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**Economic Commission for Africa
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**Sixth African Regional Conference On Women
Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of
the Dakar and Beijing Platforms For Action**

**Summary of the Preliminary Assessment Report
E/ECA/ACW/RC.VI/99/7J**

Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

November, 1999

Sixth African Regional Conference on Women
Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of
the Dakar and Beijing Platforms For Action
22-26 November 1999, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Preliminary Assessment Report On:
Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

1.0 Introduction:

1.1 The Beijing Commitments

The Beijing Platform for Action identified three Strategic Objectives (H.1, H.2 and H.3) under the theme *Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women* viz.

“Create and strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies; integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects;” and “generate and disseminate gender disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.”

The above objectives were to be achieved through the following actions:

Vesting the responsibility for advancing women’s issues in the highest possible levels of government; create and/or strengthen national gender machineries and clearly define their mandates and authority – these to include inter-ministerial coordination structures, networking and monitoring structures and structures for: gender main-streaming government and organizations’ policies, programmes and projects; developing strategies and methodologies for mobilizing resources and the energies of women, men, and society in general; empowering women through research, information, education, training, lobbying, and advisory services to the Government; coordinating various actors on the national, sub-regional, regional and international levels; monitoring impact; building capacity for gender analytic research and disaggregated data collection and dissemination; changing laws to suit the concerns of women for gender equality; etc.

Other actions included: seeking to ensure that before any policies, legislation or major decisions are adopted an analysis is carried out to determine their implications on women’s and men’s lives; regular reviews of policies, programmes and projects to ensure that their impacts directly benefit women as they do men; eradicate all forms of discrimination against women and all obstacles to women’s advancement; ensure the creation and development of functional networks between academia, research centers, activists, government, NGOs, the private sector and all other actors in creating and strengthening mechanisms and methodologies for advancement of women; undertake legal reforms focusing on improving women’s lives in the family, employment, and other spheres and ensure the promotion of equality between men and women; establish direct links between national, regional and international bodies and agencies dealing with the advancement of women; ensure that statistics related to individuals are collected, compiled, analysed and presented in form related to the concerns, issues, and questions of men and women in society; develop a comprehensive knowledge of all forms of work and

employment including unremunerated work and the full contribution of women to the economy; promote research and ensure regular publication of gender disaggregated data related to the main issues of concern to women e.g. poverty, culture, violence etc.; use more gender-sensitive data in policy-formulation and decision-making.

1.2 Commitments by international organizations

The United Nations system committed itself to implement the global platform for action. Besides ensuring that the goals of gender equality are fulfilled on a global scale through its agencies and its Division for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations system is committed to: achieving an internal gender distribution rate of 50/50 by the year 2000; appointing more women as special representatives and envoys; ensuring accountability of individual managers for implementing the strategic plan in their areas of responsibility; working toward creating a gender-sensitive environment; and enabling the Focal Points for Women to effectively monitor and facilitate progress in the implementation of the strategic plan.¹ Other bilateral and multi-lateral development agencies and international NGOs have also committed themselves to gender mainstreaming as witnessed by their insistence on gender implications of development programme/project proposals to be considered for funding.

At the regional level, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) committed itself to the *African Platform for Action: A Common Position for the Advancement of Women* when the Heads of State and Government of OAU signed the *Addis Ababa Declaration on the African Platform for Action on Women* on 28 June, 1995. The Platform specifically mentions the importance of institutional arrangements for implementing the action plan for advancing the position of women. These include the national gender machineries, sub-regional, regional and international structures such as the UN system. It also urges the setting up of a follow-up mechanism for the assessment and monitoring of the implementation of the Platform for Action having a "core structure with the mandate of coordinating, monitoring and evaluating implementation of, and accountability to, the Platform of Action...at international, regional and national levels."²

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has committed to putting gender at the forefront of its programmes of assisting Africa in its social and economic development via gender mainstreaming. As a result, it has elevated its African Centre for Women to division level and started a process of increasing capacity for gender mainstreaming throughout the Commission.

At the sub-regional level, all sub-regional organisations (SADC, ECOWAS etc.) have created institutional frameworks to implement the global and African platforms. These include: sub-regional declarations; gender units and other gender bodies/agencies and departments e.g. for research and publications or advisory services etc.; gender associations and networks; councils of gender ministers; gender programmes and projects in conjunction with development agencies; etc.

¹ United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women, 42nd Session, E/CN.6/1998/1, p.5

² UN-ECA/OAU (1994) *African Platform for Action: African Common Position for the Advancement of Women*, p.49

1.3 Commitments by governments

At national level, governments committed to set up national gender machineries for coordination, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation of all gender mainstreaming efforts. Many countries already had national gender machineries even before the Global and African Platforms. Since then, some have shown progress in upgrading gender units to departments or ministry levels³ while others have kept their previous governmental structures or machinery/focal point⁴ but added on the Global Platform to the already burdened structures. Various commitments were made beyond merely setting up the national machineries. These mainly had to do with enhancing the capacity of these machineries to deliver the level of service required; adapting the global and regional platforms to national action plans; creation, revisions or enhancements of legal, regulatory or policy frameworks for gender mainstreaming and advancement of women; creation and updating of gender disaggregated database and dissemination of such data and so on.

2.0 Assessing Progress

Much has been accomplished since the Beijing Conference in terms of *activities* performed under institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Examples include: setting up or strengthening credit and other schemes for the economic empowerment of women; laws and constitutions have been revised as a direct result of the African and Global Platforms; mechanisms for empowering the girl-child and campaigns to promote women's human rights and stop violence against women have been initiated; programmes have been set up to sensitize communities, organizations and institutions addressing gender and women's issues and train women parliamentarians; NGOs directly or indirectly addressing gender issues have proliferated as a result of the Global Platform; some efforts have been made to promote the gender disaggregation of data and utilization of such data for example in the national planning and budgeting exercises of *some* countries.

With regard to *changing or influencing laws and policy frameworks*, the national machineries have achieved some progress such as changing or shaping laws, constitutions, visions and policy framework papers to make them more gender sensitive. Most countries have reviewed their Constitution and other laws such as those on inheritance, marriage, divorce, property etc. to make them more gender sensitive. In several cases, laws and policies on affirmative action and quotas have guaranteed women's access to policy and decision-making organs of society at various local, regional and national levels. The gender machineries and specialized women's groups such as those on law, health, human rights, etc. have been involved in raising the critical issues of concern to women, sensitizing the communities and pushing for reviews of laws and constitutions. Some national machineries have also been involved in the creation of long-term, shared development visions in their countries (e.g. in Uganda 2025, Malawi Vision 2020, etc.) to ensure that the future of the country and the strategies used to realize such futures fully recognize and take into account the position and role of women.

³ For example, Zambia strengthened and elevated the Women in Development Department at the National Commission for Development Planning to the Gender in Development Division at Cabinet Office; in Swaziland, the gender programme did not have a Ministry until 1996 when it was placed under Ministry of Home Affairs;

⁴ Seychelles, Eritrea, Malawi, Kenya, etc. – though some modifications to the total machinery may have been effected e.g. renaming or re-constitution of the old structures; creation or addition of sectoral focal points; increased or strengthened networks; etc

At the regional level, the OAU and ADB have both taken measures to create their own women's departments while the ECA has, since 1996, given renewed attention and vigor to the African Center for Women (ACW) with promises of enhanced capacity to service ECA internally and the African continent at large. The ACW has developed a new programme contained in its strategic plan for 2000 – 2005 which to mainstream gender in programmes, policies, and projects both within ECA and Africa at large. ACW also intends to engage in advocacy, networking, training and coordination in order to facilitate the advancement of women in Africa at regional, sub-regional and national levels.

The ECA has been an active inter-governmental organization at the Africa regional level with regard to advancing the status of women, mainly through its African Centre for Women. At the sub-regional level, the ECA has established gender focal points in the Sub-Regional Development Centres (SRDCs) to work in collaboration with ACW and member countries. ACW has taken a decision to focus its work in specific strategic directions, namely, poverty reduction through strengthening women's economic role, fostering the leadership role of women, and promoting the human and legal rights of women. ACW also plays a role in monitoring and promoting of the implementation of the African and Global Platforms for Action; and by defining and implementing strategies for mainstreaming gender in the programmes of ECA.⁵

The ECA, through the ACW, has among many other things, also organized sub-regional Beijing follow up meetings in all of the five sub-regions of Africa. At these meetings, member countries were guided in the preparation of a viable national action plan, and how to assess and report on progress made towards implementing the Global and African Platforms for Action. ACW has also organized international and regional conferences such as that on the commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of ECA entitled "African Women and Economic Development: Investing in Our Future". It has also conducted surveys in Eastern and Western Africa on the status of women's access to productive resources and human rights within the family;⁶ senior staff and gender focal points of substantive divisions of ECA and gender focal points at the SRDCs have been trained in the basics of gender analysis. Advisory services have also provided to Member States, and publications have been and continue to be disseminated. Recent productions include for example, the regular *African Women's Report*, 53 country brochures portraying the socio-economic status of women in Africa⁷ and the outputs of the 40th Anniversary Conference.

However, ECA (and therefore ACW) deals primarily with matters of a social and economic development nature. This leaves much to be done in the area of *political* development and *development financing* where the OAU and ADB are the two major regional players. The ADB has started to mainstream gender and to require that programmes and projects submitted for financing should incorporate or consider gender issues. Other initiatives include: considering a policy on good governance as a condition for country assistance⁸; enhancing its internal gender skills; conducting gender training for ADB team leaders and heads of department; forming an inter-departmental advisory committee on women's issues; as well as human and financial capacity building for the Environment and Sustainable Development Unit of ADB, which deals

⁵ ECA, Report of The First Meeting of Ministers of the Committee on Women and Development, April, 1999, p.6

⁶ Recommendations and strategies for action by ACW and actors in the field were derived from these studies.

⁷ These brochures will also be updated and produced in book format for the 1999 Sixth Regional Conference on Women.

⁸ Which can create a conducive environment to push governments into gender mainstreaming.

with gender.⁹ Further, a new lending criteria which ties the level of development lending to a particular country to its efforts in implementing gender sensitive development is in place. This is beginning to solve the problem of lack of enforcement and accountability, as governments will be held accountable for what their actions.

At national level, governments have attempted to strengthen national machineries beyond mere placement into high offices of government either as whole ministries (of women or gender) or as divisions, units, or bureaus within ministries. Some offices of state presidents have also created offices of gender advisers. This is besides the use of the offices of First Ladies to push for various gender issues.

One of the most important structural aspects of these national machineries is the linkages they have established with civil society actors such as: NGOs and their gender networks; different types of media organisations; educational institutions and research centres; grassroots women's associations; and financial and credit institutions in private, semi-private and public sectors. Another important linkage is with bodies that belong to governing institutions of the country such as the Parliament or local governing councils. There are women's caucuses that have come up in legislative assemblies of many countries both at national and local levels.

There are also numerous other regional (and sub-regional) bodies, institutions, NGOs, associations and so on,¹⁰ as well as offices of international agencies¹¹ operating at the regional and sub-regional levels. Some have emerged as a direct result of the Beijing Conference while others have always been in existence. With the emergence of new information technologies such as the Internet, e-mail and web-based discussion groups, new monitoring and evaluation networks, as well as easier communications between stakeholders, have emerged and having noticeable impact on progress towards implementing the platforms for action.

There is much concern being raised regarding the slow pace in the *generation and dissemination of gender disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation* purposes. Attempts to generate, store, analyse, and publish gender disaggregated data in user-friendly form and to use such data in national accounts, budgets, planning and policy-making exercises, still have to gain wider currency. The First Meeting of Ministers of CWD¹² in April 1999 gives some indication of how far countries and sub-regions have gone in ensuring availability of disaggregated data. For example, the report from the West African SRDC shows that it has mainstreamed gender into the Survey of Economic and Social Conditions in West Africa; produced and circulated a questionnaire on the disaggregation of gender mainstreaming data in social and economic development in West Africa. But as an indication of what still remains to be done, it is shown that reports on mainstreaming gender concerns into development policies and programmes need to be produced.

The SRDC in North Africa noted that it had prepared a study on policy measures for enabling women to play a greater role in the economic and social development of North Africa in 1997. The center had also collected and analysed data on women and gender issues; prepared a

⁹ ECA/ACW, *Report of the First Meeting of Ministers of the Committee on Women and Development*, April 1999, p.6

¹⁰ AAWARD, WILDAF, WILSA, African Women Committee for Peace and Development (AWCPD), Women in Development Southern African Awareness (WIDSAA) programme

¹¹ Such as UN agencies (UNIFEM, UNESCO, UNDP etc.)

¹² ECA, *Report of the First Meeting of Ministers of the Committee on Women and Development*, April 1999.

study on gender equity and economic and social empowerment of women within the cultural context of North Africa; and prepared an ad hoc meeting of experts on gender equity and economic and social empowerment. Reflecting what still needs to be done in North Africa, the Center intends to: produce studies and documents on gender and cultural disparities in North Africa and women's empowerment in the sub region; build databases on women and gender issues in North Africa; and identify productive approaches and strategies for reducing gender disparities.

In Central Africa, the SDRC has ensured the gender mainstreaming of the Survey of Economic and Social Conditions in the sub-region, integrated gender into its databases and organized a meeting to help set up the Central African Women's Network (RESEFAC). But challenges for future programmes have been outlined: revitalization of RESEFAC; improvement of statistical data; integrating the gender approach into SRDC studies and databases. The difficulties of securing gender sensitive data and gender disaggregated data at sub-regional and international levels were reiterated. "One of the causes of this was the lack of dialogue between the generators and the users of such data."¹³ The Center intends to start facilitating such dialogue as well as to encourage sharing of data and research findings between itself and member countries; building partnerships for the promotion of gender equity; highlighting effects of globalization and how to take advantage of it; and pressing the need for including gender perspectives in budget analysis and decision making.

With regard to *building capacity for gender analytic research and disaggregated data collection, analysis and dissemination*, progress has been quite slow. Besides resource constraints, one major reason for the slow pace is that countries have just started implementing their national action plans and some have not even completed their national gender policies. Only recently have some countries started to take measures to increase capacity and the rate of implementing activities in this area. The UN system itself has just started to push its agencies to emulate the UNICEF example of engendering the budget. It is noted elsewhere that "...the statistical data on the basis of which national priorities were set did not sufficiently take into account the objectives of the Global Platform. Those objectives were still being relegated to the back burner and national development programmes did not genuinely reflect the economic role of women."¹⁴

Efforts are being made in some countries to publish materials and information in easy-to-read form so that the knowledge can be passed on quickly to the intended beneficiaries. Some countries have translated their national gender policies and action plans, some revised laws, and other pertinent information into all major local languages to ensure wider absorption of their content by the wider society especially the women. Radio programmes, public meetings, workshops and conferences are being conducted in many countries to discuss with and empower women by transmitting the new knowledge and information regarding their rights, new laws and institutions that can assist them. Some countries have even set up hotlines through which women in need of assistance can get help. However, progress in this area may be slowed by delays in the formulation of gender policies. Without a commonly agreed national gender policy, there is no nationally accepted pact to give a shared sense of purpose and direction to achieving the Global and African Platforms.

¹³ Ibid., p.9

¹⁴ ECA, Report of The First Meeting of Ministers of the Committee on Women and Development, April, 1999, p.3

3.0 Resources

The total amount of resources being put into building institutional mechanisms is difficult to measure and aggregate for all governments, development agencies and NGOs operating on the African continent. One reason is that there are numerous actors presently operating in this area and coordination and monitoring mechanisms are not fully developed and functional. Secondly, gender being a crosscutting issue, it is difficult to isolate or disaggregate the gender components of most development resources going into projects and programmes e.g. physical infrastructure.¹⁵ Agencies and governments have yet to provide resource data and information (for planning and accounting purposes) disaggregated along the twelve themes of the Beijing and Dakar Platform. This becomes even more complicated as many national action plans did not estimate the costs of the activities under each theme in their action plans as a starting point.

However, it is quite clear that a lot of development in Africa, including efforts to empower women and advance their status, is dependent on the generosity of development partners because the national governments cannot afford the full cost. This is why in the African Platform for Action (p.48) donors/development partners are asked to commit 20% of development assistance, instead of 17%, to human development programmes. Also, developed countries are asked to allocate 0.7% of their gross domestic product (GDP) to helping poor countries. The United Nations Agencies, Programmes, Funds and so on are supposed to allocate 20-25% of their regular budgets to gender-related work in order to support the implementation of the Platforms for Action. Any proceeds from debt buy-back schemes and equity conversion should be allocated to women's programmes. Multi-lateral partners are urged to set up special windows for channeling finances to women entrepreneurs. Donor assistance never comes in the amounts desired and when it comes, it has its own strings attached. And yet it is clear that without donor assistance not much progress occurs in advancing the status of women.

Also, in many countries the central government gender or women's machineries were created before the Beijing Conference. After the Conference and the Declaration and Platform for Action, they were assigned extra responsibilities to implement the Platforms. This significantly increased the burden but their capacity (extra personnel, training/skills pool, financial, and material resources etc.) did not increase accordingly. A related issue concerns the placement of the central (government) gender machinery in composite ministries sharing single budgets and other resources including decentralised structures. This is said to dilute the focus, mandate and resource capacity of the machineries.

With regard to the *mobilization of resources and the energies of society in general*, it is apparent that national machineries have tried and are still trying to mobilize these resources. However, the attempts have not been as successful as expected for various reasons. Firstly, most national machineries do not seem to have set up *strategic* resource (financial, human etc.) mobilization and utilization mechanisms.¹⁶ Secondly, they depend too much on the good will of

¹⁵ This justifies the call for mainstreaming gender into all policies, programmes and projects and the need for collecting and analysing gender disaggregated data in all sphere of development undertakings.

¹⁶ For example, the process of designing the National Action Plan or the Gender Policy, or reviewing progress, are opportunities for conducting all-inclusive consultations processes involving donors, youth, men, etc. to generate support and resources for gender mainstreaming. It is therefore, difficult to see how the limitation of stakeholders in these processes can enable to the government machinery strategically mobilise resources/human energies and employ them to effectively achieve progress.

donors, governments and other well wishers for resources and capacity to deliver.¹⁷ Moreover, the external environment -- characterised by limited political will; high illiteracy levels; rigid cultural practices, attitudes and values; politics; economic liberalization policies, structural adjustment programmes and other external conditionalities -- continues to constrain the effectiveness of the national machineries.

4.0 Mechanisms for Monitoring Implementation

At national level, it is clear that all national machineries for the empowerment and advancement of women are primarily mandated initiate programme implementation, establish monitoring and evaluation systems and give feedback to all concerned parties. The machineries are supposed to work in close collaboration with civil society organizations, the private sector and other players such as donors or development partners. This requires effective coordination in order to realize significant progress and to utilize resources for maximum impact without duplication of efforts, delays or wastage. It is evident that progress in raising capacity in this area has been slow. Many countries still have to build effective national machineries with capacity for coordination of gender/women's activities nation-wide. This is not an easy task, however, and even some development agencies assisting in gender programmes, need to do a better job of monitoring progress and impact towards the achievement of benchmarks set in the Platforms.¹⁸

Regular evaluations can be expensive and require expertise, which may not be readily available. It is clear that few countries have actually conducted studies to gauge how society in general is becoming gender-sensitive. It is also clear that few, if any, countries have conducted evaluative nation-wide studies to make a direct statistical link between money spent on activities undertaken and the amount or level of gender mainstreaming that is occurring in the policies, programmes and projects of all targeted organizations and institutions.

There is also a lack of precise, objective and measurable indicators of achievement and systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. In certain instances, activities are taken as indicators of progress in place of the true measures of impact. Regional and national efforts are however in progress to redress the situation.

For example, at sub-regional level, the Central and West African sub-regions compile and publish the *Survey of Economic and Social Conditions* which investigates and reports on conditions and status of the general populations. Gender is now being mainstreamed into these studies. SADC disseminates the *Gender Monitor*, a regular publication tracking developments, activities, achievements and innovations in the sub-region. It also has published a country by country book series called *Beyond Inequalities: Women in Southern Africa*, to present the information on the status of women in the sub-region.

¹⁷ In fact, if major and minor donors decided not to advance any more financial, material and technical assistance, probably most African countries would fail to consider gender mainstreaming as priority and the effort of gender sensitisation and mainstreaming would most likely collapse.

¹⁸ Evidently, individual projects may have such indicators and mechanisms to monitor progress at the micro-level but at the country/national (or macro) level the situation is not fully developed. It is difficult, for example, to show that political empowerment of women (or how women are portrayed in the mass media) is progressing since numbers of women in power or decision-making positions does not indicate the full spectrum of what women's empowerment entails.

5.0 Strategies of stakeholders

Stakeholders with an interest in institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women include: women in general and women activists and NGOs in particular; governments; donor agencies; regional organisations; research and academic institutions; etc. So far, at the national level, the national gender machineries have set up coordinative mechanisms such as gender (women's) commissions, associations or networks where the various stakeholders are represented. Some of the NGOs that deal with gender issues have also formed their own networks according to their areas of concern e.g. women's rights, economic empowerment etc. These coordinative mechanisms provide forums for periodic reviews and discussions among the stakeholders and resolutions and decisions are taken regarding the way forward. Problems however do exist. For example, in some cases meetings or discussions between the stakeholders have become irregular or non-existent due to resource constraints; follow-up, monitoring and evaluations also have been miniscule mainly because of resource constraints; lobbying, advocacy, advisory services or counseling etc., all critical services essential for a vibrant women's movement, cannot be performed due to various factors such as lack of resources, skills, and unity of direction between the actors; etc.

Most of what has been taking place in institutional mechanisms and capacity building with regard to gender has been donor driven. The United Nations and its agencies have taken a lead in institution and capacity building to spur implementation of the global platform. Other bilateral and multi-lateral agencies as well, have developed working relationships with the regional and national authorities and NGOs to build the capacity for achieving the Beijing and Dakar Platform goals on *institutional mechanisms*. However, since it has been only four years since the Beijing and Dakar Platforms and many countries have just completed their actions plans within the last two years (while others do not even have their gender policies in place yet), strategic directions for all stakeholders have not fully crystallised. For example, the serious generation and dissemination of gender disaggregated data has just began and many stakeholders still need to develop the skill and capacity to make good use of such data.

It should also be noted that institutions which have the mandate to hold accountable all actors in the gender issues and to ensure transparency in public and private policies, have the skills, capacity, knowledge, information or authority to enforce what needs to be done. They may not be able to ensure that everyone is accountable to the women constituency. In certain cases, women have taken to the streets to demonstrate their concerns and to press for accountability. Such demonstrations need to be followed up with constant pressure through other avenues such letter writing and other lobbying mechanisms in order to be effective.

6.0 Conference/workshop recommendations

At regional level, the ECA/ACW organised the "African Women and Economic Development: *Investing in our Future*" conference held on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of ECA, from 28 April to 1 May, 1998 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It brought together participants and stakeholders from all walks of life to discuss gender/women's issues and the way forward for Africa. Many topics were covered including globalization; good governance; information technologies; access to productive resources; gender and economic development; and many others relating to gender and development. Various recommendations regarding

institutional mechanisms were made in all these areas. A few examples include: setting up information centers for women; including gender perspectives in national accounts and other data, and also budgetary policies and procedures; mechanisms to facilitate women's access to land, credit and other resources; mechanisms for assisting the youth in promoting their health and socio-economic well-being; mechanisms for enhancing good governance through women's and gender approaches e.g. regarding issues of conflict, peace, human rights, economic empowerment; etc.

The Eighteenth Meeting of the Africa Regional Coordinating Committee for Integration of Women in development (AARC) was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 24-26 April, 1997. Among the recommendations made were: the need to establish a culture of developing and using gender disaggregated statistics generally, and particularly in the ministries of Finance and Planning; making budgetary allocations in such a way as to reflect the gender equity issue based on participatory and actual needs; budget and time allocation must be made for training policy makers in gender-aware and gender-sensitive planning; monitoring mechanisms should be put in place within the ministries to ensure timely implementation of commitments especially with regard to budgetary allocations; coordination of external aid must be effective in order to ensure that the percentage allocated to women's projects and gender concerns is honoured. In addition, governments should institute a mechanism to match donor funds allocated to women's programmes; mechanism for negotiating debt cancellation against national funds allocated to addressing women's concerns and gender inequality should be instituted.

Although activities have started on some of the above recommendations, full implementation is awaited and the situations being referred to still exist. These recommendations comprise some of the actions to be taken with immediate effect (by year 2000).

A study was carried out to see how all ECA divisions could mainstream gender through adequate capacity building for all divisions. ACW itself needs to build its own capacity to support and service other divisions, to conduct gender advocacy, disseminate information, to lead in skills development and methodological advancement etc. The study suggests having gender focal points in all divisions and also encouraging an exchange of ideas and expertise with staff from other ECA Divisions. Also recommended is a "Gender Advisory Group" to act as a think tank and to support ACW's programme; to institutionalize internal-external linkages and networking as well as support and advisory services.

At the sub-regional level, from the end of 1997 to the beginning of 1998, ACW organized a series of sub-regional follow-up meetings to the Beijing and Dakar conferences on women. These meetings served to guide participants in ensuring the development of a viable national action plan as well as to build their capacity for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on progress (especially in preparing country reports for the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women in November, 1999) through making evaluation tools available. From the reports of these meetings, the role, progress and constraints of institutional mechanisms since the Global and African Platforms become quite clear.

Elsewhere, national level studies and workshops have also noted issues of *institutional* concern as follows:

- i) Many managers (in both public and private sectors) do not recognize the need for planned and explicit approaches to introducing and managing *change* in their organizations (such as the changes required for gender sensitivity and mainstreaming).

This implies that attempts to increase gender sensitivity and mainstreaming can be haphazard and ineffective;

ii) Gender mainstreaming is treated in more of a reactive rather than proactive manner. Other departments, sections etc. wait upon the views and input of the Gender Department before they can proceed with anything since it is perceived that the Department is the only one with expertise in gender matters. The situation is worsened if there are only women in the Gender Department while the Departments to be serviced largely comprise men;

iii) information and communication for enhancing the identity and image of the Ministry (or Department/Unit) of Gender are crucial for raising awareness and increasing its visibility and influence;

iv) decentralized structure have worse capacity problems than their headquarters e.g. less staff with fewer or no gender mainstreaming skills, lack of financial and material resources; etc.

7.0 Recommendations: challenges to be addressed

Firstly, the capacities of national machineries need strengthening. Strategic resource mobilization and utilization systems have to be put in place by national machineries and used aggressively since most countries still lament the lack of resources (financial, human, material) both in quality and quantity. Also, besides their lack of financial and material resources some still do not exercise full, direct and decisive influence on the policy formulation process as they can only make recommendations. In other countries, programmes and legislation in areas which challenge religious and traditional forces are sometimes difficult to implement.

Secondly, several other factors have constrained efforts to mainstream gender into policies, plans, programmes and projects. These have been indicated elsewhere as: low level training of members of women's associations; persistence of women's high illiteracy rates; isolated and uncoordinated activities of associations and NGOs; setting unrealistic expectations; the trivialisation of gender issues and resistance at various levels; parallel and uncoordinated efforts by other agencies leading to wasteful duplication; communication problems; uneven commitment of countries; strained NGO-Government relationships.¹⁹

Thirdly, the macro-indicators and mechanisms for monitoring progress in some countries have not been fully articulated and are not yet operational. As a result, clear, objective and precise monitoring and evaluations cannot take place. It is also difficult to follow up the expenditures on specific themes (e.g. empowerment and institutional mechanisms), since disaggregated expenditure figures are not readily available.

Fourthly, institutions that prepare public proposals and which should ensure transparency and accountability (such as legislative assemblies, auditor-generals etc.) still lack the analytical and resource capacities for policy scrutiny and analysis on gender issues. As a result they remain quite weak in spite of multi-party democratic systems and have little capacity to change the proposals made by the executive branches. Some of these public proposals may indeed be contrary to conventions or declarations (ratified by government) or existing revised laws but the legislative assemblies and other accountability institutions may fail to see these contradictions

¹⁹ ECA, Report of Sub-Regional Follow-up Meeting on the Implementation of Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action – Eastern and Southern Africa, 15-18 February, 1999, p.8

and to correct them.²⁰ National Assemblies need to build their knowledge/skills of gender issues and analysis; build and enhance networks with civil society organizations, research centers and academics who work on gender issues. The challenge is to increase the number of Parliamentarians who have analytical and resource capabilities as well as access to information at par (as much as possible) with those of the civil servants or the executive branch of government, which prepare the policies, plans and programmes.

A related challenge is that of *enforcement*. It is one thing to ratify conventions, review and amend laws and constitutions but another to translate these into real and tangible results for the benefit of the intended beneficiaries. The capacity for enforcement and holding actors responsible is seriously lacking. There are no clear and tangible incentives or penalties to governments (and other actors) for implementing or not implementing the Global and African Platforms and the national plans for action. Besides international reprimands and threats of funds being withheld, actors such as governments can easily ignore their commitments without fear of any major penalties. Intensified sensitisation and awareness programmes, institution building, stronger lobbying, networking and advocacy systems can assist in building capacity for enforcement and accountability. The intended beneficiaries of these reviewed laws and constitutions still need to be informed, educated and trained in making use of the laws and constitutions and in claiming what is their right.²¹

Sixth, some countries have placed their central government gender structures within larger composite ministry, which share a single budget. Thus, there are lingering issues of lack of autonomy and authority to influence policy and operate independently and effectively.

Seventh, civil wars and civil strife have created, and continue to create, serious challenges for national machineries and the fulfillment of the Platforms.

Eighth, the general society, and institutions within it, has also been quite slow in assimilating and acting on the issues relating to gender disparities. In general, attitudinal, behavioural and other changes required to achieve the Global and African Platform goals have been slow to materialise. Clearly there is a lot of talking and a lot of activities on the ground, but little visible, objectively verifiable progress especially in the intractable areas of attitudes, behaviours and values. One reason why there are few verifiable results is that monitoring, maintaining databases, reporting, undertaking evaluations and research etc, are expensive propositions for African economies especially when they have to be done on an on-going sustained basis. Research centers, universities and statistical offices or bureaus are facing declining budgets every year in real terms. Surveys and censuses are becoming difficult to carry out because of lack of resources, with disastrous unreliable census results in some cases. To mainstream gender, train people in new methodologies and sensitivities, new planning and analytical tools for gender analysis and planning are needed. But these require material and

²⁰ Admittedly this is a generalisation but any serious research, information and advisory services available do not back many national assemblies to the presidents and cabinets through the civil services which advise the executive branches. As a result, they cannot *effectively* check and balance the executive branches and make them accountable for the global, regional/sub-regional and national agreements, conventions, declarations etc. (e.g. on gender issues) which the country has committed itself to implement.

²¹ Affirmative action and quotas, for example, have not had the maximum benefit in empowering women because of enforcement problems but also because many cultural, attitudinal, behavioral and socio-political factors which need to be removed (see: Africa Leadership Forum: *Index on the Status of Women*, 1999 p.65-66).

human resources besides the zeal and commitment of the top political leadership which may also not be so easily forthcoming.

Ninth, politics and the need for political expedience is also a major challenge not only for the theme of institutional mechanisms for women's advancement and disaggregated data, but for women's advancement and empowerment as a whole.²² Short-term "priorities" may take precedence over everything else such as looking at gender as a strategic development issue.

Finally, ECA/ACW need to set up a concrete and systematic regional monitoring and information recording system and data bank through SRDCs. Such a system should provide up-to-date data and information regarding what each government and national machinery is doing to achieve the Global and Regional Platforms. It should also make it easier to conduct periodic evaluations of the regional picture of how Africa is doing. The OAU also needs to intensify its proactive role in influencing African politics and African political leaders to seriously account for their commitments to empower women and to advance their status. Lip service to gender issues needs to stop and gender should be taken more seriously in a strategic approach to development.

²² This can be evidenced by the way women leadership quotas, affirmative action commitments, even democratic systems in general are manipulated to render them ineffective for the purposes they were intended to serve.

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