



E/ECA/ACGS/AWRO/2007/6

**Meeting of the First Advisory Panel for the Establishment of the
African Women's Rights Observatory (AWRO)**

*Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
20-21 April 2007*

Draft Report

Background

The First Advisory Panel meeting of the African Women's Rights Observatory (AWRO) of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia at the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC), from 20-21 April 2007.

The African Women's Rights Observatory is a joint initiative of United Nations Development Programme, Regional Gender Programme (UNDP/RGPA) and African Centre for Gender and Social Development of Economic Commission for Africa (ECA/ACGS). The Observatory aims to:

- Serve as a comprehensive source of data on research findings and resources, institutions, emerging information, developments and events on women's rights in Africa;
- Promote awareness, analysis, and use of data at the national level to inform legislative and policy debates, and assist policy makers in making informed decisions, and developing policies and programmes in the area of women's human rights;
- Track progress of African countries in the area of women's human rights and document a regional perspective regarding the status of women's rights in Africa;
- Provide a database for African researchers and activists and various stakeholders to access country-specific or subregional data regarding women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment; and
- Disseminate information related to women's rights in Africa.

Objective of the Meeting

The meeting was aimed at launching the advisory panel of the AWRO. The primary objective of the meeting was to introduce the AWRO to a pool of experts and to invite them to be part of developing the Observatory. Secondly, the meeting set out to elicit insights from the members of the AWRO on the information and data to be included in the Observatory, the sources of the data and how to manage the information and data.

Participation

The following members of the Committee for Women and Development (CWD) Bureau participated in the Advisory Panel meeting:

- **Uganda:** (First Vice-President), Honourable Minister from Uganda, Mrs. Nakadama Rugia Isanga
- **Cameroon:** (Second Vice-President), represented by Mr. Abessolo Asseko Calice (Cameroon)
- **Tunisia:** (First Rapporteur), represented by Ms. Naziha Laâbidi Zouabi (Tunisia)

The participants were drawn from a wide range of senior gender experts from the NGO sector, governments, and United Nations agencies from several African countries. The participants included the following:

United Nations Development Programme (Regional Gender Programme for Africa Bureau); African Union (AU); United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE); African Women's Communication and Development Network (FEMNET); Women and Law in Southern Africa (WILSA); African Centre for Democracy (ACD); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee (Mauritius); Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR); United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA); University of South Africa (UNISA); Femmes Africa Solidarite (FAS); Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET); Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (ISIS/WICCE); WILDAF West Africa Subregional Office; L'Observatoire Economique et Statistique d'Afrique Subsaharienne (AFRISTAT); African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies.

Opening of the Advisory Panel Meeting

The meeting was opened by the Officer-in-Charge of the African Centre for Gender and Social Development, Ms. Thokozile Ruzvidzo. In her welcoming remarks, Ms. Ruzvidzo pointed out the AWRO was a joint initiative of UNDP/RGPA. She recalled that the AWRO is a critical monitoring mechanism designed to track existing gaps between international and regional laws and policies and their implementation. She further stated that the rationale for setting up the Observatory is to support the advocacy work of governments and other stakeholders in putting commitments into action. She shared the outputs of the AWRO so far, which included a document that is expected to be AWRO's first substantial output, focusing on women's participation in public decision making, and a zero draft of a write up on women's land rights and access to credit. She stressed the importance of the Advisory Panel in reviewing such work and giving substantive support to the work of the AWRO.

In her introductory statement, Ms. Asna Ndiaye, Regional Coordinator, recalled the genesis of the AWRO that was approved by UNDP in 2004 and presented to the Kigali Forum on governance, democratization and peace in 2005. She noted that the MDG 3 framework on gender equality and women's empowerment shapes the overall process of the AWRO and emphasized the key role of ECA/ACGS in setting up the AWRO. She noted that the regional observatory was an important tool for monitoring relevant indicators related to women's human rights and offered an opportunity for policy dialogue on women's rights by various stakeholders such as governments, civil society, and the United Nations. Ms. Ndiaye stressed the role of the Advisory Panel in providing guidance and advocating for the Observatory. She also noted that the establishment of AWRO would be a long process that would require support from all the stakeholders.

The Rapporteur of the Committee on Women and Development (CWD) Bureau, Ms. Naziha Laâbidi Zouabi addressed the Panel on behalf of the Honourable Minister responsible for Women's, Family and Children's Affairs and Older Persons' Affairs (Tunisia), Ms. Salwa

Ayachi Lebbene. Ms. Laâbidi expressed the Honourable Minister's support to the work of the Advisory Panel and congratulated UNDP/RGPA and ECA/ACGS for setting up the AWRO.

Adoption of the Agenda and Work Programme

The Agenda and the Programme of Work were adopted without amendments. In the course of the meeting, the Programme of Work was revised as per attached copy.

Presentation of the African Women's Rights Observatory: The Objectives and Activities

The objectives of AWRO were presented as follows: i) to serve as a comprehensive source of data on research findings and resources; ii) promote awareness, analysis and use of data, and track African countries' progress in the area of women's human rights. The Observatory also is expected to provide a database for African researchers and activists and various stakeholders to access country-specific or subregional data. The role of the Observatory is to serve as a source of data by tracking and reporting on progress the African countries are making in the area of women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment. It is also expected to play an important role in promoting awareness and advocacy at the national level by following policy debates and contributing to informed decision-making.

The Observatory is expected to assist ECA, AU and UNDP/RGPA in the publication of qualitative appraisals of the progress the individual countries are making towards achieving the declarations and commitments on women's rights as well as those rights that are defined in related frameworks of NEPAD, MDGs and others.

(Full presentation is attached).

Main Observations from the Panel Members

During the discussion following the presentation, the members of the Advisory Panel congratulated ACGS for undertaking the establishment of the AWRO, which was long-overdue. The members stressed its importance in addressing the challenges relating to women's rights and made a strong commitment to support the initiative. The comments dealt with two major themes, i) What should the Observatory do and with whom, and ii) Where and what kind of data should be used and provided by the Observatory.

The Panel raised several specific issues that should be addressed by the Observatory, including peace and security, e-governance, and challenges that might occur in validation of the data. Further, duplication of the existing efforts to track progress towards gender equality should be avoided. Hence, the Observatory, with the assistance of the Panel, should give continuous attention and intensively follow up the public discussion as well as monitor issues of human rights. The Observatory should seek to showcase best practices on women's rights.

Access to justice continues to be a major problem, and is key to addressing issues of women's human rights for which no data is available. In this regard, it was suggested that continued effort should be made to collect both good and bad court judgments in individual

countries and compile them for AWRO's database. However, this poses some challenges in terms of protecting the informants' personal security.

Special attention should be given to building and sustaining links to CEDAW. Additionally, the Panel suggested that the experience of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should be tapped into the work of the Observatory. The panel recommended that OHCHR be included as a member of the AWRO Advisory Panel.

Strong linkages to national observatories, where they exist, should be established, either directly or through the Panel members. Promotion of the establishment of national observatories will not only track the progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), CEDAW and other international commitments at a national level, but will allow AWRO to publish timely, accurate and comparative data at the regional level. Further, the AWRO should attract more partners.

In order to provide data, data collection was identified as the major task of the Observatory. As the Observatory is expected to ensure tracking of the latest possible data and information in the field of women's human rights, serious consideration should be given to validation and harmonization of the available data. For instance, while women are the most affected in conflict situations, very little is reported on their situation. It was agreed that the Observatory should use a wide range of sources, including governments, civil-based organizations, the media, the CEDAW Committee, and other relevant sources such as various websites. As the quality of website information depends on the accuracy and timeliness of the data, it would be necessary to regularly update the data and also to define the type of information utilized. At the same time, the harmonization of the available data was recognized as an area of concern. Data in general is collected by various stakeholders from different sources, in different forms and for different purposes. Therefore, it was suggested that the Observatory develops common indicators to harmonize the existing data, and ensures availability of the data for the public. Additionally, special attention should be given to building mechanisms to ensure rapid tracking and publication of emerging issues.

Gender-related or gender-disaggregated data/information in general is scarce and limited. To meet this challenge, the Observatory's core objective will be to make available accurate and diverse data on women's rights. Although primary data is preferred to secondary data, it was noted that the AWRO will rely on secondary data, due to resource limitations.

The data collection must ensure frequent correspondence to the countries where the data is collected, the need to avoid duplication, and maintain the credibility of the Observatory, as well as transparency, non-denial and access to information by all concerned. The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) could also play a role in this exercise.

At the initial stage of collecting data, the Observatory could draw a sample guideline that will help to package information and make the work of the Observatory more relevant. In this regard, it was suggested that, depending on the availability of resources, the Observatory could consider setting up hot lines for the purpose of timely intervention where information on incidents of violation could be accessed; the Observatory is expected to include an early-warning mechanism to protect women from potential violation (an area in which UNIFEM is involved).

It was also suggested that training and capacity-building should be looked into, although this needs to be addressed cautiously as it has resource implications. The Observatory should, in its data collection, endeavour to create a common platform with the African Union and the RECs, as well as civil society organizations (CSOs). The objectives of AWRO were to fill a major gap in the work of CEDAW, since the implementation in many member States still posed a problem.

To meet the challenge of accessing gender-related or gender-disaggregated data, the national censuses in different countries should be sensitized and encouraged to pay more attention to collection of gender-disaggregated data.

Presentation of the Draft Terms of Reference and the Role of the Advisory Panel

The presenter highlighted the general framework that is expected to guide the future role of the Advisory Panel. She added that the Panel was expected to enrich the draft Terms of Reference with substantive and technical inputs. She spelt out the composition of the Panel, which consisted of senior gender experts and representatives of the UN family, AU and senior members of women's civil society organizations.

The role of the Advisory Panel is to provide general guidance and recommendations on the way forward, as well as to comment and provide guidance on the annual work programme of the AWRO. The Panel members are expected to maintain regular contact with ACGS/ECA. The Panel is expected, *inter alia*, to promote the establishment of national observatories to serve with data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings and contribute to knowledge-based advocacy.

(Full presentation is attached).

Main Observations from the Panel Members

The Panel members underscored the importance of capturing information produced by the other institutions that are not included in the Panel. As discussed before, these sources include government offices as well as e-governments, community based organizations, NGOs, media, and even private persons. The Observatory outlines the Panel members' role in providing advice and guidance for possible data sources as well as conveying burning issues to the Observatory.

The Panel suggested that in addition to the existing pool of gender experts in the Panel, it should also bring in expertise in ICT and statistics. It was also agreed to call upon various experts whenever needed, as an extended Advisory Panel could be expensive to sustain.

Two additional suggestions were made for the functioning of the Observatory: firstly, establishment of national advisory panels, and secondly, nominating national focal points to provide information to the Observatory. At this initial stage of setting up the AWRO, it was agreed that in order to coordinate the actions, the Advisory Panel should be limited to a relatively small number of experts and it was hoped that the Advisory Panel members would act as focal points and links between the individual countries and AWRO. Wherever national observatories have been established, the Panel members should assist in establishing relationships with them,

so as to promote and build links between national observatories and AWRO. It was stated that following the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action, the role of the panel is to promote the setting up of the national observatories, but the Panel is not expected to be directly involved in their establishment.

Other recommendations included:

- Preparation of an organigramme indicating the structure and management of the Observatory, including the coordination role of the Advisory Panel;
- Establishing contact persons within gender focal Ministries to serve as contacts with national observatories;
- Creating strong linkages with CEDAW, a variety of government departments and civil-based organizations;
- Involving government ministries as well as the civil society sector in the provision of relevant data; and
- Identifying modes of information dissemination on issues relating to national observatories.

Presentation on AWRO's First Theme: Women in Decision-Making

The presentation was based on the draft document produced by the Observatory team on "Women in Power: Towards Democracy and Gender Equality", soon to be launched in the AWRO as the first thematic issue of AWRO. The theme will be followed by presentations on women's access to land and credit and gender-based violence, as the second and the third themes of the Observatory in the course of 2007. This presentation illustrated the kind of data that could be generated by AWRO. In this connection, the data was drawn from the pilot findings of the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI) as a source of data and information.

The presentation summarized the role of African women in politics, based on the findings of the AGDI, which was piloted initially in 12 African countries. The AGDI consists of two major indicators, namely the quantitative Gender Status Index (GSI) and the qualitative African Women's Progress Scoreboard (AWPS). Both of them are divided into three blocks; --the economic-, political- and social-power blocks, which are in turn subdivided into various categories and sub-categories. The political block of the GSI provides numeric data on the participation of women versus men (the gender gap) in parliament, the cabinet, the civil service and local government, as well as in the judiciary and the civil-society sectors including political parties, trade unions, employers associations, professional syndicates, NGOs and community-based organizations, (CBOs).

The presentation was supported by a chart of indicators that depict the performance of 15 African countries in the political-power component highlighted in the above paragraphs.

(Full presentation is attached).

Major Observations from the Panel Members

The data presented on women's participation in decision-making shows that different countries are at different stages in terms of gender parity. The Observatory should find reliable and effective channels to analyse why this variation occurs. The Observatory should seek good practices. For instance, how has Rwanda managed, in 15 years, to re-build the country and to emerge as the world's leading country in including women in politics, and are there lessons to learn for other countries? It was agreed that in-depth analyses would be provided within the limits of available resources, as at this stage, only desk studies are affordable to the AWRO.

Panel members agreed that the Observatory should use AGDI and other sources to provide up-to-date information. Emphasis was given to the need to go beyond the numerical data to individual country strategies. Expansion of AGDI data collection should also look into indicators that showed the impact of women's representation, as some examples were raised where women themselves are hindering the advancement of women.

Presentation on Identifying Data Sources, Gender Disaggregated Data and Effective Cooperation with Research Institutions

The presentation concentrated on two main themes: i) introducing the international legal framework, in which the country performance is assessed; and ii) data collection and potential sources of data.

In order to provide a general context of AWRO, the presentation began by emphasizing the need to understand and promote regional and global women's rights frameworks such as CEDAW and its Protocol, as well as the African Women's Protocol. Indicators that show how African governments have embraced CEDAW, the CEDAW Protocol and the African Women's protocol were presented. All African countries, except Somalia and the Sudan, have ratified CEDAW. Ten African countries have ratified the CEDAW Protocol. 20 African countries had ratified the African Women's Protocol by April 2007. The current challenges lay in the lack of domestication of the international laws as well as institutional, technical and socio-economic factors that hamper implementation of laws at the national level.

It was suggested that although AWRO may be focusing on retrieving and analysing secondary data in the short and medium term, it should be able eventually to facilitate the collection of primary data through other stakeholders to complement available secondary data in the area of women's human rights. Women's-rights-related indicators have not been mainstreamed into the regular work of national statistical offices and other research centres in most cases and may not be available in secondary literature. The Observatory should be able to source information on the issue of women's access to justice as well as on good and bad court decisions. Organizations such as national women's lawyers associations are good sources of such information. Various sources of data can be utilized by AWRO, including governmental institutions, United Nations Agencies, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, research and academic institutions as well as global women's rights/human rights organizations.

As for the geographical coverage, the AWRO is expected to contribute to the strengthening of tracking and monitoring of women's protection/violations in African countries. At this initial stage of AWRO, it is not possible to have a full geographical coverage in monitoring the progress. However, once AWRO is established and fully running, the goal is to ensure data collection covering the whole of Africa.

The expected outputs of the Observatory are periodic reports with quantitative as well as qualitative analyses on progress, and identifying the gaps and challenges at national and regional levels. AWRO will utilize web-based information, academic studies, court decisions, news reports, and databases of women's rights institutions, as well as periodic seminars for information dissemination to the extent possible.

Presentation on Gender Indicators and Statistics to Address Women's Human Rights: Challenges and Strategies

The presentation addressed two major themes: i) challenges in collecting data in Africa; and ii) suggestions for strategies to obtain data for the use of AWRO.

What kind of data is collected and available in the African countries is a reflection of the gender identities and perceptions of power relations between women and men. Monitoring progress in the attainment of women's human rights requires statistics and indicators, but continues to be a challenge in every country, due to partial coverage of issues and geographical areas, time use, quality of education and overall cultural, social, economic, political and legal limitations. An example was given in relation to violence against women within the family, community and other forms of violence, including armed conflicts. The Secretary-General's Report identifies key challenges in tackling gender-based violence, including (a) attitudes of law-enforcement officers that discourage women from reporting; (b) high dismissal rates of cases by police and prosecutors; (c) high withdrawal rates of complaints by victims; (d) low prosecution and conviction rates; (e) lack of legal aid and high costs of legal representation in courts; (f) persistence of discriminatory practices and stereotypes that view violence against women as a private matter; (g) "culture of silence"; and finally, (h) inadequate legislation.

The presentation focused on two projects of ECA. The first, the AGDI, is a rigorous tool for data collection and compilation at both national and regional levels. It provides evidence-based data which allows comparison of country performances and sharing of good practices. It is a combination of quantitative and qualitative assessments of women's empowerment. The second project pertains to "Strengthening African statistical systems to generate gender-disaggregated data". This has been initiated to "engender" national and regional statistical databases. The project is expected to lead to development of new methodologies for "engendering" agricultural and trade statistics among other areas, as well as the establishment of a gender statistics network for information-sharing and peer learning.

Main Observations from the Panel Members

The discussion concentrated on four main themes: i) raising awareness on legal frameworks; ii) possible data sources; iii) quality of data; and iv) information dissemination.

The panel noted that it is essential to make sure that the bodies concerned, including the governments and community-based organisations are aware of the international frameworks and the on-going domestication processes at the national as well as regional level. Further, it was suggested that best results are achieved by creating positive competition among the African countries and ensuring that individual countries are able to take actions based on each other's positive and negative experiences. Making negative experiences public, such as by making abduction cases or female genital mutilation (FGM) visible, has a powerful impact on boosting awareness on women's rights and advocating for action.

The Panel members strongly recommended that the AWRO should rely on secondary data as this was already available and that the Observatory itself should not collect primary data. Therefore, the Observatory will rely on secondary data from a variety of sources, including NGOs, CBOs, governments, UN organizations, academic institutions and other stakeholders. Innovative approaches beyond the usual procedures should be used, and the Observatory should take advantage of the various reports produced and published by the AU, the UN, governments and other entities.

As the data is provided in different forms, guidelines to harmonize and process the data to meet the Observatory's needs should be developed. Additionally, suggestions for mechanisms to collect data in countries with modest resources, such as Somalia, should be made. The Panel advised that the AWRO should also go beyond the conventional forms of data and source some innovative information from NGOs. Ideas on how to empower rural women through the governments are crucial in disseminating information and changing the current practices.

Despite the limited resources available, the quality of data should not be compromised. Although there is an agreement among the Panel members on the next thematic areas, innovative ideas should be adopted to go beyond the traditional indicators. The first theme, women in decision-making, concentrates only on the public life. A creative, holistic approach should be adopted to expand decision-making to the household and to evaluate women's participation in decision-making at the household level. However, all parties acknowledge the limitations of available data.

In the case of domestic violence, it is important to re-define gender-based violence, and to develop new technologies and methodologies for indicators to address every form of violence. Similar concerns were expressed in relation to the international agreements and conventions, including the need to critically review the current monitoring and evaluation tools and indicators for law reforms, and to develop more effective and wider-reaching indicators to assess the country performances towards meeting the commitments of the international conventions.

Special attention should be given to harmonization of the data that will be used, whilst maintaining the integrity and objectivity of that data. The panel considered the need of focal points in different countries to assist in secondary-data identification and collection. Emphasis was made on the need for creating partnerships with crucial stakeholders.

In addition to the issues discussed, two major questions for future consideration were raised:

- How does the Observatory team, including the Panel, maximize the use of relevant available data; and
- Should a quality-control team be established?

Group Work

To structure the suggestions to the functions of the Observatory from the Panel, the last part of the meeting was dedicated to a group work session. The participants were divided into groups to further discuss the following questions:

- What should the Observatory be?
- Should the Observatory be based on themes?
- If yes, what should be the themes, in order of priority?
- What types of data and information should be included in these themes?
- Suggest sources of data and information
- Strategy to make information useful
- Look at the objectives of AWRO and concretize each of them
- Look at the TOR of the Advisory Panel and give feedback

Group 1:

The group was requested to consider: i) What should the Observatory be, ii) Whether it should be based on themes, and if so, iii) The order of priority of the themes and iv) Types of data and information to be included in the themes.

As for the role of the Observatory, it was decided to approve the overall objective, “serves as a comprehensive source of qualitative and quantitative data in the area of the human rights of women in Africa”. While endorsing the role as presented, the Panel made the following addition: “also serve as a hub of relevant information on women’s human rights, informing member States to be able to recognize and realize the gaps in implementing the rights of women at all levels”. As to what the Observatory should be, the Panel made the following recommendations:

- Repository of information on the rights of women using different tools;

- Oversee and track the rights of women on the continent;
- Oversee the implementation of the various frameworks on women's rights;
- Facilitate the utilization of gender-sensitive data-collection methodology.

Moreover, it was stated that the Observatory should be a place for dissemination of the methodologies and standardization of tools for data collection. It is a mechanism rather than a centre where data is collected.

Regarding the themes of the Observatory, the panel agreed that the AWRO should work on themes considering the reality of African Women and informed by major international instruments such as the CEDAW, the African Protocol, the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDGs.

The following themes were recommended, in order of priority:

Women in decision-making. The countries have developed MDG indicators, which are used in national, annual MDG reports. The Observatory should take advantage of the national reports to make deeper analyses on country strategies in empowering women.

Violence against Women (VAW). New, innovative approaches should be considered to go beyond business as usual. VAW continues to be one of the burning issues in Africa, despite the attention given to it by different stakeholders. To avoid repetition, but to make sure that effective campaigning against VAW continues, the Observatory should re-visit the existing discourse and address up-to-date issues, such as women in the conflict areas. It was further suggested that MDG indicators on VAW and access to justice should be utilized.

Women and Poverty: Land rights and ownership as a sub-theme.

Group 2:

The group made suggestions on: i) Potential data sources used by the Observatory, and on ii) Strategies to make data useful for the Observatory's purposes.

The group identified the following data sources to be used by the Observatory:

Media; national statistical bureaus; civil-society organizations and community based organizations; academic Institutions; legal-aid organizations; regional networks; departments of statistics in gender, agriculture, education, finance, health, justice institutions and national electoral commissions; local government, ministries and local courts; traditional leaders and traditional media; national human rights commissions; the internet; UNDP and other UN Agencies and the World Bank; any other alternative reports available, including National observatories, where available.

Special attention should be given to analysing and simplifying the data, to ensure its usefulness to different target groups. Furthermore, gender-disaggregated data should include different variables, including geographical, rural/urban and regional. Strong linkages with Ministries responsible for gender should be established. At the regional level, the African Union summits should be used as opportunities to galvanize political support, and to lobby the Heads of State and governments to promote AWRO and the national observatories, as well as encourage the government representatives to pay special attention to collecting and providing accurate, gender-disaggregated data. Furthermore, the focal points/panel members should establish strong linkages with grassroots organizations to disseminate the information, and build partnerships with training institutions and advocacy groups.

Group 3:

Members of this working group were invited to: i) look at the objectives of AWRO and concretize each of one them, and ii) review the TOR of the Advisory Panel and provide feedback.

As to the objectives of the AWRO, the Panel approved the proposed objective, but incorporating the following two amendments:

- Serve as a comprehensive source of qualitative and quantitative data in the area of the human rights of women in Africa; and
- Track progress of the human rights of women in Africa and promote the use of the data by policy makers at the national level to develop better policies and progress.

Following the presentation on the TOR of the Advisory Panel on the previous day, the Panel made further suggestions on the TOR. While the Panel fully endorsed the proposal, the following two recommendations were added:

- To advise on and monitor the establishment of the Observatory and the effective implementation of its objectives; and
- To provide advice and guidance on the annual work programme of the Secretariat.

Main Observations from the Panel Members

There was a common understanding that media is a comprehensive source of information. However, as some challenges in validation of the information might occur, the Observatory should exercise caution in regard to the types of media and information used, and pay special attention to ensuring the accuracy of the information. Mapping of data is needed, especially where Gender Focal Points are available. Again, it was stressed that to ensure that the Panel members (or possible focal points in the member countries) are able to assist in data collection, guidelines should be provided on data collection. Women Lawyers' Associations in member countries can serve as useful sources of data on violation of women's human rights. Additionally, innovative ideas on the use of the media should be incorporated, and it was suggested that ways of using traditional media should be taken into consideration, as they are a

powerful, far-reaching tool especially in rural areas, when it comes to reporting on gender issues such as FGM. The establishment of an early-warning system would be very useful, especially in areas where instances of rape are likely to occur or have already occurred.

As the status of women is a broad topic, the Panel underscored the need to specify what issues under the status of women are to be considered for data collection and inclusion in the Observatory. There is also the need to distinguish between reproductive rights and rights of women.

The Panel discussed the mode and the schedule of data dissemination by the Observatory. The Panel considered guidelines pertaining to the operationalization of the Observatory.

In conclusion, it was stressed that the Observatory would be principally concerned with knowledge-management and that action would therefore emanate from the information that would be made available for use by the Observatory, and that the initial meeting of the Panel had been convened to trigger action to this effect.

The UNDP invited the AU to play an active role in the Observatory, as it was a body that could make information available on violation of women's rights, as part and parcel of its political interventions with the respective member States.

As a general remark, it was noted that members of the Advisory Panel were invited in their institutional capacities, in line with the various organizations for which they were working.

Way Forward

- The TOR will be amended accordingly by the AWRO team to take into account the recommendations of the Panel;
- The AWRO team will work on the themes as suggested by the Panel: work is already in progress on access to resources such as land and credit;
- The AWRO team should distribute the report of the First Panel Meeting;
- The AWRO should include both quantitative and qualitative information: clear, wide-reaching gender-sensitive indicators should be used. The Observatory should build stronger relationships with ECA's own resources such as the African Centre for Statistics (ACS), as well as other institutions, to ensure high-quality reporting on women's rights;
- The AWRO should consider nominating focal points for the Observatory at the country level;
- The Panel members are expected to respond to queries from the Secretariat, most preferably, within a week's time, after which a decision would be made to proceed on the actions. The easiest mode of communication would be by electronic messages;
- The Secretariat should continue mapping out of data sources;

- The AWRO should provide guidelines for data collection to be discussed by the Advisory Panel; and
- The Advisory Panel would meet biennially.

Closing of the Meeting

The Officer-in-Charge of ACGS, Ms. Thokozile Ruzvidzo, expressed her deepest gratitude for the participation and the critical inputs given by the members of the AWRO Advisory Panel. She assured the Panel members that AWRO would take into account all the recommendations and suggestions made by the Panel members. Ms. Ruzvidzo further assured the meeting that the report of the Advisory Panel meeting and a revised Action Plan for the period April – December 2007 would be shared with the participants. She also stressed that, as the Secretariat of the Observatory, ECA would identify the appropriate methodology of data-collection and ensure that the Observatory adhered to acceptable standards and was able to reject any data that was questionable.

In order to facilitate the implementation of the AWRO activities, AWRO would make specific requests to the members of the Advisory Panel, particularly in making information available in the area of women's rights at the national or subregional levels. This specific request would be part of the mapping of existing information and data, which AWRO would embark on as soon as possible. She further expressed her appreciation for the encouraging enthusiasm exhibited by members of the Panel in favour of the establishment of a regional mechanism that would monitor the observance of women's rights in Africa. She thanked members of the Panel who had been unable to attend the first Panel Meeting and expressed her sincere hope that sister institutions, such as the AU, UN-Habitat and other invited organizations would join the Panel in the subsequent meetings. Finally, she thanked UNDP/RGPA for their support, as well as the staff of ACGD and the two consultants who had been working on the AWRO project for their dedication and hard work..

On behalf of UNDP/RGPA, Ms. Ndiaye expressed her satisfaction with the two-day meeting of the Advisory Panel. She stated that AWRO belonged to African women and we should take collective responsibility to create an effective and broad-based Observatory. It was not without reason that UNDP/RGPA had chosen ECA for this project; it was a pointer to their confidence in ECA's technical ability and its commitment to advancing gender equality in Africa. Ms. Ndiaye expressed her commitment to continue supporting the emergence of a strong Observatory that would assist African women in safeguarding and claiming their rights. Finally, she thanked ECA and members of the Advisory Panel for their commitment to support the AWRO project.