

Press Releases

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PLANS UNVEILED TO SPEED IMPLEMENTATION OF DAKAR/ BEIJING PLATFORMS

Addis Ababa, 26 November 1999 (ECA) – The Sixth African Regional Conference on Women ended here today with a Regional Plan of Action which maps out priorities and strategies for the next five years to accelerate the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms of Action.

The Plan proposes: coordination mechanisms to be established at national, subregional and regional levels; strategies for monitoring and evaluating the status of implementation of the Platforms of Action; means of mobilizing resources to enable implementation of the Platforms; and actions to enhance access to and provision of basic goods and services by African women.

The Plan is in response to a number of new developments that have constituted serious constraints to addressing the critical areas of concern over the last five years. According to the Plan, "the combined impact of past macro-economic policies and globalization has resulted in a number of adverse consequences... [including] overall social dislocation and the increased numbers of people living below the poverty line". Women ensure a disproportionate share of the burden, as they "assume greater responsibility for the care of the poor and the helpless in addition to other productive and reproductive roles".

These experiences, argues the document, "require new policy shifts from a single factor approach to a more comprehensive multi-sectoral approach to people's well-being and security". Stressing that Governments should prioritize innovative actions to respond to the growing problem, the Plan points out that some countries have made a start in the right direction. Among them is Algeria, which in 1996 instituted a social protection programme that provides financial assistance to poor families, the elderly and disabled. Another success story is South Africa, which has formulated a social partnership with business and labour to address poverty and unemployment. In Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe, for example, allowances are paid to the elderly and invalids.

The Plan categorizes the Post-Beijing challenges in six clusters:

- Most countries have drawn up comprehensive national plans of action for implementing the platforms but few have defined concrete strategies for coordinating implementation, with the resulting duplication of effort at the expense of beneficiaries;
- The national plans of action did not include well-designed monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and as such it was impossible to gauge progress and act accordingly;
- Nearly all African countries failed to institute mechanisms for accountability to those who were supposed to benefit from the platforms of action;
- Few countries have formulated comprehensive national gender policies or drawn up gender-sensitive sectoral policies;
- Countries attempting to implement the platforms of action have come

across a preponderant shortage of resources due to lack of control of those resources at all levels;

- Emerging issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the problems of the needy and helpless have become pervasive and life threatening to African society, with the level of poverty growing annually in many African countries.

More than 1,500 participants drawn from senior levels of governments, civil society, regional institutions, bilateral agencies, agencies of the United Nations, and multilateral partners took part in the five-day conference, which also constituted the Africa regional preparatory meeting for Beijing plus five, the Global Review due to take place next June in New York.

A Draft Declaration, read out at the closing session, recognized that a number of efforts had been made since 1995 to implement the platforms of action, among them: the ratification by 47 African countries of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; greater participation of women in politics and decision-making; a growing and vibrant women's activism and advocacy for peace; and a global consensus that women's rights are human rights and that violence against women is the most widespread violation of human rights.

The Declaration however recognized with grave concern that major gaps and shortcoming persisted, among them:

- The high incidence of wars and conflict;
- The continued violation by state and non-state actors of the basic human rights of women, children and men;
- The continued under-representation of women in decision-making and leadership;
- The deepening and feminization of poverty that is affecting more and more women, particularly rural women;
- The lack of women and girls' control over their lives exposes them to HIV/AIDS and other problems and further erodes their social and economic status;
- The lack of quality health services, especially reproductive health services;
- Lack of attention and resources committed to the needs of the disabled and elderly women;
- Inadequate access by women and girls to education and information;
- Lack of adequate resources and inappropriate status for national machineries;
- Lack of gender disaggregated data at the institutional level; and
- Lack of meaningful social transformation in attitudes and policy-making structures towards women's power and participation.

(END)

The full text of the Draft Declaration, Regional Plan of Action and other available addresses, statements, presentations and documents will be published on the 6th Regional Conference Home Page, which can be accessed at: <http://www.bellanet.org/partners/aisi/6thregionalconference>.

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