

Gender Support Programme Launched in Zimbabwe

Harare 17 June 2009 – ‘*Women constitute 52% of the Zimbabwe’s population; women are the backbone of the family; women are the majority of small scale farmers that produce the most food in Zimbabwe; women are the custodians of culture and women are the majority of voters... how come women are the least represented in all the decision-making bodies in the country?*’ Honorable Thokozani Khupe, Deputy Prime Minister in the Zimbabwe Unity Government was speaking whilst officially launching the over US\$3 million Gender Support Programme (GSP) in Harare, Zimbabwe. Hon. Khupe outlined women’s contribution to society that went unnoticed yet they constituted 52% of the population. She alluded to the low representation of women in the government cabinet and lambasted the insistence on lack of quality women as an excuse for excluding women in decision-making positions. In the current government cabinet, there are only 7 women out of 33 ministers. Hon. Khupe emphasized that *‘It is high time women’s contribution in socio-economic and political realms be recognized’*.



Above: Hon. Deputy Prime Minister T. Khupe
officially launching the Gender Support Programme

The GSP is a fund that aims to enhance gender equality and equity in Zimbabwe. The fund has been made possible by EC and DFID. Through a competitive selection process, the fund will support Women’s Coalition of Zimbabwe membership, registered non-governmental, community and faith-based organizations working in the gender and women’s empowerment arena. The areas of intervention were agreed upon through a nation—wide consultation process that was funded by DFID. The consultations were part of an Inception Phase that realized the development of a strategy and action plan as well as a working structure for the gender equality and women’s empowerment sector in Zimbabwe.

While the Fund will engage with the women’s movement particularly the Women’s Coalition of Zimbabwe, it will work with a wider array and network of partners in the area of gender and women’s rights. The GSP is also poised to support creative organizing at community level and build the capacity of these organizations to be viable and strong entities in their own right.

The GSP is rooted in MDG 3 which is one of the three focal priorities of the Government of Zimbabwe. Mr Udo Etukudo, an MDG specialist and



Above : Mr Udo Etukudo MDG Specialist and Economist with UNDP, presenting an analysis on *‘The cost of not investing in Gender Equality in Zimbabwe*

economist with UNDP Zimbabwe in his presentation provided empirical evidence on *'The cost of not investing in Gender Equality in Zimbabwe'*. His presentation set the tone of how timely and imperative it was for the GSP fund to be commissioned. His presentation concluded that:

- Gender is important as an economic issue as well as a human rights issue.
- Gender is important because of the interactions between inequalities on the one hand, and the dynamics of economic growth on the other.
- Gender equality is important in the reduction of not only women and girls' poverty, but also of men and boys.

Speaking at the launch, UNIFEM's Regional Director for Southern Africa, Ms Nomcebo Manzini acknowledged and praised the two donors funding the GSP, European Commission (EC) and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) for believing in UNIFEM as GSP's fund managers and wishing to see innovative and cutting edge programming that transforms gender relations in Zimbabwe. She encouraged more donor partners to support this innovative and catalytic



Above: Ms Nomcebo Manzini, UNIFEM's Southern Africa Regional Director making the opening remarks.

programme and join the Fund. *'UNIFEM is pleased and proud to be part of this partnership as it will contribute substantively and concretely to the work of gender equality and women's empowerment in Zimbabwe. It will contribute to the actual implementation of women's rights key pieces of legislation and policy frameworks that ensures services are delivered where they are most needed,'* she added.



Above: Ms Rutendo Hadebe, Board member of the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe giving remarks on 'Zimbabwe's women in transition.'

Ms Rutendo Hadebe, Board member of the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe pointed out that the gender and women's empowerment was typically low funded which incapacitated it to be effective in addressing gender inequalities in Zimbabwe. She reiterated that this fund enabled the women's movement to lobby and advocate for reconstruction in health, education and security sectors particularly in redressing impunities and pursuing crimes committed against women and girls such as politically motivated rape. Ms Hadebe concluded by acclaiming that *'The inauguration of this Fund to us as the Women's Coalition is history and a milestone. Change has come to Zimbabwe. Supporting women is the difference that Zimbabwe needs to turn*

around the decades of political and human rights violations.'

Women's economic empowerment is a critical element of the GSP. In line with this thematic area, Mr Phillip Chiyangwa, a founding member and first chairperson of the Affirmative Action Group of Zimbabwe and a leading industrialist in Zimbabwe said that while pursuing the current Constitution making process, it is also critical for women to pursue economic empowerment opportunities at a macro level.



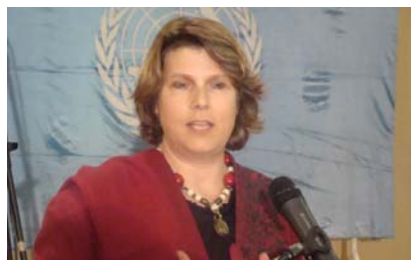
Above: Mr. Phillip Chiyangwa, Native Investments Africa Group, Chairman

'The current socio-political dispensation in Zimbabwe offers a lot of economic opportunities for wealth creation, and it is up to women to aspire to be big and move from informal trading and make strategic choices to approach and learn from people who have made it big in business'. He hoped the Fund would provide an avenue for women's economic empowerment and shift the demographics of women's engagement in big business. Mr Chiyangwa urged women to make



Above: Ms Linda Kalenga- representing the European Commission in Zimbabwe

demands for quotas that would economically empower them during this



Above: Dr Allison Beattie, DFID Head of Office

period of nation building. Representatives from the EC- Ms Linda Kalenga and DFID-Dr Beattie reiterated their support to UNIFEM through the GSP and hoped that the fund would help build a stronger gender sector that would advocate for change on critical issues in Zimbabwe.

Finally, the Minister of Women Affairs and Community Development, Dr Olivia Muchena in the closing remarks commended the fund and pledged the Ministry's continued support to gender initiatives through its coordinating role and structures that permeated to the grassroots.



Above: Hon. Olivia Muchena, Minister of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development making the closing remarks

The guests at the launch included Ambassadors, Government Ministers, Parliamentarians, Senators, UN Heads of Agencies, Women's Coalition members, Gender Forum members, and representatives from the civil society community, private sector and partners from five provinces of Zimbabwe.

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