The Sixth African Development Forum (ADF VI)

ACTION
ON GENDER EQUALITY, EMPOWERMENT AND ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN AFRICA

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I. Background

Africa’s economic performance since 1999 has been quite impressive, especially when compared with the negative gross domestic product (GDP) growth trends of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The region’s average annual GDP growth rate rose from just under 3.0 per cent in 1999 to approximately 5.8 per cent in 2007. However, these improvements in economic performance have not yet had a demonstrably meaningful impact on poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The proportion of the population living below the poverty line, which in 2004 was estimated at 41.1 per cent remains high. Studies have shown that women are the most affected, leading to the feminization of poverty. Whilst impressive progress has been made towards achieving the MDGs on education and gender parity in primary education; progress towards the health MDGs has been slow; gender disparities in secondary and tertiary education and in wages in the non-agricultural sector have not been eliminated; and progress toward improved water supply and sanitation has been slow and is characterized by a huge rural-urban dichotomy. Persistent gender inequalities have been advanced as one of the reasons for the slow progress towards the MDG targets in Africa. There has not been equitable redistribution of the increased wealth, as women have not benefited from the recent improvements in economic growth.

The continent’s average annual growth rate of approximately 5.8 per cent still remains significantly lower than the 7 per cent annual growth rate required to reduce poverty by half by 2015. Achievement of higher economic growth also depends on successful promotion of gender equality. The World Bank report “Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?”, suggests that promoting women’s education and training and their access to productive assets such as land, credit and time-saving technology could help Africa reach the 7 per cent annual growth rate needed to achieve the MDGs.

Comprehensive frameworks that promote gender equality have been developed at the international and regional levels. African countries have made commitments to address gender equality based on international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA)1, the MDGs2, and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

At the regional level, the principle of equality and non-discrimination between men and women is enshrined in the founding legal instrument of the African Union (AU) and also in the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which provides for the elimination of discrimination against women and the protection of their rights. The AU Heads of State and Government have adopted two instruments specifically to address gender issues: the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa adopted in 2003 in Maputo; and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa adopted in Addis Ababa in July 2004, which requires States to respect normative standards on women’s human rights. In order to facilitate the implementation of the Solemn Declaration, the first AU Conference of Ministers responsible for Women’s Affairs and Gender held in October 2005 in Dakar, Senegal

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1 Provides a framework for gender equality and empowerment of women in 12 critical areas of concern: poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, economic disparity, power sharing, institutions, human rights, mass media, environment and the girl child.
2 MDG 3 promotes gender equality and empowers women.
adopted the Implementation Framework and the Guidelines for Reporting on the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. At the subregional level, the regional economic communities (RECs) have adopted gender policies, declarations and guidelines for the promotion and protection of the human rights of women.

The AU's Vision and Mission Statements and the Strategic Framework mention gender equality as the main way of achieving sustainable development. In this regard, the Women, Gender and Development Directorate of AU has developed its strategic plan to build the internal capacity to mainstream gender in AU and its organs and in the regional economic communities and the member States. In this context, membership in the Pan-African Parliament and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has been subjected to the relevant articles of the Constitutive Act on gender. The Assembly of Heads of States and Government of the African Union has also adopted the principle of 50/50 gender parity in the election of Commissioners.

The United Nations of Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) has also made a contribution to the shaping of the gender equality landscape on the continent. To mark the 40th anniversary of the institution, UNECA organized a conference on African women and economic development: investing in our future, held from 28 April to 1 May 1998. The objectives of the conference were to share experiences on how public policies can equalize opportunities between men and women and redirect resources to those in which women’s participation would bring about the highest social return; draw strategic lessons from ongoing efforts to implement the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action; identify and share best practices in strategies and programme modalities for country-level implementation of actions recommended by the conference; and forge partnerships for post-conference development and implementation of the recommended actions and programmes. Following that conference, the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity announced the establishment of the African Women's Committee on Peace and Development, and the establishment of a fund for African Women's Development. Delegates also made a commitment to take the message back to their respective governments and institutions and to facilitate the incorporation of gender-equality issues into public expenditures, national accounting systems, information and communication technologies, and peace initiatives.

Since the 40th anniversary conference, UNECA has been striving to enhance the capacity of policymakers and other stakeholders in member States to use the appropriate tools and methodologies to establish gender-responsive policies and programmes. One of the major achievements by UNECA is the development of the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI). This tool measures the extent of gender inequality in Africa and helps African governments assess their performance in narrowing the gender gap and advancing the cause of women. The index assists member States to identify gaps and better mainstream gender into their policies and programmes. Other UNECA achievements include capacity-building on gender mainstreaming within the RECs and in member States; development of a Guidebook to Mainstream Unpaid Work and Household Production into National Statistics, Policies and Budgets; monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action on Women; and establishment of an African Women's Rights Observatory to monitor the status of women's rights at the regional level.
The African Development Bank’s commitment to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment as a means of fostering poverty reduction, economic development and gender equality on the continent is outlined in its Gender Policy adopted in 2001. The policy specifies five priority areas, namely education, agriculture and rural development (including infrastructure), women’s poverty, health and governance. Its implementation is anchored in five core principles namely: i) the application of gender analysis; ii) the need to foster co-operative relations between women and men; iii) recognizing that women’s economic empowerment is key to sustainable development; iv) addressing diversity among women; and v) judicious application of the twin track strategy embracing gender mainstreaming and targeted interventions for women’s empowerment.

The Bank’s Gender Policy is operationalised through its Gender Plan of Action (GPOA) adopted in 2004 by actions in key priority areas including: development of gender mainstreaming tools; gender mainstreaming in programming particularly in priority sectors; development of a critical mass of gender sensitive human resource; and strengthening of networking with strategic stakeholders and partners.

A recent midterm Review of the Bank’s GPOA (2007) noted that the Bank made major achievements that include: i) the development of gender mainstreaming tools and their application in some programmes and projects; ii) an increasing number of projects mainstreaming gender, evident in at least 33 per cent of the projects assessed and with some examples of gender mainstreaming best practice; iii) progress in providing a gender sensitive working environment through human resource development guidelines and an improvement in the gender gaps with the recruitment and appointment of women at senior levels; and iv) building stronger networks and partnerships. The Bank is also supporting efforts to build capacity for generating gender disaggregated data in the region.

The Outcome and Way Forward document that emerged from the Beijing Plus Ten review process in 2004 at the Africa regional level, indicated other achievements such as increased awareness of gender equality; policy reforms; improved legislative frameworks; and institutional development at the national level in many countries. Positive developments made in some countries include the establishment of national policies and strategies for gender equality; adherence to international and regional instruments for the protection of the human rights of women; increased diversity in the mechanisms for promoting and monitoring gender equality; attention to resource allocation through gender-sensitive budgeting; recognition of the critical role played by NGOs in awareness-raising, advocacy, monitoring and programme delivery; and efforts to engage men and boys more actively in the promotion of gender equality.

Despite these notable improvements in the policy, legal and institutional frameworks, gender inequalities still prevail, particularly in access to secondary and higher education; technical and professional training; productive resources and assets such as land, capital and technology; agriculture and rural development services; basic health services; employment opportunities and decision-making processes. Women and girls are still heavily disadvantaged. Violence against women and girls in situations of conflict and insecurity is reaching alarming proportions. Although it is difficult to obtain data on victims of sexual violence due to the breakdown of social, economic and
institutional infrastructures, it is widely known that rape, sexual violence, sexual slavery and other violations are some of the crimes committed against women and girls in conflict situations. The persistence of gender inequality in all sectors compounds the difficulty of achieving the MDGs and overall socio-economic development in Africa (the linkages are well illustrated in annex 1).

It has also become widely accepted on the African continent that promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment is essential to human development, poverty eradication and economic growth. For example, the 40th Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development organized by UNECA in April 2007 was on Accelerating Africa’s growth and development to meet the MDGs: Emerging challenges and the way forward. In the ministerial statement issued following the meeting, the ministers resolved to increase investments in gender equality and women’s empowerment that improve the status of women, including the provision of water, energy, education and health, in particular reducing maternal mortality and morbidity; improve income-generating opportunities; and strengthen policies to reduce violence against women.

Recent regional meetings (the First Joint African Union Commission and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development held in April 2008, and the 11th African Union Summit) have highlighted new challenges on the continent that could deepen and widen existing gender inequalities. They include issues such as food insecurity, which is being exacerbated by rising food prices, climate change, migration, water and energy shortages. Recent studies have shown that these issues affect women in ways that are different from those of men, making it even more pressing to improve gender equality and women’s empowerment as a means of ensuring equitable and sustainable social and economic development in Africa.

Although many international and regional resolutions have been adopted by countries, the implementation and reporting on the resolutions is somewhat lacking. Some countries have adopted relevant policies, legislation and effective strategies aimed at promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment, but they are not being implemented, enforced or scaled up to make any difference on the ground. The Decade Review of the implementation of the BPFA therefore reiterated the need to move from commitments to greater actions. Many meetings held after the Decade Review have emphasized the need to create or enhance the enabling environment to ensure that progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment is accelerated. It is clear that as UNECA marks its 50th anniversary, it is important to reflect on the progress made towards these goals on the continent; to identify the challenges constraining implementation of relevant policies and strategies at the national and regional levels; and to seek comprehensive measures to realistically address outstanding areas of gender inequality. The Forum will start from the perspective that practical actions are being taken to address gender equality and women’s empowerment. It will then look at examples of good practices, examine ways of scaling up these actions, consider the impediments to progress and possible solutions, as well as measures that could be taken to improve statistical capacity at national level to more effectively monitor progress toward gender equality and women’s empowerment.

ADF VI is to be jointly held by UNECA, AU and AfDB to reflect the strategic partnership fostered among the three institutions to deliver as one towards meeting
Africa’s development priorities, including gender equality.

II. Objectives of ADF VI

The overarching objective of ADF VI is to review progress made towards gender equality, women’s empowerment and ending violence against women and to articulate concrete actions that could be taken to accelerate the process.

More specifically, ADF VI will:

(a) Review progress made at national, subregional and regional levels in promoting gender equality, and women’s empowerment, and in addressing violence against women;
(b) Share experiences, lessons learned and good practices in promoting gender equality, women’s empowerment and in ending violence against women;
(c) Identify policy and other implementation challenges that countries have faced in promoting gender equality, women’s empowerment and in ending violence against women;
(d) Take stock of emerging issues that have an impact on gender equality and women’s empowerment;
(e) Define priority actions and mechanisms needed to accelerate progress towards gender equality, women’s empowerment and elimination of violence against women; and
(f) Strengthen and build new strategic alliances and partnerships to move the equality agenda forward.

III. Suggested thematic areas of ADF VI

The thematic areas closely mirror the challenges and areas that need further action, including the following:

(a) Violence against women;
(b) HIV and AIDS;
(c) Health and reproductive rights;
(d) Education, training and skills development;
(e) Migration;
(f) Governance, conflict, peace and security;
(g) Employment, markets and trade;
(h) Food security;
(i) Land and property rights;
(j) Climate change, water, sanitation and energy;
(k) Financing for gender equality; and
(I) Gender and ICTs.

Annex 2 provides a detailed description of the thematic areas.

The following cross-cutting issues that have been identified as key challenges to accelerating the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment on the continent, will be considered under each theme. These issues are also essential for creating or strengthening the enabling environment for gender equality:

(a) Legal reforms, including status of ratification and domestication of the relevant international and regional gender equality and women’s empowerment instruments;
(b) Effective policy development and implementation;
(c) Institutional mechanisms;
(d) Monitoring and evaluation tools and mechanisms;
(e) Availability of gender disaggregated data;
(f) Involvement of men and boys; and
(g) Capacity-building.

IV. Expected outcomes and follow-up mechanisms

(a) A plan of action with clear recommendations for member States and development partners to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment and ending violence against women;
(b) A position statement on African women and emerging issues;
(c) A proposal for an African decade on gender equality (similar to the decades for water and education) to ensure implementation of these recommendations. This will be developed in support of the AU gender policy proposal on an African decade on women. The African decade on gender equality would detail the concrete priority actions to be undertaken by the relevant entities, the performance indicators timeline and clear targets for each theme that would be used to assess progress (including a mid-term review);
(d) Regional and subregional networks around major challenges with designated facilitators to stimulate and promote the process. This may also include development of a fully functional regional web-based knowledge pool for information sharing on the actions stated in the declaration;
(e) A meeting report reflecting the issues discussed during the Forum. This report and the background papers of the Forum will be widely disseminated by print and electronic media; and
(f) Strategic mobilization of resources to support post-ADF activities.

V. Strategies

A. Pre-Forum activities
The pre-Forum activities are a core part of the strategy for hosting ADF VI. They are meant to ensure that the process is representative of issues at country and subregional levels and is participatory, in the sense that stakeholders, including governments, academia, civil society and development partners are consulted before the Forum is held.

The main steps are:

(a) Preparation of the issues paper highlighting the key issues related to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment and the major implementation challenges, and proposing thematic areas for discussion during the Forum;

(b) Preparation of the Forum’s background document based on a desk review and consultation with the other United Nations agencies and regional, subregional and national partners, including AU, UNECA and AfDB subregional offices (SROs);

(c) Presentation of the issues paper to the AU/ECA Conference of Ministers of Gender and Women’s Affairs in August 2008; and

(d) Organization an e-discussion to facilitate a broader discourse on the key issues.

B. ADF VI work programme

1. ADF VI clusters and sessions

The work programme of ADF VI will focus on the twelve thematic areas mentioned above. The programme will consist of both plenary and breakout sessions covering issues under these clusters. The objective of the breakout sessions is to discuss specific challenges, particularly implementation challenges, share good practices and experiences, and identify recommendations that will feed into the action plan emerging from the Forum.

In addition to these sessions, side-events will be organized by different partners.

2. Documentation

To ensure that ADF VI addresses the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment in Africa’s development in all its dimensions, a number of documents will be prepared as inputs to stimulate and inform the discussions.

(a) Issues paper – This document will be the key input for ADF VI as it will provide a comprehensive overview of the issues from a substantive and policy point of view;

(b) Status report on gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa – This report will be based on a desk review of existing literature and input from
The African Development Forum (ADF VI) subregions and countries. It will review the status and assess the performance of member States in implementing policies and strategies on gender equality and women’s empowerment; identify major challenges faced, good practices and lessons learned, and suggest policy recommendations to member States. In particular, the status report will review the related declarations on gender equality, women’s empowerment and violence against women, identify what has been done so far to implement the declarations as well as the implementation challenges that have been faced and how they could be overcome; and

(c) **Briefing notes** – Briefing notes will be prepared for each breakout session. These notes will be one page long and will summarize the key issues and indicate some questions for discussion, thus assisting facilitators in conducting the breakout sessions.

C. **Identification of participants**

To ensure that ADF VI is representative of a broad spectrum of stakeholders, many actors will be invited, including the following categories:

(a) Eminent persons;
(b) Role models;
(c) African member States;
(d) Regional economic communities;
(e) African civil society organizations (including community-based organizations, research and academic institutions, media networks, special groups such as nomads, indigenous people, persons with disability, persons living with HIV and AIDS, women and girls affected by violence, religious organizations and traditional leadership);
(f) International civil society organizations;
(g) Private sector organizations;
(h) United Nations partners;
(i) Bilateral organizations;
(j) International and regional financial institutions;
(k) The Diaspora; and
(l) South – South cooperation organizations.

D. **Partnerships and collaborations**

The planning, organization and holding of ADF VI will involve a broad partnership and collaborative arrangement between the joint secretariat of the African Union Commission (AUC), UNECA, the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the RECs. Collaborating institutions will include the United Nations Secretariat and agencies (UNDP, ILO, UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, FAO, UNHCR, DPKO, DAW, and others); partners will include the key members of the network on violence against women (including the embassies of Sweden, Denmark, South Africa, Finland and Norway),
civil society organizations, research institutions, development partners and other key stakeholders.

Annex 1: Conceptual links between gender equality and poverty reduction and social and economic development
## Annex 2: Description of the thematic areas and justification

<table>
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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description and justification</th>
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<tr>
<td>Violence against women</td>
<td>The United Nations Declaration on Violence against Women (UNDVAW) of 1993 defines violence against women as: “Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”. Violence against women and girls in Africa is on the increase. More violent forms, such as femicide, acid attacks, ritual rapes and murders, gang rapes, abductions, defilement and forced early marriages, military sexual slavery, rape as a weapon of war, trafficking in women and girls and ill-treatment of widows have become more widespread. In spite of legislation against some cultural practices, women in Africa continue to be vulnerable to harmful traditional practices and customs such as FGM and widow inheritance, which expose them to the risk of HIV and AIDS. Obtaining data on violence against women is still a major challenge. One of the reasons for violence against women is persistent gender inequalities in accessing opportunities and building capabilities. It is important to review the progress made by African countries in addressing violence against women; identify the implementation challenges and lessons learned; share experiences on effective practices; and suggest recommendations that can address the implementation challenges to eliminating violence against women.</td>
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<td>Gender and HIV and AIDS</td>
<td>It is widely acknowledged that HIV and AIDS have severe socio-economic impacts on both sexes, but that they are not gender neutral. Women and girls bear the brunt of the epidemic, because they are highly vulnerable to infection and are the main caregivers and, when the breadwinner is gone, have to support the family with limited resources. The proportion of women infected by HIV on the continent is high and is still increasing. The vulnerability of African women and girls to HIV infection is integrally linked to underlying gender inequalities, societal norms and discrimination. It is important that the Forum address the key gender inequality issues underlying the epidemic; review progress made in addressing these issues; identify the major challenges faced and provide recommendations.</td>
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<td>Health and Reproductive Rights</td>
<td>Reproductive rights refer to the ability to make informed decisions on sexual activity, child bearing and rearing as well as the access to resources to carry out such decisions. Gender inequality in the health sector in Africa is reflected by malnutrition among women and girls as well as high rates of fertility and maternal mortality due to inequality in family decision-making, poverty and other issues. Access to health care is generally low in most countries and access to reproductive health services is even lower. There is also considerable need for family planning and other reproductive health services. It is important to review the progress made by African countries in addressing gender equality issues in health; identify the challenges hampering progress; share lessons learned and experiences on effective practices; and define actions needed to accelerate progress towards gender equality in health and reproductive rights.</td>
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<td>Land and property rights</td>
<td>Rights to access, use and control land is central to the lives of rural women in countries where natural resources are the main source of income and livelihood. Widespread exclusion of women and girls in Africa from owning and/or controlling land and property means that they are often barred from effectively engaging in economic activities and having a secure and sustainable livelihood. Women face discrimination under both customary and formal systems of land tenure as a result of culturally embedded discriminatory beliefs and practices and male control of inheritance systems. Evidence indicates that land policies that aggravate land tenure insecurity and ignore the rights and/or interests of women increase household vulnerability. The land and property rights of women and inheritance practices and norms need to be addressed.</td>
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<td>Employment, markets and trade</td>
<td>Women in Africa experience greater challenges in accessing decent jobs than men. Women’s share of employment in the formal sector is still very small relative to that of men and their pay is on average lower than men's pay for the same work. The challenges affecting the achievement of gender parity in formal employment and in access to markets need to be analyzed and addressed. Traditionally, investment and trade policies have been considered “gender blind” i.e. they do not have any specific effect on males or females. However, trade policies have different impacts on men and women which need to be addressed.</td>
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<td>Education, training and skills development</td>
<td>The enrolment gap between girls and boys, especially in primary schools has narrowed considerably. Nevertheless, women and girls still face more challenges than men and boys, including low completion rates and limited access to secondary, tertiary and vocational education. More than 60 per cent of illiterate people over the age of 15 in sub-Saharan Africa are female; pressure from the multiple reproductive roles for women leaves them little time for adult education. Yet women need good education and skills to improve their chances of obtaining formal employment, higher earnings, better health and decision-making ability. It is important to review the progress made by African countries in addressing gender equality issues in education, training and skills development; identify the implementation challenges; share lessons learned and experiences on effective practices; and define actions needed to accelerate progress towards gender parity.</td>
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<td>Governance, peace and security</td>
<td>Several countries have significantly increased the level of women’s representation in parliament. Yet, women continue to be under-represented in all structures of power and decision-making. They are subjected to cultural attitudes that do not recognize women’s right to lead. While policies that promote gender equality in appointments to decision-making positions are in place in some countries, implementation lags far behind. It is also important to note that the higher representation of women in parliament has not yet systematically led to adequate budgets, institutional frameworks and policies for implementing for gender equality programmes. There are still major challenges to the effective participation of women in decision-making at both local and national levels. There is also widespread recognition that women are affected by conflicts, wars and humanitarian emergencies in ways that are different from those of men, and these differences need to be taken into account in designing and implementing intervention strategies.</td>
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<td>Financing for gender equality</td>
<td>The consideration of gender in some countries’ budgets has triggered more transparent processes for gender responsiveness in public expenditures. Information available on gender-responsive budgets and the inclusion of women’s unpaid work in national accounts are likely to have a tremendous impact on resource allocation in the context of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and national development strategies. Several African countries have adopted gender budgeting as a strategy to accelerate gender equality and pro-poor, equitable development. It is important to review what has been effective; what has not been working; and to come up with actions to improve financing for gender equality. What financing mechanisms, including innovative partnerships, can help accelerate progress? How can domestic resource allocation be optimized? What role can external assistance play to support scaled-up efforts? What other non-traditional sources could be developed?</td>
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<td>Emerging issues Food security, climate change, migration, water and energy</td>
<td>These past few years have seen drastic and structural changes that are reshaping the world, including Africa. Emerging issues such as food security challenges caused by rising food prices, climate change, migration, water and energy shortages are all new trends that are affecting women in ways that are different from those of men, as shown by recent studies. The Forum will take stock of these new trends, assess their impact on women and men and find ways to reduce their negative impact and strengthen the positive ones, in order to create new opportunities for gender equality and women’s empowerment in Africa.</td>
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