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**GENDER CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE ECONOMIC
COMMUNITY OF WESTAFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS): A
REVIEW OF BEIJING+10 ACTIVITIES**

**ECONOMIC COMMUNITY
OF WEST AFRICAN STATES**

**COMMUNAUTE ECONOMIQUE
DES ETATS DE L'AFRIQUE DE
L'OUEST**

**GENDER CAPACITY BUILDING
IN THE ECONOMIC
COMMUNITY OF WEST
AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS):
A REVIEW OF BEIJING +10
ACTIVITIES:**

**EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT
OCTOBER, 2004**

Introduction:

Various state governments, non-governmental organisations, women activists, United Nations Organisations and other stake holders met and consulted on women issues beginning with the meeting in Mexico in 1975; to Copenhagen in 1980; Nairobi in 1985; culminating in the Fourth World and United Nations Conference in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing conference successfully defined a global programme for women advancement and empowerment. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has been a reference point for all stakeholders. The Platform of Action asserts the mainstreaming of gender as a key strategy for promoting and achieving gender equity and sustainable development. The Beijing Platform of Action also highlighted the special role that men can play in promoting and achieving gender equality. In preparation for the Beijing Conference, African women and their respective governments adopted the African Platform for Action in Dakar, in 1994. The African Platform for Action (consisting of 11 critical areas) and the Beijing Platform for Action (consisting of 12 critical areas) are almost similar. Since the two documents are so similar, it was thought wise to refer to one common Platform of Action that would better link Africa to the rest of the world. Hence, the Beijing Platform for Action has been the reference point for everybody.

The Beijing Platform of Action identified the following 12 critical areas of concern:-

- Poverty
- Education
- Health Care
- Violence against Women
- Women and armed Conflict
- Women and the Economy
- Women in Power and Decision Making
- Institutional Mechanisms for the advancement of Women
- Human rights of women
- Women and the media
- Women and the Environment
- The girl-Child

Each country and region can decide their priority areas of concern out of these critical areas.

This paper focuses on the post-Beijing achievements and challenges of The Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS) in integrating gender in the development process within the sub-region .

The Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS):

ECOWAS was established on 28th May, 1975 in Lagos, Nigeria. ECOWAS is composed of the following 15 West African Countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Coted'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. ECOWAS headquarters is in Abuja, Nigeria.

ECOWAS MISSION

The mission of ECOWAS is to promote co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to ensure economic growth, foster relations among Member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent.

ECOWAS MANDATE

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has affirmed as its final goal the accelerated and sustained economic development of its Member States, culminating in the economic union of West Africa. Aiming to promote co-operation and integration in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, the Community has a mandate for promoting the economic, social and cultural development of the West African region (Economic Community of West Africa States, Revised Treaty, Abuja: ECOWAS Secretariat). Given this comprehensive mandate, the Community has programmes in several areas including food and agriculture; industry, science and technology and energy; trade, customs, taxation, money and payments; transport, communication and tourism; environment and natural resources; and education and health.

The ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, meeting in an extra ordinary summit in Abuja in April 2001, affirmed and resolved to concentrate every effort to turning West Africa into a haven of peace, progress and stability, in the pursuit of the goals of regional integration and co-operation. They have also set up a Court of Justice and a Parliament, actions that have increased ECOWAS' publicity and credibility as a relevant structure to bring about change. The newly created Africa Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) have also given ECOWAS increased opportunities to realise its regional integration objectives and bring about visible and tangible socio-economic and political change in the sub-region. The

Secretariat has also undergone an organisational restructuring to improve its culture, governance, operational procedures and systems, enabling it to become a more results-oriented organisation.

In the enabling and supportive environment, the Community seized the opportunity to implement its commitment to the promotion of gender equity, equality and women empowerment actions within West Africa in a manner that enables the achievement of Millennium Development Goals and the Beijing and Dakar Platform for Action targets.

EVOLUTION OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT MAINSTREAMING ACTIVITIES IN ECOWAS.

ECOWAS efforts to integrate women in socio-economic development are exemplified in the different decisions of the Authority and relevant articles of the Treaty as follows:

- In 1983 Decision C/DEC6/5/83 granted the West Africa Sub-Region Committee for the Integration of Women in Development observer status. This was based on the conviction that there was a need to integrate women in the process of development.
- In 1987, based on the appreciation of the important role which the West Africa Women's Association was playing in the development of Member States, Decision A/DEC.3/7/87 granted it the special status of specialised institution of ECOWAS
- In 1993, ECOWAS formulated a revised treaty. In Articles 61 and 63 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty, Member States resolved to formulate, harmonise, co-ordinate and establish appropriate policies and mechanisms for the enhancement of the economic, social and cultural conditions of women based on the existing evidence. ECOWAS affirmed its commitment to women's empowerment and to the promotion of women's organisations as a means of ensuring collective involvement in development activities of the region. The Treaty gives ECOWAS a strong mandate to formulate policies and develop programmes that enhance women's economic, social and cultural conditions.
- In 2001, the West African Regional Development Centre of the Economic Commission for Africa based in Niamey, as part of collaborative arrangements with ECOWAS, initiated discussions on the development of a sub-regional gender policy and gender mainstreaming of the Community's programmes. Moreover, the groundwork for the

policy initiative resulted from a synthesis of discussions between ECOWAS Secretariat and technical experts including regional, international and bilateral partners/stakeholders at a meeting held in March 2002.

- In September-December 2002, collaborative efforts between ECOWAS, United Nations Development Fund for Women - UNIFEM and the Commonwealth Secretariat resulted in the presentation of a first draft gender policy to a meeting of Gender Technical Experts from the sub region. A policy orientation document emerging from this meeting was presented to and adopted by the Meeting of Ministers of Women's Affairs. The gender policy frame was developed around regional integration, good governance, macro and microeconomics and trade liberalisation, health and HIV/AIDS, education, peace and conflict resolution, human rights, and indeed all the Beijing Platform 12 critical areas of concern and Goal 3 from the Millennium Development Goals-MDG
- The 26th Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, held in Dakar in January 2003, based on a strong political decision, authorised the establishment of a Gender Division in the ECOWAS Secretariat, the establishment of a Gender Commission and the restructuring the West Africa Women's' Association – WAWA into ECOWAS Gender and Development Centre-EGDC-A specialised institution to implement the gender policy, and do capacity building initiatives for member states to perform their gender mainstreaming mandates.

Gender Situation in ECOWAS sub region

The situation analysis done before the Gender Policy Development, examined gender in relation to a number of indicators within the broad categories of social, cultural, economic and legal issues, reveals gender disparities in virtually every sector. A wide gender gap still exists in the sub region. In general, women especially young women are at a disadvantage in terms of access to education, legal rights, health status, political and other forms of representation, in access to economic resources and in participation in, and benefit from, economic and peace building programmes. Some salient features needing gender analysis are as follows:

- A strong system of patriarchy that affects gender relations Child marriages, female genital mutilation and negative widow-hood practices that limit women's human rights.

- Women are still not included in peace building processes, mediation and conflict resolution actions.
- Gender based violence including that associated with armed conflicts
- Weak legal frameworks and/or implementation mechanisms that have negative gender implications
- Disparity in access to economic resources, such as land, credit and advisory services experienced by men and women, thus leading to different levels of integration into economic activity
- Female enrolment rates consistently lower than those of males at primary and secondary school level and not anywhere near the target of closing the gender gap in 2005
- Female illiteracy rate is still high and gender disparities exist in access to all areas of higher education
- Growing number of child labour and human trafficking
- High risk maternal mortality among women aged 15 - 19 while large family size still persists in the sub region approximately 6 children per woman
- Higher HIV/AIDS infection rates and vulnerabilities among females than males, with percentages of infected females ranging from 54 - 57 of the infected population
- Women are still seeking influence and participation in all levels of decision making
- Strong basis for measuring women's participation and contribution to the economy and the conditions of their work have not been established in the sub region
- Women and men's participation in the labour force continues to be different in the sub region because the division of labour in the households and time spent for unpaid work of house keeping is not recognised and valued.

- Gender disaggregated data does not exist in the sub region on issues- needing attention to develop dialogue between statisticians and users of gender statistics-government, NGOs, private sector etc.

The situation analysis also identifies certain critical and priority areas for the sub region to focus on based on their bi-directional links in furthering the attainment of gender equity and equality goals. For example education empowers individuals to escape the poverty trap, while economic considerations contribute to the decision of poor families to limit the education of their children and co-opt them into paid and unpaid work. Similarly, there is a bi-directional link between access to economic resources on the one hand and empowerment and the ability to make decisions on the other. There are also associations between education and health, between health and economic participation and between education and the law.

The ECOWAS Gender Policy priority areas are set out to address these and other issues that contribute to the realisation of MDG, Beijing and NEPAD Goals:

ECOWAS GENDER POLICY FRAMEWORK

Between 2000-2004, ECOWAS secretariat and member states developed a clear conceptual and operational frameworks for and systematically completed the Gender Policy, Gender Management systems- GMS and a Strategic Plan Framework for the sub-region based on the priorities agreed on during the sub regional stakeholders meeting between governments, women organisations and private sector participation. These tools are key achievements and responses to the implementation of the Millennium Development, Beijing Platform for Action and NEPAD Goals in the sub-region. The tools are also meant for accelerating the achievement of ECOWAS' integration objectives for peace building and conflict resolution, social and economic development in the sub region. The policy provides guidelines for member states to fulfil their obligations in gender mainstreaming under the regional, international protocols/agreements and the enforcement of the implementation of The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women –CEDAW as a basis for curbing discrimination in all sectors against women in the sub region. The Gender Policy is an authoritative tool for ECOWAS to address the gender differentials such as discrimination and inequities in the labour market, low women's earnings, unequal economic, social, legal, political rights, gaps and persistent marginalisation of women in top decision making and good governance, peace building and conflict resolution, access to information and technology-ICT- and livelihood.

ECOWAS Secretariat now dialogues with member states, private sector, and civil society to harmonise their national gender policies and institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming and be able to identify and remove bottlenecks inhibiting governments living up to their commitments and account for gender mainstreaming in their development plans, programmes and budget allocations.

The policy also commits countries to fulfilling their obligations under various regional and international protocols/agreements and contributes to the realisation of NEPAD's objectives and the Millennium Development Goals. The global conferences have reiterated gender equality and women's empowerment as cross cutting issues in all sustainable development efforts. The conferences primarily reaffirm the existing evidence that when women and men are relatively equal, have equal voices in the development of the community and a country, are both able to benefit from new opportunities that development brings, have rights and access to resources needed to be productive and share decisions and authority, well being is enhanced. The Platforms for Action (PFA) from global meetings are guiding principles to enable governments, development agencies, institutions, civil society and donors to measure the balance in the conditions, benefits and changes in the lives of women, men and children.

The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 1994, the Beijing Platform for Action 1995, the World Summit on Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995 and the UN Millennium Summit 2000 have strong gender dimensions. The twelve critical areas of concern agreed on through consensus in Beijing by all UN Member Countries constitute the framework for gender analysis, while CEDAW is a tool for prohibiting discrimination against women.

ECOWAS Integration instruments include many of the twelve critical issues of concerns. Its governance structure and management systems are also based on principles of inclusion and equal opportunities. The Gender Policy and institutional framework will enable ECOWAS to refine its gender efforts and streamline programme responses and systems to align with the global gender equality efforts both at the secretariat and member state levels. They include provisions for monitoring the implementation of the Platform For Action in the sub-region and for effective reporting, especially on the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment targets

set up in the Dakar/Africa Platform for Action and reinforced in the recent NEPAD Plan for Action.

ECOWAS, conscious of conflict, insecurity, risks and vulnerabilities of its people in the sub region, has a gender sensitive **vision** to make the sub region just and safe society in which men and women enjoy equal opportunities to participate, make decisions, have control over and benefit from all development interventions.

The mission for gender mainstreaming is to engage the citizens of West Africa in the formulation and implementation of sustainable socio-economic development solutions that eradicate poverty and promote gender equality, good governance and the conditions for peace, through regional co-operation and integration.

The guiding principles include affirmation of maximum political will, commitment to all global and regional instruments and to Article 63 of the ECOWAS Treaty which acknowledge the following that:

- Gender Policy be adopted as a tool for all ECOWAS institutions and stakeholders to plan programme interventions
- Gender Assessment, as a basis for gender analysis, be carried out routinely in ECOWAS Member States and Secretariat structures
- Gender Management Systems (GMS) be established in Member States and the Secretariat
- Gender Mainstreaming be a prerequisite to gender equity and equality
- Partnerships, networking, collaboration and co-ordination protocols for integration and co-operation become mandatory.

ECOWAS SUB-REGION STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK

The following sectors were agreed on as priority areas for the sub region to focus and account for in the next 3-5 years using mixed strategies.

Education is the key to development

- It empowers especially women
- Reduces ignorance particularly harmful traditional practices surrounding.
- Improves women's social status
- Increases awareness and knowledge

Peace Building and Conflict resolution: is a pre-requisite for sustainable development

- Equal representation of stakeholders in peace building and conflict resolution processes
- Responsibility and commitment of leaders to ensure peaceful environment
- Adequate protection of refugees' human rights.

Economy and Trade: effective management of the economy reduces poverty

- It empowers the individual and society to attain sustainable development
- Recognizing and utilizing the contributions of men and women in all sectors for the national account
- Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process involves both men and women to identify needs and priorities and to develop strategies for livelihoods.

Health is central to the existence of human life. Lack of available, affordable accessible comprehensive and friendly health care services obstructs productivity. Preventive health is essential for men women and child

- Women's health including reproductive health is critical for productivity
- Men's specific health needs, children and adolescent health are critical areas of concern
- Address alarming increase of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases from Gender perspectives. Also cancers, and other gender specific ill health.
- The consequences of the increase reach beyond women's health to their roles as mothers and care givers and their contribution to economic support of their families.

Governance, Representation and Decision-making

- Promoting equal opportunity policies for men and women
- Increasing women's participation in politics and to enable them lead
- Ensuring equitable participation of men and women in governance, electoral processes and decision making

- Institutionalisation of Gender Budgeting processes

Human Rights and Legal issues

- Ensure enabling environment for expressing and actualisation of individual freedoms and potentials in the sub region.
- Domesticating/localizing all international treaties-CEDAW, CRC, and human rights instruments to deal with systemic barriers to women's empowerment.
- Put Gender Based violence, sexual assault and abuse, human trafficking on the development agenda.

Agriculture and Environment: is the mainstay of ECOWAS member states. It safe guards food, national security and employment opportunities.

- Access to land
- Access to credit facility
- Access to markets
- Appropriate technology and agricultural inputs
- Conservation of environment and habitat
- Increased women in management of the environment.
- Nutrition be put on the development agenda.

ICT is an important tool for communication and development, and required for full integration in globalisation

- Closing the technological gaps and development in the sub region.
- Making internet available to both men and women equally
- Adding value to the image of women and men equally

The regional action plan was also discussed and suggestions made for it to be reviewed to include clear definition of who is doing what, realistic time line and step by step activities .

Policy Implementation Strategies include:

- Gender mainstreaming of ECOWAS' policies and programmes through the establishment of a Gender Management System (GMs)
- Institution and Human Capacity building

- **Affirmative actions**
- **Building strategic partnerships**
- **Resource mobilisation**
- **Technical assistance and support**
- **Advocacy and Policy Analysis**
- **Utilisation of ICT at various levels in ECOWAS institutions and Member States for advancement of the issues.**

Policy Implementation

Within 2000-2004 period, ECOWAS, has been able to put in place institutional mechanisms and structures for accelerating gender-mainstreaming including:

- **A Gender Commission** - To provide technical expertise on policy formulation and implementation within the ECOWAS Community.
- **ECOWAS Secretariat Gender Management Team (GMT)** - The GMT comprises of Directors of departments that are strategically placed to produce results, have access to empirical data and demonstrate some sensitivity towards gender equality/equity issues.
- **Gender Division** - The Gender Division is the Lead Agency within the Gender Management System having co-ordination for the Secretariat's gender mainstreaming efforts. It also has the added responsibilities of co-ordinating youth and children activities in the Secretariat.
- **Gender Focal Points in the different departments**

In recognition of the fact that Gender mainstreaming is a cross-cutting and multi-disciplinary issue, an ECOWAS in-house Gender Team was set up at the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat Headquarters, Abuja Nigeria. This is in order to engender plans, policies and programmes in every department within the secretariat. The ECOWAS in-house Gender team which comprises of one person from critically relevant departments within the Secretariat; has been set up with the approval and support of the Executive Secretary.

One designated officer from each of the department listed below is a member of ECOWAS in-house Gender Team:

Human Development

Legal

Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment

Trade and Industry,

Transport and Infrastructure

Economic Policy

Communications

Political Affairs

Humanitarian Affairs.

The team can always be expanded as it becomes necessary.

If the in-house Gender team works effectively then gender would be main-streamed into almost all the activities of ECOWAS.

- **ECOWAS Gender Development Centre:**

EGDC as a specialised institution for gender mainstreaming and women empowerment activities in the sub region. The Centre shall be charged with the initiation, facilitation, co-ordination and monitoring of strategies and programmes designed to incorporate gender issues into integration programmes of ECOWAS member states.

The objectives of the Centre are:

- To mobilise and involve women, as partners and beneficiaries, in the entire regional integration process.
- To establish a veritable synergy among women of the region, with a view to removing the disparities between men and women in every Community development programme.
- To initiate, co-ordinate and develop projects and programmes in every socio-economic development sector of the Community, taking into account the ECOWAS priority programmes.
- To assist women to improve their performances in their areas of activity; and to stimulate their entrepreneurial spirit and to cultivate a culture of peace.

- To help strengthen intra-Community trade in its various forms.
- To establish a communication channel between women and the Centre and to maintain an updated databank.
- To co-operate, in the interest of the region, with any regional and international institution or organisation involved in gender development.

Start off activities have just begun - designing, programming, managing and operating the centre. The centre will be the epitome of the sub region's vision and commitment to gender issues and women's perspectives in all development sectors. It will be a learning, proactive and interactive forum to build relevant skill for women leaders and advocates (first ladies, professionals, women in politics, women entrepreneurs, women managers, community leaders, young women) to take women's interests, perspectives and voices forward.

ECOWAS Secretariat has also institutionalized the following gender-sensitive processes and procedures

- **A stakeholders approach to planning, programming and evaluation decisions regarding gender equality issues in the sub region**
- **A mechanism for reviewing existing operational documents to remove sex discrimination and enforce equal opportunities in the work place**
- **A good practice for recruiting women in the top decision making and management structures in the secretariat**
- **Partnerships with international, UN, development agencies, regional and bilateral organisations, NEPAD structures and Civil Society organisations and intends to expand the base in future.**
- **Creating an environment for the legal protection of men and women, thus ensuring gender equality**
- **Incorporating gender perspectives on HIV/AIDS projects and programmes**

Institutional Mechanisms for Partnership, Cooperation and Linkages

To ensure that the gender policy and GMS are implemented:

ECOWAS Member states will:

- Ensure development and use of a national gender policy
- Establish Gender Management Systems where they do not exist
- A national indicative budget for gender equality programmes.
- Develop competencies/capacities of all nation wide gender focal points including top level Ministers, Parliamentarians, Managers, Service providers etc.
- Ensure legislation of gender equity and equality actions
- Establish a data base on gender expertise, programmes, macro and micro level gender gaps and disparities
- Work towards developing action plans for good practice. gender equality and equity policies and programmes.

Other Stakeholders

Civil Society will: work with government ministries in thematic areas and articulate gender issues especially in, Governance and Political Representation, PRSP, Peace and Conflict Resolution, HIV/AIDS and Reproductive Health, Education and Socio-cultural issues/Gender Based Violence and so on. Establish or Strengthen Parliamentary Caucuses and build competencies and capacities for them to effectively debate gender inequality and monitor domestication of international gender equality instruments such as CEDAW, Dakar and Beijing Platforms of Action and demand accountability from governments.

Private Sector will: participate in fund-raising and sponsorship activities for financial support to member states gender policy and programme activities.

UN Agencies: will provide technical and financial support to ECOWAS secretariat and member states to implement the policy and action plan. Both the secretariat and the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre will be supported and assisted through technical and financial support to develop competencies and capacities required to implement the policy. Specific agencies include UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNAIDS, FAO, UNESCO, ECA

ECOWAS secretariat will: harmonise and align all the gender policies in the member states with the ECOWAS Gender Policy to include the regional priorities. Other Regional Economic Communities (RECS) will be consulted and involved in specific activities as required.

The synergies from ECOWAS Specialised Institutions – The Parliament, Court of Justice, WAMI, and WAHO would be harnessed to establish EGDC and build its capacity to implement the gender policy.

The secretariat will organize donors meeting to raise funds for the implementation of the policy to include: The World Bank Groupings, Commonwealth Secretariat, USAID, CIDA, DFID, DANIDA, SIDA, NORAD, Foundations and the private sector.

The gender division will install a sub regional data bank of competent experts in the sub region by sector

ECOWAS DECLARATION AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS.

One of the strategic objective under the Beijing Platform For Action on Prevention of Violence against Women: is the Elimination of trafficking in women and assisting victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking. The Heads of States and Governments of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in their twenty-seventh session in Accra, on 19th December, 2003 expressed their deep concern over the suffering caused by the growing incidence of trafficking in persons within the West African sub-Region and from the member states to other parts of the world. They asserted that it is fully unacceptable that human beings are traded, bought, sold, placed, or abducted thus being denied their most fundamental human rights. They therefore condemned trafficking in persons, **especially women and children**, as a violation of fundamental human rights, and as a criminal act. They thereby proclaimed their strong commitment to the eradication of the trafficking in persons, especially women and children. They called on the member states to ratify all relevant ECOWAS conventions and International Conventions and Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. At this meeting An ECOWAS initial Plan of Action against Trafficking in Persons was also adopted.

ECOWAS FACILITATES WOMEN'S ROLE IN PEACE-BUILDING.

Recently, ECOWAS and UNDP have begun a strategy to bring women leaders and civil society on board noting that people in uniform alone cannot be accountable for peace and security in the sub region.

The success of the Mano River Basin Women Initiative (especially the Liberia Women Initiative) participating in peace talks and advocating grass root perspectives is an evidence of importance of inclusion of women in peace negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution in the sub region.

Challenges / Short comings for women empowerment in the Sub Region

Common challenges and short comings for advancing gender equality and women empowerment in the sub region highlighted during a recent stakeholders meeting in Abuja include the following:

- Continuous resistance and negative mindsets from men who are also the key decision makers in the public and domestic sphere;
- weak political commitment, lack of mechanisms for measuring government accountability;
- lack of well defined mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of actions on the ground by government, private sector and civil society;
- weak capacities for people to understand and effectively mainstream gender in policies plans programming cycle;
- lack of mechanisms to enforce and domesticate international instruments such as CEDAW;
- unavailability of resources financial and human.
- passive attitudes towards life threatening conditions such as HIV/AIDS, high maternal mortality, gender based violence;
- socio-cultural practices including early marriages and keeping girls out of school, human trafficking;
- extreme poverty in the sub region;
- women are not involved in the peace building and conflict resolution processes in the region;
- Structurally, genuine participation of women in policy decisions remains distant in many cases;
- self-assessment/gender auditing tools to measure gender inequities are still lacking.
- macro and micro programme design and reforms are still marginalized; and

- need to step up dialogue between NGOs/ Civil society and private sector to revise gender equality issues.

Future Strategies for ECOWAS sub region

In the next 5 –10 years 2005-2015, ECOWAS will promote and facilitate the implementation of international targets on women equality and empowerment in all development plans in the sub region through:

- **Increased awareness**, knowledge building and exchange on gender mainstreaming for sustainable development:
- **Harmonising** national gender policies and actions with the sub regional policy framework:
- **Strengthening institutional mechanisms** to facilitate the gender policy implementation to include co-ordination mechanisms, accountability mechanisms and performance indicators. The secretariat and the Centre will strengthen and support capacity for Ministries of Women Affairs (MWA) to better network with women organisations and the private sector;
- **Capacity Building mechanisms** to facilitate implementation of the policy framework to include allocation of financial and human resources, putting in place viable structures and quality training programmes to provide requisite analysis and gender planning. The ECOWAS Gender Development Centre will be operationalised and serve as a Centre for new knowledge and skills required to achieve equality in development and how this would advance the achievement of integration targets in the sub region:
- **The ECOWAS Parliament and Court of Justice** will work more closely with the secretariat and the EGDC to ensure achievement of gender equality targets in their mandates sub region. And develop joint continental projects in the area of women in politics and legal and regulatory frameworks for the sub region;
- Putting in place **requisite legal, regulatory frameworks and sanctions** for common issues in the sub region including addressing dual legal issues in the law and customary practices;

- Facilitation of acquisition of **Best gender mainstreaming practices** policy implementation and techniques for gender analysis in all the sectors:
- Carrying out of series of **demonstrative projects** in gender disaggregated data collection, operation research in what works with matching gender indicators, and training and advocacy in gender mainstreaming, evaluation and ICT activities;
- **Strengthening Partnerships** with the UN, donors, and other development and humanitarian agencies in designing joint interventions in all the sectors. Specifically, ECOWAS should work with the UN to understand and implement the Security Council Resolution 1325 (especially the aspect that...*Calls on all actors involved when negotiating and implementing peace agreements to adopt a gender perspective...*) ECOWAS build on the successful experience of *Mano River Basin Women* in developing a regional strategy for bringing women leaders in peace building and conflict resolution activities in the sub region (including how to hear women's voices and supported on issues such as violence against women, displacement, health, HIV/AIDS, justice and accountability, post war and reconstruction etc.). ECOWAS will work with specific structures in the sub region such as the newly established Kofi Annan Peace Building Centre in Accra in institutionalising gender training in the peace building training programmes:
- **Strengthen the synergies** between civil society and private sector to engage government in consultations and together address women interests effectively in enhancing their popular participation in development.
- **ECOWAS and other RECS teaming up with AU for results** to ensure that governments, and private sector increase the proportion of women in decision making positions in politics, economic governance and in management of organisations. One of these suggested strategies asks governments to *Take positive action to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision making positions.* Another strategy is concerned with *Taking measures, including ... in electoral systems, that encourage political parties to integrate women in elective and non-elective positions in the same proportion and at the same as men.*

CONCLUSION

ECOWAS as a sub -regional organisation has reaffirmed its commitment to the global agenda on gender mainstreaming. The high level political commitment to gender gives a high leverage for gender sensitivity and mainstreaming activities in the sub region. The long-term goal for this is to institutionalise the concept and develop necessary capacities for sustained gender capacity-building and practices. Several steps taken since the year 2000, have given visibility to gender mainstreaming issues within the community and secretariat. The record of establishment of the structures, namely Gender Commission, Gender Division in the secretariat, and ECOWAS Gender and Development Centre confirms ECOWAS total commitment to the change. The challenge for the community is to sustain the commitment and the willingness to make resources available for the implementation of the targets set out in the gender policy to close the gender gaps in all the sectors as well as empower women and men to better deal with the multi-dimensional challenges in all development sectors especially poverty, HIV/AIDS, conflict, social and cultural issues that characterise the sub-region. Also all member states have implemented some programmes. However, the economic situation in the region, debt crisis, armed conflict, and the emergence of new critical areas especially the impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girls, traditional and cultural issues; continue to pose serious challenges to the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Hence there is the need for continuous focus and action to address these challenges. Thus, the process of engendering development in ECOWAS is on course and will need to be more vigorously pursued in the coming years.

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ECOWAS Heads of State and Government Declaration Against Trafficking in Persons.
December, 2001

List of acronyms

ADB	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
AWDF	Africa Women's Development Fund
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CFTC	Commonwealth Fund for Technical Corporation
COMESA	Community of East and Southern Africa
CS	Commonwealth Secretariat
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAW	Division for the Advancement for Women
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EGDC	ECOWAS Gender Development Centre
FP	Focal Point
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GAD	Gender and Development
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GFP	Gender Focal Point
GMS	Gender Management System
GMT	Gender Management Team
GTG	Gender Theme Group
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus/Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGOs	Non- governmental Organizations
PFA	Plans for Action
PLWHA	People living with HIV/AIDS
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
UEMOA	Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WAD	Women and Development
WAWA	West African Women's Association
WID	Women in Development