The new Constitution adopted through a popular referendum in 2013 was a major milestone in the history of Zimbabwe. Zimbabweans from all walks of life participated in translating their individual and collective aspirations into a new Supreme Law of the land. Women, both as individuals and organized groups, actively participated in the constitution-making process and, as such, helped to shape a progressive new Constitution. Most notably, the Constitution provides the bedrock upon which systems and policies can be built to enhance women’s equal participation in all sectors of society.

To mark this breakthrough for women in the new Constitution, the national commemoration of the 2014 International Women’s Day was held under the theme, “Celebrating Women’s Gains through Constitutional Provisions”, on 26 March 2014, in Harare.

A special measure to increase women’s representation in Parliament, and a provision for achieving gender balance in all public entities and commissions are now part of the new Constitution.

Click on the headline of each article for online information
Officiating at the event, His Excellency President Robert Mugabe said, “We must ensure that the girl child is treated in the same way as the boy child. Under the Presidential Scholarship, women from each and every province have gone to university and it has come back with beautiful yields.”

“We, as United Nations, are very pleased that the new Constitution contains strong gender equality and women’s rights provisions and a very progressive Bill of Rights with a specific section on women rights”, said outgoing UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Alain Noudehou.

The UN in Zimbabwe, through the Constitution Parliamentary Select Committee, and with the generous financial contribution of 11 donors, has supported the constitution making process and national advocacy initiatives for women’s rights and gender equality.

“UN supports national initiatives to align all existing laws to the new Constitution”

As a result of this collective effort, gender equality is now enshrined within the Founding Values of the Constitution, with special measures also introduced to reserve adequate women’s representation in the National House of Assembly.

“Women in parliament increased from 18% to 35%”

Equally important, the constitution establishes a Gender Commission to protect and monitor women’s rights. Consequently, women representation in parliament increased from 18% to 35% – well above the global average, which stands at 21%. However, Zimbabwe still needs to take action to promote gender equality by ensuring 50-50 representation at all levels.

Going forward, the United Nations is supporting national initiatives to align all existing laws and policies to the provisions in the new Constitution. This process will also allow Zimbabwe to ensure that international and regional instruments signed and ratified, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the SADC Gender and Development Protocol are domesticated.

Although some of the recent gains are encouraging, there is still long way to go in addressing gender based inequalities. In addition to the provisions in the new Constitution, the root causes of gender based inequalities, which manifest in income inequality, employment opportunity, child marriage, high maternal mortality, and HIV incidence and prevalence, need to be addressed holistically.

Women, both as individuals and as organized groups, actively participated in the constitution-making process and, contributed in shaping a progressive new Constitution.
A Joint UN Programme to Advance Women’s Empowerment

Four UN agencies, International Labour Organisation, UN Development Programme, UN Population Fund and UN Women launched the Joint Programme to Promote Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment on 27 February 2014 in Harare.

It is implemented under the leadership of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Gender and Community Development. The Joint Programme with a total budget of USD 10.6 million runs from 2014 to 2017. So far, half of the required fund, USD 5.3 million, has been generously provided by the Government of Sweden.

The programme supports the promotion of women’s political participation, contributes to women’s economic empowerment, and advocates for national accountability on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The programme also contributes to the achievement of gender targets of the 2012-2015 ZUNDAF which aim to promote women’s empowerment, gender equality and equity in support of Zimbabwe’s national development goals.

Officially launching the Joint Programme, Honourable Oppah Muchinguri, Minister of Women’s Affairs, Gender and Community Development, explained that this programme “is very significant as it brings together UN agencies, Development Partners and a number of different gender equality advocates to support the Government of Zimbabwe in attaining national gender development goals.”

Speaking at the launch, His Excellency, Lars Ronnås, Ambassador of Sweden to Zimbabwe said, “Sweden has a long history of promoting gender equality in our own country and globally. Equal rights and opportunities between women and men are what we all should work for in each and every society.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved unless women’s rights are respected, their voices heard and their skills counted.”

“This programme will significantly contribute to strengthening joint efforts in gender equality. By working together through the 2012-2015 ZUNDAF, we will continue to support the Government of Zimbabwe in its efforts to build a just and fair society, with equity and better standards of living for all,” said the UN Women Officer in Charge, Mr. Kemal Mustafa.

The UN in Zimbabwe, through the 2012-2015 ZUNDAF, in collaboration with Development Partners has so far supported the development of National Gender Policy, advocacy to ensure women’s rights through supporting the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act, setting up of the anti-domestic violence council, the adoption of the National Gender Based Violence strategy, and the development of strong gender equality and women’s rights provisions in the new Constitution.
Refurbishing Maternity Waiting Homes to Enhance Maternal Health Services

Maternity Waiting Homes provide pregnant women with information on pregnancy, new born care, family planning services and HIV treatment, prevention and counselling services.

As part of the ongoing collective efforts to stem the high maternal mortality rate in the country, which stands at 525 deaths per 100,000 live births (2012 Zimbabwe Census), the United Nations in Zimbabwe is supporting the refurbishment of maternity waiting homes.

The maternity waiting homes are facilities, within easy reach of a hospital or health centre where pregnant women can stay towards the end of pregnancy and await labour. Once labour starts, expecting mothers are transferred to the nearby health facility or hospital so that labour and child birth are assisted by a skilled birth attendant.

The maternity waiting homes also provide an opportunity for pregnant women to receive information on pregnancy, labour, childbirth, new born care, family planning services and HIV treatment, prevention and counselling services.

Through funding of USD 13 million from the European Union (EU), the United Nations and the Ministry of Health and Child Care have been renovating and refurbishing 105 maternity waiting homes at district, mission and rural hospitals.

The programme has also procured 63 ambulances, which have since been distributed to benefiting hospitals across the country. The EU supported programme also seeks to train 800 service providers in emergency obstetric care, neonatal care and community mobilisation and awareness building. Additionally, two UN agencies, namely the World Food Programme and the UN Population Fund, are collaborating to ensure that the nutritional needs of pregnant women are met.

Apart from the nutritional support, the women are also provided with mosquito nets, hygiene and sanitation services.

“Zimbabwe’s maternal mortality is high at 525 deaths per 100,000 live births”

“800 service providers to be trained in emergency obstetric care, neonatal care”

Zimbabwe’s National Health Strategy recommended per capita allocation to health. Actual allocations stand at USD 16 per capita and half of the 15% Abuja Declaration target.
“Not Yet Uhuru” in Realising Maternal and Child Health Rights

The United Nations in Zimbabwe has called for more concerted efforts among all stakeholders in addressing maternal and child mortality.

Addressing more than 80 delegates attending the Health Four Plus (H4+) Inter Country Annual Planning Meeting and Communication Workshop held from 26-31 May 2014, in Victoria Falls, Mr. Reza Hossaini, Acting UN Resident Coordinator said, “It is not yet Uhuru,” and there is a need to double efforts in accelerating progress towards achieving the maternal and child health targets of the MDGs. “Everyday a plane load of women are dying because of preventable complications related to pregnancy and child birth. To achieve the set goals we need to double, even triple our efforts”, added Mr. Hossaini.

The Acting UN Resident Coordinator further called for strengthened partnerships and collaborations among governments, UN agencies, development partners, NGOs and communities themselves if reversing maternal and child mortality is to gain momentum.

Mr. Hossaini’s remarks come against a backdrop of some hopeful gains since maternal mortality rate trends have been declining globally. According to recent United Nations estimates released by the World Health Organization, about 289,000 women died in 2013 from preventable complications during pregnancy and childbirth, which is down from 523,000 in 1990. This represents a 45% reduction in maternal deaths. These results are encouraging, but still fall short of radically reducing maternal and child mortality.

The delegates were comprised of professionals from over 12 countries in Africa and beyond. The objective of the workshop was to foster greater synergy and effectiveness between experts to formulate a strategy for an informed advocacy on the H4+ Programme among all stakeholders, particularly among the target communities.

The H4+ partnership includes collaboration from UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO, and the World Bank. In Zimbabwe, it is funded to the tune of USD 11.7 million by the Governments of Sweden and Canada, aiming at accelerating progress towards maternal, neonatal and child morbidity and mortality reduction.

The programme aims at reducing transport costs to ensure access to maternal and neonatal services at health facilities as well as to provide critical equipment and supplies to ensure quality services at these facilities.

In line with the UN Secretary General’s strategy, the H4+ joint programme in Zimbabwe in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Child Care aims to address life threatening complications of pregnant women and newborns during the first few hours and days of childbirth in six selected districts. These districts are identified as the most vulnerable and hardest to reach part of the country.

The UN in collaboration with Development Partners supports national initiatives to enhance human resources for health including health worker management, training and retention scheme.
Promoting Gender Equality Through Harnessing the Power of Radio

The United Nations advocates for harnessing the enduring power of radio to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment and to amplify the voice of women over the air waves.

With the ability to reach up to 95% of the world’s population, radio remains the most popular mass medium. The UN promotes radio as a medium to improve international cooperation between broadcasters, and to encourage major networks and community radio stations alike to promote access to information, freedom of expression and gender equality.

“The airwaves have frequently lagged behind when it comes to gender equality. Not nearly enough women’s voices are heard – either in front or behind the microphone,” Prof. Luk Rukingama, UNESCO Regional Director for Southern Africa and Representative to Zimbabwe said, addressing over 300 participants at the World Radio Day event held on 13 February 2014 in Harare.

“No one can understand the whole story, without the voices of more than half the population”


Honorable Supa Mandiwanzira, Deputy Minister of Media, Information and Broadcasting Services. The Deputy Minister highlighted Government’s readiness to license radio channels in 25 regional urban centers and their ongoing efforts to migrate to digital broadcasting before 2015 with the aim to provide Zimbabwe with the capacity to open 40 TV channels. He underlined the need to avail opportunities for more women to participate in the broadcasting industry and assured participants that “The Government will ensure the training of more women and promote the welfare of all journalists.”

“Without the voices of more than half the world’s population [women], how can we understand the whole story?” Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, said in her message on World Radio Day, a sentiment that was also reiterated by Prof. Rukingama at the event.

The Ministry of Media, Information and Broadcasting Services called upon all broadcasting stations in the country to promote the voices of women and to dedicate messages on the role of women within broadcasting organizations.
Empowering Women and Youth With New Skills

The United Nations, through the Training for Rural Economic Empowerment Programme, is strengthening skills development for youth and women. The programme aims to improve employability, promote access to employment opportunities and increase incomes for inclusive and sustainable growth.

So far, through the 2012-2015 ZUNDAF, the United Nations supported the training of over 8,000 youth and women for self or wage employment with an employment rate of approximately 90%.

The Programme, fully funded by the Government of Denmark to the tune of USD 8 million, is implemented by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) under the leadership of the Government, and in collaboration with trade unions, employers and civil society organizations.

The youth and rural development projects are being implemented in 30 districts covering 9 provinces, so far yielding positive results for vulnerable youth and women in those areas.

During a tour to youth and rural empowerment projects in Mutoko on 5 March 2014, Mr. Erik B. Rasmussen, Chargé d’Affaires of the Royal Danish Embassy in Zimbabwe said, “Women in the skills development programme are the most important participants, because women tend to invest whatever proceeds they make from these projects back into their families, which means investing in better future.”

For every dollar earned by a woman in emerging markets including in Zimbabwe, 90 cents will be invested in the education and health of her family, (World Bank).

For every dollar earned by a woman in emerging markets including in Zimbabwe, 90 cents will be invested in the education and health of her family, (World Bank).

One of the beneficiaries of the programme is Esther Karikoga, a 32 year old single mother of two. “My life was very difficult because I was living from assistance given to me by family and friends. I wasn’t able to look after myself because I didn’t have money. So if I needed anything I would go and ask my relatives for school fees for my children and money to pay rent, so this was very difficult.”

Esther joined a carpenter course at St. Peters Vocational Training Center, through the United Nations Skills for Youth Employment and Rural Development Programme, and thereafter was placed as an apprentice with a Master Craftsperson for six months.

Esther has learned how to make furniture and run a business. She now rents an area in the High Glen Complex, which houses carpenters and furniture makers, where she works and sells from.

Being a young single mother is not easy, but now thanks to the skills development she received, she can afford to pay her rent, school fees and put food on the table. Esther’s plan is to secure her future by increasing her production of sofas, which is her speciality. She says confidently, “I can now make sofas”.

Witnessing first-hand the impact of the projects in Mutoko, the Deputy Minister of Youth, Indigenization and Economic Empowerment, Honourable Mathias Tongofa said, “The skills development programme, with technical support from ILO, has provided a working model to the Government and social partners, including workers and employers.”
New Law in Place to Combat Human Trafficking

Amid concerns that Zimbabwe has increasingly become a source, transit and destination for victims of human trafficking, the Government of Zimbabwe ratified the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. The United Nations closely worked with the Government to promote the domestication of the protocol in Zimbabwe.

The new Trafficking in Persons Bill, entered into force in May 2014, establishes a crime of human trafficking in Zimbabwe and also provides for the protection of victims of trafficking, establishment of shelters for victims, and extra territorial judicial provisions for Zimbabwean courts.

In recognition of the disproportionate effect of trafficking on women and children, the United Nations cooperated with the Women Parliamentary Caucus, through the Women in Politics Support Unit in raising awareness on human trafficking.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Chief of Mission, Mr. Martin Ocaga said, “The United Nations engaged 15 female Members of Parliament in promoting the new Bill in an effort to address human trafficking issues in Zimbabwe.”

Mr. Martin Ocaga speaking at the ninth edition of Wednesday@UNIC on the issue of human trafficking in Zimbabwe.

Congratulating the Government on the new Bill, Mr. Ocaga noted, “The new Trafficking in Persons Bill ensures that Zimbabwe abides by its commitments as a state party to the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime and the Palermo Trafficking in Person Protocol.”

Meanwhile, addressing over 60 national and international development partners as well as the media at the ninth edition of the Wednesday@UNIC public discussion held on 19 March 2014, Mr. Ocaga said “Many people, including boys and girls, are trafficked from or through Zimbabwe to South Africa for labour exploitation as well as to many other countries.”

The IOM Chief of Mission noted that human trafficking is a challenge that cannot be left for the Government alone but requires concerted efforts at national and regional levels.

The issue of community engagement and awareness-raising at a grassroots level and the need to establish rehabilitation programmes to victims of trafficking were raised by participants.

“Addressing human trafficking a collective responsibility of all members of society”

OTHER NEWS:

ZUNDAF Rollout

The UN and the Government are currently rolling out the 2016-2020 Zimbabwe UN Development Assistance Framework (ZUNDAF). The 2016-2020 ZUNDAF will be directly informed by the 2013-2018 Zim Asset and also address emerging development issues from the ongoing Post-2015 Development Agenda process. As part of the ZUNDAF rollout, the UN facilitated the training of 40 programme personnel from UN agencies and the Government Ministries on ZUNDAF Programming Principles. The training covered the Human Rights-Based Approach to Programming, Environmental Sustainability, Capacity Development, Gender Mainstreaming, and Result-Based Management. Currently, an evaluation of the 2012-2015 ZUNDAF is being conducted and a Country Analysis is soon to commence.

Promoting Social Responsibility among Artists

The UN, in partnership with the Harare International Festival of Arts (HIFA), sponsored a series of workshops from 19 April – 4 May 2014. The workshops provided an opportunity for local and international artists to exchange experiences in promoting social responsibility, particularly on the need to promote the MDGs and the participation of young people in the ongoing discussion on Post-2015 Development agenda.

UN at Zimbabwe International Trade Fair

The United Nations in Zimbabwe participated at the annual Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) held in Bulawayo from 25-26 April 2014. The joint UN information stand, which was visited by over 1,500 visitors, allowed the United Nations to share the latest updates on the 2012-2015 ZUNDAF supported national development results, the MDGs and the Post-2015 Development Agenda.