



Republic of Namibia

Keynote Address

By

**Dr Richard Nchabi Kamwi, MP
Minister of Health and Social Services and Acting Minister of
Gender Equality and Child Welfare**

At

**The Celebration of 08th March International Women's Day,
06 March 2009, Windhoek**

**THEME: "The Equal; Sharing of Responsibilities between
Women and Men including Care Giving"**

Director of Ceremonies – Mr. Victor Shipoh

Hon. Deputy Minister: Ministry of Gender equality and Child Welfare. Angelika Muharukua

UNFPA Country Representative, Mr. Fabian Byomuhangi

Hon. Members of Parliament Present

Your Excellencies member of Diplomatic Corps,

Distinguished guests,

Members from the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to be present here to collectively celebrate this remarkable day with you. International Women’s Day is celebrated every year on 8 March and has been observed since the early 1900’s a time of great expansion and turbulence in the industrialized world that saw booming population growth and the rise of radical ideologies. It is a major day of global celebration for the economic, political and social achievements of women. It is a day where women from around the world irrespective of their countries of origin, ethical background, political affiliation, cultural differences, and economic status come together as one to celebrate their achievements as women.

This day honors ordinary women as testimony of our living history after women have been strolling for countries to be afforded the opportunity to participate fully in decision making processes on equal footing with their male counterparts.

This year the event is commemorated under the theme “*The Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between Women and Men including Care giving.*” Namibia is in support of the priority theme of the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which currently is on going in New York where issues related to improving women status and conditions are being discussed. The debate on the priority theme is appropriate taking into consideration the fact that the responsibility of caring is left in the hands of women and young girls.

Gender roles in Namibia have to a large extent remained traditional in nature, with the bulk of these care giving activities being seen “as women’s work”. Reports on Regional Poverty Profiles in the 13 regions of the country, indicated that such activities include caring for children, the elderly, sick and persons with disabilities. Invariably this may include cooking, cleaning up, fetching water as well as firewood for households. Men on the other hand especially in the rural areas are involved in grazing

livestock, building food storages and digging wells. As a result of cultural perceptions and practices governing the division of labour, men continue to shy away from domestic chores. Exception to this occurs only if there is sickness among the female members in a household.

Implication of the burdens of care work on women and girls is enormous and is an obstacle to gender equality. These divisions of labour disadvantage women since a lot of work they do is not valued and remunerated. In Namibia, there is increasingly a number of female – headed households and those headed by elder children. Most of these children are girls in the rural areas. Due to these massive responsibilities, most of them drop out of school to provide for their siblings. As a result they will grow up without education and unable to contribute to the country’s socio-economic and political development. Time spent on caring limits time that women and girls can spend on self improvement especially for education and in opportunities for income generation.

It is however worth noting that the study on Poverty Assessment indicated that gender roles are changing in urban areas largely due to urbanization increased awareness on rights and evolving cultures.

Director of Ceremonies

To address issues related to male involvement, our strategy should be to create forums for men to share, discuss and agree on actions to be taken. This is an effective way that might result in changing of attitudes and behavior. This requires us to examine how boys have been socialized into manhood and masculinity values that have been passed or not passed on to them. We need to build a culture that encourages men to become involved in unpaid domestic labour, including provision of care and support. Through this process domestic responsibilities will be shared equally between men and women and it leads to the improvement of the health and well being of both women and girls.

Ladies and Gentleman

We will see no progress in gender equality until we realize that Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between Women and Men is the vehicle to gender equality and development in the gender agenda. It will reduce incidences of gender based violence and newly infection of HIV and AIDS. It will also increase job production and service delivery in both paid and unpaid labor

between men and women. The involvement of men into care giving service in both private and public places will mark a milestone to achieve gender equality to the fullest in Namibia.

Despite all these challenges, Namibia has made some significant progress in areas such as education, health, defense, safety and security, rural electrification and politics. For example, in politics and decision making, women represent 30.8% representation in parliament, 45% in local authority and 33% in senior management in public and private sectors.

Director of Ceremonies

I wish to call upon the line ministries, civil societies, parastatals and private sector to join hands in this regard. Gender issues is not only the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, but has to be addressed collectively as a nation.

I would like to acknowledge with thanks the contribution made by our development partners such as UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO and USAIDS who are always at our disposal in this regard by providing technical and financial assistance.

Director of Ceremonies

In a summary, unequal sharing of responsibilities between women and men contributes negatively to development. Therefore, I urge my male folk to support our women folk in order for Namibia to reach the intended Millennium Development Goals and indeed Vision 2030.

I thank you