



Report on the 2015 International Women's Day Commemorations

Summary of Events: This Morning Zimbabwe TV Programme - 5 March; Press Statements - 8 March; Radio Public Seminars: 9 - 11 March and Seminar: 13 March 2015

Seminar Venue: Crown Plaza Monomotapa Hotel, Harare



1. Introduction and background

During the first half of March 2015, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) conducted events to commemorate the International Women's Day (IWD) culminating in the hosting of a Stakeholder Seminar on 13 March 2015 in Harare.

International Women's Day also known as the United Nations (UN) Day for Women's Rights and International Peace is commemorated annually on the 8th of March. Since its early conception in the early 1900's, the International Women's Day has assumed a global dimension and has been celebrated by the United Nations (UN) since 1975. The annual commemoration serves to focus attention on the rights of women around the world, and highlights women's issues globally focusing on their achievements.

ZHRC, as a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) with the mandate to promote, protect and enforce human rights and fundamental freedoms (S243 of the Constitution) took an active and visible role in commemorating International Women's. The commemorative events were as follows: a) appearing on this Morning Zimbabwe TV Programme on 5 March; b) Issuing of Press Statements on 8 March; c) Radio Public Seminars from 9 - 11 March and d) Stakeholder Seminar on 13 March 2015. The commemorative events were a strategic platform for enhancing visibility of ZHRC, in particular, by promoting awareness on the Thematic Working Group (TWG) on Gender Equality and Women's Rights and creating increased awareness of women's rights.

The global theme for 2015, "***Make it Happen***" (***Beijing +20***) encourages more effective action for advancing and recognising women and girls. The United Nations (UN) or international theme is "***Empowering Women, Empowering Humanity: Picture It***". Countries can localise the theme to suit their context. The Zimbabwe theme for this year's commemorations is "***Beijing + 20: The Journey Towards Women Empowerment in Zimbabwe: Successes and Challenges***".

In line with the country theme, the commemorative events created an interactive platform for ZHRC and key stakeholders including the public at large to take stock of the effectiveness of measures adopted to promote rights of women and girls in

Zimbabwe since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), 20 years after and recommend further action needed to achieve gender equality in the political, economic, social spheres.

2. Objectives of the International Human Rights Day Commemorations

1. Raise awareness of the public on the mandate and work of the ZHRC in general and the Thematic Working Group on Gender and Women's Rights in particular;
2. Raise awareness on the importance of International Women's Rights Day and the rights of women; and
3. Facilitate dialogue among key stake holders to come up with practical steps to ensure effective action for advancing and recognising women.

3. Expected outcomes

- a. Increased visibility of the ZHRC as the lead organization in the promotion, protection and enforcement of human Rights and fundamental freedoms;
- b. Increased visibility of the ZHRC Thematic Working Group (TWG) on Gender Equality and Women's Rights;
- c. Increased awareness of International Women's Day and rights of women;
- d. Increased knowledge and adherence to international and regional instruments on protection, promotion and enforcement of women's rights; and
- e. Practical steps to ensure effective action for advancing and recognising women to be taken up by key stakeholders especially highlighting Government achievements and shortcomings.

4. Information, Communication and Education (IEC) Materials

IEC materials produced for the commemorations included a banners and t – shirts while brochures on the mandate of the Commission and simplified booklets on the constitution were distributed.

a) Banners and decor

One large banner branded with the logos of ZHRC and development partners infused with theme of the event and in colours for IWD, which are purple, green, white and gold was produced and displayed in the conference room for the engagement seminar. Some thematic banners inscribed with messages on specific human rights themes were also on displayed.

b) Constitution of Zimbabwe

About three hundred (300) copies of the abridged versions of the Constitution of produced by Zimbabwe in English, Shona and Ndebele were distributed at the engagement seminar venue for human rights education and awareness raising. Brochures on the mandate of the organisation

c) T/Shirts

T shirts produced and distributed for the event, and were worn by some participants at the engagement seminar went a long way to raise visibility for the ZHRC and development partners that funded the commemorative events.



The IWD commemorative t shirts and IEC Material distributed for and during the seminar.

Media Public Seminars and Stakeholder Engagement

Before the seminar an engagement meeting was held with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development. Other meetings planned with UN Women and Women's Coalition did not materialise due to other commitments on the part of those stakeholders. Media programmes were held which contributed to building momentum towards commemoration of the International Women's Day th, raising public awareness of significance of International Women's Day and educating the public on the functions and constitutional mandate of ZHRC.

a) Meeting with the Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development

Prior to the stakeholder engagement seminar, ZHRC held an engagement meeting with the Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, on 24 February 2015. The purpose of the meeting was to formally introduce ZHRC to the Ministry in order to forge a working relationship. The meeting also served as a platform to bring the Ministry on board in planning for the Stakeholder Engagement Seminar in commemoration of the International Women's Day.

a) "Good Morning Zimbabwe"

On 5 March 2015, the ZHRC Chairperson participated on a television programme, '**Good Morning Zimbabwe**' to speak about the significance of International Women's Day. He also took the opportunity to speak about the work and constitutional mandate of ZHRC in protecting, promoting and enforcing human rights and freedoms in Zimbabwe, in the context of International Women's Day.

b) Press Statement

A press statement was published on the 8th of March 2015 in two newspapers namely The Sunday Mail and the Sunday News. The aim of publishing the supplement was to inform and educate the public on the importance and significance of International Women's Day, highlight the local theme for this year's Commemorations, and call for greater action needed to recognise and empower women.

The press statement also publicised the forthcoming live radio programmes and was used as a platform to encourage members of the public to listen and participate in

the radio public seminars. The press statement has since been uploaded on the ZHRC website and is available to the public online.

c) Radio Programmes

Three interactive radio programmes were aired on three radio stations namely Radio Zimbabwe, Star FM Radio and Zi FM Radio on 9, 10 and 11 March respectively. Two Commissioners and four members of the Programmes team participated in the interactive radio programmes as resource persons. The interactive radio programmes focused on the work, functions and mandate of ZHRC, as well as on topical issues impacting gender equality and women's rights in Zimbabwe in relation to the theme for this year's commemorations of the International Women's Day. The three radio programmes enabled the public to either phone in or send messages via the social network platform WhatsApp. The interactive radio programmes facilitated exchange of views with the public on key issues impacting women and helped build momentum for public understanding of the theme for this year's International Women's Day commemorations in the build up to the stakeholder engagement seminar.

Some of the gender issues and concerns the public raised through whatsapp

- How can the Commission assist women whose husbands don't allow them to work? 0779 960442
- I was chased away from my field by my wife because the plot is registered in her name, what can I do? 0773 156 898
- As a woman where can I get capital to start a business? 0738 596 562
- Is a women allowed to have two husbands at a time? 0775 348 545
- What can I do? I was impregnated by a soldier who is refusing responsibility and threatening to shoot me? 0782 648 097
- If women are educated they will not respect their husbands. 078 3359212
- Women are dressing indecently under the cover of human rights, what can we do? 0775802344

- What can we do if a man is sexually abused by a woman 0783 461 338
- What are the boundaries of women's rights in the household? 0777 340973
- What can I do if my husband is refusing to give me a chance to go back to school? 0772 732 577

5. Engagement Seminar Proceedings

a) Participants

The seminar was attended by a total of 80 participants drawn from amongst others, fellow independent Commissions, Government line ministries, Civil Society Organisations, Media and Tertiary institutions and ZHRC secretariat Commissioners. The Guest of Honour for the event was the Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Honourable A. Damasane.

Journalists representing some media houses attended the event. These included The Herald Newspaper, ZBC TV, Zi FM Radio, The Flame Newspaper, The Zimbabwean Newspaper, Harare News and a few freelance journalists.

b) Introductions

Introductions were facilitated by the Master of Ceremonies, Mr E. Mukutiri, The Deputy Executive Secretary for Programmes. There were self - introductions by participants.

c) Welcome Remarks

The Executive Secretary, Ms J.H Charewa gave the welcome remarks to participants at the Seminar. In her remarks she welcomed participants to the event which sought to highlight women's issues globally focusing on their achievements. It was indicated that the Commemorative Engagement Seminar aimed to take stock of the effectiveness of measures adopted to promote rights of women and girls in the country since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and recommend actions to achieve gender equality in all spheres of life.

The Executive Secretary highlighted the other events that ZHRC had undertaken to commemorate IWD as already reported explaining the objectives of

commemorations in general and the seminar in seminar. Participants were encouraged to feel free to contribute actively to the seminar to allow for "cross - fertilisation" of ideas from the Stakeholders.



From Left to right, The ZHRC Executive Secretary, Ms J.H. Charewa delivering the Welcome Remarks and the Chairperson Commissioner E.H.Mugwadi delivering Opening remarks at the seminar

d) Opening Remarks

The Chairperson of ZHRC, Mr E.H. Mugwadi gave the opening remarks to the Seminar. He first talked about the establishment and mandate of the Commission as outlined in Sections 232, 242 and 243 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

He highlighted the Commission's 3 technical departments which are Complaints Handling and Investigations, Monitoring and Investigations and Education, Promotion and Research. It was indicated that these departments are responsible for executing the mandate of the Commission.

He noted that since the Beijing Conference (1995), the Government had ratified instruments that promote Gender Equality and Women's Rights at International,

regional and sub-regional levels. These include the African Gender Parity Principle of July 2002 followed by the Protocol on the African Charter on Human and People's Rights as well as the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) of July 2004 and the Southern African Development (SADC) Gender and Development Protocol of 2008. All the above instruments aim to promote 50-50% parity principle between women and men in both public and private life.

He talked on the multiplier effects that accrue to humanity from empowering women in line with the international theme for the commemorations. He concluded by calling upon the Government to expedite the process of domesticating and implementing various human rights instruments as well as the alignment of laws to the new Constitution. The Chairperson also acknowledged that addressing the 12 critical areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action required priority attention by all stakeholders.

e) Keynote address

The Keynote address was delivered by the Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development Hon A. Damasane.

The speech noted the objectives for IWD ranging from general celebration of respect and appreciation for women to a celebration of women's economic, social, political and cultural achievements as well as challenges they grapple with every day. The address made reference to the 12 critical areas of concern outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action which is a source of inspiration and guidance to Government. The areas are;

- Women and the environment
- Women in power and decision making
- The girl child
- Women and the economy
- Women and poverty
- Violence against women
- Human rights of women
- Education and training of women
- Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
- Women and health
- Women and the media
- Women and armed conflict

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The Deputy Minister applauded the government for progressively taking steps towards addressing these areas of concern noting that the 2015 commemorations came at a time when the country is in the process of aligning laws to the new people driven constitution that is alive to gender equality issues. She revealed that her Ministry was in the process of finalizing the second National Gender Policy (2013-2017) whose vision is to build a gender just society in which women and men enjoy equality and equity and participate as equal partners in the country's development.

The Minister highlighted that gender is mainstreamed in the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Agenda for Sustainable Transformation (ZIMASSET) has four pillars: a) Social Services and Poverty eradication cluster; b) Food Security and Nutrition Cluster; c) Infrastructure and Utilities Cluster and d) Value addition and Beneficiation Cluster

The Guest of Honour concluded her address by urging ZHRC to double its resource mobilization efforts in order to operationalize the Gender Equality and Women's Rights Thematic Working Group.



From left to right, Deputy Minister of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development Honorable A. Damasane, delivering the Keynote Address and Poet Gift Chihota presenting his piece

f) Edutainment

Edutainment at the seminar was provided by a poet, Gift Chiota who recited 3 poems in between the speeches. The poems highlighted various issues affecting women in society as well as their aspirations.

g) Presentations by Panelists

Four (4) Panellists drawn from Government (from Ministries of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development and Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs) and Civil Society (Padare Men's Forum on Gender and Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU) delivered presentations on the specific thematic topics. Two Commissioners in charge of the ZHRC Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Women's Rights guided the plenary discussions (as Moderators). The discussions then fed into recommendations for actions needed to advance and recognise women as equal rights holders in Zimbabwe.

The topics that were discussed are the following:

- a) Socio-Economic Rights for Women in Zimbabwe;
- b) Women in Politics and Decision Making in Zimbabwe;
- c) International and Regional Human Rights Instruments in Zimbabwe- Ratification, Domestication and Implementation and
- d) Violence against Women and Girls in Zimbabwe.

The topics were derived from the Beijing Platform for Action's 12 critical areas of concern. After the presentations the audience were given an opportunity to give input on the different topics.

i) Socio-Economic Rights for Women :The State of Women Empowerment in Zimbabwe

The resource person for the topic on Socio – Economic Rights for women was Redah Manga, an Officer with the Ministry of Gender, Women's Affairs and Community Development. She reported that government continues to prioritise women's economic empowerment through a number of initiatives such as the establishment of the Women's Development Fund (WDF) in 2010 which is

administered through the Post Office Savings Bank (POSB). This programme allows women to access funding without the stringent conditions of collateral and the Government through the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development is in the process of setting up the Women's Bank.

She cited the enacted of the Domestic Violence Act (2007), establishment of the Anti-Domestic Violence Council and adoption of the in 2012, the National GBV Strategy as initiatives adopted by the Government to curb violence against women. On the initiatives put in place to address health for women she noted the resuscitation of primary health care facilities in rural areas and low income urban areas and introduction of Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) to those living with HIV as well as the "provider initiated HIV testing and counselling" to ensure that women are aware of their status and therefore make informed choices.

On women and housing she highlighted that government launched the National Housing Delivery Program which has an implementation guide. 30% will be reserved for women headed households provided they can afford to meet the conditions. She noted that the Ministry sits on the National Housing Delivery Program Advisory Committee.

She concluded her presentation by making the following recommendations:

- Civil Society and other stakeholders should accord the same emphasis to women's socio economic rights as they do to civic and political rights.
- There should be a paradigm shift from Official Development Aid Agencies and development partners to put funding towards actual projects for women's economic empowerment.
- An increase in the in the budget allocated to the Ministry.

h) Women in Politics and Decision Making in Zimbabwe

The presenter of the session was Ms S. Bhala from the Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU). Her paper first focused on the contextual environment for women in politics and decision making in Zimbabwe. She noted that Zimbabwe was

commemorating the IWD 2015 after; the inception of new electoral reforms that include a quota system in the legislature; adoption of a new Constitution in 2013 and finalisation stages of the National Gender Policy (2013-2017). She also took note of the historical context saying the struggle for equality among sexes has been long and winding and seeks to address the socio cultural norms prevailing; the liberation of the country in 1980 addressed racial imbalances leaving women with the struggle to address imbalances of the sexes; and women responded by engaging in robust efforts designed to influence law and policy which led to a raft of laws and reforms being introduced to address the second class status of women created by the Colonial Regime.

She observed that currently Zimbabwe has 34% women in Parliament. The number can be largely attributed to the quota system provided for in the Constitution- Sections 120(2) (a) and 124(1)(b) in line with Section 17 of the Constitution. Statistics indicate that the country is far off the 50% mark women representation stipulated in the SADC protocol on Gender and Development and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women.

She ended her presentation by making the following recommendations:

- Independent Commissions, such as the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and the incoming Zimbabwe Gender Commission have a key role to play in addressing the underlying causes of inequalities in the political playing field.
- Political will is instrumental in ensuring that Constitutional provisions are translated into reality.

i) International and Regional Human Rights Instruments in Zimbabwe - Ratification, Domestication and Implementation

The presenter for this session was Mrs. M. Msika. She started her presentation by differentiating the two types of theories of the relationship between international law and national law namely monism and the dualism theories. She noted that under

monism the act of ratifying the international law or treaty automatically incorporates that treaty into national law and International law or treaty can be directly applied by the courts, and can be invoked by citizens just as if it were national law. She said Zimbabwe subscribes to dualism which emphasizes the difference between national and international law, and requires the translation of the latter into the former. If a State accepts a treaty but does not adapt its national law in order to conform to the treaty or does not create a national law explicitly incorporating the treaty, that treaty has not become part of its national law.

Section 327(2) of the Constitution states that “An international treaty which has been concluded or executed by the President or under the President’s authority, (a) does not bind Zimbabwe until it has been approved by Parliament; and (b) does not form part of the law of Zimbabwe unless it has been incorporated into the law through an Act of Parliament. She explained steps involved in ratification and domestication noting that the Constitution states that ratification and domestication may be dispensed with if an Act of Parliament provides that Section 327 (2) does not apply to any particular international treaty or to any class of such treaties or it may apply with modifications in relation to any particular international treaty or agreement or to any class of such treaties or agreements. Furthermore, Parliament may by resolution declare that any particular international treaty or class of international treaties does not require approval under section 327(2) but this will not apply if the treaty’s operation or application requires the withdrawal or appropriation of funds from the Consolidated Revenue Fund or any modification of the law of Zimbabwe.

She observed that Zimbabwe has been slow to domesticate the international agreements that it has acceded to but there are some notable instances where the provisions of international agreements have been given effect to in domestic law. The Constitution of Zimbabwe contains a Declaration of Rights in Chapter 4 which enshrines most of the civil and political rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Another example that can be noted relates to the efforts of Zimbabwe in domesticating the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

She said Government, through the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs commissioned two consultancies with the support of UNDP and UNICEF in 2012 and 2013 respectively. The first consultancy was conducted to review the status of ratification and domestication of human rights instruments in general and the second one focused on human instruments on women and children only. The strategies that were crafted by these consultancies are a good guide for Government in terms of prioritization of domestication. Over and above this, line Ministries are responsible for the implementation of the Treaties which fall under their purview and such Ministries are expected to raise awareness and engage in activities that implement these Treaties. She concluded by saying that the ratification, domestication and implementation of human rights is a process and not an event and therefore these processes are ongoing.

j) Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Zimbabwe - Men are part of the solution

The presenter for this session was Mr. Jonah Gokova of Padare. He first presented some of the myths about GBV e.g. that violence is part of our culture and that some women ask for or provoke men to rape, batter or abuse them through their own behaviour. He went on to present the facts about GBV explaining that GBV is a crime that is culturally condoned, but is punishable by law; nobody asks or deserves to be violated and men must take responsibility for their violent actions. He noted some of the factors that make it difficult to measure GBV, for example, privacy and ethics issues, shame associated with GBV, certain forms of gender-based violence are “invisible” in conventional research and policy and unavailability of baseline data to allow measurement. He explained why it is important to focus on men when address GBV. He observed that gender as a determinant of social relations that legitimizes and sustains men’s power over women, is inherently about relations between women and men, as well as relations among groups of women and among groups of men. Achieving gender equality is not possible without changes in

perceptions, among men and among women. He concluded his presentation by looking at **strategies for engaging men and boys to address GBV as follows:**

- Establishment of local level men's chapters (a chapter consist of at least 30 men who gather monthly to dialogue on topical gender related issues affecting their community).
- Adoption of a culturally sensitive community entry strategy through engaging relevant community authorities' i.e. Provincial and District Administrators, chiefs and other key stakeholders.
- Working with local community leadership i.e. chiefs, religious leaders, councillors etc.

k) Action Points and Way forward

- There is need for long term mentorship for women in decision making to ensure that they can clearly articulate issues and are more effective in the execution of their duties. Stakeholders should deliberately target Young Women and mentor them so that they can be groomed to become future leaders.
- There is need to clearly define Minimum Standards of Participation of Women in different spheres such as Politics, Economy etc.
- Continuous investment in sensitisation programs should be made since societal attitudes take time to change. Radio programs were warmly received by the general public. ZHRC should consider the continued use of the radio platforms in its sensitisation efforts to reach out to the people especially radio stations that use the vernacular languages.
- Appropriate socialisation of children is essential since it will determine their behaviour and demeanour in their adulthood.
- ZHRC should strive to have increased participation of various stakeholders in its activities. Such events should be held in an open environment (such as Harare Gardens) and the invitations be extended to the general populace so that the ordinary women in society can take time to reflect on what the day stands for in their lives and their struggle for emancipation.

- There is need to decentralise commemoration of the International Women's Day to the local levels so that the day may have relevance to the ordinary women in the society.
- Stakeholders should advocate for the reintroduction of affirmative action in tertiary institutions to ensure that more women get access to higher levels of education.
- ZHRC must consider introducing initiatives that enhance awareness of its mandate at grassroots level.
- ZHRC should expedite the production of IEC materials on areas such as the Declaration of Rights so that the public have a better appreciation of their rights. Seminar participants kept on requesting for more copies, indicating that the abridged and translated versions were very much in demand amongst the general public. The papers presented can be beefed up to produce information sheets on gender for distribution by the Commission.
- Action points raised during the Seminar should be taken up by the Thematic Working Group on Gender and Women's Rights as well as other stakeholders in order to improve the situation of Women in Society.

l) Closing remarks

Closing remarks were delivered by Commissioner C. Khombe who thanked all participants for making time to attend and participate at the Seminar. He also acknowledged the donor partners Danish Institute of Human Rights (DIHR) and European Union for making the event a success.

m) Challenges

The seminar coincided with the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting in New York from 9 to 20 March 2015. Some of the key gender activists and practitioners invited to the seminar were at this meeting and could not attend the seminar.