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SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE EAST AFRICAN SUB-REGION
A SYNTHESIS PAPER

SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE EAST AFRICAN SUB-REGION

WITH SPECIFIC FOCUS ON:

**PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN FOR POVERTY REDUCTION
WOMEN'S LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

A SYNTHESIS PAPER

PREPARED BY

**ELIZABETH KHARONO
EASTERN AFRICAN SUB-REGIONAL SUPPORT INITIATIVE
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN
KAMPALA-UGANDA**

Introduction:

The East African sub-region, like the rest of Africa, has been severely affected by the economic decline and recession which characterised most of the 1980s and 1990s. Of the 12 countries which make up the East African sub-region^{1/} 11 are classified as Least Developed Countries (LDCs), representing a significant proportion of the 33 LDCs in Africa. The social and economic situation in these countries is reported to have declined significantly in the 1990s as the countries have recorded a marked decline in GDP and a corresponding decline in per capita income^{2/}. In addition, the majority of these countries have not only been implementing structural adjustment programmes which have resulted in severe social consequences due to government cut-backs and withdrawal from investment in the public sector, retrenchment of public-sector employees, and disinvestment in social services, they also have a heavy debt burden and heavy debt overhang.

In addition to the challenges posed by economic decline, heavy debt burden and the harsh consequences of structural adjustment programmes, the East African sub-region has also experienced in the 1980s and 1990s socio-political upheavals on a scale never witnessed before. Not only did the sub-region witness the break-up of the nation-state in Somalia in 1991, and genocide in Rwanda in 1994, but also massive loss of life and property and displacement of people as a result of conflicts, wars and internal strife in many of the remaining countries. All these crises have affected women's lives more severely than men's and resulted in additional burdens to women in their multiple household and community roles and responsibilities.

The up-side of this situation is the emerging wave of political reform and renewal within the sub-region. A good number of countries have embarked on a path of democratic governance and political pluralism. Some countries have put in place new constitutions which guarantee citizens, in general, and women, in particular, equal rights and liberties including equal right to ownership and control over resources, participation in decision-making processes at all levels, and, in some cases, right to affirmative action. Also encouraging is the renewed political will and move towards regional integration and finding regional

^{1/}Countries which make up the East African sub-region under the ECA include: Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda.

^{2/}Economic Commission for Africa. Global Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of the Paris Declaration and Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the 1990s, 1995, i - ii

solutions and approaches to resolving conflicts. Less encouraging, although noticeable within the sub-region, is the fact that, although a number of countries are recording positive economic growth trends, this growth is taking place amidst increasing poverty and marginalisation for the majority of the population, particularly women.

FWCW Activities within the East African Sub-Region

For the East African Sub-Region, as was the case in the rest of Africa and the world, the Beijing conference process provided an important opportunity for reviewing and assessing the current status of women and the progress made in implementing the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, adopted by UN member states during the end of Decade Conference in 1985. All the countries in the sub-region were actively involved in the national, regional and global review and assessment processes reflected in their National Reports for the FWCW, as well as the African and Global Platforms for Action. Accordingly, countries within the sub-region indicated their commitment to undertaking concerted action on the critical areas of concern which pose the greatest hinderance to promoting the agenda for equality, development and peace, and women's advancement, by their endorsement of both the African and Beijing Platforms for Action. Since the FWCW there is evidence that some effort is being made by the various actors and stakeholders in the FWCW issues (including governments, NGOs and other institutions) to act upon the critical areas of concern for women identified in both Platforms for Action.

Methods of Data Collection and Limitations of this Study

This analysis has been undertaken with the intention of highlighting some of the modalities, approaches and experiences in the East African sub-region with regards to the implementation of the African and Global Platforms for Action focusing on three priority areas: **Participation of Women in Decision-making, Economic Empowerment of Women for Poverty Reduction; and Women's Legal and Human Rights.** The analysis largely draws on the conclusions and findings of the national, regional and global review and assessment processes contained in the wide range of documents generated by the FWCW preparatory process. In order to gain insights into some of the activities undertaken since the Beijing conference, country visits were undertaken additional documents reviewed and interviews held with some of the key players in the three areas of priority^{3/}.

^{3/}In this regard experiences of at least three countries were assessed in some detail: Kenya and Ethiopia (through review of documents and country visits), and Uganda, the country of residence.

Due to the very real constraint of time, this situational analysis could not be as thorough and exhaustive as would have been desired. Although country visits were undertaken, it was not possible to hold interviews with most of the key players at the national level whose insights would have further enriched this study. Review of documents was also limited by unavailability of some of the relevant documents, and the constraint of not being able to read documents which were available but not in English. It is, therefore, acknowledged that a lot more exists by way of experiences and modalities at the national and sub-regional level than what will be highlighted in this presentation. It is hoped, however, that this overview serves to facilitate technical discussion within the overall objectives of the Gender Networking Meeting, and as a spring-board for a more in-depth and exhaustive study of the various modalities and approaches set in place in order to resolve the concerns in the three priority areas.

Overview of the Current Status of Women in the East African Sub-Region

Close to two years after the Beijing conference was held, the situation of women in the sub-region has not changed significantly. The conclusions arrived at in the course of reviewing the progress made in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, therefore, are as relevant now as they were two years ago. Below is a brief overview of the current status of women in each of the priority areas:

1. Women in Power and Decision-Making

A review of the current representation of women in parliament within the East African sub-region shows that while some countries have higher levels of representation of women in parliament than the global average of 10% (such as Uganda, Eritrea, Seychelles and Tanzania), many others have made little progress (either having no representation in parliament, such as Djibouti and the Comoros) or very limited representation (such as Ethiopia and Kenya with 3% each). It is also apparent that, despite the efforts so far made in some countries, women's participation in senior positions of government is still far below that of their male counter-parts. The following overview of the level of representation in parliament and some key decision-making positions in selected countries in the sub-region illustrates this points.

ETHIOPIA ^{4/}: Central Parliament: 13 women out of a total of 545 seats (less than 3%); Regional Parliament: 6 women out of 145

^{4/}Based on interview with the Minister in Charge of Women Affairs.

seats (9%); Cabinet: 4 Ministers, 1 Deputy Minister. KENYA^{5/}: Parliament: 6 women out of 188 elected seats (3%); District and Provincial Commissioners: no women; Cabinet: 1 woman out of 33 Ministers; Assistant Ministers: 1 woman out of 66 Assistant Ministers; Chief Justice and High Court Judges: 3 out of 37 (8.1%); Chief Magistrates and Resident Magistrates: 61 out of 200 (30.5%). UGANDA^{6/}: Parliament: 51 women and 226 men (18%); Cabinet: 2 women ministers out of 21 (less than 10%) and 4 women ministers of state out of 31 (13%); Judges of the High Court: 8 out of 23 (35%).

This overview indicates that despite some positive moves towards democracy and good governance in some countries of the sub-region, these political reforms have not translated into a significant increase in the number of women in political participation and decision making. In none of the countries has the goal set in the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies of 30%, to be achieved by 1995, been achieved^{7/}. In fact progress in some countries is minimal and will require additional measures and political will to improve the situation.

2. Economic Empowerment of Women for Poverty Reduction

As already indicated above, most of the countries in the East African sub-region are classified as LDCs with low and declining levels of GDP and income per capita. In addition, the majority of these countries are predominantly agricultural, with a large percentage of the populations depending on this sector for their livelihoods. Most of the countries in the sub-region have been implementing structural adjustment policies in a bid to stem economic stagnation and stimulate growth. Although some countries have begun to register high economic growth rates, the process of adjustment has in the majority of cases not only compounded the burden on women's lives as they have had to take on the responsibilities for social welfare of their families in the face of government withdrawals, but also worsened the socio-economic position of women because pre-existing inequalities have prevented them from harnessing any positive aspects of the adjustment process.

Women are the main source of labour in agricultural production (contributing up to 80% in Uganda, 80% in Kenya and 90.3% in Tanzania, for instance). Despite their high predominance

^{5/}Source: National Report, 1994; Women and Men in Kenya, 1995

^{6/}Source: National Report, 1996; Women and Men in Uganda, 1997.

^{7/}Even the Seychelles which reached 41% of women elected members of the National Assembly, dropped to 27.5% in 1993. Source: Summaries of National Reports, p. 32.

in agriculture, women lack control over land (only 7% of women own land in Uganda, and 1% in Kenya^{8/}, for example), have limited access to agricultural extension services and credit facilities, and rely on the most basic tools (the hand hoe) for production. In addition to their concentration in the agricultural sector, women also predominate the informal sector, both in the urban and rural areas, making up 55.5% in Ethiopia and 30% in Somalia, for example. Most of the countries report a growing incidence of female-headed households (20-35%) and the fact that these households tend to be poorer. It is reported in Ethiopia, for instance, that women and children make up more than 75% of the population living in temporary shelters scattered around the country^{9/}. This confirms the incidence of feminisation of poverty in the sub-region.

This overview emphasises the fact that unless radical measures are undertaken and pre-existing barriers to women's participation in economic activities addressed, the current economic reforms are bound to not only exclude women but also further marginalise them. Constraints to women's participation in agriculture and the informal sector, therefore, must form an important element in the strategies for the economic empowerment of women and poverty reduction.

3. Women's Legal and Human Rights

Most countries in the sub-region have ratified CEDAW and a number have incorporated its provisions in their national constitutions^{10/}. Although some countries are reported to be in the process of reforming existing laws to conform with the requirements of their new Constitutions, many have not adjusted their laws, administrative practices or other public policies according to their obligations under the Convention. Another major constraint is the low level of awareness of some of the positive legal provisions which exists and a lack of enforcement of such laws. In addition, information on CEDAW is not widely disseminated even within women's and other human rights organisations. A number of governments have produced and submitted National Reports on the progress they are making in implementing the recommendations of CEDAW. However, in the majority of cases, these Reports have been produced without the knowledge and open discussion or significant in-put from other stakeholders, particularly women's organisations.

^{8/}Second Class Citizen, p. 3

^{9/}Summaries of National Reports, p. 21

^{10/}Ethiopia and Uganda are examples.

All the countries in the sub-region report the gap between de jure and de facto rights of women, and the multiple laws which affect women particularly in the areas of marriage and inheritance, access to property and ownership of resources, which are often defined in the context of traditional and cultural systems and practices. There is also prevalence of harmful traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (it is reported that over 85% of women in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia are subjected to this harmful practice), early marriages and abduction of girls in many countries in the sub-region. In addition, violence against women is reported as prevalent in all countries although there is limited data, and no comprehensive legislation to protect and defend women.

Interventions, Activities and Programmes to address the major areas of concern: Some Highlights

A number of interventions have been undertaken, particularly at the national level, to respond to some of the issues raised in the above overview. The modalities and interventions have in some cases been put in place as a result of wider socio-political and economic processes aimed at economic reform and promoting democracy and good governance. In other cases, they are intended to address gender-specific concerns. The following overview provides an insight into some of the country-specific modalities and experiences in addressing the three areas of concern.

1. Women in Power and Decision-Making

1. Affirmative Action in Uganda

The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda provides for affirmative action in favour of all marginalised groups and ensuring equal dignity for women and men. As a result of this affirmative action, political participation of women in the Uganda parliament rose from 1 woman member of parliament and cabinet (in the 1980s) to 51 women members of parliament in the Constituent Assembly, which debated the new Constitution, and 51 in the present parliament. The new Constitution also reserves 30% of the membership of each local government council for women. As a result of affirmative action, the percentage of women in the local government system is between 10% - 13% compared to between 1% and 2% of chiefs (where there is no affirmative action)^{11/}.

Although the number of women in decision-making positions is still low compared to men (13%), the visibility of women in the public arena has been enhanced by this relatively high representation of women in Parliament and the appointment of a number of women to high public offices previously dominated by

^{11/}Country Report, 1996, p. 16

men, for instance a woman Vice President, women Ministers and Ministers of State (including the Foreign Affairs and Agriculture portfolios) and, at the local government level, Resident District Commissioners and Chief Administrative Officers. This visibility of women has greatly contributed to creating awareness in the population on gender issues and the important role women can play in the public arena.

ii. Action and Advocacy for Political Participation and Representation in Kenya

The National Report prepared for the FWCW identifies fostering unity and greater coordination between women's organisations and lobby groups in pressing for women's empowerment and protection^{12/}. In the absence of specific policy measures and modalities for increasing the number of women in decision-making positions, in general, and parliament, in particular, efforts to open up space for women's participation in politics in Kenya have been largely left to these organisations and lobby groups. A wide range of organisations exist in Kenya which are actively involved in civic education and the promotion of awareness on gender, women's rights, governance and constitutional issues^{13/}.

In view of the low level of representation of women in the Kenya Parliament (3%), and in anticipation of elections to be held in 1997, a Motion to support affirmative action for women was tabled in Parliament on April 23rd, 1997. Although the Motion was defeated, the initiative to influence national policy through demanding affirmative action on behalf of the women of Kenya galvanised public debate on gender issues and the rights of women in Kenya. As a result of the Motion also, the Kenya Women's Political Caucus was formed as a broad-based national network incorporating women politicians (across political lines), specialised women's non-governmental organisations and individuals, with the long-term objective of increasing the number of women in parliament, holding members of parliament accountable to women and ensuring gender-responsive legislation, among others^{14/}.

2. Economic Empowerment of Women for Poverty Reduction

1. Micro-credit for poor women in Ethiopia

^{12/}National Report, p. 9

^{13/}For instance: the League of Women Voters, National Commission For Women, Citizen's Coalition for Constitutional Change, Coalition on Violence Against Women, and FIDA-Kenya.

^{14/}The Kenya Women's Political Caucus Concept Paper, May 12 1997

Within the overall context of its 5-year Development Plan, which gives priority to rural development, the government of Ethiopia has initiated the Special Fund Promotion Institution (SFPI) to extend credit to poor rural and urban women. This programme is new and its impact as yet to be felt. However, considerable effort is said to have been made to draw on the lessons learned from other countries on the implementation of micro-credit. As a step in avoiding some of the mistakes of other micro-credit experiments, the government has begun by putting in place an overall policy and regulatory framework to govern all micro-credit programmes in the country.

ii. Micro-credit schemes and poverty alleviation programmes in Uganda

Uganda has been making some efforts to deal with issues of increasing poverty, through specific programmes and schemes for poverty alleviation. For instance the Programme for the Alleviation of Poverty and the Structural Costs of Adjustment (PAPSCA), the Programme for the Alleviation of Poverty (PAP), the Rural Farmers' Scheme (RFS), and Entandikwa Credit Scheme. Most of these programmes have had very limited success generally and they have almost always not benefitted the majority of women, mainly due to their failure to address underlying gender-related issues and concerns and poor management. The Rural Farmers Scheme, for instance, disbursed only 21.1% loans to women^{15/}. The Entandikwa credit scheme has been equally unsuccessful in reaching most women, in general, and poor women, in particular. A number of women-specific credit programmes run by NGOs exist in the country^{16/}, although their limited geographical coverage and amounts of credit disbursed limit their overall impact in terms of poverty reduction in the country.

iii. The Action Plan for Poverty Eradication in Uganda

In response to increasing levels of poverty despite Uganda's reported high economic growth rates, the government developed a National Plan for Poverty Eradication in 1996. This "anti-poverty strategy" is expected to enhance increased household incomes while facilitating equitable distribution of income. The action plan focuses on the following areas:

- 1) **Secure access to productive assets**, including a system of land-holding which effectively enables the poor to get access to land;
- 2) **Macroeconomic stability and microeconomic incentives**;
- 3) **Infrastructure** with specific focus on roads and markets;
- 4)

^{15/}Country Report, p. 37

^{16/}For instance the Uganda Women's Finance and Credit Trust (UWFCT), and FINCA

Information on how to use resources efficiently and raise incomes; and 5) **Health and Education**.

In 1997, the government implemented Universal Primary Education (UPE) in line with this anti-poverty strategy.

A major weakness of the Action Plan is its failure to analyze the nature of poverty in Uganda from a gender perspective and to recognise the central role women play in agricultural production as well as the rural and urban informal sectors. The proposed areas of focus highlighted by the Plan of Action are, therefore, presented in gender neutral terms, thus masking the gender-based inequalities and capabilities in responding to microeconomic incentives and opportunities.

C. Women's Legal and Human Rights

As mentioned earlier, most of the countries in the East African sub-region have ratified or acceded to the CEDAW and a number of other international instruments which recognise the rights of women and children. Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Uganda have also put in place new Constitutions which have to a large extent incorporated the provisions of CEDAW. This overall policy framework has provided women in these countries with a useful basis for advocating for legal reform which protects women's human rights.

i. Law Reform and Legal Education in Ethiopia

As a logical follow-up to the new Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, effort has been put in ensuring that the laws are adjusted in line with the Constitution. The Women Affairs Office, the Ministry of Justice and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association are working in concert to ensure that the laws identified as discriminatory to women are revised. In addition, the Women Lawyers Association has undertaken researches into Traditional, Harmful Practices affecting women in Ethiopia, Family Law and Practice, and Ethiopian Laws of Nationality, Pension and Employment. These researches have served the purpose of making issues visible for policy intervention and for creating public awareness on women's legal and human rights. The Women Affairs Office is in the process of developing a curriculum, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, to systematically sensitise law-enforcement officers (while still in training) on gender issues and issues of women's legal and human rights.

ii. Law Reform, Legal Education and Legal Aid in Uganda

Like Ethiopia, Uganda is undertaking reform to bring the laws in conformity with the new Constitution. The exercise of researching into, and reforming laws is undertaken by the Law

Reform Commission (LRC) which receives recommendations and proposals from different stakeholders in the particular laws to be reformed. With regards to the Domestic Relations Bill, which covers most aspects of women's rights within the family, the LRC received proposals and recommendations from a wide range of organisations including women's and human rights organisations, and the Ministry of Gender and Community Development.

One of the major constraints to the exercise of women's legal and human rights is the lack of awareness about the legal provisions in the laws which exist and the low level of legal literacy among women and the rest of the community. Efforts have been undertaken by the Uganda Women Lawyers Association (FIDA-Uganda), Action for Development and the Ministry of Gender and Community Development to promote greater awareness of the law amongst women and the communities. An interesting initiative at providing continued community-based legal education was undertaken in a pilot project implemented by the Ministry of Gender. This project recorded an increase in community awareness of women's legal and human rights as well as an increased number of people seeking legal advice, the majority of whom were women (82%)^{17/}.

FIDA-Uganda has been providing legal aid to poor women and has opened four branches in the country. Through FIDA's legal aid clinics, it has been able to provide direct legal support to women who would otherwise not be able to be served by mainstream legal firms. FIDA's legal aid programmes have made the organisation to be known all over the country as a defender of women's and children's rights. Despite the commendable effort made by FIDA-U, the organisation is overstretched and constrained by a lack of adequate resources (human and financial), which limits its impact. In any case, efforts of such organisations should supplement not take over the role of government.

iii. Mechanisms for Protecting Human Rights in Uganda

As a way of trying to avoid repeating its past history of violation of human rights using the state machinery, Uganda has been making an effort to put in place mechanisms intended to monitor and check human rights abuses. As a result the new Constitution provides for the establishment of a number of institutions, which are independent of the Legislature, Judiciary and Executive, whose responsibility it is to monitor and safeguard the human rights of every citizen. The **Human Rights Commission** and the **Inspector General of Government** have been set up. Although not specifically focusing on women's legal and human

^{17/} Evaluation of the Paralegal Programme in Bugabula County, Kamuli District, Uganda, of the Ministry of Gender and Community Development.

rights, these institutions provide an avenue through which women's human rights can be safe-guarded. The challenge is how to make them accessible to the majority of women in the country.

iv. Law Reform in Kenya

Kenya, like Uganda, has in place a permanent Law Reform Commission whose mandate it is to keep under review all the law of Kenya and to ensure its systematic development and reform. In respect of laws relating to women, a Task Force on Laws Relating to Women was set up in 1993 in response to demands for law reform. This Task Force is as yet to produce its draft views, and there is growing public cynicism about its seriousness given the length of time it has taken.

v. Monitoring Women's Legal and Human Rights in Kenya

The Federation of Women Lawyers - Kenya Chapter (FIDA-Kenya) has embarked on Women's Rights Monitoring project and it has produced its first Annual Report on the Legal Status of Kenyan Women for 1996: Second Class Citizenship. This first issue of the Report focuses on women's human rights within the constitutional framework currently operating in Kenya. The report observes that many policies that affect the day-to-day lives of Kenyan women, treat them as if they are minors. The report also highlights issues of violence against women based on FIDA's work in counselling victims of violence as a result of rape, battery, psychological and institutional violence. The Report concludes by making specific recommendations on: the Constitution, Law Reform, the Task Force to review the laws relating to women, CEDAW and other Human Rights Instruments, Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence. Follow-up on these recommendations will require considerable political good will which appears to be quite low given the current highly charged and politicised debates on Constitutional Reform in preparation for the forthcoming elections in Kenya.

Comments on Interventions to Address Major Areas of Concern

i. Participation of Women in Decision-Making

There is considerable consensus on the fact that empowerment of women and the improvement of their social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of transparent and accountable government and sustainable development. The Global Platform for Action emphasises this point when it states, among other things, that:

"Women in politics and decision-making positions in government and legislative bodies contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and

experiences, and providing new perspectives on mainstream politics.."^{18/}

Exclusion from, or minimal representation of women in, political participation and decision-making not only denies a large proportion of the population (more than 50%) the opportunity to articulate, promote and defend interests which are important to women, it also has the danger of not fully and efficiently utilising the potential which lies in women as a human resource. This impoverishes public life and inhibits the development of a just society.

Judging from the experiences in some of the countries in the East African sub-region, it is quite clear that additional measures are necessary to enable women to participate in significant numbers in political processes and decision-making. Affirmative action is one of the modalities which have shown positive results. The political will and support of governments and political parties is essential for affirmative action to be implemented and for it to go beyond tokenism. Affirmative action in elective positions has to be complemented by a visible increase in the number of women appointed to positions of decision making. In countries where political parties exist, the need to allow space for independent candidates is important in order for women candidates to stand without the requirement for party nomination.

Support mechanisms for women in parliament (in form of caucus groups, research and training support systems, women parliamentarian associations) are essential for strengthening the capacity of women parliamentarians and male allies in parliament to define, understand and articulate women's concerns and meaningfully influence national policies which are responsive to the needs of women.

2. Economic Empowerment of Women for Poverty Reduction

Interventions for economic empowerment of women and poverty reduction need to be understood within the general context of increasing poverty within the countries of the sub-region, and the increasing burden of economic reforms on women. The current poverty alleviation strategies do not take serious account of the fact that the empowerment of women is a critical factor in the eradication of poverty. Whether in the economic policies or in the poverty eradication strategies, the structural causes of poverty, including the structural exclusion of women from economic activities due to their gender roles, rights and responsibilities are inadequately analyzed and addressed. The interventions so far put in place are a far cry from the

^{18/}Global Platform for Action, para. 182

recommendations of the Global Platform for Action which, among other things, states that:

The eradication of poverty cannot be accomplished through anti-poverty programmes alone but will require democratic participation and changes in economic structures in order to ensure access for all women to resources, opportunities and public services^{19/}.

Given the predominance of women in agriculture (both subsistence and cash crop production), efforts aimed at the economic empowerment of women must make a serious attempt to increase their control over land. Current agricultural and land reform programmes show little evidence of this happening. In addition, micro-credit programmes need to problematize women's lack of control over land, and the precarious nature of the informal sector, made more so by the negative effects of structural adjustment policies.

3. Women's Legal and Human Rights

The Global Platform for Action commits governments to not only refrain from violating the human rights of women, but to also actively promote and protect these rights. The Platform also states that:

The gap between the existence of rights and their effective enjoyment derives from a lack of commitment by governments to promoting and protecting those rights and the failure of governments to inform women and men alike about them.

The interventions referred to above indicate that, in most cases, the responsibility for promoting women's legal and human rights is left to women's organisations and poorly resourced Women's Ministries. Women's Ministries, in particular, have an up-hill task to not only promote awareness, but also put in place policies of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all national policies and programmes and monitor performance.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- i. Political will is important and must consistently be mobilised to ensure that action is undertaken by governments in all the three areas of priority;
- ii. Where there is political will, some interventions to address the areas of concern can be undertaken within existing resources, this is particularly so with regards to effecting policy changes within the context of existing frameworks and processes;

^{19/}Global Platform for Action, para 47, p. 38

- iii. National Machineries for Women are increasingly taking on all the responsibility for gender mainstreaming, policy formulation on behalf of government as well as monitoring all national policies and programmes. Yet the Machineries for Women continue to be under-resourced (both financially and in terms of human resources). Effort must therefore be made for additional resources to be invested in these important institutional mechanisms;
- iv. Legal and Human Rights of Women: Given the central catalytic role that women's and feminist organisations play in putting pressure on governments to honour their commitments, as well as raising public awareness, it is essential that these organisations are supported at all levels to strengthen their networks and advocacy;
- v. Economic Empowerment of Women for Poverty Reduction: Economic reform and poverty eradication programmes must take serious account of gender considerations right from the conceptualisation and planning up to the implementation and monitoring. Contradictions and inconsistencies in government policies as they pursue structural adjustment and economic growth oriented policies, on the one hand, and poverty eradication policies on the other, must be addressed in order to avoid the current situation where positive policies are reversed by gender-insensitive policies and programmes.
- vi. Ministries of Finance and Economic Development play a central role in the formulation of economic policies. Pressure must be brought to bear on these ministries to integrate a gender perspective in all their work. Additionally, the budgetary process needs to be made more accessible and transparent. Involvement of women at all levels of economic planning is a feasible proposition in all the countries of the sub-region and can be implemented if there is political will;
- vii. Given the high predominance of women in agriculture and the informal sector, poverty reduction and economic empowerment strategies must pay serious attention to these sectors and make visible women's central role by addressing the barriers they face within these areas.

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