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CTPD CALLS FOR MORE SUPPORT TOWARDS WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

International workers day, which in many countries, Zambia alike, is known as Labour Day was commemorated on May 1st, 2022. This day sought to celebrate the contribution of the workers to the labour force. It has been noted over the years that informal setups/Government in Zambia, women tend to enjoy certain in-service privileges such as mother's day and maternity leave, in addition to favourable pay. However, given the limited capacity of the Government institutions to employ all women, private entities have tended to create opportunities as well to women, which too have been limited and this has then created an informal sector for which majority are women. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates on unemployment, female percentage of labour force in Zambia was reported at 13.42 % in 2020 while men's unemployment, percentage of labor force was recorded at 12.31 % in 2020.

The informal sector has been characterised by precarious livelihoods for women, compared to their male counterparts. Women in informal work are left unprotected by contracts, and unrecognised by the economy. Their hard work is unnoticed, and they face problems like low pay, no job security or sick leave, and the threat of abuse. Suffice to say that the role of labour unions that champion the concerns of these workers have also been undermined, and therefore the representation specific to these groups often remains with little impact. Most women are vulnerable, and this is often driven by high poverty levels, low levels of education, lack of exposure, cultural norms, and religion. A case in point being of the women from Garden compound whom, while engaging in an illegal trade of brewing local beer lacked adequate knowledge of labour provisions with regards to informal work and therefore any grievances resulting from interruption of this trade were not well targeted.

The principle law that governs labour in Zambia is the Employment Code Act of 2019. This act facilitates for management of employer and employee relations as well as provides for skills, labour advisory committees, and their functions. Informal settings such as the market places, where many women also trade, are governed by the Markets Act, which provides for the establishment and management of markets. Even with the existence of such provisions however, it is noted, based on a mapping done by Centre for Trade Policy and Development (CTPD) that these channels, specifically the Market Act, in its current form is not an effective

lobbying mechanism for of valuing of women's work. Added to this is that, mostly women fall victims to family property grabbing in cases where their male spouse dies. Women access to land ownership and property use is still a gender issue in most communities. Equal protection of property rights of both men and women is a requirement under international human rights law. Women access to property such as land is key to business development, the right to housing and business security, and freedom from forced evictions.

CTPD advances the following recommendations, so that even as contributions of workers are spoken of and recognised, women's work are not undervalued. First is that there be capacity building training in different business avenues, including business and finance, business skills, and farming skills (life skills) for women and men alike. There is need to create decent and conducive working environments through better policies. Political will, there remains an opportunity for the government to support and empower women.

Finally yet importantly is training and capacity building in associations, cooperatives, and unions and how these can be responsive to women's needs in informal settings.

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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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