

Opening Speech

Permanent Secretary of the Minister of Gender
Her Excellency Zimbabwean Ambassador to Zambia
Government Representatives present
Civil Societies present
Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to invite you to our Pre-CSW63 Regional Civil Society Strategy Meeting under the theme Amplifying the Voices of Women in the Informal Sector on Social Protection. The objective of this meeting is to develop a common advocacy position and policy recommendations with key messages that will be used to lobby governments prior to and during CSW63.

The concept for this meeting is being drawn on the basis of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women's focus on the priority theme: "Social Protection Systems, Access to Public Services and Sustainable Infrastructure for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls" and the review theme: "Women's Empowerment and the Link to Sustainable Development", which will be under discussion during the annual world conference to be held from 11th March to 22nd March 2019 in New York at the United Nations Headquarters. CUTS and NGOCC wish to use this platform to amplify the voices of women in the Southern African region on social protection.

In collaboration with women's organizations in the region, CUTS and NGOCC have been working with five partners in Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe on women's access to existing social protection measures and highlight the gaps in the provision of social protection in each country, particularly in meeting the needs of women in the informal sector. To this end we have been working on briefs that will provide recommendations which will be shared during a Side Event to be facilitated on the sidelines of the 63rd CSW in New York.

The participation of members from NGOCC and CUTS at the 63rd CSW is primarily to continue being relevant in the CSO sector in lobbying and advocating for women's empowerment at both regional and global level.

We believe that specific country policies and practices focused on improving women's access to quality and equitable social protection services will, by and large, reduce gender inequalities and promote women's empowerment. In addition, ensuring equitable access to public social services are a pre-requisite in fostering broader participation by women and girls to end their marginalisation and subsequently enhancing community and national sustainable development.

The two themes of the 2019 UN Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) provide an opportunity for both civil society and government to show case their concerted efforts towards combatting gender inequality and promoting women's empowerment through practical and sustainable social protection systems.

In Southern Africa the informal sector is a key component of each country's economy. It comprises mostly of workers who are self-employed or who work for those who are self-employed. Given the

nature of poverty in Southern Africa, the informal sector is dominated by women. Many women working in the informal sector therefore do their business in unprotected and unsecured places and thus are exposed to many risks. In spite of this vulnerability, these women lack access to policies and programs designed to reduce their vulnerability.

When formal social security was introduced in Southern Africa, it was assumed that its coverage would eventually expand to cover everyone as countries developed and their economies grew. Policy makers assumed that as this coverage expanded, informal coping strategies would eventually fall away. Unfortunately, these assumptions proved to be incorrect as today, the majority of people in Southern Africa remain unprotected and vulnerable to risk. Those excluded from the scope of formal social security are often the most vulnerable and economically marginalized therefore informal social security remains the only source of social security for them.

Today, social security systems in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region are largely targeted towards workers in the formal sector. This is a concern as a vast majority of workers in the region are located in the informal economy. Further to this, a large proportion of the region's population live in rural areas where they are largely dependent on subsistence agriculture and are therefore unable to participate in formal social security schemes. Those who are consequently excluded from the scope of formal social security are often the poorest of the poor. The feminization of poverty, combined with discrimination by gender, age, ethnicity or disability, also means that the most vulnerable and marginalized groups tend to end up in the informal economy and this is especially the case for women and young people, who have no other choice than the informal economy for their survival and livelihood.

Further, gender inequality is more prevalent in the informal economy, where women are concentrated in lower quality jobs. In this sector, women make a sizeable contribution to GDP, either as independent entrepreneurs or in employment relationships in global production chains or small businesses. There is therefore a need to develop positive strategies to combat all forms of discrimination, to which informal economy workers are particularly vulnerable. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the informal sector, it is difficult for the actors in this sector to come together and discuss and receive information on policies and programs designed to reduce their vulnerability on their legal rights, educational and advocacy projects, legal aid, medical insurance, credit and loan schemes and the establishment of cooperatives.