

MONTH OF THE WOMAN ENTREPRENEURE

Since 2005, September has become a very busy and exciting month for women entrepreneurs in Zambia. This is because every September is now known as the Month of the Woman Entrepreneur (MOWE), a time when various activities are held in order to bring attention to the situation of the women entrepreneurs in Zambia. It is also an opportunity to showcase the various business initiatives that these entrepreneurs are undertaking and to create access to wider markets.

The Month of the Woman Entrepreneur is a time of celebration. These celebrations in Zambia have resulted from some valuable lessons and practices learnt by ten (10) Zambian experts who were sponsored by the ILO's Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality (WEDGE) Programme in March, 2004, to attend the MOWE celebrations in Ethiopia. WEDGE Ethiopia organised the celebrations as a way of creating awareness and advocating in that country for support for Women Entrepreneurs with and without disabilities.

The visitors from Zambia who represented various non-governmental and government organisations, having visited the activities in some parts of Ethiopia, were convinced that similar activities, if held in Zambia, would assist in sensitising and advocating for support from various stakeholders for Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) in order to assist women to start and grow their businesses.

WEDGE Zambia and other institutional partners selected September as the best month for the MOWE celebrations in Zambia, and have adopted it as an annual event. Today, Zambia boasts of being the only country that has successfully held the MOWE celebrations consecutively. The celebrations are characterised by various activities all over the country; such as national conferences, exhibitions, workshops, and skills training programmes. All these activities are preceded by a launch of the month on national TV, and an inaugural March Past.

The main purposes of the MOWE celebrations are to sensitise the public and stakeholders on the importance of promoting women's entrepreneurship in Zambia, as well as providing an opportunity for women entrepreneurs to network and share experiences. The other objectives aside from awareness creation are to provide an opportunity for women entrepreneurs with and without disabilities improved market access and to help mainstream issues such as HIV and AIDS into women entrepreneurship training programmes.

The MOWE celebrations have received commendable support from both the Government and the private sector, that both have joined in to support the celebrations. The 2007 MOWE celebrations were launched on national TV by Honourable Felix Mutati, Minister for Commerce, Trade and Industry. The March Past was flagged on behalf of the first lady Mrs Maureen Mwanawasa, by Minister of Gender and Women in Development, Hon. Patricia Mulasikwanda.