



**United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGD)**

**The African Women's Human Rights Observatory
Concept Note
February 2007**

Background

The Seventh African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing + 10) Decade Review of the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platform for Action took place in Addis Ababa in October 2005. The regional review was preceded by sub-regional and country reviews. The reviews showcased the success that countries achieved in addressing the Beijing Twelve Critical Areas of Concern. They also highlighted the gaps that still exist and revealed that Africa's success in addressing gender inequality and women's empowerment is far outweighed by what has not been achieved.

Among others some of the changes that have taken place since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration include the development of regional declarations, setting up mechanisms on gender and development and a relative increase in some countries in women's participation in decision making. In addition, the creation of the African Union (AU), committed by its constitutive act to the principle of gender equality and equity, provides further opportunities for institutionalizing gender mainstreaming and increased participation of women in decision-making.

Despite some of these positive trends, major challenges still remain in a large number of areas. The majority of the strategies and plans of action developed by member states have not made notable differences in the lives of women who still have limited access to productive resources, information, including ICTs, are generally marginalized in the economy and continue to suffer gross violations of their social, cultural and economic rights. The review of the MDGs so far shows that the majority of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries are off-track for many of the MDGs. A large number of these are critical to women and children. To point out a few of these:

- **Achieving universal primary and secondary education including gender equality:** In SSA, the average primary school completion rate crept up to a little above 50 percent and the net enrolment rate to 62 percent over the last decade. This is an area where member states have made progress. However, despite the positive trends, they are not enough to ensure that SSA achieves universal primary education by 2015. Governments can't achieve universal primary education or eliminate gender disparities in education if people and especially women are inadequately and/or poorly trained.
- **Reducing Child mortality:** Most of the Sub-Saharan Africa is off-track in achieving this goal. To enhance the capacity of national child immunization campaigns there is need to provide trained personnel, adequate vehicles and better infrastructure, particularly in remote areas.
- **Combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases:** Women are the most infected and affected by HIV and AIDS, bearing the main responsibility of caring

of the family. Data from UNAIDS show that in SSA, women account for 57% of people living with HIV, while over 75% of all the young people living with the virus are female. Availing generic drugs has to be scaled-up.

In recent years, there has been an increased recognition that there can't be human rights without women's rights. In concurrence with this, women's human rights have gained prominence and the gender agendas have started to feature in more fora. African governments have realized that Africa can't afford to ignore more than 50% of their population. The concern has led to concrete actions, the African Heads of States adopting the Additional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People Rights on Women's Rights in 2003 and the Solemn Declaration in 2004.

The challenges that Africa face in meeting the commitments of Beijing Platform of Action, MDGs, NEPAD, CEDAW, Cairo at Ten call for a more forthright strategy at every level from heads of states to technocrats. Additionally, the member states should be able to review progress, to learn from each other's good practice and strategies.

Reporting on the implementation of the various instruments is needed and necessary. The countries that have ratified CEDAW report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women within one year after the entry into force. Thereafter, the countries are obliged to report at least in every four years, or whenever the Committee so requests. A number of African countries are not up to date with their reporting.

Reporting on the Beijing Platform for Action, MDGs, ICPD at Ten, CEDAW and other related agreements and declarations has to a great extent shown the need for an Observatory, where information can be shared and easily accessed. Information generally and especially on African women is scattered and varied.

The Beijing Platform for Action recommended the creation of National Observatories on the advancement of women in each country. Some countries have successfully established such structures through which they can collect information and monitor progress made on the status of women. An African-wide Observatory of Women's Human is able to compile the information gathered at the national level through national observatories and provide a regional perspective of the status of women. It is within this context that the establishment of an African Women's Rights Observatory (AWRO) on gender equality, women's rights and empowerment of women will be crucial to facilitate informed policy development and foster critical review of country performances. The Observatory will also facilitate periodical report identification of good practice and constraints as well as

strengthen networking and sharing of information in the area of gender mainstreaming.

ECA has developed an African Gender and Development Index (AGDI), which was piloted successfully in twelve countries. In the next three years AGDI will be extended to 26 other African countries. The AGDI provides all the required data to report effectively within the frameworks provided by the international conventions on women's rights and gender equality. AWRO will be used as a channel to publish AGDI findings.

What Will the Observatory Do?

- The Observatory provides centralized, pertinent, updated and easily accessible information for all types of users from gender professionals to interested individuals.
- It monitors and assesses how African countries are achieving the specific and interrelated objectives of women rights.
- By working with existing national observatories or similar structures, it is an advocacy instrument for women's organizations at the national, regional and global levels.
- It will be a tool to monitor development of gender sensitive policies and fosters critical review of country performances.
- It will facilitate periodical report identification of good practice and constraints, as well as strengthen networking and sharing of information in the area of gender mainstreaming.
- It provides a basis to share experiences and learn from each other's experiences on women's human rights, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment.
- It utilizes the AGDI, which provides a useful and exhaustive tool to effectively report on women's rights and gender equality.
- It publishes statistics, combined descriptive information (e.g. news on the latest developments), strategic information (e.g. an attempt to explore rationales, decision-making processes and organisational change), and reflection. In other words, reports scrutinise what has happened, how and why it happened and reflect upon the wider implications.

- It collects, processes and formats information and data provided by government agencies, UN, NGOs and researchers on the conditions of women and making it accessible to the public, UN system, governments, CSOs, and particularly to women advocacy groups.
- It supports AGCD (ECA) in publishing the African Women's Report, which gives a qualitative appraisal of the progress individual countries are making to the achievements of commitments that they have made in AU, NEPAD and the Millennium Development Goals. The African Women's Report is published bi-annually.

The Role of the Observatory

The Observatory will:

- Serve as a comprehensive source of data by tracking and reporting on progress African countries are making in the area of women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment
- Promote awareness and advocacy at the national level by following policy debates and to assist the decision makers to make knowledgeable decisions when developing policies and programs
- Provide a network of users and content providers
- Provide a regional perspective on the status of women in Africa;
- Provide a platform for African researchers to access country-specific data on women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment
- Assist ECA, AU and UNDP Regional Gender Program of Africa Bureau to publish qualitative appraisal of the progress the individual countries are making towards achieving the commitments of the AU, NEPAD, MDGs and other related frameworks
- Encourage countries to develop adequate monitoring systems of their own based on their own national data

Who Is Setting Up the Observatory?

The observatory is a partnership between the UNDP Regional Gender Program of Africa Bureau and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa - African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGD). The AU will provide political guidance for the project. An Advisory Panel consisting of wide representation from civil based organizations and the UN will be established. Users of AWRO include all the stakeholders from policy makers to all the interested individuals.

The UNDP/RGPAB is the lead agency of the Observatory while ACGD will undertake the technical work of setting up and managing the AWRO.