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**Preliminary Assessment Report on:  
POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

**The sixth African regional conference on women  
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PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT REPORT ON:  
***Political Empowerment of Women***

By

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**September, 1999**

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## **ACCRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS:**

ACW	African Center for Women
AWLI	African Women Leadership Institute
AMwA	Akina Mama wa Afrika
AAWORD	Association of Women in Research and Development
CILIC	Civil Liberties Committee
DFID	Department of Foreign and International Development
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
E.U.	European Union
FWODE	Forum for Women in Development
FWCW	Fourth World Conference on Women
GABLE	Girls Attainment of Basic Literacy and Education
GAD	Gender and Development
GFC	Gender Focal Point
GIN	Gender Initiative Network
IDEP	Institute for Economic Development and Planning
MWYC	Ministry of Women, Youth and Community Services
MGYCS	Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Services
NCWID	National Committee on Women in Development
NPA	National Plan of Action
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NGP	National Gender Policy
OAU	Organization of African Unity
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
WID	Women in Development
PWC	Parliamentary Women's Caucus

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Empowerment implies the creation of an enabling environment where individuals can fully use their capabilities to take charge of their lives. Empowerment also implies the building or acquiring of capacity to accomplish certain tasks and attain specific goals.

In the arena of women's political empowerment, it is increasingly becoming recognized that women should both empower themselves and 'be empowered'. This relates both to individual (such as increasing individual civic competencies) and collective empowerment (such as networking). Empowerment also involves creating a conducive environment so that women can use these competencies to address the fundamental problems of society at par with their male counterparts.

It follows therefore that building the analytical, political, advocacy, leadership, networking and other competencies of women is just as important or even more important than increasing women's numbers in high policy and decision making bodies and institutions. It can even be argued that these qualitative factors provide the foundation for *sustainable* improvements in the position of women. Otherwise, legislative or constitutional mandates (or any other situations where the existing male dominated power structures are *required* to 'do favours' for women -- for instance by appointing them to the cabinet) may merely result in tokenism, manipulation and unsustainable representation.

The achievements of the Beijing Platform should therefore be judged both on the non-quantifiable aspects of women's empowerment (e.g. increased abilities/capacities of women to enter into political leadership or to create radical/revolutionary reversals in the flow of political power) and the numbers of women in positions of power and decision making. Moreover, indicators of true empowerment should show that increasingly women are breaking the traditional boundaries and stereo-types -- for instance taking up ministerial positions in previously male-dominated sectors such as defense, finance and foreign affairs. The reverse should also be true, for instance appointing men to positions previously viewed as women's concern such as women's affairs, children and community services.

This paper assesses the achievements of governments and United Nations agencies in the area of *Women in Power and Decision Making*. Interviews and documentary surveys were carried out to establish the following: the amount of resources (human, financial) allocated to political empowerment of women; statistical information depicting the status of women in the area of political empowerment; conferences/meetings and consultations that have been organized at national, regional and international levels as a follow-up to the Beijing Conference; recommendations that have come out of these fora; mechanisms that have been set up to monitor progress in the political empowerment of women; the major constraints or challenges for the political empowerment of women; and mechanisms and procedures that have been established to mobilize resources for the political empowerment of women.

## 2.0 THE BEIJING PLATFORM: WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

Before the Beijing Conference, it was evident that women played only a small role in the power and decision making structures in their countries. A report by the UN Department of Public Information showed that by mid-1989 the countries with the highest numbers of women in cabinet and legislative assemblies were Norway, Sweden, Bhutan, Cuba and Romania.<sup>1</sup> The same report noted that the extent of progress in empowering women had nothing to do with a country's level of development. It noted that the most significant reason why women were not as well represented as men in positions of power and decision-making was because *they were not put forward as candidates* for such posts. In cases where women were put forward as candidates, the evidence showed that they were more likely to be elected than their male counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, since women were not well represented in the executive bodies of political parties, trade unions and other bodies, they were not visible enough to be put forward as candidates for positions of power such as cabinet ministers and members of parliament. The report also noted that women were better represented in legislative bodies at *local levels*. A goal of the Beijing Platform was to reverse the situation of women by creating strategies to ensure equal representation of women at all levels.

In the Platform, issues of *political empowerment of women* are covered in Theme G: *Women in Power and Decision-Making* whose goals (G.1 and G.2) and strategies are outlined below.

### 2.1 Strategic Goal G.1

***“Take measures to ensure women’s access to and full participation in power structures and decision making”***

Governments committed themselves to:

- a) Establish the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees, public bodies and the Judiciary through, among other measures, setting up specific targets and implementing measures to increase the number of women in these bodies, including affirmative action where necessary;
- b) Encourage political parties to integrate women in elected or non-elected positions to reflect same proportions and levels as men;
- c) Institute measures to protect and promote women’s equal rights with men, freedom of association and representation in political parties and trade unions;
- d) Review electoral systems with the aim of removing any differential impact on women;

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, United Nations Focus: *“Women in Politics: Still the Exception?”*, November 1989

<sup>2</sup> This presupposes a situation where everything is free and fair and the democratic culture and environment is tolerant towards women candidates.

- e) Continuous monitoring and regular evaluations of progress in the efforts to increase the representation of women in decision making positions but also all other levels of employment. Quantitative gender disaggregated data to be published regularly to show the levels of men and women employed in the public and private sectors with a view to ensuring women's full representation in employment. Indigenous women's participation to receive special focus;
- f) Support NGOs and research institutions which work to enhance women's participation, empowerment and decision-making environment;
- g) Ensure that government funded organizations adopt non-discriminatory employment policies;
- h) Take measures to ensure shared work and parental responsibilities within families aimed at ensuring reconciliation of family and professional life for women;
- i) Ensure gender balance in nominating, appointing or electing candidates to United Nations bodies, agencies and organizations particularly at senior levels.

Political parties would:

- a) Examine and take measures to ensure that the party *structure* does not discriminate against women directly or indirectly;
- b) Develop initiatives to ensure women's participation in all internal policy-making structures and appointive and elective processes;
- c) Incorporate gender issues in their political agenda and ensure that women participate in leadership on equal basis with men.

All stakeholders in each country including sub-regional, regional and international bodies would:

- a) Build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions;
- b) Create or strengthen mechanisms to monitor women's access to senior levels of decision-making;
- c) Review the criteria for recruitment and appointment to advisory, decision-making and senior positions to ensure relevance and to remove all obstacles to women's participation;
- d) Encourage NGOs, private sector, trade unions to achieve equality of men and women in their ranks including in decision-making bodies and all negotiations;
- e) Develop communication strategies to promote public debate on the new roles of women and men in society and the family;
- f) Restructure recruitment and career planning/development programmes to ensure that women (especially the young) have equal access to training (including on the job), job counseling and mentoring/coaching in order to advance their careers in leadership, managerial and decision-making positions;
- g) Encourage and support women's NGOs participation in UN conferences and their preparatory processes and have gender balanced composition of delegations to UN and other international fora.

The United Nations pledged to:

- a) Implement existing and adopt new employment policies and measures to achieve overall gender equality, particularly at the Professional level and above by the year 2000, giving due regard to the requirement to recruit from as broad a geographic basis as possible, in conformity with article 101 paragraph 3 of the Charter of the United Nations;
- b) Develop mechanisms to nominate women candidates for appointment to senior positions in the United Nations system;
- c) Continue to collect and disseminate quantitative and qualitative data on women and men in decision making and analyze their differential impact on decision making;
- d) Monitor progress towards achieving the Secretary General's target of having women hold 50 per cent of managerial and decision-making positions by the year 2000.

For women's organizations and others the objectives were to:

- a) Build and strengthen solidarity among women through information, education and sensitization activities;
- b) Advocate at all levels to enable women to influence political, economic and social decisions, processes and systems, and seek accountability from elected representatives on their commitment to gender concerns;
- c) Establish, consistent with data protection legislation, databases on women and their qualifications for use in appointing women to senior decision-making and advisory positions, for dissemination to Governments, regional and international organizations and private enterprises, political parties and relevant bodies.

## **2.2 Strategic Goal G.2**

*"Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership."*

Governments and all other stakeholders in the country including sub-regional, regional and international bodies would:

- a) Provide leadership and self-esteem training to assist women and girls, particularly those with special needs e.g. women with disabilities or belonging to racial/ethnic minorities, to strengthen their self-esteem and enable them take decision-making positions;
- b) Have transparent criteria for decision-making positions and ensure that the selecting bodies have a gender balanced composition;
- c) Create a system of mentoring for inexperienced women and, in particular, offer training in leadership, public speaking, self-assertion, campaigning etc;
- d) Provide gender-sensitive training for women and men to promote non-discriminatory working relationships and respect for diversity in work and management styles;
- e) Develop mechanisms and training to encourage women to participate in the electoral process, political activities and other leadership areas.



## 2.3 Commitments by the UN System

Immediately following the Conference the UN sought to spur the global implementation of the Platform for Action through all its agencies. In its resolution 1996/34, the Economic and Social Council endorsed the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, and called for a mid-term review, which was to be undertaken by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-second session, in 1998.

*The plan was formulated at the end of 1995 pursuant to a decision of the Commission on the Status of Women. It was structured around the 12 critical areas of concern contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action ...It was also formulated to reflect relevant mandates from other recent United Nations conferences and summits. Activities were clustered under each critical area according to a typology of action, i.e., information collection and database development; research and analysis; operational activities, including advisory services, technical assistance and training; and public outreach and information dissemination. The plan largely addressed activities targeted to women but also included gender-responsive activities that were planned as part of mainstream programmes and projects.<sup>3</sup>*

The theme of *women empowerment* and enhancing their presence in power and decision-making positions was at the heart of UN priorities within the UN system itself and beyond. The UN committed to ensure that 50% of its decision-making positions would be taken up by women by the year 2000; to appoint more women as special representatives and envoys; to ensure accountability of individual managers for implementing the strategic plan in their areas of responsibility; to continue work to create a gender-sensitive environment; and to enable the Focal Points for Women effectively to monitor and facilitate progress in the implementation of the strategic plan.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Council E/CN.6/1998/3, Commission on the Status of Women, *Mid-term review of the implementation of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001*, 6 January 1998

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women, 42<sup>nd</sup> Session, E/CN.6/1998/1, p.5

### 3.0 EVALUATION OF PROGRESS MADE SO FAR

#### 3.1 African Regional Commitments and Achievements

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) committed itself to the Dakar Platform for Action through a Declaration of African Heads of State on June 28, 1995. This Platform, which was also developed in preparation for the Beijing Conference, expresses similar concerns as the Beijing Platform for Action. Among the 11 concerns raised in the Dakar Platform and therefore the Declaration by Heads of African States, was the issue of *political empowerment of women*. In the Declaration, it was noted that "...no African regional organization has appointed women to the top echelons of their hierarchy." This signifies the extent of lack of women empowerment in regional bodies besides the national bodies of policy and decision making.

The proposed actions to be taken for the empowerment of women were:

- a) Establishment of mechanisms at community and society levels to strengthen chances for women's full and equal participation and equitable representation in the political processes, power structures and decision making, and enable women to articulate their concerns and needs;
- b) Adopting specific measures to improve women's economic status e.g. ability to earn income beyond traditional occupations, achieve economic self-reliance and ensure women's access to the labour market and social security systems;
- c) Affirmative action and other measures to redress past and present imbalances between men and women;
- d) Mobilizing and sensitizing men and women and all NGOs, political parties, trade unions etc. to encourage, support and promote women at all levels in political careers and other leadership positions – making sure to select only those fully committed to promoting women's interests;
- e) Enacting and enforcing legislation to promote and protect the status, rights and well-being of women with disabilities to ensure their effective representation in decision-making;
- f) Governments to ensure that at least 35 per cent of the decision-making positions in key ministries (defense, finance, economic planning, education, health, foreign affairs etc.) are taken up by women;
- g) Providing information and training to motivate women to participate in political process. Pressure groups, political parties should encourage women in elections and competitive leadership situations;
- h) Correcting the low representation of women in decision-making positions the regional level and in the UN system;
- i) Instituting measures to ensure equal participation of women in decision-making at the community level;
- j) Parliamentarians, politicians and all concerned institutions urged to promote and implement the Plan of Action adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to address the disparities between men and women in political life.

### 3.1.1 General Overview on Progress

“Africa’s regional average representation of women in national legislative assemblies stands at 11 per cent reflecting little progress in achieving the 30% target of women in decision-making positions by 1995 set by the UN Economic and Social Council”<sup>5</sup>

In evaluating progress, questions must be raised as to what governments, national machineries, political parties, trade unions, cooperating development partners and other stakeholders have done to increase women in positions of power and decision making. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) document noted the continuing under-representation of women at most levels of government in spite of the movement towards democracy everywhere. This was also in spite of the UN Economic and Social Council’s target of having at least 30% of positions in power and decision-making taken up by women by 1995. The document noted that globally “...only 10% of the members of legislative bodies and a lower percentage of ministerial positions...” were held by women at the time.

In the post-Beijing/Dakar period, there seems to be growing consensus that progress in advancing the status of women is still slow. The Internet-based *WomenWatch Global Discussion Forum on Beijing+5*, solicited views, opinions and statistics across the globe, including Africa, to assess progress in the 12 themes of the Beijing Platform for Action. The discussions regarding the *women empowerment* theme were conducted through the *Women-Power Working Group*.<sup>6</sup> Some of the key themes addressed by the members of this Working Group were: progress attained since 1995; women in office addressing gender issues; impact of affirmative action/quotas; obstacles to strengthening women in decision-making roles; establishing partnerships and coalitions.

In general, the discussions indicated that there has been progress but it has been slow and sometimes wrought with problems. Some of the highlights of the findings -- statistics, challenges and recommendations -- are as follows:

From a Nigerian contributor the following statements were extracted:<sup>7</sup>

A political agenda for the Nigerian woman was presented to the panel, which was drawing up a new democratic Constitution, requesting at least 30% of elective or appointive posts for women. When the 1999 Constitution was released, the issue was conspicuously omitted. The three main political parties in their various manifestos did not make any commitments either. However, the President promised some form of affirmative action. This has not been reflected in his appointments so far. Of *46 ministers only five* are women (10.8%). Recently, about *106 ambassadors* were nominated and *only seven* were women (6.6%).

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<sup>5</sup> ECA/ACW Achieving Good Governance: the Essential Participation of Women, (40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference Outcome, 1998) p.1

<sup>6</sup> Which run through the months of August/September, 1999

<sup>7</sup> *Italics* not her own.

In Rivers State, the case is said to be especially bad. Nigeria has a three-tier system of Government, i.e. Local, State and Federal. Of the 23 *local government chairpersons* in Rivers State, there is *not even a single woman*. The State Governor is a man and there are *no women* in the 32-member State Assembly.

The National Assembly has 16 members representing Rivers State, *none of whom is a woman*. The two ministers and one special adviser representing Rivers State are men. At the State level of the 16 Commissioners and about five special advisors, only three are women.

The contribution concludes that:

- While little progress has been made since 1995 in increasing women's participation in decision making, many awareness raising campaigns have been carried out;
- The awareness created has forced governments to make some concessions. In the Rivers State Civil Service 8 out of 20 permanent Secretaries are women;
- Affirmative action policies have helped address women's concerns in other sectors. A policy on education exists in Nigeria where for every secondary school (mixed) established by the federal government, an all girls' secondary school will be established. In the eastern states of Nigeria more girls are graduating from secondary schools than boys;
- The main obstacles to women's participation in decision making are varied: cultural/traditional inhibitions -- women are to be seen not heard and women's roles should revolve around taking care of the children and the home; lack of funds; lack of formal education; marginalization by male dominated structures;
- Women in positions of power do not bring up gender issues primarily because most of them have been appointed by men. They therefore toe the male line or remain passive.

Some contributors from Uganda noted that the country's *quotas and affirmative action* policies have ensured that women have to make up at least one-third of any committee and each district selects one woman representative to parliament. This has increased the participation of women in politics and other key positions. Women's participation in decision-making has had an impact on the policies enacted. In one case, a female Junior Minister insisted that the health policy ensure mainstreaming of gender. This focus led to a retreat and the hiring of a consultant specifically responsible for gender issues. As a result, for the first time the governmental policy is addressing issues of violence against women and has proposed that data be disaggregated by gender.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Though experience elsewhere out of Africa, shows the opposite as quoted on the same Web site: "A Working Group member in Colombia wrote that although women may be in office, they are not necessarily speaking with their own voice. The member stated that women are often elected or appointed to office to keep their husband's, father's or brother's dynasty intact and to push his agenda. A member from Argentina reinforced this point with a similar observation. The women chosen to be on the ballots, which are drafted by men, are the "obeyers," i.e., the wives, sisters, or friends of the men drafting the ballots." *Women-Power, Summary of Week SUMMARY 9/6/99-9/10/99*

In Africa as a whole, there seems to be unanimity that some progress has been achieved in the area of women in power and decision making although the pace has been quite slow. The efforts of determined women coupled with sensitization campaigns and increased networking coupled as well as changed political party and national constitutions and legislative frameworks to institute affirmative action and quotas in legislative assemblies have seen positive results in several countries.

More and more countries are at various stages of developing their Gender Policies. Uganda developed its policy in 1997, Malawi has its second and final draft ready for review and the final draft of Kenya's document has been written and is awaiting approval from higher authorities.

UNIFEM has implemented a number of training activities for parliamentary and local election aspirants in lobbying, interpreting and presenting budgets and bills, public speaking, campaign strategies, personal communication and presentation skills. National Machineries have been assisted in strengthening capacity for policy advocacy, coordination and monitoring of programmes for the advancement of women. Women's political caucuses have been formed in Kenya and Nigeria to monitor gender aspects of constitutional reviews and political processes.<sup>9</sup>

A number of organizations are also working at regional level to empower women in various ways. The Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD) utilizes social science knowledge to empower women in various ways, including convening fora where younger women can interact with older role models. Africa Women's Development and Communications Network focuses on knowledge dissemination as a tool for women's empowerment based on the premise that information and knowledge is power.

Other organizations are FOWODE (Forum for Women in Development) in Uganda, the Women's Lobby Group in Zambia and Emang Fasadi in Botswana. All are working to empower women politically and they require capacity building and support.

Namibia, South Africa, Uganda have Constitutions that provide for affirmative action to enhance the numbers of women in policy and decision making positions. In South Africa, 20% of parliamentary seats and 50% of local governing councils' seats are reserved for women. Angola, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe have quota legislation guaranteeing certain numbers of women in legislative assemblies. However, vigilance is still called for to prevent backsliding and political manipulation.<sup>10</sup> So far, six countries in Africa are leading (*star performers*) in terms of women's representation in national assemblies, mainly attributed to affirmative action and quotas, viz.: South Africa 29.3%; Mozambique 25.2%; Seychelles 23.5%; Namibia 22.2%; Uganda 21%.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> UNIFEM: Accountability to the World's Women: Review and Renewal of Commitments to Gender Equality Through Beijing+5 and Dakar+5 Processes, 1999

<sup>10</sup> ECA/ACW 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference Outputs: *Achieving Good Governance: the Essential Participation of Women*, p.2.

<sup>11</sup> Africa Leadership Forum: *Index on the Status of Women in Africa*, 1998, p.28

### 3.1.2 Challenges

Many of the national reports on progress in implementing the Beijing and Dakar Platforms state that progress has been made in empowering women. However, there are issues and problems that need to be addressed before any country can claim to have made *significant* progress in empowering women. The concept of “political empowerment of women”, for instance, needs to be well articulated with clear indicators of empowerment as well as mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation. The numbers of women in policy or decision making institutions cannot be taken to be the *sole* indicator of empowerment of women. There is the real danger that such numbers may have resulted from a manipulated or perverted selection process.<sup>12</sup> The impact of women’s empowerment cannot be measured by the closing of gaps in parliament but by the amount of power and influence they wield towards changing the conditions of women in the whole country – including those in rural areas.

It has been indicated elsewhere that women’s chances for political empowerment are limited by discriminatory practices and attitudes arising from unequal power relationships between men and women. The question is how much progress has been made in removing these obstacles? Have the activities that have been implemented since the Beijing and Dakar Platforms resulted in much noticeable, measurable impact? Anecdotal information and general impressions indicate that limited progress has been made in these areas and that there is a long way to go to remove long-held male dominated practices, attitudes, values, traditions and social, political, economical systems.

A few examples serve to show that any progress is not necessarily positive or sustainable. Uganda is said to be one of those few countries in Africa that have made significant achievements in women’s political empowerment.<sup>13</sup> But more intractable obstacles remain even in such a conducive environment. As one author noted:

*Women's participation is often met with enormous challenges deeply ingrained in traditions and customs that have for a long time constituted societal practices. The belief that women are good as cooks, sex providers and juniors are still persistent. For example, in the cabinet women are given ministries which are considered useless*

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<sup>12</sup> Politics on the African continent, and indeed elsewhere, is usually full of manipulation, lip service and short-term horizons predominated by the need to serve men’s interests. In such a situation, quotas, affirmative actions etc. may not guarantee genuine participation and empowerment of women. Female cabinet ministers, election candidates, and others selected to fill public posts may be chosen with ulterior motives for serving a male-dominated patriarchal system. Care should be taken to ensure that those who go into positions of power and decision-making truly represent the interests of women and not their own short-term interests or those of their male patrons. Indicators need to be developed also to monitor and periodically evaluate the caliber, interests and vision of those the system is putting into the positions of power.

<sup>13</sup> Starting with being the only country in Africa with a woman Vice President to women’s quotas for public offices, affirmative action at all levels, around 40 women in parliament, one third of local government positions reserved for women, etc.

*to the economy, and therefore, not so demanding. This simply is to prove the point that women cannot take on hectic jobs.<sup>14</sup>*

This author goes on to observe that there are only 6 women cabinet ministers in Uganda and they occupy 'silent' ministry posts "that are considered not of utmost importance." There are altogether 35 state ministers out of whom only 11 are women meaning that out of the total of 66 ministers in Uganda less than one third are women.

Addressing the General Assembly 53<sup>rd</sup> Session Item 103/104 on Advancement of women and Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Ms Angela King, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women noted:

*However, we have a long way to go to meet the challenges of the Platform for Action. This is especially so in light of current global realities characterized by a financial crisis that is substantially reducing national incomes and growth in many parts of the world, including Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America... The financial crisis is lowering social indicators in affected countries. It is threatening many others, including those considered the richest and most powerful. It is crucial for us to focus on the gender dimensions of the consequences of the current crisis, as well as of globalization in general.*

Members of the **Women-Power Working Group** identified several challenges for women entering into positions of power and decision making in Africa, and elsewhere. These include: the lack of training and preparation for working in the political arena; offices that focus on women are being demoted to lower ranks in public administration and thus are placed at a higher risk for cutbacks; and the primary responsibility that women must fulfil for their homes and families (without greater involvement of men in household labour (including childcare), any outside responsibilities, such as involvement in politics represent additional burdens for women).

Another obstacle in the political system is the "glass-ceiling" that keeps women from reaching positions of significant decision-making power. Members also mentioned that women often feel that they are in the minority, and that the cultural expectation is that women will be, and should be, silenced simply because they are women.<sup>15</sup>

Severely declining economies and the debt burden for most of the African countries have reduced available resources for all development initiatives including women and gender in development programmes. The downsizing and reforming of public services has also seen the removal or merger of departments and ministries, including those addressing

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<sup>14</sup> Amongi Betty Ongom, *Women's Political Participation in Uganda*, (Women-Power, a Web-based discussion group by WomenWatch, United Nations, September 11, 1999)

<sup>15</sup> Women-Power, *SUMMARY 9/6/99-9/10/99*, 16 Sep 1999 14:32:41 -0700

women's affairs. Some cultural and religious beliefs continue to pose a major deterrent to progress especially since these factors will take generations to change. New and more ingenious strategies need to be created for this intractable challenge.

The “*star performers*” above do experience challenges that need further attention. For instance in South Africa women experience conflict between work and domestic responsibilities; certain processes in Parliament still need to be made gender sensitive; many women still feel that they lack the skills for dealing with Parliament.<sup>16</sup>

### **3.2 Sub-Regional Commitments and Achievements**

The Southern Africa Development Community, SADC, provides an example of the institutionalization of the Beijing and Dakar Platforms at sub-regional level. The SADC Declaration on Gender and Development by Heads of State reaffirms the sub-region's commitment to the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, the African Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The Declaration endorses SADC's decision to establish a *policy framework* for mainstreaming gender in all SADC activities; putting in place an *institutional framework* for advancing gender equality (including establishment of Gender Focal Points (GFPs) in all sectoral initiatives, an Advisory Committee and a Gender Unit). The Declaration has an addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children with proposed legal, social, economic, cultural and political strategies to tackle this “strongly condemned” phenomenon.

Although the above commitments serve to empower women and improve their status, SADC has also made a direct commitment ensure that women occupy 30% of positions in power and decision-making.

#### **3.2.1 Progress**

The SADC Gender Monitor is a landmark achievement for the SADC region. It serves as a tool for monitoring and publicizing implementation and achievements of the SADC commitments. The first issue of the Monitor highlights the successes that have been made so far in women's empowerment.<sup>17</sup> Angola for instance has appointed well-qualified women to the positions of Cabinet Ministers in Petroleum and Fisheries while at least 7 countries – Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe – have identified women in power and decision making as one area of priority.

Affirmative action and quotas have also been introduced in Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

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<sup>16</sup> Republic of South Africa, The First south African Report: Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women,

<sup>17</sup> SARDC, *SADC Gender Monitor*, Issue #1, February 1999



The SADC countries have also finalized action plans concentrating on certain priority areas and implementation has started. "Where there is stronger partnership with the non-governmental sector – such as in Botswana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa, the environment for promotion of gender equality is enhanced" (SADC Gender Monitor p.11).

Gender awareness in general is increasing in the sub-region and actions are being implemented by various actors, sometimes in uncoordinated fashion, to enhance the empowerment of women. There has been an increase in NGOs dealing with women's issues and networks are forming to enhance the capacity of national machineries for empowering women. Regional offices of international agencies such as UNESCO are making efforts to enhance empowerment. One activity is the training of parliamentarians in Malawi jointly sponsored with UNDP and undertaken by the University of Malawi. The training programme, which comprises several phases, was started at the request of the Women's Caucus in Parliament.

### **3.2. 2 Challenges/Constraints**

Despite the progress made in some sectors, women are still largely invisible in the key decision-making positions of academia, judiciary, financial institutions, parastatal bodies and their governing boards, and the private sector. Quotas and affirmative action provisions need to be enforced in these areas. It is also crucial for the SADC countries to tackle the structural problems that keep women out of power and decision making. Women's skills, competencies and personal empowerment in all spheres of life need to be increased if they are to effectively assume positions in power and decision making.<sup>18</sup>

Inadequate support of family and political parties also prevents women from taking up positions of power and has to be dealt with. NGOs which try to help women in this area have little capacity and are too dependent on outside donors. This negatively affects empowerment and building of effective institutions for women's advancement.

The problem of balancing between their personal and professional lives remains a major challenge for women. Sacrifices, major risks and serious challenges abound on either front especially when spousal, family and societal encouragement and support are absent.

In West Africa, the ACW/ECA follow up meeting in 1997 noted a number of institutional constraints to women's empowerment. These include: conflicts and absence of peace; poor formulation and monitoring of plans; low status of structures responsible for the advancement of women and lack of clear definition of their mandate; and lack of political will to enact changes.

Technical and financial constraints were also identified. These include: ineffective coordination and cooperation among the various actors in the planning and

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<sup>18</sup> Empowerment of women within the domestic arena, so that they can take up public and private sector positions, still remains a major challenge in the sub-region.

implementation of plans for action; ineffective distribution of responsibilities in the implementation of action plans; existence of several other sectoral plans of action and lack of coherence between them and the national plans of action; insufficient gender disaggregated data; low capacity in gender related planning; lack of vision with regard to social issues when formulating national plans of action; insufficient consultation and grassroots participation in planning of national action plans; inadequate sources of information; inadequate financial resources and inability to mobilize funds.

### **3.3 National Level Commitments & Achievements**

The main commitment made at the national level by most African countries has been to endorse Beijing and Dakar Platforms for Action and to adapt these, mostly through participatory processes, into national plans for action and gender policies. In addition, by acceding to CEDAW without reservations (or with few reservations) most countries have demonstrated a level of national commitment to raising the status of women and increasing their presence in power and decision making. The following examples, from the four African sub-regions, serve to illustrate these commitments and the progress achieved as well as the challenges and constraints that countries continue to face.

#### **3.3.1 Southern African Sub-Region**

*South Africa* has developed a national action plan for implementing the Beijing and Dakar Platforms. The plan considers women and violence as a top theme alongside economic empowerment and health, poverty and education. The ruling African National Congress has committed itself to affirmative action by reserving 30% of parliamentary seats and 50% of local government seats for women. It has also pledged to implement CEDAW without reservation. As a result, South Africa has the highest representation of women in the national assembly on the African continent; 19% of local government elected representatives in 1995 elections were women and 14% of positions at executive level are held by women; 13% of foreign heads of mission are women. Some of the problems faced are highlighted in section 3.1.2.

After *Namibia's* elections in 1998, 15 women out of the 78 legislators in the Parliament were elected,<sup>19</sup> amounting to about 19.2 %. While this signified a reduction from the previous elections there was, however, some improvement at local level.

Namibia has implemented quotas for its 11 local councils at regional and local levels. In the 1998 election, 158 or 40% of the 397 filled seats were taken by women. These positions were distributed as follows: one Regional Governor (out of 13), 136 local councillors (out of 329), five mayors (out of 28), and 16 deputy mayors (out of 27).

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<sup>19</sup> Republic of Namibia, Department of Women Affairs, *Namibia National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action*, July 1999, p.69

The Namibian report concludes that:

Even though women constitute the bigger part of the population fewer women than men have been elected to positions of decision making. It can be said that affirmative action provisions have not necessarily served to help individual women get political experience. Maybe it is possible that women who were Local Authority Councillors in the past election could have moved to on to higher posts.<sup>20</sup>

The constraints cited in Namibia's case are: human, material and financial shortages -- making all programmes heavily donor-dependent; lack of adequate research to make informed decisions; the burden of HIV/AIDS; lack of a specific gender budget; and lack of readily accessible credit systems for women.

In many countries there has also been an increase in NGOs dealing with women's political empowerment.

In *Malawi*, the national machinery worked fervently to put more women into power in the 1999 elections. There are such organizations as Women's Voice and the Association of Malawian Professional Women working for women's empowerment. The National Democratic Institute (NDI), an American funded body, has been conducting training programmes for aspiring women parliamentarians for the 1999 presidential and general elections. It is also targeting women aspirants for the upcoming local government elections. The Parliamentary Women's Caucus (PWC) is also behind many activities for women's empowerment such as encouraging other women to stand for elections.

The emphasis on civic and voter education specifically targeted at women has resulted in 16 women (2 going as independents) entering the 193 seat National Assembly. This was an improvement from the previous 9 out of 177 seats for women after the 1994 general elections. However it still falls short of the targeted 30 per cent of seats for women as stipulated in the SADC Protocol<sup>21</sup>.

In addition, Malawi's Constitutional Review process specifically looked into ways of enhancing equality between men and women, which resulted in proposals to review relevant legislation, some of which have now been amended, e.g. the Wills and Inheritance Act. Work is in progress to review all other legislation that is biased against women.

The GABLE (Girls Attainment of Basic Literacy and Education) project funded by USAID has also successfully managed to change some policies -- for instance girls who get pregnant at school are allowed to return to their studies after delivery.

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.70

<sup>21</sup> and falls short of the desire to have 25 women in Parliament (as noted by the Executive Director of CILIC in the Nation of August 14-15, 1999 p.3)

The second (and probably the final) Draft of the National Gender Policy is now under review.

UNDP's civic education project claims to have resulted in a 60% increase in women's participation in decision-making positions especially in the boards of parastatals with a number of women becoming appointed as board chairpersons. However progress is slower in the civil service. Within the UNDP itself, the target for achieving a 50-50 sharing of posts between men and women has been set for 2003. The organization claims, however, that presently women make up about 75% of the management cadre and the new Resident Representative is a woman.

In *Botswana*, public perception of gender equality and advancement of women has significantly improved. However, "...as of the last election there are 40 males as opposed to only 4 females in Parliament whilst in Cabinet there are 13 males in comparison with 3 females. The public service is no exception to this scenario."<sup>22</sup>

As in many other African countries, the status of women has improved with increased awareness of gender issues at various levels of society. Steps are also being taken to integrate gender concerns in policies, programmes and projects.

One constraint is the continued existence of laws and practices that discriminate against women, in spite of the equality provisions of Constitution. The National Machinery is also new and therefore lacking in adequate finances and staff with the required skills. Sometimes it is difficult to prioritize and the lack of a decentralized system hampers at district and community levels. In addition, there is a tendency to view women's issues as the exclusive responsibility of the National Women's machinery with the result that other departments view gender issues as secondary to their primary roles and responsibilities.

In *Swaziland* it is noted that "there has been a slight improvement in the area of participation of women in decision making." Sensitization campaigns on power sharing are said to have progressed very well, however.

As in other African countries, Swaziland consider the following as obstacles to women's empowerment: the patriarchal structure of society; socialization and culture; lack of support systems; lack of research; and lack of a well formulated gender policy.

### **3.3.2 Eastern African Sub-Region**

*Uganda's* priorities are poverty, income generation and economic empowerment; reproductive health and rights; legal framework and decision making; the girl child and education. Although women in power and decision making is not specifically mentioned as a priority area, some progress has been made as witnessed by the commitment to affirmative action and quotas in elected bodies at national and local levels. The achievements and obstacles for Uganda have been mentioned in preceding sections.

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<sup>22</sup> Botswana Country Report

*Seychelles* has nine critical areas for action and *Women in Power and Decision-Making* is *explicitly* mentioned. It is reported further that 5% of managers in the parastatal sector are women and 65% of those currently being trained in management skills are women. *Seychelles* is one of the countries indicated above as having high representation of women in national assembly.

In *Kenya*, the current Parliament has 4.2% of the 222 elected seats taken up by women compared to 3.2% in 1991. However, more women have been nominated (42% of total nominations) than in 1992 (only 8%). Women form 23% of staff in public administration as compared to 21% in 1992. The number of women in the Judiciary has risen from 25% in 1992 to 30% 1998. Women currently occupy 8% of seats in local authorities; 6% of ambassadors and high commissioners are women (compared to 3% in 1992); 13% of principal secretaries and 16% of deputy secretaries (compared to 6% and 8% respectively in 1992). "It is also worth noting that more women judges (commissioners of assize) have been appointed since May 1999."<sup>23</sup>

It is difficult to assess which of these improvements are the direct result of Beijing Platform activities since the base year of comparison is 1992 while the Beijing Platform was developed in 1995. Some noted constraints in Kenya were the slow progress of the constitutional review process, insufficient funds to cover rural areas, limited coverage in the media of successful women and low circulation of posters.

### 3.3.3 West African Sub-Region

The ACW/ECA follow up meeting for West Africa which took place in Dakar, Senegal, 25-27 November, 1997 noted progress in the sub-region as follows:

*There was an appreciable increase in the number of women in decision-making and power-management. Mali, for example, has 6 ministers; Gambia has a woman vice-president; portfolios for the ministries of Interior, Education, Justice, Industry, Scientific Research, Tourism and Culture, Environment, etc. hitherto occupied by men are currently being offered to women...most...countries had adopted their Plans for action...priority areas identified (included) women's human rights... women's participation in decision-making bodies.*<sup>24</sup>

*Ghana's* platform for Action has **seven** priority areas of which *Women in Power and Decision-Making* is *explicitly mentioned*. Noted achievements include a 15 year Plan to implement the Beijing Platform; a committee constituted under the First Lady of Ghana, Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings, which seeks affirmative action through a 40% quota representation of women in policy making bodies; a system being put in place starting at the highest levels to implement the affirmative actions including monitoring of progress;

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<sup>23</sup> Kenya report

<sup>24</sup> ACW/ECA Sub-Regional Follow up Meeting on Implementation of African Platform for Action for West Africa, Dakar, Senegal, 25-27 November, 1997, 7

development of a gender policy document and a strategy framework; and sector specific gender policy documents for agriculture, education and trade unions. Appropriate laws (for example customary registration and divorce laws) have also been passed which provide one standard form of inheritance. Also under review is legislation that regulates distribution of marital property upon divorce.

The number of women in Parliament has increased from 16 to 18 out of 200 – a modest increase. There is a Women in Public Life Project which has undertaken a number of tasks including: conducting a major research on the situation of women in decision making; developing training needs; and disseminating research findings to various institutions and government. A documentation center has been set up and a management information system will be set up to further disseminate gender and development data. In addition, a directory of women in decision making is being developed as well as one on women with leadership qualities at grassroots level.

In Ghana, obstacles encountered include inadequate financial, human and material resources. There is also an over-dependence on the expertise of NGO staff as well as negative societal attitudes and perceptions about the roles of men and women.

### **3.3.4 North Africa Sub-region**

In Egypt, there are 9 women in a Parliament of 454 (2.2%); 2 women in a cabinet of 23 (8%); 22 women out of 360 local authorities (6.1%) and women account for 5.7% of the Senate. Among the major obstacles faced are difficulties implementing legislation that challenges religious forces; effects of economic liberalization/structural adjustment policies and programmes. NGOs also claim that they were not consulted in formulation of women's policies.<sup>25</sup>

## **3.4 The UN System**

### **3.4.1 Commitments and Achievements**

The Inter-Agency Committee for Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE) was created specifically to ensure implementation by monitoring activities to ensure that the goals and objectives of *women in power and decision-making* were fulfilled. Furthermore, the general Assembly mandated the *Commission on the Status of Women* to integrate into its work programme a follow-up process to the Beijing Conference, in which the Commission should play a catalytic role, regularly reviewing the critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action – including women in power and decision making.

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<sup>25</sup> WEDO, Mapping Progress, *op. cit.*, p.67

The UN strategic plan was still under implementation when the mid-term review was being conducted. However, the following excerpt provides a general indication of some activities accomplished in *women in power and decision-making*:

The Platform for Action and in turn the plan both place new importance on the critical area "Women in power and decision-making". In this critical area, the United Nations system has focused on the importance of increasing the number of women in decision-making positions at all levels and in various sectors, strengthening the role of women parliamentarians, leadership and management training, and researching issues of women's empowerment and honouring significant women role models. Support has been given to women's organizations to empower women, particularly at the community level.<sup>26</sup>

Internally, the UN system itself has made some headway in efforts to increase the number of women in positions of power and decision-making. Starting from the goal of 50/50 gender distribution by the year 2000 in all UN agencies at national, regional and international levels, initiatives have been undertaken to improve the balance of men and women in the system.

Data from the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) show that generally the situation is improving in all the UN agencies, organs, funds and programmes. For example, recruitment of women at the senior levels (p-5 and above) accounted for 4.8% of all recruitment compared to 2.6% in 1993. However, progress seems to be slow and there is still a long way to go towards parity especially at the highest echelons of the system. For example, about half of the professional level women are at P-3 level and below; women hold only 20% of the system's geographical posts at the P-5 level and above; as the grade levels increase, the number of women thins out.<sup>27</sup>

Concern is raised regarding slow progress in achieving the 50/50 requirement by 2000. At the current rate of progress, this goal may not be reached until 2013 for *geographical* posts and 2018 for *non-geographical* posts.<sup>28</sup> Among other things, the position of women in the UN system can be improved through: top level commitment; policy development – including establishment of focal points and on-going revision of targets; expanding recruitment sources; facilitating work/life balance; enhancing the working environment; follow-up mechanisms.<sup>29</sup> These are on going initiatives that have already shown results and there are other new initiatives being created all the time.

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<sup>26</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Council E/CN.6/1998/3, Commission on the Status of Women, Mid-term review of the implementation of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, 6 January 1998

<sup>27</sup> UN, International Civil Service Commission (ICSA), Gender Balance in the United Nations Common System: Progress, Prognosis, Prescriptions, December 1998

<sup>28</sup> Geographical posts rose by less than 1% per year between 1984 and 1996 while non-geographical posts rose by less than half a percentage point. (ICSC, *op. cit.*, p.8)

<sup>29</sup> ICSC, *op. cit.*, p.8

### **3.4.2 Challenges/Constraints**

Globally, the UN strategic plan and implementation of the Beijing Platform faced the following challenges/constraints: lack of data and of methodologies and indicators for monitoring progress; lack of tools for tracking expenditures for cross-sectoral activities, at both headquarters and field levels; inadequate human and financial resources; low levels of commitment, both politically in some countries and at the level of management in some agencies of the United Nations system; cultural and other constraints; and delays in delivery of technical assistance.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*,



## **4.0 RESOURCES**

### **4.1 Regional**

Since 1996, the ACW has received greater support and pledges to enhance its capacity to service ECA internally and member countries in gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. The new programme for the Center is contained in its strategic plan for 2000 – 20005 which aims at assisting members countries (as well as other Divisions in ECA) with information, tools and advice on how to mainstream gender into programmes, policies, projects and laws. ACW also intends to assist with advocacy, networking, training and coordination to facilitate the advancement of women in Africa at regional, sub-regional and national levels.

A major constraint for the Center is lack of the necessary capacity to achieve these goals. The regular budget for the Center is limited, amounting to not more than USD2 million per year. Extra budgetary sources are targeted to fund certain activities but success in such fundraising will depend on the image that the Center can portray and how it delivers on its current programme. Poor performance can lead to a vicious circle of poor image, lack of donor confidence reduced funds and hence a poor image.

In terms of human resources, there are currently only five professional staff at the ACW<sup>31</sup> which seriously limits its ability to carry out its work. ACW has had to rely heavily on external consultants but this is only a short-term solution. There are two Regional Advisors on economic empowerment and empowerment and human rights but their mandate to service the entire African region leaves them with little time for ACW internal work.

ACW's work-load will be made lighter when the new initiative to revive ECA's Sub-Regional Development Centers (SRDCs) is completed since gender mainstreaming and other ACW services for advancement of women will be decentralized thereby creating some space for ACW to concentrate on more global issues.

### **4.2 Sub-regional**

SADC has committed resources to gender issues especially through its gender unit and the other institutional arrangements and sectoral gender focal points. UNIFEM, UNESCO, UNDP, US-NDI and other agencies have funded programmes on women empowerment but the amounts are not easily disaggregated from their overall budgetary figures.

### **4.3 National:**

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<sup>31</sup> A Director and four staff at P2, P3, P5 levels and one research assistant.

In general, it is difficult to assess the financial and human resources that have been specifically allocated to the theme of *political empowerment of women*. Most countries provide only general information on funds and personnel allocated to programmes or projects for the advancement of women encompassing all the concerns from Beijing.

According to a UNDP source in *Malawi*, it is difficult to disaggregate financial resources used for empowerment and institutional mechanisms. UNDP engages in capacity building activities (which means empowerment by increasing capacity of institutions to address gender issues across the board). The overall budget for the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality Project is US\$1.3 million. There is also a Democracy Consolidation Project with US\$1.9 million from UNDP alone and a Human Rights project with US\$695,000.00. Both have gender components not disaggregated. Altogether the UNDP has at least 5 people working on gender issues.

However, according to a Government source in the Ministry of Gender and, Youth and Community Services, quite a substantial amount of money comes through donor assistance amounting to about MK200 million excluding the Government's allocation of about MK18 million and the USAID Quality Education programme for girls.

Similarly in *Botswana*, the Women's Affairs Department (WAD) has been mandated to coordinate all issues relating to women including equality and advancement. Few other departments have a budget allocation for women's programmes and therefore the WAD finds itself sponsoring most of the activities although it operates on a small and inadequate recurrent budget of P6.6 million. In 1998/99 the Ministry and the National Women's Machinery were allocated 5% and 1% of the national budget respectively. Again, it is not clear exactly how much of the resources went into the specific theme of women in power and decision making. Other sponsors of women's programmes are SIDA, UNDP, and UNIFEM.

The *Nigerian* Country Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform also shows blanket figures totaling to an expenditure of 426,308,635.00 Naira without breaking down what was spent on each thematic area.

In *Swaziland*, "the national budget allocated to gender and development has risen 200% from 1998/99 to 1999/2000"<sup>32</sup> and donors such as UN Agencies, DFID, E.U. British Council and others also render assistance.

In *Ghana*, the government committed 215.4 million cedis to the National Plan of Action (NPA) for 1996 and one billion cedis for a rural finance scheme. It is clear that substantial resources have been channeled to the *economic* empowerment of women but no specific amounts are mentioned for *political* empowerment.

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<sup>32</sup> (p.4 National report)

## 5.0 CONFERENCES/WORKSHOPS, STUDIES

### 5.1 Regional

*African Women and Economic Development: Investing in Our Future* was an international conference held during the commemoration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ECA from April 28 to May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998. ***Achieving Good Governance: the Essential Participation of Women*** was one of the four themes of discussions and dialogue between development stakeholders from all walks of life on the African continent. The conference made strategic recommendations for the political empowerment of women as follows:

- ◆ Promoting affirmative action to develop a critical mass of women in leadership positions;
- ◆ Setting up a central fund to assist women who are aspiring for political office;
- ◆ Reviewing and challenging electoral processes and discriminatory practices that hurt women's aspirations to political office;
- ◆ Supporting women public leaders through an active and vibrant women's movement to provide technical support, information, and solidarity;
- ◆ Ensuring economic empowerment of women;
- ◆ Changing oppressive traditional and cultural practices;
- ◆ Promoting alternative leadership through encouraging and acknowledging leadership initiatives by women at all levels of society, and conceptualizing an alternative framework for women's leadership such as the responsible use of power, challenging corruption, promoting a culture of peace and non-violence.

The conference also made some recommendations on women's empowerment in decentralized governance structures as follows:

- ◆ Facilitation of strong political will through creating awareness on gender, training and nurturing an dynamic women's movement;
- ◆ Adequate financial provisions and affirmative action should ensure that women share equally with men in the decentralized offices of power;
- ◆ Monitoring by governments of the number of women that have been empowered by decentralized policies;
- ◆ Training and building the capacity of women at grassroots level to participate in decentralized governance structures.

## **5.2 Sub-Regional**

### **5.2.1 SADC**

The first meeting of SADC ministers of gender/women issues took place in August 1997 to review the SADC Declaration on gender which has an addendum on Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and children – aimed at periodic reporting of successes and failures in initiatives of this issue.

A SADC conference on Women in Politics and decision-making : Beyond 30% in 2005” was held in Botswana in March 1999. One of its major outputs was the adoption of a Regional Programme of Action for Women in Politics and Decision Making in SADC.

### **5.2.2 The African Women’s Leadership Institute (AWLI)**

Set up by the UK-based Pan-African NGO called “Akina Mama wa Afrika” ( AmWA), AWLI is “...a contribution to the post-Beijing process.” It is a regional “networking, information and training forum” targeting mostly women in the 25-40 age category with programmes to enhance critical thinking on gender issues. The Forum is directly linked to Strategic Objective G.2 of the Beijing Action Plan because it was set up to increase the capacity of women to participate in leadership and decision-making.

AWLI held its First Women’s Leadership Forum from February 22<sup>nd</sup> to March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1997. During this period the participants (25 from across Africa) underwent formal training sessions, workshops/lectures and other activities including strategies for future action.

Of relevance to the political empowerment and institutional mechanisms themes were papers presented and discussions conducted on: women’s political participation; education, youth and political empowerment; leadership, personal empowerment and organizational development; women’s human rights; research and representation of African women.

## **5.3 National Level**

In *Malawi*, the Gender Initiative Network (GIN) organized a national forum during the commemoration activities of the International Women’s Day, March 8, 1997. A cross-section of stakeholders (totaling over 1000) participated in the forum and discussed how to put gender issues firmly on the development agenda. Among the themes discussed was women in politics. It was noted that many obstacles prevented women from fully participating in politics and leadership positions. These were identified as: women's reluctance to present themselves as candidates; men's reluctance to support female candidates; women's neglect of the 'cause' once elected into leadership positions; men taking advantage of the lack of solidarity among women to sub-divide them; a focus on

urban, 'elite' women and neglecting the potential support of rural women; and marginalization of women who refuse to succumb to sexual advances of male bosses.

It was noted that, "women who come to positions of power through the 'back-door' become instruments of male domination and oppression of women – and therefore women must reject all back-door and token offers for leadership positions<sup>33</sup>.

A number of recommendations were made to deal with such situations including: solidarity among women and building each others' strengths; pursuing the women's cause by women at decision-making levels; seeking out rural women and developing an understanding of legal provisions and how to use them to advance women's empowerment.

*A Snapshot Survey of Women in Politics in Malawi* (1999) confirms the reality in most of Africa that women are poorly represented in political offices, policy and decision-making positions in the public, private and NGO sectors.

The figures for the percentages of women occupying senior positions in various public offices were as follows: Government ministries and departments --17%; Ministries and departments at district (local) government level -- 14%; Judiciary (magistrates, high court and supreme court) --- 27%; Police force -- 9%; Parliament -- 8% (a modest 3% increase from the previous election); Chief executives of public and private companies --- 7%; and Board members -- 20%. Out of 17 ambassadors and high commissioners representing Malawi in the foreign service only 4 were women.

In *Botswana*, a consultancy was commissioned to develop a comprehensive advocacy and social mobilization strategy for consensus building, resource mobilization and sustained commitment for the National Gender Programme.

In *Swaziland*, a UNFPA funded consultant assisted in developing the National Action Plan and also conducted sensitization workshops.

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<sup>33</sup> (p.26 Taking Beijing Home)

## **6.0 MECHANISMS FOR MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION**

### **6.1 Sub-Regional**

The SADC Gender monitor has been established by the Southern African Research and Documentation Center to monitor implementation of the Beijing Commitments by SADC member states.

Various countries as well as specific projects/programmes are now establishing indicators at macro and micro-levels to monitor effects on gender aspects and gender benchmarks.

### **6.2 National Level**

In *Ghana*, a gender management system to monitor mainstreaming of gender issues in public sector policies is being set up with assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The macro indicators in *Malawi* have been established but are not yet fully operational. Meanwhile, the NCWID has been mandated to keep track of progress through regular meetings, workshops etc. It is hampered, however, by inadequate resources and capacity. In a separate initiative, gender oriented NGOs are setting up their own networks along various themes so as to develop a coordinated system of tracking activities, their outputs and impacts.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

The evidence from most African countries shows that some progress has been made in the area of women's political empowerment, particularly in terms of increased awareness and sensitivity to women's issues at the various levels of society. There is also increased activity in this area by a number of actors and resources are being provided from a growing number of institutions to ensure the economic and political empowerment of women.

It is unfortunately also evident that political empowerment, however defined, has been very slow especially when considered in light of goals or targets set at national, regional and international levels. A lot still needs to be done to increase women's representation in policy and decision-making; to increase the knowledge, skills and dexterity of women in power, policy and decision making; to free women from the overload of work and responsibilities so that they can pursue careers in politics and leadership. There is also need to dismantle gender stereo-types, negative cultural values, oppressive practices and other obstacles that stand in the way of women empowerment. Much work will need to be done to enhance institutional structures and capabilities, institutional memory, organizational and individual zeal to push women's empowerment to new heights. And there is still need to mount the daunting challenge of inadequate financial, human and material resources

Despite these potentially discouraging setbacks, it is important to keep track of efforts that have already been taken to empower women and to build on these efforts. At the moment most countries lack clear monitoring mechanisms for activities being undertaken, the amount of financial and human resources devoted to these activities and their impact. Additionally, the lack of coordination between the government machineries and the NGO community in most countries further compounds this problem and leads to inefficient duplication of efforts.

Women's empowerment requires long term strategies. These include: increasing basic literacy of women especially in civic and political skills, human rights, leadership and other functional skills to enable women participate in politics on the same level as men; changing laws and other policy frameworks to enable women's empowerment and participation in governance structures; increasing awareness and sensitivity of the general population regarding the roles that women already play in society and increasing society's acceptance of women as leaders, heads of households and so on.

In the short-term, political empowerment of women requires strong networking abilities between men and women who are determined to bring about the empowerment of women. Effective advocacy and lobbying strategies<sup>34</sup> are also needed to ensure that more

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<sup>34</sup> It is high time that African's started to create and make effective use of lobbying organizations of all types to push through ideas, proposals, solutions, interests etc. in national and international politics. Women could significantly increase their empowerment through strategic lobbying strategies of the institutions that matter in their empowerment efforts.

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- women attain top decision-making positions as a natural result of their skills and capacity.
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## ANNEX A: WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT AND GOVERNMENT POSITIONS BY COUNTRY

Table 1

Women in parliament as at 1 January 1997

### Africa

Country or area	Single or Lower House			Upper House or Senate		
	Election date	Number of seats	% Women	Election date	Number of seats	% Women
Algeria	05 1994	183	6.6	..	..	..
Angola	09 1992	220	9.5	..	..	..
Benin	03 1995	83	7.2	..	..	..
Botswana	10 1994	47	8.5	..	..	..
Burkina Faso	05 1992	107	3.7	12 1995	176	11.9
Burundi	...	...	...	...	...	...
Cameroon	03 1992	180	12.2	..	..	..
Cape Verde	12 1995	72	11.1	..	..	..
Cent Afr Rep*	09 1993	85	3.5	..	..	..
Chad	04 1993	52	17.3	..	..	..
Comoros	12 1996	43	0.0	..	..	..
Congo	10 1993	125	1.6	10 1996	60	3.3
Côte d'Ivoire	11 1995	168	8.3	..	..	..
DRC**	04 1994	738	5.0	..	..	..
Djibouti	12 1992	65	0.0	..	..	..
Egypt	11 1995	454	2.0	..	..	..
Equ. Guinea	11 1993	80	8.8	..	..	..
Eritrea	02 1994	105	21.0	..	..	..
Ethiopia	05 1995	550	2.0	05 1995	117	...
Gabon	12 1996	120	...	..	..	..
Gambia	...	...	...	...	...	...
Ghana	12 1996	200	...	..	..	..
Guinea	06 1995	114	7.0	..	..	..
Guinea-Bissau	07 1994	100	10.0	..	..	..
Kenya	12 1992	202	3.0	..	..	..
Lesotho	03 1993	65	4.6	05 1993	33	24.2
Liberia	03 1994	35	5.7	..	..	..
Libya***	01 1994	750	...	..	..	..
Madagascar	06 1993	134	3.7	..	..	..
Malawi	05 1994	177	5.6	..	..	..
Mali	03 1992	129	2.3	..	..	..
Mauritania	10 1996	79	1.3	04 1996	56	0.0
Mauritius	12 1995	66	7.6	..	..	..
Morocco	09 1993	333	0.6	..	..	..
Mozambique	10 1994	250	25.2	..	..	..
Namibia	12 1994	72	18.1	12 1994	26	...
Niger	11 1996	83	...	..	..	..

Nigeria	...	...	...	...	...	...
Rwanda	11 1994	70	17.1	..	..	..
Sao Tome****	10 1994	55	7.3	..	..	..
Senegal	05 1993	120	11.7	..	..	..
Seychelles	07 1993	33	27.3	..	..	..
Sierra Leone	02 1996	80	6.3	..	..	..
Somalia	...	...	...	...	...	...
South Africa	04 1994	400	25.0	04 1994	90	17.8
Sudan	03 1996	400	5.3	..	..	..
Swaziland	10 1993	65	3.1	10 1993	30	20.0
Togo	02 1994	81	1.2	..	..	..
Tunisia	03 1994	163	6.7	..	..	..
Uganda	06 1996	276	18.1	..	..	..
Tanzania #	10 1995	275	17.5	..	..	..
Zambia	11 1996	155	9.7	..	..	..
Zimbabwe	04 1995	150	14.7	..	..	..

\* Central African Republic

\*\*DRC Democratic Republic of Congo

\*\*\*Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

\*\*\*\*and Principe

# United Republic of Tanzania

**Source:** Inter-Parliamentary Union, Men and Women in Politics: Democracy Still in the Making - A World Comparative Study (Geneva, 1997).

#### Technical notes:

The indicators on women in parliament are based on data provided to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) by national authorities and published periodically by IPU.

Statistical symbols and conventions used in the tables

The following symbols are used to indicate reference periods of more than one year: A dash (-) between two consecutive years, for example, 1992-1993, indicates coverage of the full period of two years. A slash (/) between two consecutive years indicates a financial year, school year or crop year, for example 1991/92. A dash between two years which are not consecutive, for example 1985-1990, indicates an average over the full period. This convention is used for many demographic indicators. A slash between two years which are not consecutive indicates a period within which data are available for one year only for the countries listed, for example, a listing of countries containing data for one year in the period 1985/94 for each country.

The following symbols are used in the tables:

. Indicates decimals.

.. Not applicable.

... Indicates that data are not available or are not separately reported.

- When placed before a number indicates a deficit or decrease, except as indicated.

0 or 0.0 Indicates magnitude zero or less than half of unit employed.

**Table 2:**

Percentage of government positions occupied by women, 1996

## Africa

Country or area	Percentage of positions occupied by women		Total
	Ministerial level	Sub-ministerial level	
Algeria	0.0	8.3	4.8
Angola	10.7	1.8	4.9
Benin	19.0	13.3	14.9
Botswana	7.7	15.4	13.5
Burkina Faso	9.1	11.9	11.5
Burundi	10.3	0.0	5.4
Cameroon	2.6	5.3	4.5
Cape Verde	13.3	8.3	11.1
Central African Republic	8.0	2.4	4.9
Chad	8.7	0.0	4.3
Comoros	6.2	0.0	2.7
Congo	7.4	5.3	6.5
Côte d'Ivoire	8.3	6.8	7.1
Dem. Rep. of the Congo	8.0	0.0	3.4
Djibouti	0.0	1.0	0.9
Egypt	3.1	4.5	4.0
Equatorial Guinea	4.8	5.0	4.9
Eritrea	18.8	4.2	7.8
Ethiopia	6.7	9.6	8.9
Gabon	3.3	11.4	7.7
Gambia	18.8	19.0	18.9
Ghana	10.3	9.4	9.6
Guinea	15.0	11.5	13.0
Guinea-Bissau	8.0	13.2	11.9
Kenya	3.4	6.6	5.8
Lesotho	0.0	18.2	14.6
Liberia	3.7	10.0	7.0
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	4.5	0.0	3.4
Madagascar	0.0	3.3	1.8
Malawi	3.6	4.7	4.3
Mali	10.0	0.0	6.2
Mauritania	3.6	5.9	5.4
Mauritius	0.0	12.6	9.8
Morocco	0.0	1.4	0.9
Mozambique	4.0	14.7	12.8
Namibia	8.7	12.3	11.4
Niger	14.3	10.0	10.9
Nigeria	7.7	5.6	6.2
Rwanda	8.3	12.5	10.7
Sao Tome and Principe	0.0	16.7	7.7
Senegal	6.7	4.2	5.6
Seychelles	33.3	18.3	20.8
Sierra Leone	3.8	6.5	5.9
Somalia	0.0	0.0	0.0
South Africa	6.1	7.5	7.0

Sudan	2.4	1.3	1.7
Swaziland	0.0	13.6	7.5
Togo	4.3	0.0	3.0
Tunisia	2.9	10.9	7.9
Uganda	10.7	8.1	8.9
United Rep. of Tanzania	10.5	8.9	9.6
Zambia	7.7	8.6	8.4
Zimbabwe	8.3	14.0	11.6

**Sources:**

Data compiled by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat based on information from the *Worldwide Government Directory* (Bethesda, Maryland, January 1996).

**Technical notes:**

Decision-making positions in Government are defined as ministers or equivalent, deputy or assistant ministers or equivalent, secretaries of state or permanent secretaries or equivalent, and deputy of state or director of Government or equivalent. In the table, "ministerial level" positions refer to ministers or equivalent positions only, while "sub-ministerial level" positions refer to the rest of the positions enumerated above.

Statistical symbols and conventions used in the tables  
 The following symbols are used to indicate reference periods of more than one year: A dash (-) between two consecutive years, for example, 1992-1993, indicates coverage of the full period of two years. A slash (/) between two consecutive years indicates a financial year, school year or crop year, for example 1991/92. A dash between two years which are not consecutive, for example 1985-1990, indicates an average over the full period. This convention is used for many demographic indicators. A slash between two years which are not consecutive indicates a period within which data are available for one year only for the countries listed, for example, a listing of countries containing data for one year in the period 1985/94 for each country.

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## **ANNEX B: EVALUATION QUESTIONS:**

1. Most countries seem to look at women's political empowerment in terms of numbers of women in the various levels of power or policy and decision-making positions. How can we best approach the issues of measuring women's empowerment? Can we say progress has been achieved according to this measure?
2. Why has progress been so slow in attempts to empower women and to increase their representation in: national assemblies, cabinets, foreign services, higher echelons of civil services, boards of directors, and other important policy and decision making bodies/institutions – even where quotas and affirmative actions have been explicitly specified?
3. What would you consider as being adequate levels of resources (human, financial, material) for the political empowerment of women? What obstacles stand in the way of getting to these levels?
4. It seems clear that for women's political empowerment to accelerate and bear fruit, a widespread and aggressive rural grassroots mass movement should be undertaken, and in fact it should have started by now. Do you believe this has taken place? If not, what is preventing this from taking place?
5. What mechanisms and procedures have been established to improve the decision making process and to influence policies and programmes at the national, regional and international levels?
6. What mechanisms and procedures have been established *to enforce* and ensure implementation of what has been agreed as benchmarks and strategies for national action plans and the Beijing Plan of Action including all other conventions such as CEDAW?
7. What mechanisms and procedures have been established to ensure constant dialogue between all concerned parties (government, NGOs, donors, etc.) regarding political empowerment of women and establishment of mechanisms for advancement of women since the Beijing Conference?