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**GENDER INEQUALITIES AND VALUING OF WOMEN'S WORK**

Inequality has a negative impact on women, and this is reflected in all industries, including mining, manufacturing, trade, and agriculture. This article focuses on trade, specifically small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), and the inequalities that affect them. The SMEs sub-sector provides various opportunities for economic growth and securing of livelihoods for many households, in rural and urban areas alike, however there are structural challenges that impede the potential for growth of the informal SMEs. Because of this there has been a growing concern over the need to formalize the informal sector to ensure that they to benefit from organized trade and increased markets for their products.

While we recognize that women continue to face challenges as a result of the informality of trading spaces, this article also recognizes that there are vast inequalities related to the undervaluing of women's work, which is manifested through unpaid care work and an unfair economy in which, despite their critical role, informal workers and unpaid carers are absent from social and economic policies.

The 2014 Labour Force Survey (LFS) shows that 52% of economically active females were mainly employed as contributing family workers (CFWs) compared to 17% of males. CFWs are unpaid workers assisting in the family business or farm. They are largely wives (71%) and daughters (17%) supporting family businesses without a wage mainly in the agricultural sector (Mulenga, 2018). This injustice leaves many women in highly vulnerable situations, with little or no access to even legal protection.

The Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD) is of the view that the very definition of work must transform. There is need for a shift in how women's informal and unpaid work

is concretely valued by Government, so as to challenge social expectations and norms around women and girls.

To consider the gender specific challenges to women engaging in trade, first, is the lack of access to finance. Women are often disadvantaged when it comes to accessing finance mainly due to the socio-cultural norms that characterize rural communities, as well as limited collateral items as these are often possessed by men. This is evidenced through land ownership issues that are mainly experienced in the rural areas.

Second, access to markets is a problem when there is a lack of funds. Aside from the long-distance terrains and poor road networks that obstruct women's ability to transport goods to markets, there is an increasing demand for SMEs to supply local supermarkets. However, the absorption power of these supermarkets is limited, coupled with the many requirements that supermarkets seek from people who supply them. An example of this is the requirement that SMEs be legally registered, with capacity to supply chain stores and be able to transport their products to the stores. Many SMEs are unable to meet these requirements and find themselves with no market for their goods.

Another challenge, particularly with the women engaged in agricultural trade is limited diversification in the sector. Women are often not sensitized on high value crops for which they are able to grow and ensure that they have steady cash-flows throughout the year. This is coupled with a dictation of agricultural activities for which they can engage in. In rural areas, supporting agencies in some instances are specific on what crops women can engage in and this tends to disadvantage their comparative advantage with neighboring districts/countries.

Women also lack negotiation as well as technological skills and are therefore not able to take advantage of high crop/ commodities prices as they have no access to end users. A case in point is with regards women engaged in mining. In Mufulira, for example, women involved in Silica mining are exploited by buyers of their extraction, who either delay or do not pay at all.

Regarding SMEs engaged in cross border trade, they are often manipulated into paying exorbitant prices to trade and are often dubbed by middlemen for fear of losing their

commodities. This has at times led into women engaging in illegal activities such as sexual trade.

Overall, women face a reduction in cash flow and consumer demand, especially in times of external influence such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The general increase in prices caused by inflation, as well as the Kwacha's poor performance against major world currencies, have harmed overall demand for goods.

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Editor's Note

The Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD) is a not- for –profit, membership based trade policy and development think tank. The organization was established in 1999 and existed as the civil society trade network (CSTNZ), until 2009 when it was rebranded as the Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD).

The mandate of CTPD is to influence pro-poor trade and investment reforms at national, regional and multilateral levels as well as facilitate the participation of various stakeholders including member organizations in ensuring that trade is used as a tool for poverty eradication.

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