

and the implementation of significant legal and policy measures. Nonetheless, the path to gender equality is fraught with challenges:

1. **Human Development Inequality:** High maternal mortality rates, gender gaps in education, and lower female representation in STEM fields.
2. **Economic Opportunity Inequality:** Lower employment rates and wages for women, including women with disabilities, dominance in the informal economy, and limited access to productive resources.
3. **Asset Ownership and Control Inequality:** Discrimination in access to land and property, challenges with financial inclusion, including limited access to high-value finance due to a lack of collateral and limited earnings.
4. **Inequalities in Voice and Agency:** High prevalence of GBV, lower levels of participation and representation of women in government and key leadership positions, and marginalization in decision-making.
5. **Cultural, Social, and Economic Challenges:** Persistent socio-cultural norms leading to gender disparities and disability related stigma, significant gender and disability digital divide, and vulnerability to climate change impacts.

To address these challenges, Zimbabwe and the EU have established a shared commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, launching a policy dialogue to ensure gender is considered a crosscutting issue across all sectors. This collaboration is part of a broader donor coordination effort facilitated through the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment”. Donor coordination is structured through regular meetings of EU Gender focal points and the wider Gender and Women’s Rights group, encompassing participation from EU and other non-EU development partners. This coordination aims to transform policy dialogues into more formal sector policy dialogues with the government, building on established practices around inter-ministerial committee meetings. The EU will continue to advocate for increased access to finance opportunities for women-led MSMEs, including through EIB intermediate lending or opportunities under EFSD+ and will monitor that the skills development programme is responsive to the needs and requirements for bankability under these financial institutions.

Furthermore, the EU-funded Spotlight Initiative has made significant contributions towards addressing GBV and supporting women's economic empowerment and the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities. As this program concludes, the objective of the proposed Action is to sustain its gains, focusing on implementing the High-Level Political Compact on Ending GBV & Harmful Practices.

2.2 Problem Analysis

Zimbabwe has witnessed significant advancements in gender equality and women's empowerment across various sectors, including education, health, governance, and agriculture. Yet, despite these strides, women in all their diversity and across ages in Zimbabwe continue to face substantial challenges across empowerment indicators. Deep-rooted social norms, religious beliefs, gender and disability stigma, and traditional values restrict women's and girls' rights, contributing to a landscape where voice, choice, and agency are often limited. This setting is further complicated by the feminization of poverty, a high prevalence of HIV among women, and widespread acceptance of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), all of which point to persistent and unequal gender power relations and discrimination.

According to the National Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender based Violence 2023-2030, despite having a progressive legal and policy framework and concerted efforts of government, development partners, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and communities, the prevalence of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Zimbabwe remains high. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2019) shows that close to 40 percent of women and girls in Zimbabwe experience physical violence in their lifetime and 12 percent experience sexual violence. Prevalence of physical GBV among women and girls in Zimbabwe is 10 percent higher than the average global prevalence rate of 30%. The 2017 Zimbabwe Young Adult Survey, a Violence Against Children Survey (VACS), shows that about one in ten females ages 18–24 experienced sexual violence during childhood, and the prevalence of overall childhood sexual violence is significantly higher for females (9.1 percent) compared with males (1.1 percent). Key drivers of GBV include harmful cultural practices; entrenched patriarchal norms, values, and practices;