledge”.

On Valentine’s Day last year, the Council ran a day of voluntary counselling and testing for couples, thanks to a gender aware HIV and AIDS policy that is targeting men. The Council’s 2013 budget makes a provision for refresher courses and kits for care givers, the majority of whom are unpaid women. The SADC Gender Protocol has strong provisions around the appropriate recognition of care work.

Community members and councillors site the triple scourges of poverty, gender violence, HIV and AIDS as the major challenges to gender equality. Preliminary results of the Violence Against Women Indicators Study in Zimbabwe shows that Mashonaland has the highest levels of gender violence in the country, with 88% of women reporting that they have experienced some form of violence over their lifetime. Emotional violence, which barely features in police statistics, constitutes the highest form of violence in all provinces. This reflects deeply held patriarchal beliefs that still have to be challenged.

In ward nine, Herbert Nyaude heads the Child Protection Committee of the Council. He talks passionately about young women dropping out of school as a result of teenage pregnancy; violence in schools, child marriages, child headed households, and the need to protect the girl child. He says that gender training has empowered him to “speak out and apply what I have learned.” The Zvimba gender budget statement makes provision for visits by the gender committee to the local police station and Sixteen Day campaigns.

“Personally getting to know about gender issues has been an eye opener,” reflects Makota. “I used to look down upon myself and my capabilities... I now know that you can contest with men and challenge them, even at work. I have learnt that Gender Based Violence (GBV) has to be reported and there are institutions like Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA) who can help women affected by GBV.

“Most important, I have learnt that there is need for behaviour change. In the past we had people having



Dancing to a new tune: Mugabe (left) and Makota (right) Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

multiple concurrent relationships in our community but this has decreased. If you want to be a role model, your behaviour needs to change. I have acquired information and the ability to act on the knowledge that I have acquired.”

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EVENT: Zvimba RDC Verification
VENUE: Zvimba
DATE: 21/02/2013

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Statistics by Gender

Male	9	40.9%
Female	13	59.1%
Total	22	100%