

Inspite of constitutional guarantees, few African countries have achieved gender parity, says Janneh

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United Nations HQ, New York, 4 July (ECA): Although about 90 percent of African constitutions endorse gender equality and affirmative action, only 11 countries have achieved parity in secondary education and only eight countries have achieved parity at tertiary level, the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, said in New York on Friday as the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) kicked off its "Dialogue with Executive Secretaries of Regional Commissions of the United Nations"

Speaking on the theme "Gender Equality and empowerment of women in the implementation of the MDGs", Mr Janneh said women's participation in executive, judicial, traditional and other public spheres is visibly low across most African countries, while their participation in non-agricultural wage employment is mainly at lower echelons and worst, at eight percent, in the security forces.

Generally, he said, while Africa had been making mixed progress across subregions, "chances of MDG achievements in their entirety are very unlikely across countries ." He said external shocks were influencing the achievement of the MDGs in Africa, including conflicts, slow pace of political and economic governance, and the global financial crisis.

But Janneh said Africa had a success story in the area of universal primary education (MDG 2), where there has been boy-girl enrolment parity in some countries (The Gambia, Gabon, Malawi, Mauritius, Mauritania, Namibia, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles and Uganda) and is imminent in others such as Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique and United Republic of Tanzania.

Inspite of this success, said Janneh, serious challenges remain with the "retention, progression to higher levels, violence against girls and increasing signs of boy dropouts in a number of African countries".

He said while North Africa is on track regarding progress towards the MDG target on reducing child mortality, insufficient progress was being made in East Africa, West Africa, while there was no progress in Southern Africa and Central Africa towards meeting the target.

On environmental sustainability (MDG 7), Janneh said the impacts of climate change on rural livelihoods are not gender neutral as they deepen and widen existing gender inequalities in areas such as food insecurity, ill health and increased water stress. Women and young girls in many African countries, said Janneh, still have to walk longer distances in search of water and to care for the sick.

Stating that scant attention was generally paid in Africa to the interface between gender and climate change in policy design and implementation, Mr. Janneh said ECA would focus on the issue of climate change and sustainable development during the seventh African Development Forum from 11-15 October 2010.

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