



Mbare Report:

Shawasha Hostels- The True Story

10 April 2010

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1. OBJECTIVE OF REPORT:

- a. To highlight the plight of Shawasha Hostel tenants in Mbare
- b. To recommend ways to address the challenges facing the hostel tenants.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Harare Residents Trust (HRT) undertook this tour on Saturday 10 April 2010 following widespread reports by tenants who have attended residents' meetings in Mbare, at Mai Musodzi Community and Stodart Gym Halls. The delegation comprised of the HRT Coordinator Precious Shumba, Kadoma Residents Association (KRA) Coordinator Mrs Shorai Domingo, Mr Arnold Mangezi, Vice Chairman Mbare Residents' Trust (MRT), Mrs Rosemary Madamombe, MRT Committee Member, Samson Mutsadyanga, MRT Committee Member and Rudo Mudeyi, the MRT Treasurer.

The tenants' problems range from inadequate representation by their elected representatives, poor service delivery, high water bills and unaffordable rentals, as well as deplorable living conditions tenants have endured for a long time. The challenges of burst sewer pipes has been resolved by the City of Harare following the laying down of bigger pipes, replacing the archaic pipes that had constantly burst, spewing sewage all over the place. During this tour it emerged that City employees who earn monthly salaries to provide cleansing services in the hostels have not been doing their work. In separate interviews with City council employees, it was established that each block at Shawasha Hostels is serviced by two employees who have to clean the flats, particularly the toilets, the bathrooms and the surroundings to ensure they conform to the expected minimum standard health regulations in terms of urban regulations and the Public Health Act.

Sadly, these workers have not serviced the community as expected in terms of their job descriptions. Tenants claimed that the workers lacked 'seriousness, commitment and lack tight monitoring' owing to 'politics' whatever that meant. On further enquiry it emerged that some of the workers were improperly recruited as they were employed through their political superiors in higher authority which renders the supervisor powerless to exert his authority on them. It is said that these workers are constantly shielded from scrutiny by their influential handlers.

Some of the workers come to work late and leave very early, usually from 8.30am until around 11 am, meaning they receive their full salaries which they have not earned.

The focus of this report is to explore the opportunities arising from this crisis for the City council, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development and other key stakeholders. From observations made during the tour, interviews with some City workers and speaking to tenants, it is apparent that the major challenge compounding the health crisis at Shawasha Hostels is the inaction of the City authorities in the departments that oversee all carpentry and plumbing work.

For how else would the authorities justify the continued delay in the partitioning of male and female toilets, leaving men and women to almost share the same toilet, with superficial demarcations that directly undermine Zimbabwe's cultural values. According to some officials, these requests for the purchase of all plumbing and carpentry items were made a long time ago but there is lack of commitment to address this situation.

The threat to the health of around 7 000 tenants cannot be overemphasised. This report critically looks at the living conditions, water supplies, hygiene in Shawasha Hostels and makes recommendations, informed by the expectations of the tenants.

3. REPORT ASSUMPTION AND THE THEORY

The HRT expects that the City of Harare, the Minister of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development will take this report seriously and attend to the issues affecting tenants living in Shawasha Hostels, and other hostels in Mbare. The situation as observed during this tour was pathetic. Human waste filled the passages and dirty stagnant water covered the floors of the bathrooms and toilets. While this situation has been made know to the authorities, still no action has been taken. Each block at the hostels has six toilets and six bathrooms.

5. TOUR DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

During the tour, the HRT observed the status of the hostels and the living conditions of the tenants. Interviews were conducted with tenants in all the hostels, mindful of the need to be gender sensitive. Focus group discussions were held with representatives of Mbare Residents' Trust (MRT), tenants and some City of Harare employees during and after the tour.

6. LIVING CONDITIONS IN THE SHAWASHA HOSTELS:

a. Situation

There are 12 blocks of flats constituting Shawasha Hostels, each floor has 28 housing units, and there are three floors. In each housing unit, there are seven people crammed in one room, making an approximate total population of 196 in each floor. When they were built during the Rhodesian era, these flats were meant to contain single male employees of local industry, while their wives stayed in the rural areas. They were expected to move out once they decided to stay with their families.

People reportedly slip all the time and get injured when they take their baths because the floors have become slippery. There is no cleaning taking place despite tenants making monthly payments to the local authority. Below are key observations made during the tour;

- The toilets are unclean, human waste is everywhere on the floors
- The bathrooms have single taps functioning. The bathroom floors are flooded with dirty water. On the other side of the bathrooms are sinks, which have mostly collapsed.
- The taps on the sinks have ceased to function. Women were observed washing plates in the filthy sinks, while their feet rested on human waste scattered on the floors.
- In Block 1, C-Floor, the sinks have fallen, the floors are water logged, and the stench nauseating and the whole place is an eyesore.
- Cast irons have become rotten and there is unending leakages. Thick pastes of human waste and dirty water leaking from the C-floor, pours into the sinks

in B and A floors, making the sinks horrible to use, but the tenants use them anyway. There is no choice. In some of the sinks it was observed that the tenants have placed some buckets to try to minimise the splashing of human waste but they overflowed.

- The toilets in all blocks, in the C-Floor have knee high cardboards dividing the female and male toilets, rendering privacy non-existent.
- There are no lights in the corridors and at night there is always a looming threat of muggings and rape to girls and women.

The C- Hall in Block 9 Hostels:

- The C-Hall in Block 9 is occupied by nine tenants relocated from Block 4 Matapi flats which were burnt down on 5 January 2009 following an electrical fault. On 9 January 2009, the victims of the fire were allocated open spaces in the C-halls in Blocks 9 and 10 at Shawasha Hostels. Prior to the burning down of part of Block 4, Matapi Hostels, these tenants lived in addresses ranging from **C53 to C70**. But despite not staying in their burnt down quarters, the tenants have received statements from the City of Harare indicating they owe the local authority amounts ranging from US\$825 to above a thousand dollars. It remains a mystery how they have calculated these figures when these tenants have been without adequate accommodation for nearly 15 months. For example, Mr C. Makasu of C65, Block 4 Matapi, of Account Number 192004371000007 has received bills indicating the following figures, stretching from October 2009. October- 586, November- US\$630, December- US\$675, January 2010- US\$724, February 2010 – US\$774, and March US\$825.
- These tenants in the hall face multiple problems.
- The tenants have sub-divided the hall into nine housing units, using cardboards. There are averagely nine people in each cubicle they call houses.
- The situation is the same across other C-halls at Shawasha Hostels with people sub-dividing the halls into housing cubicles where an average nine people share one room. Block 8 C-hall is the only exception because it burnt down three years ago and has not been repaired.
- Tenants in these C-halls face another hurdle in their attempts to have a life. Rats are breeding fast and destroying what remains of their personal belongings.
- Ceilings are falling in and leak heavily during the rainy season.
- Windowpanes are all broken and they have to endure winds throughout the day, worst at night.
- Lice and mosquitoes have become a common menace.
- Electricity cables hang loose above the sub-divided shacks, and there is potential for fire breaking out, in the case of a short circuit.
- This situation with electricity has spread to the surroundings of the hostels with members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police who patrol during the night

allegedly beating up people returning to their workplaces at night, especially in Machingura Street, nearby. The HRT heard of how the police have waylaid residents going or returning from schools.

- Within the hostels' corridors, drug abuse is rampant with teenage boys and men, including some women engaging in orgies of sex, capitalising on the darkness. This has led to unwanted pregnancies and subsequently to risky backyard abortions, creating health complexities among the victims.
- Used condoms are daily removed from the corridors. This might be traced back to the issue of conjugal rights by married couples and partners. While this could be attributed to prostitution, the tenants also believe that some desperate couples decided to have their sex in the corridors and return into their sleeping quarters afterwards.

b. Water Supplies:

The tenants in Shawasha Hostels face constant water shortages. In the A floors across the 12 blocks there is only one tap functioning out of the six available. People who want to do their washing have to wait till around 10pm to midnight in order to get some water. This is difficult for tenants who live in the C and B floors who have to climb down and up those stairs to fetch some water for all domestic purposes. This places a burden on the aged who still live in the hostels. Residents have to fetch water from the A-floor so that council employees can do the cleaning of their bathrooms, toilets and sinks. If tenants fail to provide the water, there is no cleaning that takes place because the city employees refuse to fetch the Water on their own.

The hostels' tenants have an added responsibility of fetching water from the A-floors to the other floors in order to have their places cleaned. However, the challenge is that the cast irons that should be linking the whole water and sewer system to the main sewer pipes have blocked, rendering all cleaning activities irrelevant.

The clogging of the bathrooms and toilets is attributed to the negligence of the tenants, who constantly pour bones, cloths, sand, cotton wool and pads.

c. Response:

Recognising their living conditions and the failure by the local authority to provide them with a clean living environment, the tenants, led by Mrs Rosemary Madamombe, a tenant in Block 9, have set an example in Block 9. They now take turns to clean the walls, the bathrooms and toilets, and the floors have been regularly scrubbed to remove any dirty.

The Mbare Residents' Trust (MRT), through the initiative of their Vice Chairman Arnold Mangezi and Committee Members Rosemary Madamombe and Samson Mutsadyanga and their adviser Tawanda Nyahuye, has come up with an initiative dubbed '**Chenesa Musha- Mbare**'. This initiative's objective is to;

- Mobilise resources to constantly clean the hostels and transform people's lives in all hostels in Mbare. These include sweeping brooms, gloves, repair of

sinks, sub-dividing the toilets, purchase of taps, cleaning detergents, respirators, gumboots, and repainting of the inside and outside walls. The tenants have established cleaning teams that will oversee the whole initiative, meaning they want to take an active role in the whole exercise.

- Make the City of Harare and other key stakeholders aware of the situation. They seek a partnership that endures the test of time.

7. **SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS:**

a. **Women's Rights:**

According to Mrs Madamombe, the situation has been worse on women. Relatives have ceased to visit them in the hostels due to the living conditions. The dirty is overwhelming. In a representative situation, there is the father, the mother, three teenage boys, two teenage girls, extended family- three more males and two more females, primary school kids- boys and girls, totalling about nine people, sharing one room. In the same room there are two other families with approximately equal number of people, making the room accommodate an average of 16 people. However, each family receives a bill from the City council giving them the same room number as an official address, but with their respective names. From the viewpoint of the City of Harare, they expect to receive a total amount of around US\$360 from the same room, from the average four families sharing the room.

Husbands and wives, or partners no longer can have their conjugal rights as and when they desire to. From the focus group discussions, it also emerged that unfaithfulness has become the order of the day, putting the families at a higher risk of HIV/Aids infection and other sexually transmitted infections. The women accused their men of sneaking to other women for sex. The problems arise once the men want their conjugal rights. The women said they cannot have sex in a room full of people. Even when the children and other adults have gone to sleep it is still a challenge to really enjoy your sex with your husband, Mrs Madamombe said. Even if you just proceed to do it, there is always the risk that your husband's young brother, your child or young sister might wake up and witness us in action.

'It is un-African to do that. We are now being beaten up by our husbands,' said Mrs Madamombe. "There is no way any woman would accept to have sex with her man in a crowded room unless you have become very desperate."

If the woman refuses to have sex, the women said they are accused of infidelity, forcing these ladies to simply go against their values, having sex in the same room with your adolescent children.

Like the majority of the women in the hostels, they do not make reports to the police in terms of the Domestic Violence Act. There are varying reasons they do not report to the police- the husband is the breadwinner, if one makes the bold step of making a report, the police allegedly demand bribes in order to withdraw the charges.

Instead of houses being private sanctuaries for married couples, they have become prisoners of hope as they struggle to preserve their marriages, and to contain the rising anger against each other. Tempers flare easily, the tenants said about their relationships, raising the stakes for domestic violence monitors.

The girl child has been devalued. She has to endure witnessing her brothers and parents taking turns to close eyes while they changed clothes. The kids are witnessing their parents beating each other up, psychologically impacting on their lives. In one case, a 12-year old boy raped seven girls aged from six to nine years in Block 10, Shawasha Hostels. When the girls' parents made an official report at Matapi Police Station, they were told that 'children living in those circumstances usually do that kind of thing' and nothing else was done to address the situation.

Women now face constant harassment from their husbands owing to several issues. They are usually accused of infidelity if they delay returning from fetching water downstairs or Mukuvisi River if the situation is desperate enough.

This has left most marriages on the brink of collapse in the hostels. Occasionally one witnesses couples seated in the open grounds nearby outside their hostels just to have a quiet time to talk about their private issues alone.

b. Maintenance of Hostels:

The council has abandoned its responsibility of repainting the outside and inside of the hostels. Council employees used to be available to monitor how tenants behaved around the hostels. They also closely monitored how the women doing dishes did it, preventing them from using sand, as it blocks pipes. Tenants caught misbehaving were constantly reminded of their terms of occupancy of those rooms, with threats to repossess their houses. The rentals were affordable in the past but now the charges have gone beyond their incomes. For a long time, the City of Harare has not devoted any resources towards the maintenance of the hostels, and years of neglect have affected the piping system, the walls, the sinks and general orderliness. Walls across all the hostels, the interior and exterior are written all sorts of things like: *Zanu PF chete, Vote Savanhu, MDC Ndizvo, Hatidi Uchapa, marara panze*. Graffiti is everywhere.

8. APPROXIMATE POPULATION IN THE HOSTELS:

NAME OF HOSTEL	No. OF BLOCKS	APPROXIMATE POPULATION
Matapi	14	9, 120 people
Nenyere	13	7 644 people
Shawasha	12	About 7, 056 people in all the hostels with 588 on an average of 7 people in each housing unit per block. There are about 28 housing units in each floor. There are three floors on each hostel
Mbare	9	2 400 people

Matererini	10	2 500 people
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9. **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The residents in Shawasha Hostels deserve better. There is nothing being done to suggest that the City of Harare has taken the necessary steps towards addressing the concerns of the hostels' tenants.

- The overcrowding can only be overcome if the City of Harare or Central Government provides land for these tenants to build their own houses.
- The Carpentry Division at City of Harare should urgently sub-divide all the toilets to clearly separate men and women.
- The corporate sector can provide 108 brooms, 60 litres of toilet cleaner every month for each of the 12 blocks, 36 pairs of gloves and gumshoes per block, floor polish, paint for all the blocks,
- Residents to provide all labour in this initiative as long as these materials are available.
- To hold civic education seminars for all tenants so that they understand their responsibilities towards their community infrastructure, on health and environment.

ENDS