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IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICE DELIVERY UPHOLDS HUMAN DIGNITY

In the 21st Century most governments, including the government of the Republic of Zambia, recognise that all human beings have basic rights and freedoms to which they are entitled. Among these rights are those rights that ensure that people have an adequate standard of living (rights to education, proper sanitation, water, and health) which are known as economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR). Protection, cultivation, promotion of, and most importantly access to these rights or lack thereof has a direct effect on the dignity of the human person. The JCTR, as a faith-based organisation, believes in the promotion of societies in which human dignity is advanced and safeguarded through the recognition and exercising of these rights. In this light, over the past three months, the JCTR supported by Misesan Cara has facilitated a project aimed at improved people's awareness of rights or entitlements in relation to education, health and water and sanitation in selected marginalized areas of Zambia. Specifically, our research/field visits focused on Chishipula of Kasama; Kapulanga of Mongu; Chamboli of Kitwe and Simoonga of Livingstone.

Field visits that were conducted in these communities revealed that the dignified and predictable access to the basic requirements of daily living was sorely limited. Field visits revealed gross limitations in the provision of reliable, consistent and adequate services thereby denying the poorest of the poor access to economic social and cultural rights. In terms of education, in all communities visited, it was found that the teacher-student ratio in both primary and secondary schools was high at 1:72. It was also further brought to our attention that there was limited space for classrooms. Facilities expected to be found in schools such as laboratories, computer laboratories and libraries were either poorly equipped or non-existent. Inadequate infrastructure limited learning and contact hours for learners. Furthermore, almost without exception, pupils had to travel long distances in order to get to school. All these factors confirmed that the children in these communities could not have the benefits that a good education would bestow upon them, severely limiting their chances of success in the future.

It was also found that access to good healthcare services was limited for a number of reasons, among them: healthcare facilities were at a considerable distance from these communities with members of the community having to travel about 5km to access healthcare services. Health facilities were also grossly understaffed revealing 2 nurses against the required 7 nurses. Additionally, the health facilities lacked essential services such as ambulance services and maternity wards.

Access to water and proper sanitation was found to be problematic as well. Community members had to rely for their water either on shallow dug wells or to trek for several miles as far as 2km in order to have access to fresh water. These field visits revealed the severe limitations of access to basic necessities. Consequently, the people are denied human rights in general and ESCR in particular. Without any such access, human dignity is compromised. It is imperative therefore that the state improves citizens' access to ESCR. The JCTR calls on the government to consider holding another referendum that would ensure inclusion of ESCR in the Bill of Rights to make them justiciable so as to hold the government accountable.

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