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MPWC Implementation Plan for the International Conference on Women and the Changing World of Work

Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Summary of Key Conference Issues..... | 1 |
| Areas of action for parliaments represented at the International Women's Conference | 4 |
| Proposed Implementation Plan..... | 5 |

Introduction

In August 2017, Parliament hosted an international conference with the same theme as that of the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women held at the United Nations headquarters in New York from 13 – 17 March 2017, namely “Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50:50 by 2030.” The conference sought to provide a platform to engage further with the critical issue of transforming workplaces for women. The conference concluded with the adoption of a declaration, which outlined the action areas that parliaments represented at the conference would take up. This implementation plan seeks to identify key areas of possible action and to propose ways in which these could be taken up in the parliamentary agenda. It does this by suggesting both areas of action for the Multi-Party Women’s Caucus as well as areas of work for referral to other committees.

Summary of Key Conference Issues

The conference identified a number of key issues that impede upon the economic empowerment of women as well as a number of challenges that make the world of work a difficult space for women. Some of the key issues raised include:

Women and economic empowerment: The release of the recent ‘Poverty Trends in South Africa’¹ 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

¹ Poverty Trends in South Africa, Statistics South Africa, 2017



women workers around the world are in located in the informal economy and states cannot afford to ignore them.

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 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.

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.

Areas of action for parliaments represented at the International Women's Conference

Parliaments represented at the international conference agreed to take the following action:

- Effectively oversee poverty alleviation strategies, including addressing the plight of women and girls in situations of extreme poverty.
- 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.
- 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.
- Oversee the maximisation of targeted financing to accelerate the achievement of women's economic empowerment.
- Be rigorous in ensuring that gender responsive budgeting is used as a tool in passing and overseeing government budgets.



- Encourage legislative reform that seeks to address structural barriers that constrain work and family responsibilities of women.
- Oversee gender-responsive education policies and strategies at all levels, including ongoing, lifelong learning opportunities for women and girls.
- 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.
- Accelerate 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.
- Adopt 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.
- Commit to forming partnerships and engaging civil society and the private sector and ensuring their regular and meaningful participation in legislative and oversight processes.
- 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.
- 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.

Proposed Implementation Plan

Based upon the resolutions taken above, 7 key areas of work have been suggested. These are reflected in the table below:

| Area of Work | Key Issues and Action to be taken | Role of MPWC | Involvement of other Committees |
|---------------------|--|---------------------|--|
| 1. Women and | Develop an oversight plan | The MPWC should | PC on Trade and |



Economic Empowerment

that explores the following:

- Women in the informal economy
- The under-valuing of care work in society
- Women in marginalised sectors of economy.

The economic status of black women should be a specific area of focus in this oversight plan.

refer this matter to related committees that are best placed to take on this work and should engage with these committees on the oversight plan.

Industry, PC on Economic Development, PC on Small Business.

Income Inequality

Income inequality emerged as a significant issue at the conference.

The High Level Panel on the Independent Assessment of Legislation (HLP) has looked at this as a key area of its work. It would make sense to use this work (once the report is released) to develop a plan on how to best take up the gendered implications of income inequality.

Once the recommendations of the HLP have been considered, the MPWC can engage further with the Employment Equity Commission as a point of departure to explore how to best take this issue up.

Collaborative initiative with the PC on Labour, PC on Small Businesses and PC on Trade and Industry.

Changing the world of work so that it is more gender sensitive

The conference raised the need to revisit related legislation to ensure that the world of work is sensitive to women's gendered needs and interests.

It would be useful to organise a summit on this issue and look at ways in which the Labour Relations Act, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Employment Equity Act need to be amended to take up this matter.

Joint Summit with the PC on Labour

Violence against Women

Violence against women emerged as a significant area of concern in that it negatively affects women's ability to be economically active and productive. Concern was raised that legislation is not being implemented as it should be.

The need for oversight in this regard should be referred to the PC on Justice.

One aspect of this work that the MPWC could take on, is to engage with Treasury

Referral to PC on Justice



to ensure ring-fenced budgeting for gender-based violence. This would also relate to the area below on taking up GRB.

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)

GRB emerged a critical area. Government departments are not currently budgeting in ways that make clear the gendered implications of their budgets.

MPWC to meet with Treasury and engage with it on initiating a pilot on GRB in relation to violence against women.

Not applicable.

Concern was raised at the fact that Women's Budget Initiative had collapsed and that the Department of Women has not made any progress in this regard.

MPWC to meet with the Department of Women to engage with its plans to take up GRB.

In order to start up the process of GRB, it is suggested that a pilot is conducted in relation to GRB and violence against women.

Strengthen the National Gender Machinery (NGM)

The need to strengthen the NGM emerged as a key area of activity.

MPWC to send out questionnaire to NGM structures and compile report and action plan.

Not applicable.

It is proposed that the MPWC conducts a study on the status of the NGM. This could be done by sending out a questionnaire to all the structures in the NGM (the CGE, Department of Women and the gender desks in the Departments). The questionnaire should focus on areas of work, impact, capacity and key challenges of the NGM structures.

Address Sexual Harassment

The need for more information on sexual harassment in parliaments

Once the MPWC has been briefed by the Secretary, it is

Not applicable.



emerged as a key area of interest.

It is suggested that the MPWC meets with the Deputy Secretary to engage with her on the number of cases formally taken up in Parliament and the related challenges in this regard.

proposed that host a roundtable/seminar on sexual harassment in Parliament.