

From Informal Cross Border Trading to



Formal Cross Border Trading

Consultative Meeting for women in Informal Cross Border Trading from 3 – 4 June 2010 at Holiday INN Harare, Zimbabwe

In 2007, UNIFEM Southern Africa Regional Office (SARO) embarked on a research that targeted women Informal Cross Border Trading (ICBT) after it observed that women were especially drawn into this trade. The Research focused on Zimbabwe and Swaziland as countries of origin and South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique as countries of destination. The research revealed that women suffered mostly from targeted attacks and suffered all types of abuse. They were more women than men in ICBT. It was realised that women's resources were used for survival means whereas men were acquiring assets such as houses. It was also realized that that despite all the challenges encountered women ICBTs were contributing a considerable percentage to the GDP of both their home countries as well as the countries they were trading in.

In February 2010, UNIFEM SARO in consultation with the countries involved in the study supported a regional consultation to disseminate the results of the research. In her remarks the **UNIFEM Regional Director, Ms Nomcebo Manzini**, thanked the Governments and the informal cross border traders for their commitment to ensuring that the research recommendations are implemented. She noted: "It is time to end the impunity with which women traders are treated at points of entry and

departure simply because they want to live decent lives and educate their children"

On 3 and 4 June 2010, UNIFEM in conjunction with the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development hosted a two day ICBT strategic planning meeting which was graced by stakeholders who are necessary in ensuring the establishment of a holistic plan of action for women ICBTs. These included the Ministry Industry and Trade; Health and Child Welfare; Finance; Small and Medium Enterprises; Home Affairs; Economic Planning and Investment Promotion; Local Government; Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA); Justice and Legal Affairs; Zimbabwe Trade; ZEDCO, academics, UN agency representatives, ICBTs amongst others.



Above: Dr S.J. Utete- Masango, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development

Whilst officially opening the meeting, **Dr Utete-Masango, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Women Affairs** said, "The women seated in here are very important as they play a critical role in the day to day running of this country. Their trade is largely about thinking on the spot and making decisions in the split of a second that can either make or break their businesses. Let us listen to them and I believe that as we do, we will gain a lot of knowledge from them." The programme was heavy and participants were eager to learn as much as they can during the given time (see attached programme).

A lot of valuable information was shared with the and between the participants. Whilst there were positive stories that inspired many, the majority of the issues raised were challenges that the women ICBTs face especially at the border posts. The women raised issues around the rebate rate which is currently set at US\$300 as being very minimal and not going hand in hand with the current inflation levels. They urged the relevant authorities to consider increasing it. They also engaged the Ministry of Finance and ZIMRA to come up with a communication directive which would ensure less hassles for ICBTs at the border posts since often at times what would have been declared as duty free goods by the Finance ministry will not be recognized as such by ZIMRA thereby causing commotion and confusion at the border posts for the women.



Above: Dr. Sibanda, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Economic Planning and Investment Promotion

The meeting was educated of the SADC and COMESA protocols on trade. Most participants were perplexed to find out about a US\$500 free duty which they are never informed of at the border posts.

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Economic Planning and Investment Promotion, Dr Sibanda said “Women in ICBTs, I assure you that the Ministry of Economic Planning and Investment Promotion is recognizing the critical role that you are playing and as such my ministry is mainstreaming issues of ICBTs into the Mid Term Plan (MTP) of the Inclusive government thereby formalising ICBT.”

The media was captivated by the major outcome of the meeting which was the agreement to form a National Umbrella body for women ICBTs by the end of June 2010 which would represent all women in ICBT thereby ensuring that their challenges are addressed and resolved. This meeting outcome was adequately captured during the prime time on both national television and radio news nationwide which has a viewer and listenership of over 5million people.



Above: Meeting stakeholders

By the end of the meeting, the women ICBTs redefined and formalised their trade titles into Women Cross Border Traders. The meeting participants were grateful that that UNIFEM had hosted the meeting at an opportune time when Zimbabwe is undergoing economic recovery. It was forecasted that with the economic recovery, comes significant changes that recognises women as significant players in the economic sector. Participants left the meeting with high sense of wanting to conquer and wanting to make a big dent where women’s economic empowerment is concerned!

Contact Details: UNIFEM Country Office

Block 9, UN Compound, Arundel Office Park

Mt Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe

Tel: +263 338838 -44

Email: unifem.admin.zw@undp.org