



ZIMBABWE

**A TRADE UNION
FOCUS ON THE SDGs**

#HLPF2020

**COVID-19:
WORKERS DEMAND
JOBS, INCOME AND
SOCIAL
PROTECTION**

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED RESPONSES FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

The government of Zimbabwe declared the Covid-19 pandemic a national disaster and has enforced lockdown measures. It has set up a Covid-19 task force, excluding social partners, which has put forward responses that include an economic recovery and stimulus package and scaling up funding for medical expenses and towards Covid-19 related mitigatory measures. However, these measures have a limited coverage. Only two per cent of the population is covered by some sort of social security, thus leaving 98 per cent of the population at risk. Social protection coverage and free access to healthcare need to be extended, and social protection support should be benchmarked with the national Food Poverty Line to ensure households have at least food on the table.

Although measures such as paid sick leave and managed reduction of working hours are in place, these have not been accompanied by income security, and the majority of the workers, either with non-permanent employment or in the informal economy, are not benefiting from them. Trade unions have called on the government to establish a moratorium to freeze the retrenchment of workers; they have also called for a fund for distressed industries and informal economy operators adversely affected by the lockdown. However, given that social dialogue is ad hoc, stakeholders' contributions to Covid-19 measures have been limited.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The government of Zimbabwe has committed itself to implementing SDGs through the "Post-2015 Development Agenda: Zimbabwe Position Paper on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)". The paper gives priority to the SDGs that are expected to have a multiplier effect throughout the economy: SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13 and 17.

The government entities in charge of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are the Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare, which is the coordinating ministry under the guidance and supervision of the Office of the President and Cabinet. While a multi-stakeholder forum to consult on the implementation of the SDGs exists, it is not consistently functional, and it has mostly been convened on the occasion of development of Zimbabwe's SDG Progress Report and upcoming voluntary national review (VNR). Information on progress towards meeting the SDGs is not consistently shared with all stakeholders, as forum discussions within it are largely ad hoc and government centric. While a CSO SDG platform exists, its operations have been limited

due to lack of funding. Trade union contributions have also been limited due to the exclusionary approach of the government.

So far, social dialogue around the SDGs has been minimal, and the government has been unilaterally implementing programmes side-lining the social partners. However, the National Tripartite Negotiation Forum has recently been renewed, supported by a new Act and paving the way for a new structure with an independent secretariat. Trade unions are involved in the setup of the new structure and expect it will provide an opportunity for tripartite deliberations on the SDGs.

Trade unions warn that not enough resources have been allocated to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Quite the opposite, the current budget fails to provide resources for essential social services such as water and sanitation, electricity, education, health and housing.

TRANSPARENCY



Irregular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



Informal or ad hoc consultation

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Social partners submit joint contributions to the government's SDG national plan



IS THE (DECENT) WORK GETTING DONE?

Zimbabwe faces significant challenges in meeting **SDG 1 (end poverty in all its forms everywhere)**. In 2017, 70.5 per cent of the Zimbabwean population was living in poverty, a slight decline from 72.3 per cent in 2011-12. Nonetheless, the rates of extreme poverty went up from 22.5 per cent to 29.3 per cent in the same timeframe, suggesting regression on **target 1.1 (eradicating extreme poverty)**. The increase in extreme poverty in rural areas is attributed to a worsening economic environment. In urban areas, deindustrialisation and job losses have led to an increase in the informalisation of the economy.

Reaching **target 1.3 (implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures)** is far off the mark, as Zimbabwe's 2020 budgetary allocation towards social protection was 0.7 per cent, significantly less than the 4.5 per cent of GDP stipulated in the Social Policy for Africa. In addition, social protection systems suffer from fragmentation, narrow coverage, duplication and underfunding; the growing inflation is further eroding the value of cash transfers and monthly pensions. Whilst the total healthcare budget increased from seven per cent to 10.1 per cent between 2019 and 2020, it remains short of the Abuja Declaration target of 15 per cent and the Sub-Saharan African average of 13 per cent. The country's dependence on donor funding in the health sector raises additional questions of the sustainability and predictability of the funding in a volatile political environment.

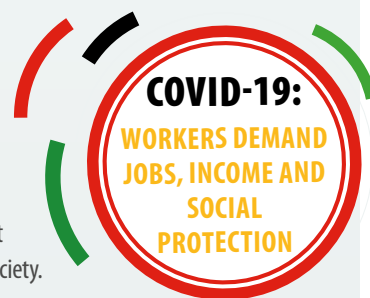
The continued deterioration of the socio-economic environment, coupled with austerity measures introduced in 2019 and the rollback in the state's provision for social services, has resulted in increased time spent by women and girls in care and unpaid work. Reaching **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)** remains far off, with women in Zimbabwe spending twice as much time, or even more, caring for family members, housekeeping and home duties as men.

There are significant obstacles to Zimbabwe meeting the targets set by **SDG 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all)**. In 2019, the proportion

of informal employment stood at 76 per cent, and 19 per cent of workers were considered to be in precarious employment, an increase from 13 per cent in 2014. This poses a challenge to reaching **target 8.3 (support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of MSMEs)**. The 2019 unemployment rate stood at 16.4 per cent (higher for women, at 17.2 per cent, with the rate for men being 15.7 per cent), suggesting challenges in fulfilling **target 8.5 (full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men)**. In addition, women are more likely than men to be working in precarious work and low remunerated sectors; as a result, their average income is only two thirds of that of the average man's. The underemployment rate stands at 15.5 per cent. Indicators on **target 8.7 (take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour)** remain worrying, as trade unions warn of the harsh economic environment, vulnerability to exploitation, modern slavery and high human trafficking. Delivering on **target 8.8 (protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers)** seems far off, as in 2019, Zimbabwe joined the list of the ten worst countries for workers, where wage theft and the non-remittance of union dues by employers are widespread.

Target 10.4 (progressive achievement of greater equality) remains unmet, and inequalities are increasing due to corruption and the stagnancy in wages and salaries versus the cost of living. Although the Gini coefficient of Zimbabwe between 2010 and 2017 was low, standing at 43.2 per cent, during this period the share of the bottom 40 per cent of income earners in GDP was 15.3 per cent, while the top ten per cent of income earners held 33.8 per cent of GDP.

While the Zimbabwean government has passed a number of policies in order to meet **target 13.2 (integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning)**, the insufficient allocation of financial resources is likely to limit their implementation.



TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

The government of Zimbabwe needs to put in place policies and measures in order to tackle the economic and social shocks brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. Today more than ever the SDGs show the way in building up a sustainable and inclusive economy and society.

Trade unions call on the government of Zimbabwe to ensure urgent action to cope with the pandemic crisis, in line with the SDGs, through the following measures:

- Improve the functioning of the national SDG multi-stakeholder dialogue platform and include discussions on the SDGs on the agenda of the national social dialogue platform (TNF).
- Shift from implementing top-down, neoliberal macroeconomic policies and austerity measures which undermine social investments and worsen poverty.
- Allocate meaningful resources to the implementation of the SDGs, including by fully financing the Zimbabwe Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP).
- Reprioritise and improve efficiency of government expenditures in order to create fiscal space to fight the pandemic and revise the national budget with a redistributive approach which takes into consideration the gender impacts of Covid-19.
- Implement robust social protection policies and systems and extend coverage.
- Ensure swift allocation and distribution of the Covid-19 stimulus packages anchored by inclusivity, transparency and accountability.
- Develop and implement policies through social dialogue that promote inclusive decent work-rich recovery and sustainable development.
- Improve and strengthen social dialogue structures so that stakeholders can make proactive and meaningful contributions towards Covid-19 responses.



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