



*Permanent Mission of the Republic of Zimbabwe  
to the United Nations*

**STATEMENT BY HON. OLIVIA N. MUCHENA**

**MINISTER OF WOMEN AFFAIRS, GENDER AND COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT**

**TO THE**

**55<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**ON THE 'PRIORITY THEME'**

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## Introduction

**Chairperson,**

Zimbabwe aligns itself with the statements made by Argentina on behalf of the group of 77 and China, by Mozambique on behalf of the African Group and by Namibia on behalf of the SADC. Zimbabwe is pleased to participate in the 55<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women on this important priority theme. To that end, I thank the UN Secretary-General for his reports which provide a basis for our deliberations. Let me also congratulate Ms Michelle Bachelet on her appointment as the Executive Director of UN Women and also point out that my country pledges its cooperation with her office.

## Benefits of science and technology education

**Chairperson,**

My Government is fully aware that development of nations is dependent on the availability and full utilization of appropriate science and technology. Zimbabwe recognizes that more than 50 % of its population is women whose vast potential is still to be fully utilized in some critical areas of education and training. As a critical element of education, science and technology contributes to human development by providing knowledge, skills and attitudes with which to make sense of the world.

**Chairperson,**

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action addressed the issue of eliminating all of forms of discrimination against women and the girl child and to increase their access to education, training, science and technology, and remove all obstacles to gender equality and the advancement and empowerment of women. In line with this my government has prioritized the Millennium Development Goal 3, on promoting gender equality and empowerment of women in our national development agenda.

## Progress made and gaps remaining

**Chairperson,**

Despite the many challenges being faced by Zimbabwe, my Government has gone a long way to enhance the pillars of this year's theme on access, participation, training and employment of women and girls. We have surpassed the MDG target in terms of access to basic education. According to UNESCO

2010 statistics, Zimbabwe at 92% literacy rate is in the lead in Africa. This feat has been achieved through successive policy provisions that were adopted at independence in 1980.

My Government has further put in place measures to assist vulnerable children especially the girl child to access and retain them in school through the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM). Of the total number of children assisted, 56% are girls. Furthermore, my Government has sought to build schools to ensure that all children of school going age access a school within 3 km radius from their homesteads. The concept of providing child friendly schools have been adopted and this has helped increase completion rates particularly for the girl child. The focus on early childhood development has resulted in the introduction of the early childhood learning (zero grade) in all primary schools both in rural and urban areas. In addition, the Presidential Computerisation Programme is availing computers through out the country to rural schools in order to enhance both teaching and learning and also reduce the urban-rural digital divide.

### **Making science and technology attractive to girls**

To encourage the girl child to take up science, mathematics and technical subjects at secondary school, government has adopted a strategy of science and mathematics camps for girls in all the ten provinces of the country. These camps and science clubs provide a forum to promote and demystify science and mathematics education and to boost the confidence of the girls to pursue science related careers at tertiary and higher education institutions.

In these camps, female role models who have ventured in non traditional careers come and talk to the girls. Two thousand girls drawn from the ten provinces of the country participates in these camps every year.

### **Chairperson,**

In higher and tertiary levels strategies have been put in place to increase access to education by female students. These include affirmative action in the admission policies at universities. The establishment of the Zimbabwe Open University has enabled more previously disadvantaged females to pursue their chosen fields of study at their own pace. The establishment of the Women's University in Africa in Zimbabwe by women themselves has resulted in the enrolment of 85% females and 15% males at the said university. This has greatly increased access to university education by women and girls. In addition a special student financial assistance scheme (cadetship programme) set up by Government in 2005 has assisted up to 45% female students. His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe has set up a presidential scholarship programme to assist needy students to study at universities outside the country. 49% of the beneficiaries are female students.

These strategies have resulted in a much improved access to tertiary education by women from 2006 to 2010 as follows;

- Vocational Education & Training enrolment of women increased from 34% in 2006 to 44.3% in 2010
- Universities from 36.9% to 39.5%
- Polytechnics from 41.2% to 44.3%
- Teachers colleges from 56.7% to 69.4 %

Of the total number of students involved in open and distance learning 40% are women.

#### **Chairperson,**

Zeroing in on to science and technology education there is mixed progress on the level of participation by females at tertiary levels. An assessment on the participation of women in science and technology at universities carried out in 2010 indicated female enrolment in the following faculties' as follows;

- Agriculture: 48.7%
- Engineering: 7.4%
- College of Health Sciences: 31.9 %
- Natural Science: 50%
- Veterinary Science: 9 %

#### **Chairperson,**

My Government is working in collaboration with a local NGO called E-Knowledge for Women in Southern Africa (EKOWISA) which promotes the effective and efficient use of information and communication technologies (ICT's) by women in urban and rural areas. This is done through availing ICT's to communities in local languages to help them appreciate the value of ICT's in their life, for example by marketing their products through the internet. 80% of community participants are women at each programme site.

#### **Chairperson,**

My Government has also introduced a programme to develop science and engineering in schools in collaboration with the Society for Engineering and Technology in Africa (SETA). SETA accomplishes this by introducing practical engineering or technology to cultivate creativity and innovation in children, including the girl child.

## **Challenges**

**Chairperson,**

The above impressive gains and measures are threatened, stagnated and reversed in some instances because of the illegal economic sanctions that were imposed upon our country by the EU and the USA a decade ago. The women and girl children of Zimbabwe have borne most of the brunt of the economic sanctions. The resultant economic decline has meant that girls are less likely to complete their education in the context of competing family demands. Secondly, introduction of innovation in science and technology for girls is perceived as a luxury instead of a necessity because of limited resources. Thirdly, the flight of skilled human capital to other countries in search of greener pastures has eroded our gains and has also meant that the availability of role models to girls is compromised.

## **Conclusion**

**Chairperson,**

Zimbabwe remains committed to gender equality and the empowerment of women and will continue to do its utmost to deliver progress to our women & girls and our society at large. We call upon the EU and the USA to unconditionally remove the economic sanctions they unfairly imposed upon my country. This development will facilitate the education and economic empowerment of women and girls which is a prerequisite to achieving gender equality.

I thank you.

