




ZIMBABWE

A TRADE UNION FOCUS ON THE SDGs

#HLPF2021

WORKERS DEMAND A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

COVID-19: WORKERS NEED SDG-DRIVEN RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS

The Zimbabwean government, through advice from the Tripartite Negotiating Forum (TNF), declared the COVID-19 pandemic a national disaster and introduced various measures in response. The government launched an economic recovery and stimulus package of US\$720 million (9 per cent of GDP); a US\$25 million package to compensate small businesses, vendors and the elderly for loss of income during the national lockdown was also announced, as well as a US\$26 million national preparedness and response plan and an informal economy relief fund. The National Social Security Authority developed guidelines for protection of workers in the workplace and on the manufacture and distribution of PPE and medical consumables. In addition, the government unfroze 4,000 health sector posts and created an additional 200 posts to ensure a full-scale response to the pandemic.

Trade unions, however, are aware of and point out important challenges in the implementation of response measures. There is no clear information on how the different measures have been of benefit, nor on who has benefited from them, and trade unions have, together with business, demanded transparency on how the package has been distributed. While the Zimbabwean government introduced a managed reduction of working hours, it has done so with no corresponding support to ensure income security. While a three-month cash transfer programme targeting one million of the most vulnerable households was launched, the support provided per household per month was far below the food poverty line.

ARE TRADE UNIONS AT THE TABLE?

The government of Zimbabwe has integrated the SDGs into its 2021-2025 National Development Strategy (NDS1), which aims to realise the country's Vision 2030 and Africa Agenda 2063. All SDGs are integrated into the 14 national priorities of the NDS1, with clear targets and indicators to monitor progress.

The Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare is in charge of coordinating the implementation of Agenda 2030. Government reporting mechanisms on SDG implementation are based on VNR pre-processes, but trade union presence and ability to provide input has improved, as the trade union think tank LEDRIZ was commissioned to undertake the national progress review on SDGs. However, the multi-stakeholder platform to consult civil society on the implementation of the SDGs still meets only on an ad hoc basis.

Although for the first time the NDS1 has a clear recognition of the role of decent work in the COVID-19 recovery period, there are doubts around the political will to implement this strategy in the current context, as the government has failed on

its commitments with all its economic frameworks and has resorted to austerity. There are therefore important concerns around a possibility of improvement in the implementation of the new NDS 1.

The national Tripartite Negotiating Forum does not discuss the SDGs as such and is only involved in policy development rather than implementation and monitoring. At tripartite dialogues, labour has raised critical issues which include wages and prices, labour law reform, productivity, national social security and corruption, but no concrete results have come out of these negotiations.

Trade unions warn that not enough resources have been allocated to the implementation of Agenda 2030. They attribute this to a lack of concrete efforts on cutting back on non-productive recurrent expenditures to create fiscal space; corruption and rent-seeking behaviour; failure to plug loopholes and eliminate leakages and illicit financial flows; and the slow pace of reform of state enterprises providing social services.

TRANSPARENCY



Regular access to limited information

CONSULTATION



Structured multi-stakeholder platform

SOCIAL DIALOGUE



Social partners contribute individually 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, the proportion of the population that was deemed poor was 70.5 per cent and extreme poverty increased from 22.5 per cent in 2011-12 to 29.3 per cent in 2017 and 34 per cent in 2019, 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 in 2019, only 2 per cent of the population were receiving a monthly pension or some social security funds, very low compared to the demand, which has increased due to job losses and the informalisation of the economy. 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. Social protection is fragmented and dependent on donor funding.

Reaching **target 5.4 (recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work)** remains far off, with women in Zimbabwe spending 6.5 hours per week on all unpaid care work compared to 4.5 hours for men. With regard to **target 5.5 (ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life)**, women have lower completion rates at upper secondary level (40.8 per cent for women and 59.2 per cent for men).

The Zimbabwean economy is dominated by informality: in 2019, the proportion of informal employment outside of agriculture stood at 76 per cent, and 19 per cent of workers were considered to be in precarious or vulnerable 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 – 17.2 per cent than for men – 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 the one for men. The underemployment rate stands at 15.5 per cent. The number of NEETs ("not in employment, education or training") mentioned in **target 8.6 (reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training)** stood at 44.7 per cent in 2019, a sharp rise from 35.2 per cent in 2012, affecting more women (52.9 per cent) than men (36.4 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 that due to the harsh economic environment, vulnerability to exploitation, modern slavery and human trafficking is high. 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. In 2017, the top 10 per cent of income earners had a 34.8 per cent share of GDP, with the bottom 20 per cent of income earners holding a 6 per cent share.

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 lack of political will and insufficient allocation of financial resources is likely to limit their implementation.

Trade unions report that Zimbabwe's performance on **target 16.10 (protect fundamental freedoms)** remains worrying: the increase in violence against and attempts to dismantle independent unions continues and the prosecution of union leaders through violence, threats and kidnappings rose between 2019 and 2020.

TRADE UNION ASKS TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

To ensure an SDG-led recovery and resilience from the crisis, trade unions urge the government to:

- Ensure a consistent national dialogue through the Tripartite Negotiating Forum and effective implementation of its agreed positions. Provide for social partners' involvement not only in Agenda 2030 policy development but also in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Provide adequate budget support for the implementation of Agenda 2030, especially SDG 8.
- Reprioritise government expenditures, address corruption and impunity and halt illicit financial flows to create fiscal space to fight the pandemic and improve social service delivery.
- Increase budgetary provisions for socio-economic rights in line with the SDGs. Benchmark social protection support to the Food Poverty Line. Transform the temporary COVID-19 social protection measures into sustainable social protection mechanisms.
- Review the Zimbabwe National Employment Policy Framework in line with broad-based social dialogue and consultations in the COVID-19 recovery framework. Invest more in employment-intensive programmes and formalising the informal economy.
- Include informal economy operators in the dialogue and give priority to the informal economy in any future economic stimulus packages.
- Ensure accountability and transparency in the mobilisation, procurement processes and distribution of resources to combat COVID-19.
- Ensure the adequate provision of water and sanitation to enhance personal hygiene in informal economy workspaces, home industries and artisanal mining areas which either have erratic or no water supplies.



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