



Report on the Role of Parliament in 2030 Agenda and SDGs

Engagement meeting with Parliament Portfolio Committee on Women, Community
Development and SMEs

28th of June, 2019

Jameson Hotel, Harare

1.0 Introduction and Background

The Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT) organized a meeting to engage Parliamentarians on their role in SDGs implementation. The engagement meeting took place on the 28th of June, 2019 at Jameson Hotel, in Harare. The meeting was conceived from the background that the SDGs agenda recognizes the essential role of national Parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability in the effective implementation of the SDGs.

The meeting was attended by 20 Parliamentarians constituting the Parliamentary portfolio Committee on Women and community development, 13 representatives from Civil society organizations and 2 officials from the Ministry of Public Services, Labour and Social Welfare. The specific objectives of the meeting were: (1) To engage Parliament and appreciate the role it is playing in the implementation of the SDGs, and (2) To identify effective ways of strengthening the Parliament's oversight role in SDGs implementation

1.2 Presentations

The following presentations were made to inform the meeting and incite discussions; The full presentations can be accessed on <http://www.prftzim.org/download/parliament-portfolio-committee-on-gender-meeting-presentations/>

- The Role of Parliament in SDGs implementation- Judith Kaulem the Executive Director, Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT)
- The Zimbabwean Government's SDGs Road Map and Implementation Plan- Mr Muchineripi Nemhara, Ministry of Public Service Labour and Social Welfare
- Budget tacking for SDGs with Particular Focus on Gender - Artwell Gonese, Public Finance Consultant

2.0 Key deliberations

The three presentations made were very instrumental in steering the discussion on the current status with regards to what Parliamentarians are doing to keep SDGs on track and the gaps that need to be filled for Parliamentarians to effectively perform their oversight role in SDGs implementation. Key issues discussed are summarized as below:

Parliament's role in holding the government to account on overall SDGs implementation

The dialogue noted that all the Committees set in the 9th Parliament of Zimbabwe including the Parliament Portfolio Committee on women and community development are working towards ensuring that the SDGs implementation is on track. It was also established that the mandate to hold the government to account on the overall implementation of the SDGs was given to the Thematic Committee on SDGs. The Committee is currently constituted by Members drawn from the Senate. The Members of Parliament felt that the Parliament could play a bigger role in holding the government to account on SDGs implementation if the Committee on SDGs is constituted within the lower house. This arrangement presents an opportunity for MPs to effectively keep track of the overall implementation of the SDGs implementation through developing motions and following up of resolutions on SDGs monitoring and accountability. An observation was made that the Senate's capacity to handle these important oversight aspects is limited since its mandate is to pass laws that Parliamentarians make in the House of Assembly. A call was made for the MPs to raise this issue with Parliament.

The Members of Parliaments also indicated that in the event that re-constitution of the Committee on SDGs is not an option, there is an opportunity to make use of the Expanded Committee on SDGs which is already in place and made up of all the Chairpersons of the Portfolio Committees. Currently this Expanded committee is chaired by the chairperson of the Finance and Accounts Committee and deputized by the chairperson of the Thematic Committee on SDGs. It was however noted that this Committee is currently dormant, thus needs resuscitation. The chairperson of the portfolio Committee on women and community development committed to inquire if the above mentioned Committee can also be tasked to debate and pass resolutions on issues that relate to overall SDGs implementation. The Committee agreed to deliberate further among themselves on the way forward before they can raise the issue with Parliament and give feedback to the Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT).

Parliament's role in tracking progress reports on SDGs

A call was made for the Members of Parliament to be well conversant with the national reporting mechanisms for SDGs as this will help them to hold the government to account on SDGs implementation. The presentation made by Judith Kaulem assisted the Committee to have a better appreciation of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) reporting mechanism. Through the VNR process, countries have an opportunity to volunteer to report on the progress that they make on the implementation of SDGs during the High Level Political Forum which is held every year in New York. The VNR process requires a country to engage all stakeholders in the development of the report. The government is obligated to consult everyone so that NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND in the implementation of SDGs. The presentation indicated that the best practices require Parliament to be consulted when the government is developing its Voluntary National Review Report. It emerged from the

dialogue that the involvement of Parliamentarians in Voluntary National Review processes is generally weak. It was noted that Zimbabwe's first Voluntary National Review undertaken in 2017 did not pass through Parliament. A call was made for Members of Parliament to demand the VNR reports, review them in Parliament before they are presented in New York. MPs were also urged to ask questions on the issues that appear in these VNRs and verify if the report is a true reflection of the country's progress in SDGs implementation. It was also highlighted that MPs should get more capacity building on the Voluntary National Review process in order for them to submit informed questions to government.

MPs were also urged to find ways of learning from other African Parliaments that have adopted best practices in improving the role of Parliament in SDGs implementation. Parliament of Kenya was cited as one of the Parliaments that the Zimbabwean Parliament could learn from.

The Members of Parliament also appreciated the need to encourage the government to localize the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. Localization of VNR was found to be helpful in the establishment of a strong domestic accountability mechanism that ensures implementation of SDGs stays on track. Participants were of the view that more energy should be put in holding the government to account at national level rather than at global conferences where VNR reports are presented. Localization of the VNR process presents an opportunity for the country to produce yearly VNR reports and create effective national dialogue on issues that the country should address to achieve the SDGs in an inclusive manner.

Working with key government institutions to access information

The Committee indicated that a lot of work has been done with regards to building the capacity of Members to track gender specific goals and indicators. For example, an acknowledgement was made that the Members of the Committee were equipped with information on the number of women in key leadership positions within government and other entities, national gender policies and legislations and contacts for government officials to engage in case they need clarifications on gender related issues. However, the participants urged the Committee to strengthen its oversight role on issues that it deals with hence the need for more capacity building. The dialogue also underscored the need for the Committee to prioritise quality and not necessarily quantity of women leadership when tracking for women empowerment indicators.

Involvement of MPs in the Governance structure on SDGs implementation

The dialogue discussed opportunities that are there for Members of Parliament to effectively play its SDGs oversight role at ministerial level. The representative of the Ministry of Public Services, Labour and Social Welfare made an indication that MPs through their portfolio Committees can invite ministries to come and share their progress on the implementation of specific SDGs goals. He also revealed that there is a Committee that has been established to

coordinate SDGs government clusters¹. The coordination Committee is obligated to present reports to the thematic Committee on SDGs.

Awareness Raising and broad based public engagement on SDGs

The participants applauded the government's plans to increase awareness on SDGs in the country through various methods. The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare representative indicated that his ministry is planning to roll out SDGs awareness campaigns on Radio and Television. The government is also intending to roll out provincial and districts level SDGs awareness raising meetings. It was also established that MPs can also play a part in SDGs awareness raising through inviting the Ministry of Public service, Labour and Social Welfare to share with their constituencies issues regarding SDGs.

On SDGs public engagement, the participants applauded government's move to rope in churches through incorporating Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) as part of its stakeholders. It was acknowledged that churches offer a safe environment for people from diverse political backgrounds to converge and discuss development issues. However, the government was urged to be more inclusive when engaging the church. It was noted that the Zimbabwe Council of Churches(ZCC) does not represent all churches in Zimbabwe. Churches like Roman Catholic, Apostolic Sect and Seventh Day Adventist were cited as examples of churches which are not part of ZCC.

The Committee's role in advocating for SDGs sensitive national budgets with particular focus on Gender

The participants also deliberated on the need for the Committee to strengthen its role in advocating for the formulation, adoption and implementation of national budgets that promote realization of gender indicators. A call was made for the MPs to constantly do budget tracking and check if the national budget is in sync with SDGs commitments made by government. It was established from the meeting that the Committee can be better placed to advocate for Gender sensitive budgeting if they effectively make use of information from various researches produced from time to time by government and other institutions. The Auditor General's report is one of the key documents that the participants urged the MPs to familiarize themselves with as well as interrogate. A call was made for the Committee to constantly analyse recommendations from Auditor General's report and ensure that the recommendations are implemented. The Parliamentarians were also challenged to effectively represent children living with disabilities so that they can access basic necessities of life such as education. The MPs were urged to carry out researches on the number of children who are living with disabilities within their constituencies and develop a strong case for their representation.

3.0 Summary of Recommendations

¹The coordinator Committee is chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. It is comprised of other Permanent Secretaries from Ministry of Health and Child Care, Ministry of Agriculture, Water, Climate and Rural Resettlement, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, UNDP and Zimstat

- There is need to strengthen the SDGs oversight role of MPs in the 9th Parliament of Zimbabwe through efforts such as capacity building, exposure to good practices from other Parliaments in the region and beyond.
- MPs should explore opportunities to learn from other African Parliament on best practices around the role of Parliament in SDGs implimentation
- There is need to lobby for localization of VNR in Zimbabwe
- TheVNR reports should be reviewed and passed by Parliament before being presented at the High Level Political Forum in NewYork.
- There is need to strengthen the capacity of the Committee on tracking gender sensitive budgeting.
- There is need for government to rope in churches that are not represented in the Zimbabwe Council of Churches for inclusive public engagement on SDGs.
- There is need for government to move beyond developing beautiful engagement plans on paper to effective and inclusive implementation.
- Members of Parliament should be well equipped with the full knowledge of all the SDGs and their interlinkages.
- The Committee should closely work together with CSOs in the SDGs area and Women Organisations to promote gender equality in development
- The Committee should conduct budget tracking for SDGs throughout the budget cycle.
- The MPs should push for reforms and implementation of policies that encourage transparency, accountability and promote gender equality.