ACTION TEAMS CALL FOR WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN TRADITIONAL COURTS

By Blondie Ndebele

Habakkuk Trust Community Advocacy Action Teams from Umzingwane, Gwanda, Matobo, Mangwe, Nkayi, Bubi, Inzisa an hat women are not represented in most traditional courts in their areas. These traditional courts are presided over by either the village head, Headman or the area Chief. Section 17 of the Zimbabwe’s Constitution stipulates that the State must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men. Presenting a position paper drafted by women at a policy dialogue meeting organized by Habakkuk Trust in Bulawayo recently, Habakkuk Trust Action Team Vice Convener for Umzingwane Ward 5, Mrs. Mollefe Dube said men have continually dominated traditional courts making it difficult for women to access justice. “Traditionally, women were not allowed to speak in front of men and this has continued even though women have been empowered,” she said. “Women are not able to fully express themselves in issues affecting them as most traditional courts are male dominated. The absence of women assessors in these courts has made it hard for women to seek justice on various crimes committed by men.”

The Action Teams noted that even though there are some areas where there are female tradition-al leaders and assessors, the majority of traditional courts have no female representation. “As such, traditional courts are biased in favour of men,” said Mrs. Dube. “Women are mere listeners and do not actively participate in these courts. We therefore call for appointment of women assessors in traditional courts to allow women to access justice.”

Arts, Culture and Heritage Officer in the Ministry of Rural Development, Promotion and Preservation of National Cultural Heritage, Mr. Canman Mathema, who was at the meeting, said there was a need to train traditional leaders on the contents of the Constitution. “Traditional leaders must be taught on what the Constitution says regarding equal representation so that they can include women in their team of assessors,” he said. “In most cases, assessors have the power over the outcome of a case more than the Chiefs.” Mathema also encouraged communities to attend parliamentary public hearings on bills so that they can input on the policies that affect them.

The Action Team Vice Convener for Inzisa said women are not represented in most traditional courts in their Ward in terms of gender equality. “The workshop made them realized the gap that exists in their Ward in terms of gender equality. As Insiza Wards 2 and 9 were meant to strengthen decision-making structures,”

The two-day gender advocacy workshops conducted in Umzingwane Wards 5 and 9 as well as Inzisa Wards 2 and 9 were meant to strengthen the community’s knowledge and understanding of gender issues and how they can promote gender equality in their Wards. Pastor Reynold Mugadza, a participant at a workshop conducted in Inzisa Ward 15 said the workshop made them realize the gap that exists in their Ward in terms of gender equality. “The workshop allowed us to look at gender in a different light and to fully understand its impor-
It is ironic that in Umzingwane’s Ward 9 community, a ward that is presided over by a female Councilor, participation of women in development and decision-making structures is very poor as the service delivery structures and development committees are mainly dominated by men.

According to statistics from Habakkuk Trust’s recent gender and advocacy capacity building workshop in the ward, women constitute less than 25% of the membership of Village Development Committees, about 12% of membership of the Neighborhood Watch and 0% in membership of Assessors in Village Courts. The only structures where women were represented fairly were the School Development Committees and Village Health Workers where representation is 42% and 71% respectively.

The Councilor of the ward, Ms Sithabile Ndlovu encouraged the Action Team to seriously pursue gender advocacy to ensure that in all village and ward service delivery structures where males are dominating, women are also incorporated.

The Constitution needs to be implemented by everyone including us in the villages. Now that we know and have seen that women are not represented, we need to ensure that we correct it so that we do not violate women’s rights. We need development and service delivery issues that responds to the needs and concerns of women,” she said.

Councilor Ndlovu further challenged the men in the workshop and the traditional leaders to reform themselves and accept the inclusion of women in community decision and development structures.

MEN ENCOURAGED TO ACCEPT WOMEN LEADERSHIP

By Mzimbezani Tsanzu

ACTION TEAM ENGAGES MOBILE OPERATORS TO IMPROVE MOBILE NETWORKS

Umzingwane Ward 9 Habakkuk Trust Community Advocacy Action Teams recently engaged the leading mobile network operators, Econet Zimbabwe, Telcel Zimbabwe and Netone over inaccessibility of mobile networks in the bulk of the Ward.

The Ward is less than 60km from Bulawayo but most people are forced to walk distances, climb mountains or trees to merely make a phone call. The bulk of the Ward has no network access and where it’s available, the reception is very poor.

Speaking on behalf of the Action Team Mrs Sithabile Sibanda explained that the Ward is left behind technologically as they have difficulties in accessing mobile networks, radio and television signals.

“We are in serious need for network base stations,” she said. “When one wants to make a call, they have to climb a mountain or walk distances to where there is network. It is really hard for older people and at night. We cannot receive important information and our children are technologically illiterate because of that.”

Responding to questions at a policy dialogue meeting, Telcel Regional Manager-Southern Province Mrs Priscilla Chivasa said they were aware of the problems and they are working fulltime to make sure that at the earliest possible time the issue is addressed.

Netone Public Relations manager, John Nyanhau assured the Action Team that he will engage the mobile operator’s technical team to find out if there are any plans put in place to ensure improve access to network in Umzingwane.

“We really appreciate communities which are so serious especially regarding communication because it doesn’t make sense that at this day and age there are communities who still can’t access mobile networks. This is the people’s network and it is our wish to avail network in every corner of Zimbabwe. We might not have done so because of resources but however there should be plans in place,” Nyahau said.

The Action Team will make a follow up to the issue until network access in the Ward is improved.

GENDER INEQUALITY AND MIGRATION AFFECTING DEVELOPMENT

By Robben Shwanda

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