



African Centre for Democracy & Human Rights Studies

ACDHRS message on International Women's Day, 2017

The African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) reiterates the long held view that women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights. Consequently, it joins the international community to celebrate 8th March as International Women's Day (IWD). It is a day set aside to celebrate women's social, economic, cultural and political achievements. A day to reflect on the challenges that hamper women's empowerment and development as well as to call to action to accelerate the attainment of gender equality and parity through diverse actions with a view to identifying intervention strategies to address challenges faced by women.

Women in the changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030' is the theme for this year's celebration. It focusses on women in the working world and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Women are disadvantaged in the economic sphere compared to men, are in more less paying jobs and earn less than their male counterparts. In addition, they have to balance work, family, education amongst others. The realization of Goal 5 of the SDGs which specifically calls for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls would remain another dream for many women until they are able to be actively participate in the labor force, take up higher paying jobs, and enjoy the rights to equal work and pay as their male counterparts.

Women comprise about 40 per cent (1.3 billion) of the roughly 3.3 billion people who are in paid work. Somewhat surprisingly, labour force participation of women ages 15–64 globally has actually declined over the last two decades, from 57 to 55 per cent. Male labour force participation rates have also declined slightly, but are still much higher: 82 per cent. Women's participation rates vary widely by region, for example Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe and Central Asia have the highest participation rates of any developing region, with almost two-thirds of women participating in the labour force (64 and 63 per cent, respectively), whereas only around one-fifth of women work in the Middle East and North Africa. **(Gender at work in Africa- legal constraints and opportunities for reform: Jenny Klugman and Sarah Twigg – Oxford Univ., Working paper 3, Jan. 2015)**

A regional legal framework that speaks directly to the issue is Article 13 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa which calls on State Parties to **'adopt and enforce legislative and other measures to guarantee women equal opportunities in work and career advancement and other economic opportunities'**. Consequently, effective implementation, monitoring and enforcements of this and other Articles in general is essential.

Though there are other international human rights conventions and treaties signed and ratified by governments, the lack of implementation and enforcement of such paper rights remains a major hurdle in the promotion and protection of women's rights. Therefore, there is need for continuous education and empowerment of women and girls as a critical component to realize their full potentials and to address the underlying norms and gender stereotype.

To be bold for change, as the 2017 campaign them depicts, we must urgently shift from commitment to action, from silence to speaking out to ensure that Planet 50-50 becomes a reality for all women to enjoy.

The time to be bold is now, because women's rights cannot wait. Happy International Women's Day!