

MEFMI CONDUCTS A REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON GENDER-RESPONSIVE ECONOMIC POLICY MANAGEMENT

Gender is a socially and culturally defined set of economic and political roles, responsibilities, rights, entitlements and obligations, as well as privileges and assumptions, associated with being female and male. The current gender emphasis on women is, however, to take account of the widely held view that women and girls have been prejudiced and disadvantaged for too long, compared to their male counterparts. There is, therefore, need to take deliberate actions to correct past injustices and discrimination, in order to bring women and the girl child to equality with men. The overriding objective, however, is not to bring men down, as there are some men who have also been marginalized, disadvantaged and discriminated. There is empirical evidence to the effect that empowering women contributes immensely to the health and productivity of families and communities, which improves the prospects for, and prosperity of the next generations. Gender policy interventions are, therefore, deliberately aimed at uplifting the status of women, to bring it to some level of equity with that of men.



In line with MEFMI's intensification of gender mainstreaming in Phase V (2017-2021), the Macroeconomic Management Programme (MMP) conducted a one week regional workshop on Gender-Responsive Economic Policy Management from 3 to 7 April 2017 at A-Zambezi Hotel, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. The objectives of the workshop were to improve competence of participants in identifying and addressing gender biases in economic policy; to equip participants with skills to identify and implement economic strategies that enhance gender equality; to facilitate sharing of country experiences among participants on formulation and implementation of economic policies with gender lenses; and to enhance understanding of the relevance of gender sensitivity as part of key criteria for evaluation of

economic policy. It was expected that after the workshop, participants would serve as gender focal persons in their respective institutions and countries. It was also envisaged that this would go a long way in enhancing countries in the MEFMI region, to engender economic policy making and implementation.

The workshop was attended by middle to senior level officials involved in policy formulation and analysis, drawn from the Central Banks, Ministries of Finance and Planning that deal with economic policy management. 9 out of 14 MEFMI countries were represented. A total of 32 participants attended the workshop, of which 24 (75%) were women and 8 (25%) men. Only Angola, Botswana, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania were not represented.

Present from the MEFMI Secretariat were Dr. Caleb Fundanga, Executive Director; Dr. Sehliselo Mpfu, Director of MMP (who was also a resource person); Mr Senei Molapo, Programme Manager (MMP) and Ms Margaret Mutyorauta, Programme Assistant (MMP).



The workshop was officially opened by Dr. Sehliselo Mpfu. In her remarks, she informed participants that the workshop was part of the first steps towards addressing the objectives of MEFMI Phase V strategic plan, which emphasises mainstreaming of cross cutting issues such as regional integration, gender, anti-corruption and HIV/AIDS. She mentioned that during Phase V implementation, all MEFMI activities, including course curricular, would be gender mainstreamed. She thanked her co-facilitator, Mr. Samuel Tarinda, for accepting to assist MEFMI in this regard. She also extended appreciation to the participants for attending the workshop, and most importantly, their Principals who released them.



Dr. Mpfu acknowledged that the workshop drew on a wide range of experiences and expertise from countries such as Malawi and Zambia, whose representatives indicated that they were already analysing official documents and national budgets for gender sensitivity. She pointed out that strong networking links were expected to emerge from the workshop, to foster long-run exchange of ideas and experiences among professionals in the region and that there was need to strengthen these synergies as countries build gender sensitive societies and achieve a more fairer allocation of resources in preparation for deepening economic inter-linkages in the region. She reminded the group that the workshop was a macroeconomic policy management workshop, which she expected, would bring new insights into their daily work routine.

In terms of content, the workshop focused on key issues as follows: concept of gender; gender terminology; gender and economic policy; gender and economic policy analysis; gender and unpaid care work; gender and statistics; gender responsive budgeting; gender and women empowerment indices and indicators; gender and poverty; gender and international trade; gender value chain analysis; gender and banking; gender and access to finance; gender and financial inclusion, among others. It was noted that gender dynamics at household level affected women and men differently in labour markets, trade markets and other economic activities.

The official closing of the workshop was done by Dr. Caleb M. Fundanga. Dr. Fundanga thanked everybody for the honesty with which they addressed gender issues during the week. He pointed out that the workshop was the first activity financed by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) grant under which MEFMI and ACBF agreed on an 18-month project Plan, scheduled to start in April 2017. He also highlighted that MEFMI activities aimed at improving macroeconomic and financial sector policy formulation and implementation, thereby supporting economic growth and sustainable development. He emphasised that economic goals could not be met without including all key stakeholders,

women and men, girls and boys. He mentioned that MEFMI had realized the need for gender mainstreaming within the Institute, where currently, women employees dominated in numbers and that he was impressed by countries such as Lesotho where women occupied executive posts like that of the Central Bank governor. He was impressed by observation that women dominated attendance at this workshop, something rare in MEFMI, but, however, fulfilling the objective of the workshop.

Dr. Fundanga pointed out that he was pleased that the workshop recognized the Equal Pay Day on April 2, which was started by the National Committee on Pay Equity (NCPE) in 1996 to highlight the gap between men and women's wages. However, he stressed that it was also important to note that while the empowerment of women was encouraged, there was a need to be able to assess when equality had been reached (turning point) to avoid creating another form of inequality. He expressed his expectation to see the group practising smart economics, which is "engendered economics". He also expressed his will to see participants focusing at policy issues with gender lenses and analysing economic policy from a gender perspective because economic policies that were not engendered were considered endangered. He indicated that the workshop was not the end, but the beginning of renewed interactions between MEFMI and its Member States to do gender mainstreaming for economic development. He indicated that it was up to the participants to maintain the momentum of sharing information, learning from each other and networking, so as to keep the concept of gender equality on the developmental agenda. Lastly, he urged the participants to continue attending MEFMI activities. He then declared the workshop, officially closed.