



Keynote Address

Director, Centre for Social Concern (CfSC)

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Decent Work for Women: Dinner Conference with Parliamentary Committee

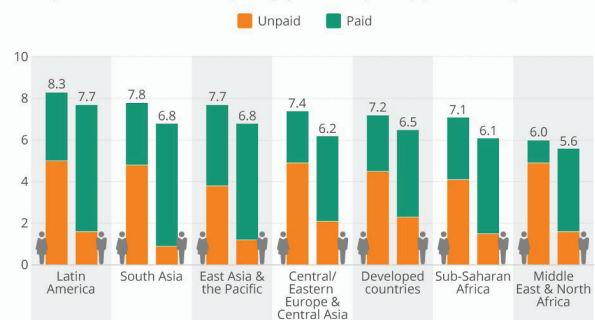
The Chairpersons of Parliamentary Committees of Agriculture, Budget and Finance Committee and Welfare Committee, Honourable Members of Parliament (MPs), Representatives of Malawi Congress of Trade Union (MCTU), Representatives of Government Ministries, namely Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Gender, Civil Society Partners, Representatives from different Media Houses, And not forgetting the Staff Members of CfSC, Very distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Centre for Social Concern (CfSC), I would like to warmly and wholeheartedly welcome you all to this important dinner conference on Women at Work Campaign. Hivos through the Centre for Social Concern and other partners is championing a global work campaign. Centre for Social Concern realises and strongly believes that Women are the heart of a family. It is a mere fact that women work very hard from early in the morning to late in the evening, from Monday to Monday. In fact, women very often combine a number of activities at the same time, which quite different from us, men! As men, we do admire them. And yet their hard work is least recognised and appreciated by the society or it is taken for granted. Many women are exploited, abused and often dehumanised - taken as robots or objects.



Women Work More Than Men

Average total hours of work done per day (paid and unpaid), by gender and region



Total figures may differ slightly from the source due to rounding. A total of 75 countries were included in the analysis.

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Source: MenCare

statista

Note: “Hard at work but often ignored: Women’s contribution to the economy is under-appreciated as they are often paid less or not at all for their work.”¹

With our effort to promote decent work for women, we, the CfSC, are happy and glad to see that the Chairperson of the Budget and Finance Committee is now a woman, Honourable Gladis Ganda – replacing our friend, Honourable Sosthene Ngwengwe. We hope and trust that decent work for women under your leadership in this new government will hit its peak and bear abundant fruits, fruits which will last.

¹ Vikas Choudhary, Hard Work but Often Ignore, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/gallery/lifestyle/rural-women-at-work-57313>, (accessed on September 08, 2020).

Brief Historical Background of the Centre for Social Concern (CfSC):

Centre for Social Concern was founded in 2002 as faith-based organization that promotes research and action on social issues, linking Christian Faith and Social Justice. The CfSC aims at transforming the unjust structures in Malawian society through research and advocacy to ensure sustainable change in policies for the betterment of all in line with their human dignity and the Integrity of Creation. CfSC is very prophetic as it aims at speaking for the voiceless; those who are dehumanised, the so called, ‘second-hand class citizens’, the unrecognised, those in the fracture zones. In Hebrew you would say, the amatoloi. Our inspiration, therefore, is drawn from the Social Teaching of the Church (STC).

In the spirit of exposing the plight of the poor and the vulnerable who most of the time are voiceless or quietened, and with the realization and knowledge that the average person is struggling to afford even the most basic of monthly commodities, CfSC, through its Social Conditions Research Program, conducts the “Basic Needs Basket” (BnB) survey since its foundation. The Program aims at gathering facts through research, and use those facts to lobby and advocate for change in policies and/or practices that inhibit attainment of sustainable livelihood.

In line with our new Strategic Plan Centre for Social Concern dwells on three main pillars, namely Social Conditions Research (SCR), Interreligious Dialogue (ID) and Economic Governance (EG).

This very conference tonight, namely *Decent Work for Women* falls under Economic Governance pillar. With funding from *Hivos*, Centre for Social Concern is implementing a project titled, *Activating Gender Lenses in Advocating Decent Work for Farmer Workers in the Horticulture Value Chains*. The Decent Work for Women programme builds on Hivos’ “*Women@Work*” programme (2011-2015), targeting the conditions of women working in 8 countries in Africa.

With support from Hivos, CfSC carried out two studies on decent work. The first study that was carried out in 2018 covered the following countries: Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The second study was carried out exclusively in Malawi targeting horticulture farms. The following are some of the findings of the Studies.

a. Status of Women:

The studies revealed that women in the horticultural industry in Malawi live in a male-dominated culture² and are not accustomed to claiming their rights and lack knowledge about their Labour Rights.

b. Policies and Registration:

The studies found out that on the policy front, Malawi has important legislation and policy instruments that are able to ensure that women workers in horticulture sector enjoy their right to decent work, if well implemented. These include the Malawi Constitution, the Labour Relations Act (1996) the Employment Act (2000), the Workers’ Compensation Act, the Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare Act, just to mention but a few. Further, between 2011 and 2016, Malawi was implementing the ‘ILO-supported Malawi Decent Work Country Programme’, that was promoting decent work among employees in Malawi, including those in the agricultural sector.

c. Non-adherence to Occupation Health and Safety Act:

The studies revealed that most women workers are not provided with protective equipment at all thereby risking their health.

d. Low Minimum Wages:

² Even though a number of tribes in Malawi are matrilineal in nature/culture, it is proven that men still have the upper hand, dominating women especially in major decision-making matters.

The studies revealed that women workers are receiving equal to or slightly above the minimum wage. Women workers are unable to meet food cost and consume the 2400 calories as per requirement and as stated by the World Health Organization (WHO).

In a bid to promote decent work for women Centre for Social Concern is providing these recommendations to the Members of Parliament this evening.

a. Members of Parliament should propose an upward adjustment of Minimum Wage(s) in Malawi:

Our minimum wages have been very low in Malawi for decades. MK35,000 is equivalent to \$47 an amount which is far much less than many, if not all, southern and eastern African countries. The MK50,000 will mount up to around \$67 per month. The monthly research on cost of living carried out by the Centre for Social Concern reveals that the family of six people requires an average income of MK197,000 per month; and the cost of living goes up in lean months.

Research for the cost of living specifically done on farms conducted in May 2020 revealed that the cost of living for household was MK150,000. Household required MK92,000 to buy food alone, not mentioning school fees, uniforms, medication, transport and other eventualities – that are to be covered by the remaining MK58,000. The women workers in farms are receiving wages equal to or slightly above MK35,000 which is the legal minimum wage. How do they manage to survive? God knows!

The impact of low minimum wages was evidenced by low dietary intake of 2100 calories against the required 2400 as per World Health Organization recommendation. Low dietary intake contributes to stunting of children, low brain development for children and wasting of lactating and complication to pregnant mothers. This obviously implies that the wages they earn are not able to push them out of poverty. On the contrary, poverty remains to be their ‘eternal hopeless portion!’

CfSC, therefore, recommends or advocates for the increase of wages through you, Members of Parliament. We do realise that even the proposed MK50,000 is not enough to meet the minimum dietary intake. As stated above, workers in farms, majority being women workers, receive very little pay. No household can eat three times a day with MK50,000. Apart from the dietary viewpoint, the increase in minimum wage will help to reduce income inequality and poverty.

b. Promote Sensitisation of Decent Work for Women:

Every worker is entitled to certain basic rights at their work place, including freedom of association, non-discrimination and lack of forced labour in abusive conditions. It is very essential that these rights are known not only to the employers but also to the workers themselves. Workers who know and understand their rights at work place, are fully able to have and enjoy decent work. Studies which were commissioned by Hivos revealed that 74% women workers are not aware of their rights at their work place. Fear of losing their jobs exacerbated the situation. Most of them believe that the employer has power over them; thus, they are supposed to do whatever they are asked to do even if they are not comfortable with it or totally deprived of their rights. Centre for Social Concern understands that it is the responsibility of Members of Parliament to ensure that workers are empowered in order to be able to demand decent work for them.

c. Champion Ratification of Convention 190:

While Malawi has some pieces of legislation on sexual harassment and gender equality, Centre for Social Concern is convinced that Malawi could do better to join the rest of the world in fighting sexual harassment and gender inequality by ratifying convention 190. Centre for Social Concern is, therefore, requesting and urging you honourable Members of Parliament to champion the course, the ratification of ILO 190.

d. Casualisation of Labour

Centre for Social Concern has noted with deep concern on the culture of employing casual labours as a way of denying workers terminal benefits such as a pension. CfSC is concerned to see that some workers are being employed as casual workers for over 25 years. This practice is impinging the livelihood and rights of workers in their old age since they are not entitled to pension.

e. Capacitate Ministry of Labour:

Centre for Social Concern is concerned with regrets that workers in farms are not fully supported by the government. Why? Simply because the Ministry of Labour is poorly or under-funded. Labour inspectors are not able to perform inspections as required by law with the aim of enlightening and protecting the workers. CfSC is, therefore, asking Members of Parliament to ensure that Labour Officers are adequately resourced in order to perform their duties³. Capacitating Ministry of Labour will help women workers to be provided with protective equipments which will reduce their risk from injury or any harm.

Conclusion:

All in all, Centre for Social Concern is requesting you, Honourable Members of Parliament here present to fight modern slavery which subjects citizens, especially our mothers and sisters to poor working conditions. We are requesting you all to be champions of and for decent work in Malawi.

Tonight, I humbly and sincerely wish you all fruitful deliberations as you enjoy sharing knowledge and experiences in the field of decent work for women.

Remember our mothers are the “warm-heart of the household.”
Thus, decent work for them remains to be our major concern:
The undignified women must be dignified,
The dehumanised women must be humanised.

**Long live our mothers, long live our sisters;
Long live humanity in decent working conditions;
Thank you one, thank you all;
May God bless the ‘warm heart of Africa’, Malawi;
May God bless you all;
Takulandirani!**



³ On a light mood, the CfSC is grateful and appreciative for a good and positive collaboration which exists between the Ministry of Labour officers and the Centre. We have been working together very well on Labour Rights issues.