



## STATEMENT BY ZGC ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN 2020

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission is one of the five Independent Commission established in terms of Sections 232 (c) and 245 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and operationalized through the Zimbabwe Gender Commission Act (Chapter 10:31), with the overall mandate of promoting, protecting and advancing gender equality as provided for in the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

The world commemorates International Day for Rural Women (IDRW) on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October every year. Today, ZGC joins the world in celebrating numerous achievements that have been registered in changing the lives of rural women and girls. The 2020 edition of the IDRW commemorations is running under the theme, **“Building rural women’s resilience in the wake of COVID-19.”** The thrust of the celebrations this year is to highlight possible ways of improving lives of rural women in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Women and girls continue to carry an unfair burden of socio-cultural, economic and policy failures. While the vulnerability is inherently aggravated for rural women and girls its scale is amplified it becomes unimaginable in a pandemic situation. Hence, the need, on this day, to raise awareness on the practical needs and strategic interests of women living in rural areas as evidence to inform policy and practice reform during and beyond the pandemic.

Right to health care is paramount as access to essential treatment and protective clothing against the highly contagious COVID-19 is an issue of life and death to women in general and those living in rural areas in particular. Access to quality health care such as reproductive health services has become a nightmare during the pandemic. For those women living in remote areas, it has been virtually impossible for them to access such essential health services. COVID-19 has increased the burden of unpaid care on women as people ‘self-quarantine’ at home as social norms allocate such responsibilities to women.

Lack of access to authoritative and timely information is another challenge. Information is power and in this day and age where access to information is techno-centred, rural women are further relegated to the peripheries of the source of power as they have limited access to technology. Development and empowerment models which are primarily techno-powered, are therefore passing-by rural women and girls. If anything, rural women are seriously exposed to misinformation in most cases leading to their exploitation and abuse.

In spite of these multiple challenges facing rural women and girls, it is imperative to highlight the invaluable contribution they are making towards development of their families, communities, nations and globally. Women living in rural areas have and will continue to play a pivotal role in ensuring food security and nutrition for consumption by rural and urban

communities through agricultural production. Rural provide majority labour in all agricultural activities despite the fact that most of them do not own the land on which they toil daily. Various research papers concur that smallholder agriculture, which is mainly done by women living in rural areas, produces nearly 80% of food in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite their immense contribution to the well-being of communities and nations, women living in rural areas remain bound by systemic socio-cultural, religious, economic and political barriers that perpetuate their exploitation. They thus continue to wrestle debilitating poverty and abject squalor.

The Commission thus takes the opportunity of the IDRW commemorations to:

- Call upon Government to uphold section 56 and section 80 of the Constitution on equality and non-discrimination and rights of women respectively to ensure that rural women have equal access to means of production and public infrastructure. Information, health care, water, electricity, food and nutrition, education, land, agricultural inputs, assets and capital are some examples;
- To review the national COVID-19 response informed by experiences and lessons learnt is addressing women and girls' concerns at local and national level;
- Appeal for a multi-sectoral approach to development and empowerment programmes as civil society organisations and development partners work with government to improve the lives of rural women and girls; and
- Encourage rural women and girls themselves to remain resolute in the fight against all these challenges and to continuously demand their rights and privileges.

ZGC appeals, to all Zimbabweans living in rural areas to follow all health and other guidelines to fight against COVID-19.

#staysafe

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