



ZIMBABWE GENDER COMMISSION STATEMENT ON THE COUNTRY'S 40TH INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS

Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) joins the nation in commemorating its 40th Independence. In commemorating, ZGC notes the milestone that the Government has achieved on gender equality and women empowerment since its independence in 1980. The Commission also notes remaining challenges and lessons learnt to inform future national programmes and policies.

Over the years, in its continued commitment to removal of all forms of gender discrimination in the society, the Government has alluded to several international and regional declarations and conventions. As a way of domesticating these instruments, the Government enacted legislation to promote gender equality. Some of the laws include:

- Equal Pay Regulations 1980
- Legal Age Majority Act (LAMA) 1982
- Labour Relations Act (1984) - revised in 1993
- Matrimonial Causes Act 1987
- The Electoral Act of 1990
- The Administration of Estate Amendment Act of 1997
- Labour Act of 2002
- The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act of 2006,
- Anti-Domestic Violence Act of 2007
- National Gender Policy 2004 – revised in 2017
- Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) Act 2013 (the Constitution that has strong gender equality and women's rights provisions).

In addition, gender has been integrated in acts governing other sectors. The Government also set up gender machinery which include, Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development; Zimbabwe Gender Commission; the Anti-Domestic Violence Council and the Zimbabwe Women's Microfinance Bank, among others. Within other mainstream institutions, gender focal points have also been appointed. These institutions are supported by public funds.

While acknowledging the above landmarks, ZGC however notes remaining challenges regarding gender equality. The overall challenge is that gender equality remains elusive and is likely to stay unattainable. The main reason for the disparities remains the incongruence between the letter and spirit of the legislative framework beginning with the Constitution, and the lived realities of the people of Zimbabwe. While the Constitution, as the supreme law of the land guarantees gender equality and outlaws discrimination, in practice, inequalities prevail across social, political and economic spheres.

While both women and men participated towards the making of the 2013 Constitution resulting in several clauses upholding gender equality and non-discrimination, current efforts to review

the Constitution ignoring the equality clause are a cause for concern. The proposed extension of the parliamentary quota falls far short of the constitutional benchmark of equal representation not only in Parliament but also across all areas. Access to justice remains out of reach for most citizens but particularly women due to the prohibitive costs and arduous processes despite efforts by other stakeholders to provide the services pro bono.

The under representation of women in politics and decision making is not only problematic but also acts as an obstacle to equitable and sustainable development. Since the outcomes of the political party processes determine representation through elections and/or Executive appointments, it is worrying that political parties remain unaccountable to the constitutional tenets.

Gender disparities also prevail in access to economic resources and employment. While most Zimbabweans are now in the informal economy not by choice but due to lack of formal job opportunities, women's specific needs are not prioritised. The experience under COVID-19 lockdown has proved the vulnerability of women and men working in the informal economy, most of whom now face abject poverty.

The gains of post-independence Zimbabwe in education and training that led to high literacy rates have been eroded. Gender disparities now exist in access to education at higher and tertiary level as well as quality of education.

The health sector remains a key challenge in relation to gender issues even outside humanitarian crises. There is need for concerted efforts to ensure that health concerns of men, women, boys and girls are addressed. Maternal and infant mortality, while decreasing, remain unacceptably high.

While a number of positive outcomes have been seen e.g. the enactment of the Anti-Domestic Violence Act, the establishment of the Anti-Domestic Violence Council and a gender sensitive Constitution, the Commission notes with great concern that cases of gender based violence in all its forms continue to escalate. According to the 2015 Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey, 1 in 3 women (35%) aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence. And about 1 in 4 women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. As a nation, we need to find a way to curb GBV. More recently, one of the COVID-19 experiences includes increased reports of domestic violence against spouses and children.

While the media remains the only way to amplify the voices of Zimbabweans, the challenge is that it also is an instrument by others to challenge gender equality. This has been seen in cyber bullying and or negative coverage of gender issues.

Finally, the conservation of environment and natural resource management will remain unattainable as long as the socio-economic needs of citizens of Zimbabwe are not met.

The ideals of the liberation struggle will remain mute without gender equality!

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