

## MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN ZIMBABWE'S "DECADE OF CRISIS"

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### ABSTRACT

The philosophy of hunhu or ubuntu needs to be recognized and valued if real development is to be realized in Africa, especially Southern Africa. In this paper, an attempt is made to use this transformative philosophy to discuss the extent to which Zimbabwe has moved towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as set by the United Nations organ on development in the year 2000. The study is based on the authors' understanding of hunhu or ubuntu as an emerging Southern African transformative philosophy and the thesis offered by the authors is that Zimbabwe's MDGs are at the moment unachievable because of the failure by its leaders to use hunhu or ubuntu to bring people together and fight extreme poverty, patriarchy and the Human Immuno Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV and AIDS). The authors believe that hunhu or ubuntu promotes servant leadership and transforms gender relations which are critical elements of development.

**Keywords:** Millennium Development Goals, Development, Philosophy and Hunhu or Ubuntu

### INTRODUCTION

As the year 2015 (when the Millennium Development Goals, MDGs, must be met) inexorably draws close, the following questions continue to linger in our minds: Will Zimbabwe have covered sufficient ground in addressing poverty, gender inequality and the HIV epidemic by the set date? Will the country have attained appreciable levels of social and economic development? How can the country appropriate indigenous ethical values to galvanize the development process? The authors of this article consider these to be crucial existential questions that require interrogation.

It is argued in this article that the preservation of an ethical culture is important in the development discourse as it provides a fertile ground for both social and economic development. In the case of Zimbabwe and many other countries in Southern Africa, this ethical culture is best explained by the philosophy of hunhu (in Shona), ubuntu (in Ndebele) or botho (in Sotho). In this article, the authors endeavour to use this philosophy to explain why Zimbabwe is still lagging behind when it comes to the achievement of the MDGs, whose deadline is September 2015. Before delving into this discussion, it is important for authors to explain what is meant by the phrase, "decade of crisis." By "decade of crisis," is meant the period from 1998 to 2008 when Zimbabwe was experiencing social, political and economic crisis of alarming proportions. This period has three indicators, namely: 1. The collapse of social institutions such as education, health and the family. 2. Political polarization characterized by violence, hate speech and media propaganda. 3. The monumental fall of the Zimbabwe dollar leading to galloping inflation, shortage of basic commodities and the emergence of the black market. These and many more will be

explained in detail in sections to follow. In the next section, an attempt will be made to define and explain the concept of hunhu or ubuntu before demonstrating how this transformative philosophy can help in the achievement of these MDGs.

### **HUNHU: PROBING AN INDIGENOUS PHILOSOPHY**

It is important to define hunhu or ubuntu before any attempt to show how its impact (or lack thereof) on the achievement of the MDGs in Zimbabwe. Thus, the word ‘hunhu’ (and in some Shona dialects, ‘unhu’) or ‘ubuntu’ is prominent in the works of Stanlake Samkange and Tommie Marie Samkange (1980), Mogobe B Ramose (1999), Ronald Nicolson (2008) and Fainos Mangena (2008). Other non-Zimbabwean scholars such as Wim Van Binsbergen (2002) have also grappled with this concept. For instance, in his *Reflections on Reconciliation and Ubuntu*, Van Binsbergen argues that ‘...ubuntu or hunhu has become a key concept to evoke the unadulterated forms of African social life before the European conquest.’

For Van Binsbergen hunhu or ubuntu has survived the test of time: ‘The world view (in other words the values, beliefs and images) of pre-colonial Southern Africa is claimed to survive today, more or less, in remote villages and intimate kin relationships and to constitute an inspiring blue-print for the present and future of social, economic and political life in urban and modern environments...’ This means that hunhu or ubuntu as the ethical benchmark of African societies provides a guide to the African man and woman in whatever setting they are. Hunhu or ubuntu is the bone and marrow of sub-Saharan Africa, especially Southern Africa. The authors of this article are convinced that this indigenous philosophy is consistent with the language of human rights (Chinouya & O’Keefe 2006) and development and is therefore applicable to discourses on the MDGs.

Hunhu or ubuntu, which Nhlanhla Mkhize (2008) refers to as the process of becoming a human being, calls for a particular mode of being in the world, which mode of being requires each person to maintain social justice, to be empathetic to others, to be respectful and to have a conscience. Failure to observe these guidelines disrupts communal unity leading to disequilibrium. Verhoef and Michel (1997) refer to this as a circular moral process and in a circular moral process; the community is always in a state of flux: it is strengthened if people fulfill their mutual obligations. For Verhoef and Michel, moral transgressions weaken the community by causing separation between people. However, separation resulting from moral transgression could be rectified if the community works interactively to re-establish social connection, interdependence and hence moral community. Hunhu or ubuntu makes this possible. Writing in a Zimbabwean context, Tarisayi A. Chimuka (2006:115) observes that:

Amongst the Shona people, hunhu (in some dialects unhu) is a powerful instantiation of the African humanity. This involves not only the physical mode of existence but also the whole array of values – moral, legal, aesthetic and all the other norms. These values are pegged in the collective consciousness of specific groups, which are expected to vary in accordance to the history and experience of the collective. These values, in turn, are transmitted to the progeny through the process of socialization.

What can be discerned from the above paragraph is that hunhu or ubuntu is a metaphysic as well as an ethic that define the African essence of community. This essence is historical in the sense that it is passed from generation to generation. Among the Shona, the phrase tsika dzedu (our values, customs, norms and traditions) puts everything into perspective. Tsika means to put your foot mark on top of another's which literary means to follow someone. Thus, by assimilating the values, customs and traditions of our forefathers, we are basically following their footmarks in doing what is good. The values of unity and togetherness are imbibed in this essence.

At the level of politics, hunhu or ubuntu opposes moral transgressions such as a culture of violence and/or political intolerance that disrupt communal unity. These moral transgressions are often fuelled by political polarization. By political polarization is meant divisions along political party lines or having different political ideologies and thereby treating each other not as political opponents but as enemies. This kind of attitude is against the spirit of hunhu or ubuntu and is one of the major causes of underdevelopment in Africa.

It is argued, in this article, that without embracing the philosophy of hunhu or ubuntu, it will be difficult to achieve the MDGs in Zimbabwe. The authors of this article maintain that the political and economic instability that has gripped Zimbabwe in the last ten years – which they refer to as the “decade of crisis” – has been a result of the failure by politicians to use hunhu or ubuntu to develop our social and economic institutions. The authors are convinced that hunhu or ubuntu offers a powerful vision for social transformation. Augustine Shutte (2001:3) confirms this when he writes that:

Ubuntu is almost the exact opposite of apartheid. Apartheid's key idea is separation, separate development, development through separation. At the centre of ubuntu is the idea that umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, persons depend on persons to be persons. This is our hidden secret. This is something we can reveal to the world. This is something the world needs. It can become our special product.

Indeed, ubuntu is a special product which helps in the realization of a nation's goals, aspirations and most importantly a nation's place in the world. In the context of Zimbabwe, ubuntu is the opposite of polarization, the opposite of political violence and the opposite of social disharmony which are all recipes for underdevelopment. Ubuntu acts as a reminder that despite people's political differences, they should remain united by the fact that they occupy the same geographic space and are beneficiaries of this land which was passed down to them by their ancestors.

#### **DEVELOPMENT: UNPACKING A PACKED CONCEPT**

Before an attempt to establish the extent to which the MDGs have been achieved in Zimbabwe since 2000, it is important to define the term 'development' and to outline the MDGs. Generally, 'development' describes the growth of humans throughout their lifespan, from conception to death. According to Van Wagner Kendra (2009), the scientific study of human development seeks to understand and explain how and why people change throughout life and this includes all aspects of human growth, including physical, emotional, intellectual, social, perceptual, and personality development. Development for

Wagner Kendra (2009) does not just involve the biological and physical aspects of growth, but also its cognitive, ethical and social aspects.

The authors of this article are aware that there is no unanimity over the meaning of ‘development.’ However, in this article it is argued that development represents human growth in all aspects of life. ‘Development’ is considered to be the process in which human beings experience abundant life and have their liberties upheld. The authors of this article contend that, ‘development’ suggests that citizens are meeting their basic needs (food, clothing and shelter) as well as their higher needs (emotional, aesthetic and intellectual). Although indices of development remain contentious, the authors of this article argue that it is possible to identify the absence of development. Where there is no development, there is poverty, oppression and general discontent.

Amrtya Sen (1999) defines development as an integrated process of expansion of substantive human freedoms. Among the most important of these freedoms are freedom from famine and malnutrition, freedom from poverty, access to healthcare, and freedom from premature mortality in addition to political freedom. Economic growth, technological advancement and political change are all to be judged in the light of their contributions to the expansion of these basic freedoms. Since the focus of this article is mainly on the cognitive, ethics and social aspects of development in sub-Saharan Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, especially as these relate to Zimbabwe’s MDGs, the definition of ‘development’ by Sen will be very important. Below, the authors outline the eight MDGs with the main focus being on MDGs 1, 3 and 6 which the Zimbabwe government chose to prioritize on.

### **MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: A BRIEF BACKGROUND**

In September 2000, heads of states and governments met at a millennium summit at the United Nations headquarters in New York (United States of America) riled by global poverty and economic injustice. This summit was very important in that every leader agreed on a common vision for a better future – a world with less poverty, less hunger, equal opportunities for women, better access to education and health services. The vision was captured in eight goals collectively known as the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, and every country, rich and poor, large and small, agreed that by 2015, these noble goals would be achieved in every corner of the globe. The following is an outline of the 8 goals:

- Goal 1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2. To achieve universal primary education
- Goal 3. To promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4. To reduce child mortality
- Goal 5. To improve maternal health
- Goal 6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7. To ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8. To develop a global partnership for development

**Source:** United Nations Statistics Division - Unless otherwise noted, information on this page is accurate as of February 15, 2007

While it is important to discuss all the eight MDGs, the authors of this article will, for reasons of space and time, concentrate on the three that the Zimbabwe government has chosen to prioritize. These are MDGs 1, 3 and 6, namely, 'to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,' 'to promote gender equality and empower women' and 'to combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases.' It is important to note that Zimbabwe has prioritized on these three, but without ignoring the rest. Below, the authors discuss each of these three MDGs with a view to show that without embracing the philosophy of hunhu or ubuntu, it will be difficult to achieve the set targets. It is argued that ten years after these MDGs were agreed on; Zimbabwe is still very far away from achieving these goals. While there is some notable progress in the area of health and gender empowerment as captured in MDGs 3 and 6, much more remains to be done. The reason for this is that those who govern, especially politicians have, since the beginning of the new millennium, been driven by selfish motives to acquire as much wealth as is possible, against the spirit of hunhu or ubuntu which calls for a fair distribution of social and economic advantages or life chances.

### **MDG 1: TO ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY AND HUNGER**

The definition of the term poverty will set the tone for this section. By poverty is meant the condition of not having the means to afford basic human needs such as clean water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing and shelter. This is also referred to as absolute poverty or destitution ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty)). People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in society ([www.combatpoverty.ie/povertyinireland/glossary.htm](http://www.combatpoverty.ie/povertyinireland/glossary.htm)). According to the world bank, poverty is the state of living on less than \$2 a day or a general lack of opportunity and empowerment, and bad quality of life ([www.combatpoverty.ie/povertyinireland/glossary.htm](http://www.combatpoverty.ie/povertyinireland/glossary.htm)).

The last ten years have seen Zimbabwe, which was once considered to be the breadbasket of southern Africa, becoming a basket case. Plummeting health standards caused by a combination of factors such as the brain drain and shortage of foreign currency to procure drugs led to the drastic fall in life expectancy and an increase in infant mortality. The outbreak of cholera in 2008 worsened the situation as it claimed more than four thousand lives. Much work needed to be done and the prevalent rate of HIV and AIDS especially in the first half of the decade in crisis reached alarming levels with 1 in every 4 people having the virus that causes AIDS. These statistics were a smack in the face of goal 1 of the MDGs which was one of the three goals [out of eight] which Zimbabwe had prioritized. It is clear from the above points that by the end of the first five years of the "decade of crisis," the government of Zimbabwe had failed to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

In the education sector, many qualified teachers left the country in search of greener pastures, thereby disrupting learning. The situation was worse especially in rural areas where most teachers were victims of a new wave of political violence which also left many innocent people dead. In 2008, many schools were closed and the majority of children were thrown onto the streets, leading to moral vices such as thuggery, theft and drug abuse. This also fuelled the spread of the HIV pandemic, the effects of which shall be discussed under goal 6. On the economic front, inflation rose to alarming figures and the last recorded figure

was 230 million percent and the Zimbabwe dollar completely lost its value as one would need something like 5000 0000 000 to buy a loaf of bread. Supermarkets were under-stocked because of the shortage of basic commodities such as sugar, mealie meal, bread and cooking oil. This scenario led to the creation of the black or parallel market where these basic commodities were available but had become very expensive. Hunger became the order of the day and it led to the death of many people, especially the poor who could not afford the exorbitant prices of these basic commodities at the parallel market.

Poverty and hunger became difficult to contain, driving many people out of the country to South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia and other neighbouring countries (Crush & Tevera 2010). As inflation continued to gallop, political violence also increased as politicians fought each other for political space and the situation became uncontrollable in the run up to the June 27, 2008 run-off election which became a sham as one of the contestants withdrew from the race citing violence and intimidation of his supporters (see Chitando & Togarasei 2010).

### **MDG 3: TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN**

Many women-based organizations such as Msasa project, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) and the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Women's Rights (ZLWR) have been instrumental in championing the cause of women in Zimbabwe since the beginning of the new millennium. The emergence of these organizations is a result of the increasing wave of women rights violations in the home as well as in the public sphere. On the home front, many women have become victims of domestic violence as a result of male chauvinism and this has led to the break-up of many families, thereby throwing many children into destitution. In the public sphere, especially at the work place, women's rights have been violated through a protracted wave of sexual harassment which has also led to the break-up of many families and an increase in the incidence of HIV. Women at the work place have been sexually victimized for, among other things, failing to meet the sexual desires of their male counterparts, particularly in situations where their male counterparts occupy privileged positions.

There have also been reported cases of rape in both the private and public spaces with women being the main victims and men being the main culprits. These gross women rights violations, have forced women-based organizations such as those mentioned above to complain and lobby for the emancipation of women and the need to promote gender equality. This article therefore underscores the need to consider the role those women organizations have played in fighting for gender equity in both the homes and the public sphere in Zimbabwe and the urgency with which this issue has been dealt with by politicians and other influential members of society such as academics and gender activists. The promotion of gender equity and women empowerment has actually been set as one of Zimbabwe's key priority areas. For instance, in the political sphere, a good number of women have occupied influential positions in government since 2000. Rudo Gaidzanwa (2004) puts this into perspective when she argues that, "the 2000 parliamentary elections saw the highest number of women candidates contesting an election in Zimbabwe's history. 55 women candidates from 5 political parties competed for 120 seats in the national legislature. Of the 55 candidates, however, only 14 (25%) were elected." For Gaidzanwa, this figure represents 9.3% of the total 150 parliamentary seats, fewer than those secured by women after the 1995 election when 22% of the parliamentary seats were held by women (2004:20).

Elsewhere Mangena (2009: 22) argues that while the inclusive government of Zimbabwe has taken some positive steps towards empowering women by giving them key positions in government, this number is still far below 50% which is the index that can probably be used to see if men are prepared to share power equally with women. Nevertheless, there is some progress as compared to the situation at independence (Mangena, 2009: 22). But surely having less than 50% of women in government is a sign that women are still be emancipated from the yoke of patriarchy and that goal number 3 of the MDGs is still to be achieved.

#### **MDG 6: TO COMBAT HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES**

The HIV epidemic has emerged as an urgent development challenge in Zimbabwe and in the region. While Zimbabwe has made remarkable progress in bringing down the rate of new infections (Halperin, et al 2011), a lot more remains to be done. Despite the availability of anti-retroviral therapy, too many people continue to succumb to HIV and to die of AIDS. Efforts to combat malaria and other diseases have been hampered by the poor state of the health delivery system. Massive investment in the health sector is required if this goal is to be met.

Zimbabwe's struggle against HIV, malaria and other diseases confirms the extent to which the different goals are closely intertwined. To respond to HIV, malaria and other diseases (goal 6) implies to simultaneously eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (goal 1) and to promote gender equality and empower women (goal 3). Zimbabwe has not succeeded in meeting these goals because men have not summoned sufficient socio-political and economic energy to address these challenges holistically. There is need for men to admit that the fight against HIV, malaria and other diseases requires a collective effort where both men and women play an important role instead of the former feminizing the disease. Thus, men should not blame women for the spread of the epidemic since both men and women are culpable. In fact research has shown that men's machoistic attitude contributes more to the spread of HIV than women's actions. Chitando puts it thus:

The notion of a man as a sexual predator has had disastrous consequences... Cultural factors have led many men to regard themselves as having uncontrollable sexual urges and many men have multiple sexual partners. Men in the military, truck drivers and those in activities that perpetuate specific notions of masculinity have often engaged in risky sexual behaviours. The pre-occupation with virility has led many older men to court younger women... Masculinities are also responsible for the definition of sex as penetration by the male organ. Other possible definitions such as the traditional Swazi prescription that a boy could make love to his fiancée between her thighs while avoiding penetration have been replaced (Chitando 2008, Kasenene 1998).

Michael Kelly (2010), a Jesuit priest based in Zambia who has spent over 30 years in the struggle against HIV and AIDS, observes that there are many factors that have led to the “feminization” of the epidemic. The gendered aspects of almost every one of these factors implies denial in practice of the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” They degrade women, expressing their subordination to men. Instead of making women’s essential equality with men a lived reality, they deny it by proclaiming that women are inferior to men in the practical situations of life. And as they do so, they reduce women’s ability to avoid the risk of becoming infected with HIV and block their access to testing and treatment services (Kelly 2010). This chauvinistic attitude makes it impossible for the MDGs to be achieved by the set date since women are important partners when it comes to the fight against HIV and AIDS and social development in general. In fact, women contribute more than men do when it comes to social development since they are the ones who have the burden to socialize children when their husbands are at work. They ensure that children are well fed, clothed and their health is well catered for. They also ensure that children receive quality education. Men are always away and when they come back, they have no time with the children as work sometimes follow them at home.

It is also important to note that although the era of the inclusive government (GNU) has brought up economic stability, taming of the hyperinflation and a relative cooling of political temperatures, numerous challenges remain. First, the dollarization of the economy has left the rural and urban poor more vulnerable. Accessing the US dollar remains an absolute nightmare for the majority. Despite the semblance of normalcy, the humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe remains quite dire. Many families are struggling to find food, clothing and shelter. These are challenges women have to face because of their place in a patriarchal set up.

Second, the unemployment situation remains desperate. Zimbabwe’s plunge (Bond & Manyanya 2002) has left too many of its educated young people without jobs. University graduates have had to live with the frustration of not being gainfully employed, with many joining the exodus. Third, the uncertainty surrounding the fate of the inclusive government does not generate optimism. As it is, individuals, institutions and communities remain wary of the future. Uncertainty is an enemy of investment. This has left the country in a state of virtual paralysis as it is almost impossible to make long-term plans in uncertain contexts (Chitando 2009). Fourth, there has been very little investment in the healing and reconciliation initiatives, despite the presence of the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration in the Office of the President and Cabinet. This is grossly unfortunate as there can be no meaningful development when the nation stands (or falls!) divided. As David Kaulemu (2010: 48) argues, there is need to transcend the preoccupation with preserving political power and invest in amicable relationships in society.

Given these challenges and hurdles, what can Zimbabwe do to achieve the MDGs? What is the role of hunhu or ubuntu in mobilizing individuals, communities and the nation to overcome the stumbling blocks and ensure that Zimbabweans prosper? How can an indigenous philosophy guide a post-colonial nation-state as it seeks to take its rightful place amongst the community of nations? The following section grapples with these questions. The central argument is that hunhu or ubuntu has the potential to assist Zimbabwe to meet its MDGs, if not in 2015 but at least within the shortest possible time.



## **HNHU OR UBUNTU: A PREREQUISITE FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MDGS IN ZIMBABWE**

In the foregoing section, the authors outlined the extent to which Zimbabwe has sought to meet the selected MDGs. While some progress has been made, the overall verdict is that the country still has a long way to go. Too many Zimbabweans remain enmeshed in poverty. Gender inequality remains an issue of concern, while the HIV epidemic remains a threat to human development. The political climate has been marked by the absence of a shared national vision, thereby crippling collective action. It is the contention of this article that adopting and employing hunhu or ubuntu would go a long way in addressing the challenges facing the nation and contribute towards the attainment of the MDGs. The authors of this article share this insight with Mandivamba Rukuni who writes:

Unhu-Ubuntu-Botho comprises several pathways as a way of life, while at the same time developing strong families, communities and therefore strong, modern Afrikan nations. These age-old pathways have been developed to empower the individual, so that every single Afrikan man and woman has the ability to carry the responsibility for his or her life, family and community and the power to help chart the way of the continent of Afrika into the future (Rukuni 2007: 72).

The authors of this article are persuaded that hunhu or ubuntu, being an indigenous philosophy that promotes communal harmony and well-being, is strategic for the attainment of the MDGs in Zimbabwe. In the following sections, various ways in which the concept of hunhu or ubuntu can galvanize the nation in its quest to meet the MDGs are explored.

### **HUNHU/UBUNTU AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

Politicians who are charged with policy implementation tend to be motivated by selfish motives. Hunhu or ubuntu plays a major role in reminding leaders that they are there primarily to serve their fellow human beings and not to enrich themselves. Leaders who embrace hunhu or ubuntu know that they may not flaunt wealth when the majority of the citizens are struggling to have only a meal a day. Leaders who have imbibed the tenets of hunhu or ubuntu cannot sleep well when the majority of their citizens are living below the poverty datum line. Hunhu or ubuntu therefore acts as a political ideology that guides leaders to serve their citizens rather than to enjoy being hero-worshipped. At any rate, hunhu or ubuntu itself implies that the leader cannot exist on his/her own, but only among fellow citizens.

Hunhu or ubuntu serves to remind Zimbabwe's political leaders and technocrats that policies are only meaningful when they enhance the well-being of the majority. Servant leaders are individuals who know that they are there to serve, and not to be served. They invest their mental and physical energies in promoting economic growth. They go all out to ensure that their compatriots overcome poverty and enjoy prosperity. Servant leaders promote unity. Thus:

Within the context of ubuntu, people are family. They are expected to be in solidarity with one another especially during times of duress when the need for ubuntu becomes more acute. Persons in need should be able to count the support of those around them. And when some are in need others must play their part in contributing to their good and that of society. Individuals manifesting qualities of individualism and selfishness, or lack of caring, do not

escape scrutiny. Such individuals are described as akanabuntu (lacking ubuntu) or akangomntu, ha se motho (not a person, not human). These are statements or observations made in judgment. Although this is seen as ‘de-recognition’ of another person’s humanity, it is a way of expressing displeasure at bad behaviour or practice (Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009: 71).

Thus, hunhu or ubuntu help leaders to appreciate the need for solidarity with the most vulnerable members of the community. Leaders with hunhu or ubuntu are aware of their obligations towards the poor. They do not buy the latest models of expensive cars when their fellow citizens are wallowing in abject poverty. They ensure that proceeds from national resources are channeled towards meeting the needs of socially disadvantaged members of the community. Leaders with hunhu or ubuntu are willing to forgo the trappings of power and focus on the things that really matter: serving the poorest of the poor. The authors of this article are confident that servant leaders who embrace hunhu or ubuntu are a powerful resource to the quest to meet Zimbabwe’s MDGs target. Such leaders do not allow power to cloud their vision of the common good. They do not become disconnected from their fellow citizens and strive to eliminate poverty. They are informed by indigenous values and norms. They shun projects that are bent on enhancing status but have no practical significance to the majority of citizens. They continue to embrace indigenous values in their policy formulation and implementation. Thus:

The traditional African approach regards the group as more important than the individual and whatever has an effect on the individual also affects the group (the ubuntu principle). This custom fosters a joint consciousness, emotional dependence, collective identity and group solidarity and describes the behaviour of one human being towards another. The concept of ubuntu emphasizes supportiveness, cooperation and communalism...In the context of the ubuntu-oriented team leader, the concept promotes inclusive administration and development, racial unity and trust, cooperation, democracy, and the application of the Rule of Law. The main standards are honesty, responsiveness, efficiency, effectiveness, competence, adherence to democratic procedure and social equity (Lues 2009: 241).

## **HUNHU/UBUNTU AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF GENDER RELATIONS**

For Zimbabwe to achieve the MDGs there must be a concerted effort to transform the existing gender relations in society. Where women’s potential is continually undermined, there can be no meaningful development. It is not possible to meet the MDGs without enabling women to make their contribution. As noted above, the full emancipation of women is a prerequisite to the attainment of the MDGs in Zimbabwe (as indeed everywhere else!). Unfortunately, there has been a worrisome tendency amongst many technocrats to limit gender to “women’s issues.” This is unfortunate as gender is at the very heart of development discourses. We cannot talk about any “development” if women remain poor and marginalized. It is the contention of this article that hunhu or ubuntu can play an important role in ensuring that women’s abilities and needs are taken on board as the country strives to meet the MDGs.

Whereas a lot of focus has been on women, the authors of this article reckon that hunhu or ubuntu equally challenges men to transform their masculinities in the quest for development. Hunhu or ubuntu questions men’s life-styles, expensive tastes, militancy, multiple concurrent sexual partnering and other troublesome aspects of masculinity. Men must be challenged to

give up dangerous ways of being human, in line with the demands of hunhu or ubuntu. This implies recognizing the humanity of women and giving full attention to their capacities. Unfortunately, Zimbabwe's society remains highly patriarchal (Muchemwa & Muponde 2007). Without a radical transformation of the gender relations, the country cannot hope to attain the MDGs in the shortest period of time. Only when women's rights, dignity and abilities are fully appreciated can the country hope to make rapid progress.

Hunhu or ubuntu, when fully embraced, reminds men of the fact that women and men are created equal. Hunhu or ubuntu upholds the value and dignity of every single human being, male or female. In this connection, discrimination on the basis of gender becomes a violation of hunhu or ubuntu. Zimbabwean men therefore need to outgrow masculinities that are a threat to the well-being of women and children. This need to transform masculinities is particularly urgent in relation to goal 6, namely, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. The authors of this article are convinced that hunhu or ubuntu generates new versions of masculinity. They cite Adrian van Klinken at considerable length below as he offers crucial perspectives on this theme:

In view of the HIV epidemic, this theoretical perspective brings some significant insights. Firstly, it opens up space for active gender politics: what is constructed can also be actively deconstructed and reconstructed. In other words, there is a possibility to realize change among men and to engage in a transformation of masculinities. Indeed, HIV intervention strategies have engaged in this space and seek to work with men, not only with regard to HIV prevention but also in a broader project of a transformation in gender relations. Related to this is the second insight, being the notion of agency of individual men. The idea that masculinity is not a static, monolithic characteristic naturally defining "manhood", but that there are several co-existing and competing masculinities, implies that to a certain extent men do have agency to configure and reconfigure their identity and performance as men (Van Klinken 2011: 7).

The authors of this article agree with van Klinken's observation and challenge men in Zimbabwe to embrace progressive and life-giving masculinities. These masculinities, informed by hunhu or ubuntu, will ensure that men take women's health and well-being seriously. Such men will appreciate how hunhu or ubuntu promotes women's health and agency (Chirongoma, et al 2009). Instead of being threats to women's health, such men will become strategic partners with women. They will invest heavily in meeting women's reproductive health rights. They will mount programmes that promote women's empowerment in all spheres of life. This will contribute immensely towards the achievement of the MDGs.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article looked at the challenges Zimbabwe is currently facing regarding the realization of the MDGs whose deadline expires in September 2015. In terms of periodization, the authors of this article situated these challenges within what they called the "decade of crisis," that is, the period between 1998 and 2008 when Zimbabwe experienced its worst ever socio-political and economic crisis. The article then identified three indicators that aptly describe these challenges namely: 1. The collapse of social institutions such as education, health and the family 2. Political polarization characterized by violence, hate

speech and media propaganda. 3. The monumental fall of the Zimbabwe dollar which led to galloping inflation, shortage of basic commodities and the emergency of the black market. It was argued in this article that all these challenges were a result of the failure by political leaders to invoke the spirit of hunhu or ubuntu to guide the country out of this messy. Thus, hunhu or ubuntu was considered to be a transformative philosophy that can lead to the promotion of servant leadership, the taming of toxic masculinities and the realization that women were an important factor in the fight against poverty, HIV and AIDS, Malaria and other diseases. Thus, the achievement of Zimbabwe's MDGs rested on the country's ability to summon sufficient socio-political and economic energy to fight polarization which divides people thereby leading to underdevelopment.

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