PRESENTATION ON GENDER EQUALITY IN ZAMBIA
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GENDER SPECIFIC ISSUES

The Non-Governmental Organizations’ Coordinating Council (NGOCC) was established in 1985 to champion the process of empowering women in Zambia in a concerted manner through addressing gender and development challenges. The organization was born to facilitate networking nationally and internationally for increased impact on its constituency. NGOCC’s membership has grown from the initial 9 in 1985 to 69 in 2005, 83 in 2007 and 109 in 2012. This growth has brought about a special strength to the organization in consolidating the women’s movement in order to build a critical mass of people to instigate progressive changes in society.

During this process of its growth NGOCC notes that over the past 47 years of Zambia’s independence, the movements in economic fortunes and misfortunes of Zambia have impacted differently on women and men. Characterized by normative values that generally undermine the role of women in economic and social development, women have had the worst experiences. The economic deterioration emanating from the liberalization processes and therefore loss of jobs and livelihoods during the 1990s impacted negatively (in the short and long term) on women more than on men. Equally, the new gains in growth trends are bound, structurally, to benefit men more than women unless the women’s movement empowers itself to meet the new challenges.

The approach taken by NGOCC of advocating for issues that affect women and girls in Zambia is due to the vulnerability levels of women in the country. Women in Zambia account for 51% of the total population according to the Central Statistics office 2010 census report. However women in Zambia are more vulnerable as they are the worst hit by poverty, HIV and AIDS, illiteracy levels which are high amongst women. NGOCC also facilitates capacity building of member organizations through trainings. In addition, NGOCC works with the government by information sharing through making submissions to parliament on various polices and legislature that affect women and girls in Zambia.

NGOCC’s work in Zambia is guided by the three pillars of equality, peace and development with regards to improving the status of women politically, socially, culturally and economically. This is done through lobbying various stake holders such as the government, parliamentarians, local government, civil society, religious groups such as churches, communities and the private sector.

The overall existing reality reveals the following inequities and inequalities within the Zambian society, which no doubt will require to be addressed.

a). Women constitute 52% of the country’s population but at the same time face severe difficulties in fully participating in various local and national
development processes and programs. It is still evident that society still has a bias towards the male gender who continue to disproportionately access various services and benefits. Efforts to change the status of women in Zambia have continued to be frustrated by a number of legal impediments, inadequate political will, inadequate resources etc. The net result is that women continue to bear the harshest brunt of poverty, HIV/AIDS, and a general decline in the standards of living.

b). Women continue to be marginally represented at all levels of decision making. Out of the 150 parliamentary seats contested, only 18 seats (11 percent) have gone to women. This is a sad decrease from the previous 14 percent of seats held by women. The small number of women candidates was a disappointment to observers who were hopeful that the 2011 tripartite elections would re-define Zambia's male dominated electoral landscape. This of course is well below the SADC target of 50%.

c). Feminization of poverty remains the broad characteristic of Zambian poverty profile. Women in Zambia continue to face severe consequences from the high poverty levels currently being experienced in the country. Statistics show that of the 68% poverty levels, 80% of these are women and children. The situation of socio-economic inequalities affecting rural populations especially Female Headed Households remains a challenge.

d). The incidence and prevalence of HIV/AIDS continues to affect women more than men. It is evident that women take on more of the burden of care; and their poor socio-economic status does not help matters. Of the current 14% prevalence rates, the majority cases are women who at the same time are the least in accessing ART. In the same vein girls in the age group 15-29 are more vulnerable to contracting HIV/AIDS than their male counterparts.

e). Gender Based Violence has continued to increase and has been a source of great concern for everyone. A positive step has been taken with regard to the enactment of the Anti-GBV legislation to deal with this problem but there remains a deepening need for advocacy towards sensitization of the general public and especially leaders at the community and national level on the evils of gender based violence.

f). The low socio-economic status of women has been identified as one of the major hindrances to women’s participation in decision-making. It has been argued that due to discriminatory practices in access to education and training, women are both less educated and skilled. As such, women’s employment opportunities and chances to earn cash incomes have tremendously been compromised. In particular, women’s inadequate skills inhibit them from occupying high positions in the formal sector, which would easily influence the course of their lives. Supporting women to strengthen their entrepreneurial skills could go a long way in redressing this reality.
g). Women’s legal rights continue to be undermined by the existence and recognition of both Customary and Statutory Laws. While the existing constitution purports to protect citizens from discrimination on grounds of sex and marital status, it includes a clause in Article 23 which exempts all forms of discrimination arising from customary, family and personal law. The Review process of the Republican Constitution, which has implications for the status of women in Zambia has been ongoing for some time now. There is an obvious need for expanding the Bill of Rights so that women’s rights are included and protected.

This is in spite of government ratifying and acceding to a number of human rights and women’s rights instruments at the global and regional levels such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women; International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights; Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), SADC Protocol on Gender and Development; and Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children, among others.

It remains the role of the civil society organizations (CSOs) and especially that of NGOCC with the support and commitment of government and other stakeholder to mobilize the women movement to find ways of addressing the gaps in action towards women empowerment and gender equity and equality.

**OUR EXPECTATIONS**

- We would like to call on the Government to show more commitment towards the constitution-making process by ensuring the guaranteeing and protection of women’s rights and economic, cultural and social rights in the Bill of Rights in the constitution. In addition there must already be a Referendum Commission to start preparatory work as the draft Constitution is being finalised.

- Government has progressively committed itself to domesticating all signed and ratified regional and international conventions on women’s rights - this is one of our greatest expectations in the immediate. This will go a long way in addressing challenges of women’s participation in decision making positions especially targeting strategic appointments and nominations of more women.
There is need for visible and practical commitment by top leadership in the fight against GBV. Women and children are no longer safe in their homes, communities and indeed in the public domain.

NGOCC has over the recent years been instrumental in advocating for the repeal of the NGO Act which has been put in place by government. This law is retrogressive and will work to jeopardize development work to a great extent. In addition there is a serious departure from the human rights and freedom of association and expression principle as enshrined in the constitution. This process is a matter of urgency and calls for honest engagement and cooperation.

NGOCC also expects serious and urgent focus on redressing the high maternal mortality rates through adequate investment and resource allocation to the health sector, especially targeting maternal infrastructure, human capital and all other essential medical facilities. More attention is needed on directing adequate resources to the care giving role of women in Home Based Care and Hospices as part of improving women’s participation in development programmes.

It is also our expectation that government should visibly and practically demonstrate its commitment towards the reform process of all public accountability structures, systems and processes to convincingly deal with corrupt tendencies and practices by those in public office.

It is also NGOCC’s expectation that workable economic empowerment and entrepreneurship programmes should be put in motion to address women’s low socio-economic status. This should be coupled with practical steps towards job creation especially in those sectors that have a multiplier effect on women.

In conclusion it is our sincere hope that the above will receive attention from all well meaning citizens and that government will take leadership in ensuring that real partnership exist in advancing the status of women.