



## **STATEMENT BY SOUTHERN AFRICA RURAL WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, 8 March 2018**

Today 8th March marks International Women's Day. This is an historic day that has to be remembered for the struggles of poor women over 100 years ago who fought for an 8-hour work day, and decent working and living conditions for women. Over the decades International Women's Day has symbolized the ongoing struggles for living wages, against violence, the rights of women and most importantly against patriarchy.

Although more than 100 years has passed since this significant date not much has changed for women and girls who live in rural areas. Women and girls who live in rural areas in SADC play a crucial role in improving rural livelihoods and the overall wellbeing of those who live in the country side. However, they experience increasing levels of inequality and are often at the forefront of being marginalised and displaced as a result of the increasing land grabs in the region, no access to clean drinking water and are victims of gender-based violence.

All these challenges come as a result of the close connection between the African rural areas and its links to patriarchy and capitalism. This system of patriarchy and capitalism subordinates both women and nature. It is ruthless and violent dispossessing, oppressing and displacing women and girls who live in the rural areas.

This year the Rural Women's Assembly will participate in the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) where we want to highlight the situation of rural women and young girls in Africa. The theme for this year's 62<sup>nd</sup> CSW is the *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls*.

In Southern Africa, millions of rural women work the land and are the many producers of food for household and the local economy, yet they do not own the land.

Land and water are intrinsically linked and rural women in low- and middle-income countries bear heavy burdens of water fetching. A study of time and water poverty in 25 sub-Saharan African countries estimate that women spend at least 16 million hours a day collecting drinking water; men spend 6 million hours; and children, 4

million hours.<sup>1</sup> This sharply contrasts to middle-class women in high-income countries who just open a house tap connected to municipal systems at often subsidized rates.

Rural women's work and their contribution in the care economy remain invisible. As rural women we spend more time than urban women and men in reproductive work, including time spent obtaining water and firewood, caring for children and the sick and producing and processing food. This work subsidises the state particularly in rural areas where very little government services are available and infrastructure development are poor to non-existent.

Violence remain a big challenge for women who live in rural areas and has reached high levels. Rural women are victims of both interpersonal violence which often goes unreported because it happens in the private sphere of the household. Women's bodies have become a site of violence in the region.

While we struggle for a better countryside we also celebrate our value to society and acknowledge that the world is sustained by our labour, creativity and imagination.

**We stand in solidarity with women and girls who live in rural areas and salute them for the critical role they play in the wellbeing of the SADC region!**

For more information:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>