



ACTION

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

Empowering African Women

Key Messages & Practical Guide
for Print & Electronic Media

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Economic Commission
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Empowering African Women

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This document is provided to give all media partners a general context of the Issues Paper on empowering African women. There are a number of key messages arising from the paper that are listed and described below. These messages as well as the Summary will provide you with specific information for engaging efficiently the ADF VI.

Summary of Issues Paper

Overall progress has been witnessed in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa in areas such as education and increased resource allocation, however much remains to be done.

African countries have adopted numerous universal declarations and commitments; however the translation of these declarations into national policies has not yielded substantial advancement on gender equality on the ground.

The paper also exposes how countries can adopt and scale up gender equality policies that have proven to be effective.

Hence, Member States, AU and UN agencies have a central leadership role to play in the promotion of a more cohesive and coherent regional movement mobilized around attainable targets.

The aim of this issues paper is to underscore the key challenges constraining implementation of the commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment; and to propose a framework for discussion at the Forum out of which an action plan to accelerate translation of commitments into reality can be developed.

In addition, this issue paper is a comprehensive analysis of the facts and challenges related to gender equality and women empowerment in Africa. It affirms that global and regional views are vital prerequisites for moving African countries to the transition point in tackling gender inequality.

Avowing gender equality and women's empowerment presents a major challenge to virtually every country in Africa, the paper also calls for a large-scale alliance to promote women empowerment in Africa through mobilization of political will, the enforcement of existing conventions or adopting stronger conventions, laws and policies and the linkage of such efforts with effective implementation strategies (reporting mechanisms, increased involvement of men in executing strategies to empower women).

Background

Over the last six decades since the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, important progress in gender equality and women's empowerment as a development end in itself has been made. Progress has also been made in the development of global and regional commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment.

African countries have for the most part, been signatories to and have ratified most of the international conventions and have made commitments to address gender equality.

Despite these commitments and declarations, progress has been slow in overcoming gender imbalances and gender based violence.

Advances in policies and legislation at the macro-level have not necessarily resulted in progress on gender equality and women's empowerment on the ground, largely due to barriers in implementation. For example, many laws and policies are not enforced due to entrenched values and power relations at the macro and micro-level, which in turn shape local policies, communities and cultural beliefs and women's daily lives.

Issues Paper Key Messages

■ ***Gender equality and women's empowerment are key tools to promoting sustainable development, particularly in Africa***

Ensuring that women have access to education and training, productive assets including land, credit and time-saving technology is a sine qua non to the achievement of the 7 per cent annual growth rate needed to achieve the MDGs in Africa.

■ ***Strategic areas to be tackled for progress in the agenda for gender equality***

Social development through access to education, health care, water and sanitation; economic development through access to employment and productive resources; and political participation reflected via more involvement in decision-making

■ ***African countries are undertaking initiatives to promote the land and property rights of women***

In Kenya, community watchdog organizations and other groups providing home-based care for those living with HIV/AIDS have designed interventions to secure the property rights of women. In Rwanda, the government passed a law in 1999 giving women inheritance rights equal to those of males, overruling traditional norms by which only male children could inherit. This has enabled widows and female orphans of the 1994 genocide to secure land.

■ ***Women's empowerment is central to raising levels of nutrition, improving production and distribution of food and agricultural products***

Agricultural productivity increases dramatically when women have equal access to productive inputs. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women have less access to education and to labour, fertilizer, and other input than men do. When women obtain the same levels of education, experience, and farm

inputs that currently benefit the average male farmer, they increase their yields for maize, beans, and cowpeas by 22%. Consequently Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) are linked to women's access to productive inputs.

Longer-term strategies should aim at addressing the underlying problems of gender inequality in agricultural development and support women's crucial contributions to agricultural production.

■ ***Providing access to decent employment for African women is a major step toward economic empowerment and freedom***

Most African women are marginalized in the labour market and too often end up in vulnerable, lowly-paid and unprotected jobs, mostly in the informal sector. The insufficient creation of decent jobs in the region and widespread poverty continue to be heavy burdens on women. There are several employment frameworks that are being explored for empowering women which include rural employment, ICTs, micro-credit and entrepreneurship development, skills acquisition, literacy, training and enterprise development for women. Affirmative action programmes in self-employment, entrepreneurial skills development and small and medium enterprise development are strongly recommended.

■ ***Education and training are crucial ingredients for driving economic growth and broader development***

In most African countries, access to education and training has lagged behind other developing regions, which has been a major factor in the low growth rates and high poverty levels witnessed in the continent.

Africa has one of lowest rates of female literacy and the highest gender disparities in adult literacy. In sub-Saharan countries, 62 per cent of the 155 millions adults who cannot read nor write are women.

Since 2000, expenditures devoted to education increased in the majority of African countries driven by higher economic growth, increased tax revenues and higher expenditure ratios allocated to the education sector. Between 1999 and 2005, 10 African countries allocated at least 6 per cent of their GDP to education, and across a sample of 24 sub-Saharan African countries the share of education expenditure increased in 18 countries.

■ ***Women's lack of access to ICTs remains a major challenge in Africa***

Despite several initiatives African women continue to be marginalized in accessing ICTs due to difficulties ranging from illiteracy, socio-cultural attitudes and preconceptions about women's interaction with technology. There is also a lack of understanding of the resource and situational obstacles experienced by women. The inability to read and write in particular is a major barrier to women's access to ICTs.

Enhancing women's participation in the information economy would produce a range of benefits, including increased creativity, expertise and competitiveness in the technology sector of a country, and hence facilitate the development of an information economy leading to increased productivity and economic growth

■ ***HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa is feminized***

Gender inequality, low socio-economic status of women, and gender based violence make women and girls much more vulnerable to HIV infection.

The adult HIV prevalence rate in Sub Saharan Africa has declined from 5.8% in 2001 and 5.7% in 2006 to 5.0% in 2007. In most countries HIV prevalence rates have either stabilized or are showing signs of decline (UNAIDS 2007). Even though a decrease in prevalence rates has been recorded, more women are currently living with HIV and AIDS than men, and women continue to be at a higher risk for contracting HIV.

The proportion of women infected by HIV is high and is increasing on the continent. As of December 2007, women constituted 61% of people living with HIV and AIDS in Sub Saharan Africa, up from 57% at the end of 2003 (UNAIDS 2007).

■ ***Inadequate attention to gender issues on water and sanitation is one of the major challenges constraining progress***

According to a report of the Millennium Task Force on Water and Sanitation, rural African women and girls usually walk 10 kilometres each day to the nearest water source, and the distance doubles during the dry season. This decreases their level of productivity and in the case of schoolgirls creates more obstacles for school attendance. While affecting all school-age children, poor school sanitation facilities hit girls hardest, especially during puberty where privacy and subsequently dignity could be compromised. This disables some girls from attending school altogether.

Improved access to water can make a significant difference in the life of a woman, in terms of a drastic reduction in time and energy spent fetching water. Water technologies such as water pumps can enable easier access to clean water. The benefits are not only in terms of saving time and energy but also in terms of improved health and increased opportunities to access education.

■ ***Women should be included in all aspects of decision-making***

Although many African countries have made some progress in the area of women representation in parliament and ministries, such progress has not necessarily led to adequate budgets, institutional frameworks and policies for implementing gender programmes for gender equality (UNECA, 2007). Some countries don't even have national strategies to increase women's participation in decision-making. As a result, women are still under-represented in decision-making positions in governments, civil society and the private sector in almost all African countries.

■ ***Impacts of climate change are not gender neutral, they deepen inequalities in Africa***

Some of the current and projected impacts of climate change on Africa's development include exposure to increased water stress and water-related conflicts, desertification, deforestation, food insecurity; energy insecurity; increased risk of disease including malaria, rift valley cholera and meningitis; and degradation of coastal areas.

Women bear the major responsibility for household water supply and energy for cooking and heating, as well as for food security. Because of their socially ascribed roles, unequal access to resources and technologies, and limited mobility women in many contexts are disproportionately

affected by natural disasters, such as floods, fires, and mudslides. Climate change thus exacerbates existing inequalities.

Assessing the impact of climate change on gender and developing relevant policies and strategies is hampered by lack of reliable gender disaggregated information and lack of financial support.

■ ***Food insecurity caused by food price increases is affecting women in both urban and rural areas***

As the driving force behind African agriculture, rural women must play a vital role in finding solutions to Africa's food crises. Women are involved in all aspects of food security, but are ignored by policy-makers.

Women are involved in all the three pillars of food security that include food production, food access and food utilization. The rising food prices will adversely affect women and female-headed families more than other groups in society. Many studies have revealed that female and child-headed families are often the poorest in Africa.

Responses to the food security crisis require short and long term strategies that address gender inequalities.

Discussion Forum

- Why is implementation of the declarations on gender equality and women's empowerment lower than expected?
- What are the good practices in promoting women's land and property rights (community, national, sub-regional and regional)? How can they be scaled up?
- What are the necessary actions to be taken by partner governments, the AU, AfDB, the UN and other agencies, to expand women's effective participation in agricultural policymaking, and trade negotiations to ensure that the resulting policies are not gender blind?
- What policies are needed to promote decent jobs for women in African countries? What are good practices in targeting women? Where should governments focus on, the supply side (education, training, etc.) or the demand side (job creation)?
- How can member governments, AU, AfDB and UN agencies overcome the challenges to women's participation in trade at community, national and international levels?
- What practical steps should member governments, AU, AfDB, UN and other agencies take to get ICT to rural areas and especially to reach rural women and girls? How can they be used for the promotion of women's participation in rural development?
- What are the most promising practices to combat the persistent obstacles in achieving the targets of gender parity in primary, secondary and tertiary education?
- What should member governments, AU and UN agencies do to increase access to treatment to meet the treatment gap, especially the gender treatment gap? What specific actions should each of the partners (member governments, AU and UN agencies) take to accelerate scale up of access to prevention, treatment, care and support and ensure gender equity in access to services?
- What can member governments, AU, AfDB and UN agencies do to overcome the challenges hampering progress towards gender equality in health and in reproductive health?
- What do member governments, AU and UN agencies need to do in order to address critical issues for women in relation to development of suitable and affordable technologies for water, and sanitation at national and local levels? As an example, how can the infrastructure be improved to ensure access of water and sanitation to women?
- What practical steps can member governments; AU and UN agencies take to translate the lessons learned and good practices into scaled up policies and programs that promote greater participation of women in peace building processes?
- How can member governments, AU, AfDB and UN agencies overcome the gaps and challenges in engendering policies and programs on sustainable development and climate change?
- Which gender sensitive policies to address the food crisis should be put in place by member governments, AU, AfDB and UN agencies? What practical steps need to be taken at the three levels to get the policies into place and to support implementation?

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