



**WEEKEND RAEDER - WEEK ENDING 13 DECEMBER 2019**



**Women speak on the Women Development Fund**

Gender equality and economic empowerment of women are critical components of sustainable and inclusive development as well as addressing cases of gender-based violence. This is in line with Sustainable Development Goal number 5 on gender equality. The United Nations Development Fund for Women established in 1976 took cognizant of the need to empower women through financial and technical assistance in critical areas which advance gender equality and promote economic independence of women.

Government initiatives such as

gender - responsive budgeting and women development funds are equally critical in promoting women economic empowerment and financial inclusion as it increases women access to economic resources and employment creation for women. While government efforts to promote gender equality and inclusiveness are commendable through the Women Development Fund Initiative, there are loopholes in the process that need to be addressed to ensure that the process leaves no woman behind. It should be taken into cognizance that women are at the epicenter of any country's development.

The gender dimension of poverty focuses on the dilemma of women, their numerous roles and their role in fighting poverty. In many developing countries, women are discriminated in terms of access to means of production, employment opportunities and access to credit

facilities. In Zimbabwe, like in many developing countries, empowering women through micro-credit finance is viewed as a way of empowering them, reducing their vulnerability and poverty as well as improving their well-being especially in rural areas.

The gendered nature of women poverty emanates from the dilemma of women originating from the multiple roles ascribed to them by the society. Women are hardest hit by poverty as they are often excluded in terms of access to financial assistance, employment opportunities as well as decision making positions. Financial inclusion plays an increasingly critical role in development efforts both at national and global level. The Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Prof Mthuli Ncube's initiative of empowering women through the Women Development Fund is a welcome move in

United Nations SDG 5 - Gender Equality Source: IS Global



*Women Small-Holder Farmers from Domboshava*  
*Source: IPS News Agency*

fighting poverty and reducing their vulnerability despite some women feeling that a lot more could be done. During the ZIMCODD facilitated Constituency Indabas held in Mkoba (Gweru) and Mutasa South (Mutare) constituencies, women representatives expressed dismay citing that the government is not doing enough in addressing the needs and interests of women with heightened discussions on the 2020 National Budget as follows;

- The \$ ZWL20 million that was allocated towards Women Development Fund in the 2020 National Budget as announced by the Minister of Finance and Economic Development will not sufficiently meet and sustain the needs of every women taking into consideration that women constitutes more than 55% of the total population, hence the need for revision. Furthermore, there is a need to empower women through complementary initiatives such as a capacity building. Mutasa South Constituency women suggested capacity building on how to utilize sawdust coming from timber in their community to generate energy.

- The same issue was also

raised with regards to the \$ZWL 200 million that was allocated towards providing sanitary wear to girls in rural areas. Mkoba women were of the view that the services should also be extended to school dropouts as well as young girls in peri-urban areas. Mkoba Constituency Member of Parliament, Hon. Chibaya indicated that he will take the issue to parliament and lobby for sanitary wear initiative to be extended to school dropouts as well as girls in the peri-urban as requested.

- Mkoba and Mutasa South women were also concerned with

how the process of the disbursement of the Women Development Fund lacks the basic principles of openness and transparency which are the cornerstones of effective public finance management. They argued that the whole process is partisan where those who are politically connected to high offices are in most cases beneficiaries of such funds leaving behind poor women especially in rural areas.

- Women in Mkoba constituency also noticed the gaps where loans are only disbursed to women who are already running projects leaving out the majority who are poor. There is a need for startup projects for women that generates income at the local level.

The government should, therefore, take a step further in engaging citizens especially women on budget-making processes to ensure that every citizen particularly vulnerable groups are consulted so that the budget is responsive to their needs and developmental aspirations. This is one way to ensure that the social and economic rights of vulnerable groups particularly women and young girls are progressively realized.



*Women Rights Are Human Rights Placard*  
*Source: IS Global*