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**International Conference on Women and the Changing World of Work – Giving Effect to the  
Sixty-First Session of the Commission on the Status of Women  
Conference Report**

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## Executive Summary

The International Women’s Conference on Women and the Changing World of Work was structured around 3 themes:

1. Women and the Changing World of Work;
2. Sexual Violence and its Relationship to Productivity in the Economy;
3. The Role of Parliaments in Changing the World of Work for Women.

The following key issues emerged during the course of the conference:

**Women and economic empowerment:** The release of the recent ‘Poverty Trends in South Africa’<sup>1</sup> report by Statistics South Africa shows that the face of poverty is female. This is true for the rest of the African continent and is also the situation globally. There is a significant need to break down the structural barriers that impede upon women and girls accessing equal rights. All economies depend on the unpaid care work provided by women and girls. Yet, almost none of the women in the care economy have legal protection. It is vital that care work is valued. This can bring about positive results for economies. Economic policies need to focus on women who work at the bottom of the pyramid and on bringing the informal sector into the economy. More than half of all women workers around the world are in located in the informal economy and states cannot afford to ignore them.

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<sup>1</sup> Poverty Trends in South Africa, Statistics South Africa, 2017



**Violence against women:** This is a significant obstacle that negatively impacts on women's lives and exacerbates their economic disempowerment. Violence against women is so pronounced that it can be described as being a physical and psychological warfare waged on women. Violence against women has a negative impact on everyone in society and must be addressed at all levels. In addition, violence-free societies have a positive effect on growing the economy. It is estimated that 15% of all sexual offences take place at the workplace. Violence significantly affects both women and places of work, for example, in the form of absenteeism, loss of productivity, high staff turnover and costs to companies. When women are economically vulnerable, they are more dependent on men and unable to leave violence relationships.

**Sexual harassment at Parliaments:** It is not possible to have a conversation about violence against women in the workplace without looking at sexual harassment at Parliaments. Parliaments are places of work and it is important that their policies cover sexual harassment between Members of Parliament and staff. Parliaments should set an example by taking a strong stance against tolerating sexual harassment. It is important to understand how the 'sexual economy' operates in places of work whereby sexual harassment is used as a way of ensuring promotion and opportunity.

**Women in marginalised sectors of employment:** The face of poverty on the African continent is female. The legacy of colonialisation and racism has meant that black women constitute the majority of the poor. Economic empowerment measures must seek to redress the imbalances of the past. Further, it needs to place emphasis on the plight of women in vulnerable sectors of employment such as in the informal economy, farm workers, domestic workers and sex workers.

**Income inequality:** There is a dire need to change the established patterns of gender inequality in institutions, particularly as regards income inequality. On average, women earn 23% less than men. They work an average of 3 months more for the same pay. As part of the focus on changing the world of work for women and making it more equitable, states must embark on a targeted campaign to address income equality and ensure that there is equal pay for equal work.

**Creation of gender sensitive places of work:** In dismantling patriarchy, it is necessary to transform structural inequality and to ensure that workplaces become gender-equal spaces where



women's worth is valued equally, where the physical environment is gender sensitive (such as spaces for breastfeeding) and where the organisational ethos is sensitive to women's family responsibilities.

**Care work:** Social care work is performed predominantly by women and is paid less by what is traditionally perceived to be more masculine work. There is a need to pay and value this kind of work more. For example, on average, house mothers at shelters for abused women earn about R2500 per month. Parliaments have an important role to play in considering minimum wage levels.

**Development of action plans:** When the United Nations was established 71 years ago, it was founded with a commitment to gender equality. While great strides have been made towards promoting the rights of women and girls, progress has been slow and unequal and the achievement of gender equality is still a goal and not a reality. In addition, there has been an erosion of some of the gains made in promoting gender equality in areas where progress had already been made. Swift and decisive action is needed to address this. For this reason, states need to develop national action plans for the attainment of gender equality. These should have clear targets and benchmarks against which progress should be measured. At the level of the United Nations, a commitment has been made to ensure that more women are put into positions of senior leadership. A clear goal has been made for 50/50 representation in positions of leadership by 2026 in this regard and states need to develop their own plans in this regard.

**Focus on SDGs:** Monitoring the implementation of the SDGs is critical to the promotion of gender equality. One of critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action is to ensure that states ensure that there are mutually reinforcing links with all international instruments aimed at the eradication of poverty. The conference must seek to strengthen the global normative framework and must attempt to link together regional and international instruments aimed at eradicating gender inequality. Monitoring the implementation of the SDGs from a gender perspective is critical.

**2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:** The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which was adopted by all member states in the United Nations is critical to the promotion of gender equality. Its vision is transformative in nature and it has specific timeframes for the achievement of



certain targets. The achievement of full human potential is not possible without gender equality. It requires the systematic mainstreaming of gender quality into all processes at state level. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a critical instrument for transforming society at the level of gender oppression.

**Technology as a tool to women's empowerment:** Innovation and technology are key to unlocking women's economic potential. Ensuring that women and girls are technologically empowered, computer literate and able to navigate their way on the internet, is critical to growing their knowledge base. In addition, this is key to economic survival in the formal economy. Digital literacy is a basic requirement for economic development and being absorbed into the world of work. States therefore have a responsibility to ensure that they invest in access to multi-purpose centres that make computers and internet access readily available, particularly in impoverished communities. Technology can expand women's access to the economy and to entrepreneurship. It can play a critical role in assisting with addressing violence against women, for example, by facilitating access to safe houses, forensic evidence etc.

**Development of gender sensitive policies:** The world of work is changing rapidly and in profound ways. There is a need to put in place the right policies and measures to cater for this. States must focus on 3 things at a policy level, namely to focus on investing in the care economy and the links between paid and unpaid work, to ensure equal pay for equal work and reduce the gap in this regard and to address sexual harassment and violence against women.

**The role of Parliaments:** In most countries in the SADC region, there are good legal frameworks for women's equality and empowerment, which are entrenched in Constitutions. However, enforcement and implementation is poor. Parliaments can initiate legislation that reduces gender inequality. Parliamentarians also have a responsibility to scrutinise gaps and weaknesses in legislation, as well as to ensure the domestication of regional and international legislation and instruments that have been ratified. Through their oversight role, parliaments should also ensure that there are dedicated budgets for women's programmes and that government departments engage in gender-responsive budgeting. Parliaments must therefore strengthen their oversight and accountability mechanisms.



**The importance of Women's Caucuses:** Women's Causes are an important platform for women to come together across the political divide and create a space to discuss issues that affect all women regardless of party affiliation. Women's Caucuses must engage with civil society and, furthermore, they should engage with a body of robust research on the issues that negatively impact upon women's development. Women's Caucuses should find effective ways of collaborating with civil society organisations in order to broaden their knowledge base on issues that affect women.

**Gender responsive budgeting:** A critical issue that emerged over the course of the conference is the issue of budgets, of ensuring that there are adequate resources for investing in women's economic empowerment and addressing violence against women. Parliaments have a critical role to play in ensuring that governments use gender responsive budgeting as a tool for ensuring that public expenditure is viewed through a gendered lens.

## 1. Introduction

The South African Parliament hosted a 2-day international conference with the theme "Women in the Changing World of Work" on 29-30 August 2017.

The objectives of the conference were:

- To create a platform for the discussion of progress made on the continent in absorbing women into the economy and in creating working environments that are gender sensitive.
- To discuss the challenges in relation to absorbing women into the economy and the factors that impede upon their career progress and ability to manage their gender roles in work environments.
- To give effect to resolutions made at the 2016 Women's Parliament in relation to women and economic empowerment.
- To provide a platform for reporting back on the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women.





- To develop clear national plans to give effect to resolutions adopted at the sixty-first session of the Commission of the Status of Women.

The conference was structured around 3 broad themes:

- 1.1. WOMEN AND THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK:** The conference was located in the context of taking forward the agenda of the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Its key focus was on why it is necessary to take women's gender interests and needs into account in the world of work and an assessment of the related gains and challenges in this regard. Innovation in changing the world of work for women received focused attention. This included, amongst others, taking into account women's triple gender role in a work context; the role of technology in unlocking women's economic empowerment; and best practice models in creating gender-sensitive work environments. Protecting the rights of women in vulnerable sectors such as in the informal economy, domestic workers, sex workers and women on farms were also a key focus point.
- 1.2. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO PRODUCTIVITY IN THE ECONOMY:** Sexual harassment and violence against women have a significant, wide-ranging impact on women and negatively impact on their ability to be healthy, well and productive in the economy. The conference considered the ways in which violence detracts from women's ability to work and how it negatively contributes to economic productivity on the whole. It considered effective mechanisms of addressing sexual harassment and violence so that women are better able to participate in the economy.
- 1.3. THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN CHANGING THE WORLD OF WORK FOR WOMEN:** The conference sought to find innovative ways in which Parliaments can engage in legislative and oversight activities that address the barriers to women's effective participation in both in the economy and in their work environments. This included a focus on legislative review, parliamentary oversight as well as the use of international instruments in enhancing women's participation in both the formal and informal economy.



## **2. Summary of the Opening Address by Hon B Mbete, Speaker of the National Assembly, South Africa**

Hon Mbete noted that the conference takes place at a time when South Africa celebrates 20 years of its Constitution and the National Council of Provinces. It takes place within a context where the South African Parliament reflects on the gains made in promoting women's rights and identifies the key challenges that must be addressed. This must happen concurrently with a process of strengthening the normative and legal frameworks that will enable decent work for women. The Speaker advised that the conference was intended to be a platform for taking forward the resolutions of the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Ensuring that states are implementing policies for women's economic empowerment was pivotal to the conference. As part of ensuring that women are economically empowered, the conference should engage with the role of technology-driven advances and its impact on women as well as strengthening the private sector's role in women's economic empowerment. The goal was to emerge with practical outcomes that tackle the structural barriers to women's economic empowerment and gender equality.

The Speaker highlighted the following key issues to guide the conference discussions:

- 2.1. THE NEED FOR 50/50 REPRESENTATION:** The United Nations committed to ensure that more women occupy positions of senior leadership. A clear goal was established for 50/50 representation in positions of leadership by 2026. Sustainable development Goal 5 focusing on gender equality focuses on women's empowerment. Yet, achieving gender equity is still a challenge. South Africa has advocated for 50/50 representation of women in its government and will ensure that more women are absorbed into positions of senior leadership, including at the highest level. This is by no means a stretch target, but a precondition for making further progress in advocating for gender equality. On the African continent, there are sterling examples of women who have led their countries from which South Africa can learn.
  
- 2.2. THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS SUCH AS HEALTH, EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY:** In



engaging with the conference themes, exploration of every aspect of gender equality such as health, education, economic activity, power relationships within families and societies, and to engage with the ways in which each of these areas have experienced a mixed pattern of change was imperative. The world of work is rapidly changing within a global context of pushing for a green economy, digital change and technological innovation and these should be addressed in the context of women's economic liberation.

- 2.3. THE REVIEW OF LEGISLATION IN SOUTH AFRICA:** The South African Parliament has passed a number of laws to create an enabling environment for gender equality. It has also set up institutional structures such as the gender machinery to accelerate the pace of change. However, many systemic challenges remain and there is a need to assess the impact of legislation on the quality of life of women.

In South Africa, the High Level Panel on the Assessment of Key Legislation has spearheaded a review process of assessing legislation in South Africa and its impact on the lives of South Africans. Preliminary findings underscore the fact that the inequality gap has not narrowed – the triple challenges of poverty, class and race still remain. A radical rethink of economic ownership and land patterns is therefore required.

- 2.4. ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:** Globally, gender-based violence has become an epidemic. In South Africa, we battle with this scourge on a daily basis. Cultural and societal norms enable widespread gender-based violence, which impacts on all aspects of women's lives, including their ability to participate in the economy and on their health and well-being in general.

- 2.5. VALUING WOMEN'S WORK AND ENSURING ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY:** The contribution of women and girls to unpaid care must be addressed as it is the work traditionally associated with men that is valued, while social care work is undervalued and unpaid or underpaid. There is also a need to promote the participation of men in care work so that women are better able to enter paid work.



It is essential that women are included in the technological and digital revolution as it is pivotal to their future economic well-being and success. The conference therefore engaged with women's rights through a human rights lens. The participation of women in economies is an essential precondition for effective development.

### **3. Summary of the Conference Address on Locating the Conference by Hon T Didiza**

In locating the conference, Hon T. Didiza highlighted the need for parliaments represented to ensure that the gender pay gap is closed by assessing and measuring the impact of government policies. The Fourth Industrial Revolution offers both benefits and challenges as states grapple with how to use it to the benefit of women and ensure that they do not lose jobs.

The House Chairperson highlighted the following key issues:

- 3.1. PARTICIPATION BY WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE:** Although more women are participating in the labour force, they occupy low levels and low paying positions within the labour force ranks. The pace of change in accelerating women into skilled and senior positions has been slow.
- 3.2. UNPAID CARE WORK:** Women contribute disproportionately to the care economy. The notion of wellness in a society is inextricably linked to notions of care, where social organisation is structured around caring for those in need, in the interest of society as a whole. Girl-children start contributing to the care economy at an early age and are involved in unpaid care work at the expense of engaging in developmental activities such as focusing on their studies.
- 3.3. MEASURING OF COUNTRY PERFORMANCE:** The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report in 2016 showed that only 50 percent of women of a working age are in the labour force, compared to 77 percent of men, with the gap in labour force participation being especially large in Northern Africa, Western Asia and Southern Asia.



Globally, more women than men are likely to be unemployed and women are more likely to be employed on a part-time basis. Women are also less likely to be in decision-making positions and they earn between 70 – 90 percent of what men earn across all sectors and occupations. The Global Gender Gap Report shows that if women are not properly absorbed into economic activity, it impacts negatively on the whole of society. In Europe, for example, where there has been increased economic growth, women have played an increased role in the economy. Countries need to assess the impact of their policies in closing the gender gap index.

**3.4. BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF TECHNOLOGY:** Technology brings with it speed, efficiency and swift communication but it can also lead to the displacement of women in the labour force. In order to circumvent this, women must be empowered to ensure that they embrace and keep abreast of technological change through ongoing learning and skills development.

**3.5. INCOME INEQUALITY:** On average, women work longer hours and earn less than men. There is a need for a targeted campaign to ensure income equality and equal work for equal pay.

#### **4. Summary of the Message of Support from the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF), Senator M Mutsvangwa, Vice President SADC PF**

Senator Mutsvangwa delivered a note of support to conference delegates from the Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF). The Vice President acknowledged the role of Speaker Mbete in organising the conference, which was much needed in developing collective strategies to deal with the economic challenges facing women on the African continent. She pointed out that a conceptual shift was needed when dealing with women's economic empowerment. This required critically examining women's economic empowerment through the lens of what is right from a human rights perspective as opposed to operating from the premise that women are "asking for charity." Women have worked hard and made an invaluable



contribution to national and global economies, yet this has not been valued in monetary terms. Senator Mutsvangwa further highlighted that women of the SADC region must, as a matter of urgency, catch up with their global counterparts in addressing obstacles to their economic empowerment. Given the changes in the labour market, the conference must engage with these and embark upon an analysis of threats and opportunities in taking forward women's economic empowerment. Senator Mutsvangwa also called on SADC-PF Member States to put in place regional empowerment targets that would remove the subordinate status of women and indicated that the SADC-PF has developed guidelines for gender responsive budgeting. The Vice President highlighted that the challenge is in ensuring that states act on these. Furthermore, Member States were urged to support the transformation of SADC-PF into a sub-regional Parliament with full legislative and oversight powers.

The Vice President of the SADC-PF highlighted the following key issues:

- 4.1. CHALLENGES IN THE SADC REGION:** Remedial action that corrects past imbalanced gender relations as a result of patriarchy and deep-rooted prejudices must be implemented. In addition, ways of ensuring that women benefit from economic opportunities must be fast-tracked and concerted plans and strategies must be developed, against which progress should be measured. Women's capacity must be increased through skills development initiatives to ensure access to procurement opportunities and participation in the mainstream economy.
- 4.2. ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS:** Parliamentarians should be cognisant of the challenges faced by national economies and must ensure gender responsive and enabling legislation and policy frameworks. SADC States have solid and inclusive constitutions – these constitutions must be upheld, implemented and enforced.
- 4.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRESS:** Access to finance and credit for women to access possibilities for significant economic empowerment is important. One option here is the establishment of a women's microfinance bank to increase access to capital, as well as access to land and markets. Gender-based violence and pay disparities in the workplace must be eradicated. Unpaid care work and poorly paid domestic work



must also be addressed. It is imperative that Members of Parliament are skilled with gender-responsive policy analysis skills and that all stakeholders, in particular the private sector, are involved in formulating solutions to promote women's empowerment. Men must also be included as champions for change in facilitating women's economic empowerment.

## **5. Summary of the Conference Lecture by Dr J Kabwila, Chairperson of the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus**

Dr Kabwila emphasised that the conference was a strategic opportunity to establish an agenda that could facilitate women's economic empowerment. Within a global context, the world of work is changing rapidly for women, yet women's conditions globally have not improved in ways that eradicate the feminisation of poverty. In the political arena, men still dominate in key decision-making positions and there is need to change this to ensure that more women become active in politics. Women in politics have a critical role to play in creating an enabling policy environment for women's economic empowerment. It is therefore critical that the barriers to women's participation in politics are addressed.

Dr Kabwila raised the following key issues:

- 5.1. THE PATRIARCHAL DIVIDEND:** The concepts of 'work' and 'worker' have been determined by men. Similarly, the way in which institutions such as the workplace, marriage, religion and communities operate have been determined by men and in ways that put their interests first. There are also instances where women are harvesting the patriarchal dividend and using it to promote their own success, but in ways that reinforce patriarchy and sustain the oppression of other women. Ultimately, this benefits institutions with androcentric values and does nothing to address structural inequality.
- 5.2. WOMEN'S UNPAID CARE WORK:** Women's labour should not be cheap or unpaid, both in the home and outside of it. The majority of women work in the care industry where they are not being compensated adequately. In order to address this holistically,



enabling legislative and policy frameworks must be reviewed. In addition, vigorous oversight that monitors the implementation of plans to economically empower women, as well as gender responsive budgeting and budget tracking, to ensure that women's labour is paid for fairly requires urgent attention. It is also essential that states take responsibility for good governance and eliminating corruption in the public sector as this negatively impacts on service delivery to girls and women and redirects state resources from investing in eliminating economic injustice.

**5.3. SOCIAL CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY:** Social corporate responsibility must be gender-aware and seek to promote women's interests and needs. Many companies are doing very little to address structural inequality. There is a need for the private sector to play a pivotal role in enhancing the education of girls and promoting women's economic empowerment.

**5.4. ACCESS TO EDUCATION:** Access to good quality education is the single biggest investment that can be made on the African continent to equip women to break the cycle of poverty and enter the labour market in jobs that pay well. This means that states must prioritise education and ensure that the quality of the education provided is of a high standard and that the systems for managing education are intact and functioning properly. It also entails ensuring that teachers are suitably qualified, that learners have access to the internet, that there is a good educational infrastructure in place, good working conditions for teachers, rural electrification, access to water and sanitation, and policies on child brides, amongst others. In addition, both the public and private sector must invest in bursary schemes for girls.

**5.5. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:** Women should have control over their bodies and be allowed to make their own decisions regarding sexual reproductive health. Sexual violence in all its forms should be eradicated. The world of work must also enhance and accommodate women's reproductive health issues, put in place strategies to prevent and address sexual harassment and play a role in society in eliminating gender-based violence in all its forms.





## **6. Panel Discussion on Setting the Scene: Assessment of the Gains Made and Outlining the Challenges to Creating Work Environments that are Sensitive to Women's Needs and Gender Roles**

**Panellists: Minister L Zulu (Department of Small Business Development, South Africa), Ms F Shabodien (Action Aid), Advocate B Gawanas (Ministry of Health and Social Services, Namibia), Moderated by Hon T Didiza (House Chairperson, Parliament of South Africa)**

The main aim of this panel discussion was to provide a reflective and a prospective account of successes and challenges in creating inclusive working environments and advancing the economic empowerment of women. Panellists raised the following key issues:

- 6.1. WOMEN AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:** There is a significant need to break down the structural barriers that impede women and girls accessing equal rights. On the African continent, the face of poverty is equated with that of a black, rural woman. More than half of all women workers around the world are in located in the informal economy and states cannot afford to ignore them. The ability of women to be economically active, educated and adequately skilled is critical to business performance and economic prosperity on the whole. Global research has shown that greater equality between men and women has a direct link to increased productivity and a higher GDP. In South Africa, it is essential to monitor small and medium business enterprises, particularly in the agriculture, mining and manufacturing industries in terms of progress made in facilitating women's economic empowerment.
  
- 6.2. WOMEN IN MARGINALISED SECTORS OF EMPLOYMENT:** The legacy of colonialisation and racism has meant that black women constitute the majority of the poor. Economic empowerment measures must seek to redress the imbalances of the past. Furthermore, emphasis should be placed on the plight of women in vulnerable sectors of employment such as in the informal economy, farm workers, domestic workers and sex workers.



- 6.3. INCOME INEQUALITY:** There is a dire need to change the established patterns of gender inequality in institutions, particularly as regards income inequality. An example was cited of the Shoprite CEO who earns R50 million a month, compared with the average Shoprite store worker who earns about R2 500 a month. Another example cited was that of women working in commercial farming, often below what should constitute a minimum wage. Most jobs in this sector are on a casual basis, with no maternity or housing benefits and women workers are often exploited. Women in the informal economy are rendered particularly vulnerable.
- 6.4. CREATION OF GENDER SENSITIVE PLACES OF WORK:** In dismantling patriarchy, it is necessary to transform structural inequality and to ensure that workplaces become gender-equal spaces where women's worth is valued equally, where the physical environment is gender sensitive (such as spaces for breastfeeding) and where the organisational ethos is sensitive to women's family responsibilities.
- 6.5. TECHNOLOGY AS A TOOL TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:** Innovation and technology are key to unlocking women's economic potential. Ensuring that women and girls are technologically empowered, computer literate and able to navigate their way on the internet, is critical to growing their knowledge base. In addition, this is key to economic survival in the formal economy. Digital literacy is a basic requirement for economic development and being absorbed into the world of work. States therefore have a responsibility to invest in access to multi-purpose centres that make computers and internet access readily available, particularly in impoverished communities. Technology can expand women's access to the economy and to entrepreneurship. It can play a critical role in assisting with addressing violence against women, for example, by facilitating access to safe houses, forensic evidence etc.
- 6.6. DEVELOPMENT OF GENDER SENSITIVE POLICIES:** The world of work is undergoing rapid and profound change. There is a need to put in place the right policies and measures to respond adequately to this. States must focus on three main policy issues: (i) investing in the care economy and the links between paid and unpaid work,



(ii) ensuring equal pay for equal work and reducing the gap in this regard and (iii) addressing sexual harassment and violence against women.

**6.7. ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR:** A culture of socio-corporate responsibility is lacking globally. The private sector should take responsibility for both ensuring that their places of work are gender sensitive as well as investing in social initiatives to address structural inequality. Over and above the concept of the private sector taking on a greater sense of socio-economic responsibility, it should also take on board the notion of corporate-social reparations. In this way, it can begin to make amends for a long historical legacy of ill-treating and exploiting workers, particularly women. This is especially applicable in the mining sector.

## **7. Panel Discussion on Setting the Scene: Women and Economic Empowerment on the African Continent: A Synopsis of the Key Challenges and How They Can Be Creatively Addressed**

**Panellists: Ms J Owigar, Co-founder and Operations Director of JuaKali (Kenya), Ms Marlise Montsho, President of FemTIC Dev (Benin), Ms S De Martino, Economist: Mind, Behaviour and Development Unit, World Bank (USA), Moderated by Hon E Ntlangwini**

Panellists raised the following key issues:

**7.1. FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS:** Monitoring the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is critical to the promotion of gender equality. One of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action is to ensure that there are mutually reinforcing links with all international instruments aimed at the eradication of poverty. The conference must seek to strengthen the global normative framework and must attempt to link regional and international instruments aimed at eradicating gender inequality. Monitoring the implementation of the SDGs from a gender perspective is critical. The vision of the SDGs is transformative in nature and it has specific timeframes for the achievement of certain targets. The achievement of full



human potential is not possible without gender equality. It requires the systematic mainstreaming of gender equality into all processes at state level. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a critical instrument for transforming society at the level of gender oppression.

- 7.2. DEVELOPMENT OF ACTION PLANS:** There has been an erosion of some of the gains made in promoting gender equality in areas where progress had already been made. Swift and decisive action is needed to address this. Therefore, states need to develop national action plans for the attainment of gender equality. These should have clear targets and benchmarks against which progress should be measured.
- 7.3. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:** Coordination of structures that focus on the development of women in business that promote access to business and training opportunities is required. The approach of focusing only on providing women access to micro credit is not enough. Women-owned businesses need leverage and the ability to grow in scope thereby realising potentials beyond that of a small business. One of the key avenues for the economic empowerment of women is through women political leaders monitoring the extent to which the procurement of government services is preferentially given to businesses led by women. Economic empowerment must happen at all levels of society, at the top levels such as by ensuring that women are equally represented in political decision-making positions and at grassroots level, by ensuring that men are more involved in family and community care work so as to ensure that women have more time to enter into economic activities.
- 7.4. CHANGING SOCIAL NORMS – CULTURE AND TRADITION:** Culture and tradition are key structural barriers that impede progress in the fight for gender equality and the eradication of patriarchy. There is a need to envisage the world that we want to create 20 years from now, with a gender perspective. Women should define the vision of this world and the changes that they want to see come into effect. In the context of women in the world of work, there needs to be a clear vision of what is needed to transform the world of work in order to assist women to be integrated fully into the economy in a way that it is sensitive to their roles as caregivers. An example of this how workplaces did



not previously provide for maternity leave. Women activists had a clear vision for changing this and progressive laws governing maternity leave were subsequently promulgated.

**7.5. FAMILY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:** Many women end up sacrificing their careers so that they are able to be more active in their families and homes. There is a need to examine this in the context of patriarchy and explore the implications of this on women's financial independence and the ability to make life decisions such as when women want to leave a marriage or relationship. Many women find themselves in situations where, because they have had no career pathing and have dedicated their time and energy to their families, they are unable to leave abusive relationships and start out on their own because they are unable to enter the formal economy.

**7.6. EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:** Education and skills development is key to creating a platform upon which women can grow their career potential. A critical part of this is the mentoring of young girls by skilled women so that they are able to develop their skills and abilities to their full potential. Skills development in areas where women and girls have not traditionally been encouraged such as maths and science, are areas that must receive particular focus. Campaigns that focus on creating positive role-models for younger women, such as "telling her story," which aims to create awareness about women leaders who have made significant achievements, should be developed and expanded.

**7.7. INTENSIFY AND UP-SCALE GENDER MAINSTREAMING:** Gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy to promote gender equality. It is a strategy for making women's experiences and needs an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that inequality is not perpetuated. Parliaments have a critical role to play in monitoring gender mainstreaming by government departments in order to ensure that women's economic empowerment is facilitated.



**7.8. CREATING ENABLING LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS:** An enabling legislative framework is critical to ensuring that women's economic rights are protected and promoted. Legislation must make adequate provision for education and skills development, affirmative action, and measures aimed at eradicating economic inequity.

## **8. Panel Discussion on Violence Against Women and Sexual Harassment and Its Impact on The World of Work**

**Panellists: Minister S Shabangu (Department of Women in the Presidency), Ms L Vetten (PhD Fellow at the University of the Witwatersrand), Moderated by Hon D Robinson**

Panellists raised the following key issues:

**8.1. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AS AN EPIDEMIC:** Violence against women is a significant obstacle that negatively impacts on women's lives and exacerbates their economic disempowerment. Violence against women has a negative impact on everyone in society and must be addressed at all levels. In addition, violence-free societies have a positive effect on economic growth. The Minister noted that an estimated 15 percent of all sexual offences in South Africa took place at the workplace, with 28 percent of these being attempted rapes. Almost 30 percent of these sexual offences involved a knife. In 2014, KPMG<sup>2</sup> estimated that the cost of violence against women to government was somewhere between R 28.4 billion and R42.2 billion.

**8.2. ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY EXACERBATES GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:**

Women's structural economic dependence on men contributes to domestic violence and creates conditions of inequality. When women are economically dependent on men, they are unable to leave violent relationships.

**8.3. WORK AS A PLACE OF VIOLENCE:** The workplace can be a site of violence for many women. Reliable information on the situation in South Africa is not readily available.

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<sup>2</sup> KPMG, "Too Costly To Ignore – The Economic Impact of Gender-Based Violence in South Africa," 2014



The Department of Labour should conduct research in this regard. Domestic workers and those working in unregulated occupations such as vendors are not adequately protected by law. In addition, women sex workers are extremely vulnerable due to the illegality of sex work. Many women do not report sexual harassment for fear of losing their jobs. Women who are most vulnerable are those in low-skilled, low-paid jobs and those working in the rural economy.

- 8.4. VIOLENCE AFFECTS WORK AND WORKPLACES:** Gender-based violence impacts on the workplace in that it results in high levels of absenteeism as well as a loss of productivity and other opportunities. It can result in high staff turnover and the costs to companies can include costs for vicarious liability. Yet domestic violence is still seen as a private issue and not something that the employer should get involved in. Women are not provided with adequate support in terms of time off and other psycho-social support. The corporate sector should assume some responsibility in addressing domestic violence. Potential options here are to partner with shelters for provision of housing or learnerships for women who have suffered abuse.
- 8.5. SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT PARLIAMENTS:** It is not possible to have a conversation about violence against women in the workplace without looking at sexual harassment at Parliaments. Parliaments are places of work and it is important that their policies address sexual harassment between Members of Parliament and staff. Parliaments should set an example by taking a strong stance against tolerating sexual harassment by Members of Parliament due to the power dynamic between Members and staff. It is also important to understand how the 'sexual economy' operates in places of work whereby sexual harassment is used as a way of ensuring promotion and opportunity.
- 8.6. CARE WORK:** Social care work is performed predominantly by women. Remuneration for such work is lower than similar traditionally masculine work. For example, on average, house mothers at shelters for abused women earn about R2 500 per month. Parliaments have an important role to play in considering minimum wage levels. One in five women earn less than R1 000 per month as compared to 1 in 10 men. In addition, women form the largest proportion of employees in paid care work.



- 8.7. BREAKING DOWN PATRIARCHY:** One of the most challenging aspects of patriarchy is that it is violent. The fact that violence has become a normalised conflict resolution mechanism where physical and sexual violence is used to settle conflicts with women is a situation that exists because of patriarchy. The dismantling of patriarchy requires interaction and strategic planning at a global level. As part of this, clear goals must be set with a focus on winning the war and not just short-term battles. Data and evidence are key to compiling information required to measure progress in this regard. The social norms that enable patriarchy must be clearly identified and plans must be put in place to address these.
- 8.8. AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY:** The language of society must change as it encourages sexual violence and harassment – sexist and derogatory jokes in the office and social media must not be tolerated. This kind of sexualised language must not be normalised. The way we socialise our young children, and in particular young men and boys, must also be different – gender equality must be at the centre of socialisation. In addition, tolerance must be promoted – people’s sexuality and choice of attire are no reason for condemnation and discrimination.
- 8.9. SUPPORT PROGRAMMES FOR VICTIMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:**  
Although Victim Empowerment Programmes and interventions exist, implementation must be improved. Support systems needed to deal with issues related to sexual violence and harassment should also be established. Support needs to address both the physical and psychological impact of sexual violence.
- 8.10. LEGISLATION AND REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS:** Legislation and international and regional instruments should not just be paper tigers, they must be translated into real action. In addition, the justice system and labour law must be reviewed to look at gaps, as well as ways to expedite cases of violence against women.





## 9. Panel Discussion on The Role of Parliaments in the Changing World of Work

**Panellists: Senator M Mutsvangwa (Vice President of SADC PF), Mme O Yacouba (Directrice de Cabinet Adjointe, Niger), Moderated by Hon T Didiza**

Panellists raised the following key issues:

- 9.1. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS:** In most countries in the SADC region, there are good legal frameworks for women's equality and empowerment, which are entrenched in Constitutions. However, enforcement and implementation is poor. Parliaments can initiate legislation that reduces gender inequality. Parliamentarians also have a responsibility to scrutinise gaps and weaknesses in legislation, as well as to ensure the domestication of regional and international legislation and instruments that have been ratified. Through their oversight role, parliaments should also ensure that there are dedicated budgets for women's programmes and that government departments engage in gender-responsive budgeting. Parliaments must therefore strengthen their oversight and accountability mechanisms.
- 9.2. ECONOMIC GROWTH OF WOMEN:** On the African continent, the majority of women are still employed in the informal sector at the lower end of the economy. This must be addressed and women need to be absorbed into the formal economy at a faster rate. Parliaments must also work towards ensuring that the global gender gap is reduced. Through oversight, the role of women in entrepreneurship must be encouraged, particularly in rural areas. Women's access to finance, their 'time poverty' and continuing discriminatory practices such as child marriage and inability to own land must be addressed, as these factors impact on women's ability to make meaningful contributions to the economy. Efforts must be made to harness the contribution of stakeholders in the private sector to ensure that poverty amongst women is reduced.
- 9.3. EDUCATION AND SOCIALISATION:** The education of young girls is imperative for economic empowerment. Girls and young women continue to experience discrimination in their daily lives through limited access to education and socialisation which enforces



that home and care work is the domain of women. Equal opportunities for girls and boys must be created and discriminatory practices outlawed. Boys must also be educated on respect and gender equality.

- 9.4. SUPPORT FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS:** Women continue to face obstacles to entering leadership positions. In the political sphere, women must often “fight” to retain their positions. The creation and revival of structures to provide support to women in parliaments is important for networking and exchanging ideas and sharing best practice models. Women often leave the political sphere and do not enter leadership positions in new occupations, while men often leave and become board directors and executives. There is a need to look at the retention and exit strategies for women.
- 9.5. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:** Gender-based violence was a concerted area of focus of the conference and much discussion ensued on its related challenges and the strategies that should be put in place to address it. Gender-based violence significantly impacts on women’s ability to be economically active. Parliaments have a critical role to play in eradicating such violence. Parliaments should use the conference deliberations to develop plans for taking up the issues raised as a matter of urgency.
- 9.6. WOMEN’S PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUSES:** Women’s Causes are an important platform for women to come together across the political divide and create a space to discuss issues that affect all women regardless of party affiliation. Women’s Caucuses must engage with civil society and, furthermore, they should engage with a body of robust research on the issues that negatively impact upon women’s development. Women’s Caucuses should find effective ways of collaborating with civil society organisations in order to broaden their knowledge base on issues that affect women.
- 9.7. INCLUSION OF MEN AS CHAMPIONS FOR CHANGE:** Men in parliaments should be encouraged to actively participate in changing gender relations in society. One practical way of initiating is through endorsement and implementation of the United Nations ‘He for She’ campaign.



**9.8. FOLLOW-UP ON RESOLUTIONS:** Processes should be established to ensure that the conference resolutions are implemented. Resolutions made at the conference should result in specific areas of activity for the parliaments represented. It was also recommended that the conference be held on an annual basis.

## **10. Innovative Ways of Changing the World of Work for Women, Chaired by Hon L Maseko**

The following issues were raised during the session:

### **10.1. BARRIERS TO INNOVATION:**

- There is a lack of skills development, capacity building and networking opportunities for women.
- Women are still used as a “front” for accessing business opportunities, however they are rarely business owners.
- Older women, who have valuable skills and experience, are excluded from labour opportunities.
- There is a lack of information about legislation and policies protecting women, particularly those in rural areas and in vulnerable occupations.
- Structural barriers are still a problem. The workplace is designed in a male-oriented manner and does not make provision for women’s needs (e.g. childcare and breastfeeding facilities).
- Women often do not have decision-making power about the money they earn.
- Women-owned businesses are not adequately supported and need capacity building and opportunities that enable their growth.
- There is too much bureaucratic red tape when starting a business. This needs to be addressed at municipal level.



#### Recommendations

- There is a need for increased oversight and scrutiny by Members of Parliament, particularly of departmental budgets, programmes and targets to ensure that they promote access to skills and resources for women. Stringent monitoring and follow-up must happen in this regard.
- Gender-responsive budgeting and dedicated budgets for women are imperative to ensure opportunities for innovation.
- Skills transfer, coaching and mentorship amongst women in the workplace is needed.
- Resource facilities need to be more easily accessible.
- Resuscitate women's structures at all levels to ensure networking and engagement opportunities for women.

## 11. How Can Technology Be Used to Expand Women's Access to the Economy and to Entrepreneurship? Chaired by Hon S Hanoomanjee

The following issues were raised during the session:

**11.1. RELOOK AT BASIC EDUCATION:** Delegates reflected on poor matric (Grade 12) results, and added that it was difficult to advocate for innovation when youth are failing mathematics and English. Efforts to strengthen the skills of girls should be accelerated. The focus on quality education should start at an early age and efforts should be made to improve the quality of education at early childhood development level.

**11.2. FOCUS ON SUPPORTING GIRLS IN STEM FIELDS OF STUDY:** Concerted efforts should also be made to encourage and support girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields of study. The majority of students enrolled at South African universities are women. In 2016, 56% of bursaries were awarded to women towards postgraduate studies. Yet more needs to be done to encourage girls to study science and technology.



**11.3. ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY IN RURAL AREAS:** Technological development of girls living in rural areas must be addressed as a matter of priority. Delegates noted that this is a serious problem for women living in deep rural areas. A national plan that focuses on building technological infrastructure in rural communities should be developed, resourced and implemented with urgency. This will facilitate the quality of education and provide opportunities to girls in rural areas. Electrification in rural communities is a critical prerequisite to create an enabling environment for information and communication systems (ICT). Access to free wifi in rural areas is essential to unlocking women's economic potential and should be viewed as an investment in future economic prosperity.

**11.4. NEED TO SIMPLIFY THE UNDERSTANDING OF TECHNOLOGY:** For many, technology can be daunting. Opportunities should be created to improve understanding and learning optimal use of technology. Children should be exposed to technology at a young age in the education system. This can be done by ensuring that all schools are equipped with computer laboratories, especially those in disadvantaged communities. Existing ICT programmes must be available in all official languages to ensure easy access and understanding by all users. Learnerships and internships that focus on information, communication and technology should be strengthened. These should be readily available in rural areas.

**11.5. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY:** There is a need to recognise students and not just their supervisors for technological innovations. Universities must acknowledge the work done by students and not take ownership for the work of young people. Delegates noted that parliaments should review legislation that protects indigenous knowledge.

## **12. Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women – The Role of Legislatures in Fast-Tracking Progress, Chaired by Hon S Morutoa**



The following issues were raised:

- 12.1. INADEQUATE STATISTICS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:** Notwithstanding that levels of violence against women has reached alarming levels, current statistics in this regard are inadequate and there is significant room for improvement in the collation of these statistics. Since 2013, the South African Police Services (SAPS) has not reported on crime statistics for murder, assault with the intention to do grievous bodily harm or common assault by gender. This is a problem as violence against women must be looked at in the context of these statistics.
- 12.2. UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONS, GENDER INEQUALITY AND PATRIARCHY:** The unequal power relations between men and women and the social context of patriarchy and gender inequality play a role in creating an enabling environment within which violence against women can thrive. Violence against women cannot be addressed in a vacuum without addressing the broader social context of structural inequality.
- 12.3. LIMITED AWARENESS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:** Victims of violence, especially women in the rural areas and at grassroot levels, are often not aware of their rights as information does not filter to them or information is inaccessible in terms of language and plain language.
- 12.4. FRAGMENTED APPROACH TO ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN BY DEPARTMENTS SUCH AS POLICE AND JUSTICE :** The approach to addressing violence against women must be coordinated and concerted to have a positive impact. One practical solution here is to introduce a system where it is possible to track a single case in the police, health and court systems through a centralised system with a single tracking number. This should be available on a computerised system that links health, police and court services and provides updated information on where a case is at any given point in time.
- 12.5. POOR REPORTING OF INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT:** The issue of sex for jobs is often reported after the fact and not as soon as it takes place. Moreover, it is



difficult for victims of sexual harassment to come forward and admit that they secured a job after being sexually harassed. Government departments are also not required to report incidents of sexual harassment in their annual reports to Parliament.

**12.6. WEAK POLICIES ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT:** Although workplaces have policies in place against sexual harassment, these policies rarely address sexual harassment from a preventative perspective and do not offer effective support to victims who are too afraid to lodge a formal case. Even where policies are in place, they are sometimes flouted and not implemented.

**12.7. POOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE:** Women often experience secondary victimisation when engaging with the criminal justice system. There is a need to ensure that service provision to victims of gender-based violence is co-ordinated at an inter-departmental level, adequately budgeted for and implemented in an effective manner that reduces secondary victimisation.



## Recommendations

- Address gender-based violence as a multi-dimensional issue

Violence is a multi-dimensional issue and strategies to address it require complex approaches involving a range of different stakeholders in society. No one initiative can both prevent and address violence against women. It requires coordinated effort and it is critical to involve all stakeholders in a quest to change the social norms and gender stereotypes that allow gender-based violence to thrive. The issue of gender inequality is at the heart of violence against women and prevention work must focus on this.

- Review the implementation of legislation

There is a need to review the implementation of legislation aimed at addressing violence against women. Civil society participation should be elicited in this regard. Based on the recommendations received through this process, a strategy should be put in place to address the challenges experienced.

- Conduct a review of sexual harassment in the workplace

There is a need to elicit evidence-based information that provides an understanding of the nature and extent of sexual harassment in workplaces and the extent to which recourse mechanisms are effective or not. Based on this, plans should be put in place to make places of work safer for women. All legislatures should ensure that they have sexual harassment legislation in place as well as internal policies to address sexual harassment in legislatures as places of work. Legislation and policies on sexual harassment should carry harsher penalties and place an obligation on an employer to address and deal with complaints of sexual harassment.

- Ensure adequate budgeting

Budgeting for service provision to address gender-based violence, including infrastructural and operational costs, should be ring-fenced. Without transparent budgeting, it is impossible to track what is being spent to give effect to policy and legislation aimed at addressing violence against women.

- Health consequences of gender-based violence

The health consequences of gender-based violence include physical injury, depression, attempted suicide, mental health issues and reproductive health problems. Within the ambit of a public health approach, it is important that states include maternal and child health programmes; mental health initiatives and sexual and reproductive health interventions. In developing a comprehensive public health approach, governments must ensure that they incorporate violence against women in their health plans, have a dedicated budget for providing related services, develop service delivery plans and develop strategies for improving upon the collection of health-related data and evidence.

- Address the way in which culture and tradition impact on gender-based violence

Culture and tradition are often permeated by power relations and used to exercise control over girls and women. Domestic violence and the exclusion of women from inheriting land are examples of cultural practices that are harmful to women's rights. There is a need to monitor the negative impact of culture and tradition. Traditional leaders should be educated on issues relating to violence against women and sexual harassment.





### 13. Conference Resolutions

The following declaration was adopted by the conference:

1. The International Conference on Women and the Changing World of Work builds upon and reinforces the conference conclusions of the sixty-first session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The Conference:

**Affirms** the SDG 5 targets, which include the ending of all forms of discrimination against women and eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in both the public and private spheres.

**Reaffirms** the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and reiterates the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as well as other relevant international legal frameworks for realising gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including those that address women's economic empowerment.

**Recognises** that the gender responsive implementation of the AU Agenda 2063 for sustainable development in Africa is a critical component to facilitating women's economic empowerment

**Further recognises** the important role played by regional conventions, instruments and initiatives in the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, including, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.



2. Based on the deliberations of the International Conference on Women and the Changing World of Work, the following conclusions are agreed to:
- a) That women's right to work is critical for economic empowerment. This includes the right to decent work and full and productive employment as a critical means of implementing SDG 5 on achieving gender equality.
  - b) That the feminisation of poverty is a significant challenge in women's economic empowerment.
  - c) That transformation of the world of work will help achieve exponential economic growth and assist with ending poverty.
  - d) That gender inequalities in labour markets persist and that the pace and scale of transformation towards realising women's economic empowerment has been unacceptably slow. Parliaments have a critical role to play in overseeing that the pace of change is accelerated.
  - e) The continued gender gaps in labour force participation and leadership; wages and income; occupational segregation; social norms and workplace culture; unequal working conditions; the burden of women's unpaid domestic and care work and gaps in social protection and commits to finding ways of addressing these. The conference commits Parliaments to overseeing gender gaps in labour force participation, wages, income, pensions and social protection as a matter of priority.
  - f) That access to and effective usage of technology is key to unlocking women's economic potential. Ensuring that women and girls are technologically empowered, computer literate and able to navigate their way on the internet, is critical to growing their knowledge base, especially so in the case of rural women and girls. In addition, Parliaments need to engage in oversight to ensure that the cost of access to broadband is not exorbitant, thereby excluding the poor from using it for their development.



- g) The empowerment of indigenous women as well as the empowerment of rural women and girls is critical to the economic empowerment of women.
- h) Structural barriers to women's economic empowerment can be exacerbated in conflict and post-conflict; refugee and humanitarian settings.
- i) Changing women's lives is not possible without states ensuring that expenditure is planned and monitored from a gender perspective and that the gendered implications of all government programmes are clear.
- j) Structural barriers to gender equality impose constraints on women in balancing work and family responsibilities and that these barriers need to be eliminated so as to ensure women's full participation in the world of work.
- k) The sharing of family responsibilities creates an enabling family environment for women's economic empowerment and encourages the creation of societies where men and women make significant contributions to the home and community, including unpaid care and domestic work.
- l) The right to quality and inclusive education is a critical component of narrowing the gender gap in the economy. This includes the need for women and girls to acquire skills in digital fluency and technology.
- m) Violence against women in all its forms has serious consequences for the quality of life of women, including the fact that it serves as a major impediment to women's economic empowerment and their social and economic development.
- n) Sexual harassment is a significant impediment to women's health and well-being and to their economic advancement.



o) That men and boys must be encouraged to take an active part in and to engage fully as agents and beneficiaries for change in the realisation of women's economic empowerment.

p) Civil society organisations and the private sector have a critical role to play as stakeholders and agents in ensuring women's economic empowerment.

3. Based on the above conclusions, the Conference encourages Parliaments to:

a) Effectively oversee poverty alleviation strategies, including addressing the plight of women and girls in situations of extreme poverty.

b) Conduct oversight of the integration of government action for women's economic empowerment into national sustainable development, poverty eradication and sectoral strategies, policies and action plans at all levels.

c) Ensure that appropriate legal frameworks exist for the protection of rights, safety and security of women and girls in conflict, post-conflict and refugee settings.

d) Take action at national, regional and a global level to strengthen normative and legal frameworks for full employment and decent work and the eradication of gender discrimination on the whole.

e) Oversee the maximisation of targeted financing to accelerate the achievement of women's economic empowerment.

f) Be rigorous in ensuring that gender responsive budgeting is used as a tool in passing and overseeing government budgets.



- g) Encourage legislative reform that seeks to address structural barriers that constrain work and family responsibilities of women.
- h) Oversee gender-responsive education policies and strategies at all levels, including ongoing, lifelong learning opportunities for women and girls.
- i) Strengthen the capacity, resources and the authority of national gender equality mechanisms so that they can support and monitor the implementation of action plans. Specifically, Parliaments should adequately capacitate, resource and support the work of Women's Caucuses in Parliament.
- j) Accelerating reform and initiatives to address violence against women and its impact on the economic and social empowerment of women through vigorous oversight in relation to violence against women and to ensuring that budgets for expenditure in this regard are ring-fenced. Parliaments should seek to ensure that government budgets prioritise care work in relation to violence against women and that this is adequately provided for.
- k) Adopting sexual harassment policies that cover all aspects of sexual harassment, including harassment by Members of Parliament to members of staff. Parliaments should set the example of adopting a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment.
- l) Commit to forming partnerships and engaging civil society and the private sector and ensuring their regular and meaningful participation in legislative and oversight processes.
- m) Develop national action plans for oversight of the attainment of gender equality insofar as women's economic empowerment is concerned. These should have clear targets and benchmarks against which progress should be measured.



- n) Further build, support and capacitate integrated and coordinated national and regional initiatives to promote gender justice and women's socio-economic empowerment through the established gender machinery.

## **14. Conclusion of the Conference, Hon B Mbete, Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa**

Hon Mbete noted that the conference had achieved what it had set out to do and had created a platform for unpacking a number of critical issues. Within the context of SDG 5, the conference had managed to develop a plan to ensure that parliaments take forward the work of the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

A critical issue that emerged over the course of the conference is the issue of budgets, of ensuring that there are adequate resources for investing in women's economic empowerment and addressing violence against women. Parliaments have a critical role to play in ensuring that governments use gender responsive budgeting as a tool for ensuring that public expenditure is viewed through a gendered lens.

In terms of suggestions to host the conference on an annual basis, this is a difficult decision to take upfront as the questions of resourcing such an initiative comes to the fore, careful thought will have to be applied to the issue of how this could be financed. What is critical is that the conference declaration is used to channel the conference issues through the relevant structures in parliaments.

One possibility of ensuring information sharing on implementing the conference resolutions is the development of a small task team of persons who participated in the conference to look at how to take the conference forward. The Women's Caucuses represented should discuss and settle this matter.