

ORAL STATEMENT BY ZAMBIA'S NGO COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON THE THEME OF CSW 56 – "THE EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN AND THEIR ROLE IN POVERTY AND HUNGER ERADICATION, DEVELOPMENT AND CURRENT CHALLENGES"

In Zambia, women constitute 64% of the rural population of which approximately 80% participate in the agricultural sector as providers of labour. Under Zambian customary law women mainly have User Rights and no Ownership Rights to land. This is because men are conferred ownership under the administration of traditional land thereby creating a situation of landlessness for the female populace. Provision of Article 23(4) (c, d) of the Republican Constitution recognises the application of customary laws in matters dealing with property (National Gender Policy, March 2000, Page 32).

Despite the country being a signatory to international and regional conventions on women's rights such as the CEDAW, Africa Union Protocol and the SADC Protocol on Gender, which call for women's equal access to economic resources, including land, credit and markets, as a means to further the advancement and empowerment of women and girls, there is still a big gap in resource allocation. It is very difficult for women to access credit arising out of their lack of land ownership rights thereby hindering their provision of the required collateral. In addition, even though women participate in both cash and food crop production, they are isolated when it comes to incentives aimed at promoting their participation in various developmental programmes.

Because the rural women themselves have the knowledge and capabilities to contribute to changing their situations, it is critical that they are provided precious and indispensable

support towards the cause for empowerment. It is our expectation that the CSW56 will connect discussion issues to the real lives of women and that the gathering will expose those very issues that women face on the ground. There is no longer room for powerlessness, isolation and invisibility of rural women – the world must offer opportunities for the voices of all women to be heard and included on the global development agenda.

Therefore, governments should refocus and re-strategize to design programmes and policies deliberately aimed at empowering women. This should be done through accelerated land ownership to promote security of land tenure and supporting local level initiatives that involve rural women such as direct access to microfinance, environmental education, markets and appropriate infrastructure. This will, to a large extent, address the daunting discrimination on access to and control over productive resources such as land.

Governments should further forge real partnerships and working coalitions, in terms of accessibility by women, to agricultural extension services and sustainable agricultural methods. In addition governments must institute strategies and mechanisms to end dispossession of large chunks of land due to commercial land investments through sustainable land management systems.

The platforms for regular dialogue will enhance strategies on women's common goals, which will in turn provide opportunities for women's perspectives and wisdom to make gender equality and equity a reality. The insights of women are critical at all levels especially in incorporating the human rights of women into major poverty eradication policies and hence the need to advance them where needed.