



MUSASA PROJECT

A REPORT ON THE 53rd SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
OF WOMEN 2009

‘T H I N K G L O B A L L Y A N D A C T L O C A L L Y ’

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The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is one of the high level platforms where progress made in advancing women's rights is explained. The commission was mandated to review the progress made in implementing commitments made through International instruments like the UN World conference in Mexico, the Nairobi and Copan Hagen conference and Beijing Platform for action. Recommendations are made by the commission to the Economic and Social Council as evidenced by the latter's resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The theme for the 53rd session of the Commission was: The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men including care giving in the context of HIV and AIDS.



Zimbabwe delegation at the Zimbabwean Embassy

CSW is attended by various actors on human rights drawn from the world over. The Zimbabwean delegation was composed of Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association, Women's Action Group, Padare Men's Forum on Gender, Women in Law in Southern Africa Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network, Musasa Project and Fact Mutare among others. Musasa Project presented a paper on the link between HIV/AIDS and Gender Based Violence based on the findings from the research that the organization did in 2003 and issues coming from counseling records.

Emphasis was put on the need to empower women to develop negotiation skills, create support structures for the women who are alienated by their families and to create an enabling environment in communities so that women can be able to demand and access their rights including their Sexual and Reproductive Health and rights. Accessible and affordable health and education service were highlighted as the prerequisite to achieving Millennium Development Goals. Male involvement was also identified as key in minimizing women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and GBV.

At the same session other Womankind partners like Masimanyane from South Africa and Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association also made their presentations. ZWLAs presentation looked at legal recourse in the face of HIV/AIDS and clearly showed challenges that women face in trying to seek redress for deliberate infection. It was clear that even though legislation provided for such recourse it was not easy to prove in court that the accused was the one who infected the affected person. The argument that ensued involved the need to simplify laws for the benefit of women at all levels, how the AIDS levy is assisting people living with HIV and AIDS, and whether there was a body that held governments accountable for women's rights abuses. Some of the participants wanted to understand how women in Zimbabwe were coping given the humanitarian, economic and political



Participants in one of the meetings

crisis prevailing at that time. Responses pointed to the fact that the tone was slowly changing and that there was light at the end of the channel.

Other sessions attended were on male involvement, care, and support for women survivors of GBV and HIV/AIDS, Home Based Care and Human rights, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of people living with AIDS. Highlights were on the need to acknowledge, support budget, cost and remunerate Home based care givers. Responsibility was piled on governments which people said had relegated their duty of providing health care to citizens, to ill equipped individuals.

Recommendations were that governments must provide resources for care work because it takes valuable time and was taxing on the care givers. Others pointed out that the gaps went as far as constitutions that do not recognize social and economic rights. The effects of home based care on the girl child were also discussed, that it interfered with their rights to education, rights of being children, they become adults at a tender age and some of the chores predisposed them to abuse. Other challenges identified included collapse of health and education systems, inadequate human and financial resources, poverty and uncoordinated programmes. Best practices on the involvement of men in care work were presented. One of these was from FACT Mutare and Padare Men's Forum on Gender. Recommendations made included the following:

- There should be a standard approach to training Home Based Care givers.
- There should be a clear discharge plan for People Living with AIDS.
- A percentage of AIDS levy to be ploughed back to communities to strengthen their capacities to deal with HIV/AIDS.
- Governments must be held accountable for signing conventions and Protocols and not domesticating them.
- There is need to develop culturally and gender sensitive service provision and use existing indigenous social structures.
- There should be gender sensitive distribution of committed funds for care and support.
- Ensure and secure women's rights in care work.



Culture as an obstacle to the promotion of Women's rights was discussed in many forums and the best illustration was given by Swaziland. It was reported that a strong culture curtailed women from even demanding their rights. In one of the sessions young women gave testimonies of how their rights were taken away from them when they were sterilized without their knowledge just because they were HIV positive. Discussions on the African Charter were also held. It was highlighted that it protects women's rights against infectious diseases like HIV and AIDS recognizes economic rights of women. Some of the care givers were present to tell their stories. They indicated that most of them were also living with HIV. The meetings also explored how the global economic crisis would affect women. It was likely to increase unpaid labour for women, high level of unemployment, increase the historic imbalances in employment, decline in remittance from migrant labour and would reduce incomes from export earnings.

The African Caucus made recommendations in line with the theme. Some of which included:

- The need to recognize the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment in order to achieve peace, equality and sustainable development.
- State parties to honour all their commitments since the Beijing world conference.
- 15% of national budgets to be allocated to health care.
- In spite of the financial crisis governments should not reduce commitments to social services.
- Empower women and girls to be assertive.

- AID effectiveness was discussed in one of the sessions attended. Challenges highlighted were that when governments negotiate for aid they do not consider HIV and AIDS.

- Many campaigns like the Women Wont Wait have lost momentum due to inadequate funding.
- Mechanisms to monitor how aid is used should be strengthened.

- There should be global monitors of policies, accessibility, timelines and capacity to utilize funding especially for HIV and AIDS.

On Gender Based Violence per se, the general consensus was that:

- There is need to do more prevention work to protect women from GBV.
- Consideration to be given to women in different contexts like women with disabilities and women in post conflict situations.
- Prevention should also include ensuring that appropriate legislation is passed and provides security for women.
- Care and support programs to be scaled up especially in emergency situations.



Panelists at the Womankind side event

- Ensure that prosecution and perpetrators accountability is understood by all actors in GBV and protection mechanism to go beyond borders.
- The economic crisis to be used as an opportunity to advocate for state ownership of social systems.
- Government to prioritize women's rights and allocate adequate resources for programmes aimed at promoting these rights.

AIM FOR HUMAN RIGHTS presented an Impact assessment tool for human rights work. They indicated that the tool links human rights to women's lived realities. It involves issues like how to end impunity, states to be accountable for obligations to women's rights, how to collect evidence



Lighter moments Zimbabwe and Mozambique delegates at CSW

and strengthening the ability to monitor and evaluate programs and how to use the uptake of services as indicators of what is happening in women's lives.

On the whole platforms like the Commission on the Status of Women help one to reflect on the work done benchmarking it against what other programs in other countries are doing. In the 3 years that one has attended CSW the general view is that programs in Southern Africa are more advanced than other countries. Some countries are still battling with fundamentalisms like culture and religion, how to get acceptance or how to transform these rather than using them as allies to transform their own lot. There is need to share more information of successful interventions on GBV so that other actors can circumvent the learning curve and replicating successful programmes locally and even taking it beyond borders so that a critical mass can be created in the fight against GBV and HIV and AIDS.

There is also need to maintain consistency in campaigning for recognition and promotion for women's human rights otherwise the whole cause runs the risk of being relegated to oblivion. Consensus on indicators for measuring the impact of GBV interventions is still elusive; some still feel that numbers are the most important indicators whilst others feel otherwise. Zimbabwe can learn from other countries which organize pre and post CSW sessions to make coordinated inputs to the Commission by way of expressing country specific recommendations and even highlighting the country's best practices. It envisaged that the meeting that the Zimbabwean team had with the ambassadorial team will be a starting point for a broader concrete initiative.