



United Nations  
Economic Commission  
for Africa

# 5 years after Beijing:

What efforts in favour of African Women?



Assessing the Girl Child

September 2001

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What efforts in favour of African women?



Assessing the Girl Child

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## Preface

Following the Dakar and Beijing Conferences on women, a number of actions have been taken on the African continent to meet the needs and concerns of the girl-child. In fact, twenty-three countries have included the issue of “the girl-child” as a priority in their national plans of action. Forty-three have set up national committees to follow up on the Beijing Programme of Action concerning young people. Twenty-two countries have set up committees to follow up the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. A number of countries have set up Children Parliaments and associations of mayors committed to protecting the rights of the child.

Although most programmes in favour of the girl-child had been initiated before the Beijing Conference, the mobilization of international specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this regard became reinforced in many areas after Beijing. These include: reducing the disparities in the school enrolment of girls and boys; universal primary education; combating the incidence of girls dropping out of school; mobilizing action against female genital and sexual mutilation; combating exploitation of the labour of girl-children; fighting against AIDS; protecting AIDS orphans; disseminating information on methods of contraception; and legislating on violence against the girl-child.

These actions are necessary for guiding early childhood; for keeping girls in school, especially in rural and sub-urban areas where the rate of dropping out is high; for improving the legal protection of girls; and for increasing girls’ access to health care.

Most sub-Saharan African countries are striving to attain the objectives mentioned above, but in an unfavourable context marked by an impoverishment of families, an external debt burden, political instability, the proliferation of conflicts, reduction in external aid for education and health care and an ever-increasing school-age population. Thus, although the Beijing Conference brought about institutional changes, many of its objectives have yet to be translated into specific policies and programmes at the national level.

Some countries have made adjustments in their institutions responsible for improving the situation of the girl-child and woman, and have increased their budgetary allocations for women’s affairs. Other

countries have still not given specific priority to the issue of the-girl-child such that actions in favour of the girl-child are conceptualized within the framework of sectoral programmes and strategies for women's advancement in general, making these actions difficult to identify and assess on the ground.

There are no reliable mechanisms for monitoring change with regard to either the situation of the girl-child or the implementation of the twelve critical areas identified by the Dakar Platform for Action and the Beijing Programme of Action. Therefore, countries and other actors should take measures to correct this. The next stage should be to reinforce of current actions and lay the groundwork for gender analysis. This entails collecting statistical data at the national level; breaking them down by age, sex and zone; and disseminating them for decision-making, for designing strategies and for planning and implementing programmes identified in the field.

In promoting information on national development policies and strategies, the African Centre for the Woman (ACW) expects this report to help strengthen the ongoing dialogue with the national, regional, subregional and international institutions contributing to the effort to speed up the implementation of the Platform and the Programme.

## Introduction

The fifth African Regional Conference on Women held in Dakar in 1994 specifically examined the issue of the girl-child and decided to make it a priority area of the African Platform for Action and the Beijing Programme of Action.

Consequently, although underlying all the problems concerning woman and development, the theme “the girl-child” came up for the first time as a specific area of concern in a context that is both favourable, when human development became central in development debates, and unfavourable, with the continent’s persistently worsening political and social crises and its increasing impoverishment.

Girls make up half of the 303 million children aged 0-14 who account for 43 per cent of the African population. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is a person in the 0-18 years age range. Yet, at 18, in most sub-Saharan African countries, almost half of the girls are already married, have had their first child and try to take up their responsibilities as individuals, wives and mothers, in an environment where their roles and positions are largely predetermined. In Africa, as in most other parts of the world, girls are, from birth and at all stages in their lives, placed at a disadvantage by socialization practices in terms of their legal, economic, social, health, cultural and emotional status.

Participants at the Dakar conference believed that, since the girl-child of today is the woman of tomorrow, she should be given special attention to enable her “to grow-up while benefiting from health, self-confidence and education necessary for her to occupy with dignity and on an equal footing with man, the place which is hers in society”.

The need to consider the specific condition of the girl-child has never been more pressing. Indeed, widespread poverty; social and political instability; changes in the social fabric and in relationships within the family; and the ensuing conflicts, including between parents and children, all have a direct impact on the girl-child. The public, governments and development aid organizations are becoming increasingly aware that no significant progress can be made in improving the status of woman if the inequalities, discrimination and marginalization they are subject



to are not addressed from the roots by questioning the socialization process and bringing the attention of young people to matters concerning them.

The fact that the girl-child is the woman of tomorrow makes her, first and foremost, someone whose rights should be guaranteed and protected throughout her life. She has her specific needs and concerns, some of which she shares with women and others. Countries and other actors must formulate adequate strategies and take appropriate measures to meet these needs and concerns.

The main objective of the sixth Regional Conference on Women held in Addis-Ababa from 22 to 27 November 1999 was to conduct a mid-term appraisal of the recommendations of the Dakar Platform and the Beijing Programme; to identify the progress made and strategic actions to be recommended for the next five years. A preliminary report on “the girl child” was prepared as a working document of the workshop on this theme within the framework of the Conference. This report is the final version of that document. It takes into account the lessons learned from country reports, the conclusions of the workshop discussions on the girl-child, the Conference’s recommendations on the theme, and information supplied by institutions involved in the implementation of the Platform and the Programme

## 1. Objectives and commitments

In the resolution adopted by the fifth African Regional Conference on Women, African countries affirmed “their political will and their commitment to set up or strengthen national mechanisms, as well as to establish a conducive environment for implementing the Platform for Action while providing for considerably increased budgetary resources for the implementation of strategies, programmes and projects commensurate with the concerns of women and youths”. This resolution urgently called on government organizations to focus their efforts on the major areas of the Platform in designing and implementing their programmes. It also called on African governments, bilateral and multilateral institutions and the United Nations and its specialized agencies, to support the adoption of the gender approach in the formulation and implementation of programmes coming within their respective areas of competence.

With regard to the girl-child, the Platform for Action laid down the following four major objectives:

- (a) To eliminate discrimination against girls in the areas of education and training, health care and nutrition;
- (b) To advocate for the elimination of negative cultural attitudes and practices against women and girls;
- (c) To enhance the capacities and esteem of girls, especially those with special needs; and
- (d) To sensitize young girls to social, economic and political issues and problem;

For these objectives to be achieved, the Platform recommends:

- (a) That research should be undertaken on the situation of girls, and that information and data obtained should be disaggregated by sex and age to provide an appropriate basis for action;
- (b) That awareness should be created among policy makers, implementers and communities about the disadvantaged situation of girls;
- (c) That the policies and laws in force should be reviewed to ensure the enlightenment of girls in matters pertaining to education, health care and early marriage;
- (d) To support NGOs and community-based organizations in their efforts to promote positive changes in the prevailing practices and attitudes towards women and girls;
- (e) To provide the necessary education and skills training to girls, after the primary school level, in order to increase their opportunities for employment. The education of the girl-child with disabilities should be made free and compulsory to ensure that her needs are met;
- (f) To provide sex education as from primary school;
- (g) To review school curricula and textbooks to integrate in them the principle of gender equality;

- (h) To use the media to promote information on the need to give equal treatment to women and girls on the one hand, and to these and their male counterparts on the other, with regard to nutrition, health care, education and participation in decision-making;
- (i) To mobilize men and boys to work for the advancement of woman and for a real partnership based on equality between boys and girls;
- (j) To provide opportunities for schoolgirls who become pregnant to continue with their education.

Besides the specific objectives of the Dakar Platform for Action and the Beijing Programme of Action, the international community has made a number of commitments which have featured on the agenda of major international conferences since the 1990 World Summit for Children. The commitments made in this regard aim:

- (a) To reduce by half, during the period 1995-2005, the number of children suffering from malnutrition;
- (b) To attain the objective of 80 per cent school enrolment for boys and girls in the year 2000 and reduce illiteracy among women and men to 8 per cent by the year 2015;
- (c) To pay more attention to the reproductive health of the woman throughout her life span;
- (d) To promote respect for children's rights in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

### **1-1 Commitments made by United Nations agencies and other organizations**

The commitments made by international organizations and donor countries within the framework of the Beijing conference are contained in the United Nations System-wide Medium-term Plan for the advancement of the woman during the 1996-2001 period; in terms of

bilateral cooperation, they are also contained in the documents of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on the role of technical cooperation for development on the eve of the 21st century and on the “guidelines” of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) for gender equality and the empowerment of women within the framework of development cooperation.

All the United Nations institutions, especially the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) were requested to adapt their action plans to the objectives of the Beijing Programme, to draw up operational guidelines for cooperating with countries and to support coordination efforts within the system while carrying out their respective mandates. Consequently, the organizations of the United Nations system pledged to involve youths at all stages of the implementation of the Beijing Programme. Two working groups made up of NGO representatives were set up in Geneva and New York, respectively, to give more prominence to the theme of “the girl-child” and to see to it that her concerns and contributions are adequately considered in the deliberations of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

UNICEF, UNFPA, the International Labour Office (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have taken major steps to improve the status of the girl-child.

Under its “education for all” programme, UNICEF has implemented its African Girls Education Initiative with the support of the Governments of Canada and Norway. Almost 60 million dollars were raised for this operation which to date has covered 27 countries. The initiative for girls’ education (SCOFI) enabled participating countries to try out various approaches to closing the gap between boys and girls. The programme’s strategies include social mobilization and the involvement of parents and the community, as well as strengthening partnership with all the actors on the ground.

In 1996, UNICEF adopted a global strategy for protecting and promoting the rights of the child, drawing on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the guidelines of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. UNICEF also plays an active role in the fight against AIDS by embarking on programmes to prevent neo-natal transmission, by addressing the needs of orphans

and by involving young people. Furthermore, it assists the initiatives taken in many countries to eradicate harmful traditional practices (HTPs) affecting the health of mothers and girls.

UNFPA has paid particular attention to the situation of adolescents in implementing the Cairo Programme of Action on Population and Development. Both the Dakar Platform and the Beijing Programme clearly address the specific reproductive and sexual health needs of adolescent girls and young women. Most UNFPA programmes include sensitization and training for health personnel catering for the needs of adolescents, campaigning for policy reforms, educating schooled and unschooled youths on family life and setting up information centres for youths.

The African Forum on the reproductive health of youths organized in January 1997, by UNFPA in cooperation with ECA and OAU, brought together 500 girls and boys from 48 countries. The recommendations and resolutions of the Forum were submitted to the Council of Ministers of the OAU. The agency has also paid much attention to the involvement of men in the fight against AIDS, a principle already integrated in the programmes of 43 countries.

In 1997, WHO launched a Regional Plan of Action, to speed up the elimination of FGM in Africa within the period 1996-2015, covering 26 countries. This plan is multisectoral and multidisciplinary aims to eradicate these practices and to deal with the resultant medical complications. It provides for the inclusion of a module on (HTPs) in training programmes for medical and paramedical agents. UNICEF, for its part, pledged to help governments in drafting their plans of action in this area. The strategies recommended by this plan are:

- (a) To involve communities in the identification of the physical, psychological and emotional problems associated with the practices in question;
- (b) To design and produce, together with the people concerned, adequate Information, Education and Communication (IEC) programmes on culture, and focused on specific target groups;
- (c) To promote multisectoral and multidisciplinary cooperation in identifying and planning actions.

In 1997, WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA issued a Joint Declaration on female genital mutilation in which they asserted their intention to assist governments and communities to promote the health and development of women and children.

ILO supports the campaign against the exploitation of child labour through its International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). This programme aims to prevent the use of child labour, to eliminate the most extreme forms and the most serious situations of the exploitation of child labour and to improve working conditions. The subregional Workshop on the trafficking of children used for domestic work in West Africa and Central Africa, organized with the support of UNICEF from 6 to 8 July 1998 in Cotonou, Benin, made it possible to work out a framework for analysis and for improved coordination of the actions of countries and subregions – West Africa and Central Africa in particular – in this regard.

The World Bank notes that increasing the school enrolment of girls and the education of women is one of the surest ways to the economic and social development of Africa. In 1997, it adopted a Regional Gender Action Plan (RGAP) which identifies new opportunities for action in favour of the girl-child. The second strategic objective of this plan focuses on the human development of women and on considerably improving their participation in education and their access to adequate health care, nutrition and planning services. The World Bank has recently begun to strengthen its action in favour of education, especially for girl-children in Africa.

As for UNIFEM, it has launched a regional campaign to combat violence against women in many countries. The regional seminar organized in Dakar in 1998 on the Law on violence against women enabled 12 countries to compare their national laws and to recommend necessary amendments particularly on rape, genital mutilation, domestic violence, sexual harassment and forced marriage.

At the bilateral level, significant is the revision by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), in 1995, of its “Woman and Development” policy and its adoption of a new gender equality policy that gives importance to the rights of women and girls. The strategic framework defined for each subregion contains the two priority areas of “woman and development” and human rights which are among

the six priority areas of the development aid policy of the Canadian Government; and each country is required to prepare its own strategy for gender equality.

To illustrate, the project on “Women’s rights and citizenship in French-speaking Africa” initiated in 1997 by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) is aimed at increasing respect for the rights of women and girls and their participation in democratic life. The project focuses on three aspects: equal legal and social rights for men and women; elimination of violence against women and girls; and increasing women and girl’s participation in power sharing. This project which concerns Guinea, Mali, Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso supports the establishment of coalitions of organizations involved in the promotion of women’s rights, human rights, and the rights of institutions with decision-making powers or influence. At the regional level, it is hoped that these networks will be brought together in a Forum that will also include the Subregional Committee on HTPs and the Group of Women Ministers and Members of Parliament.

These positive actions notwithstanding, many countries regret that efforts made to fulfil the Beijing commitments are below expectations. While funding agencies have supported the process of developing national plans of action to various degrees, the financing of projects remains a problem. Some funding institutions have even reduced the medium-term contributions to sectors having a direct impact on the well-being of the child, for example, the contributions of the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to health care and education. Paradoxically, these budgetary cuts are coming at a time when the beneficiary countries need larger and sustained financing.

It should be pointed out that the priorities of donors and those contained in the national plans of action do not always tally and agencies tend to intervene on a country-by-country basis rather than take an articulated regional approach. Moreover, while most of their programmes have a gender perspective, the inadequate mastery of the gender approach prevents the national partners from making the best of the existing opportunities for the advancement of young girls. Also, information is not available on the volume and distribution of funds allocated in support of the implementation of national plans of action. The coordination of technical assistance has often been informal - virtually inexistent in the case of financial aid.

Most development aid agencies give priority to combating poverty which affects women and young people more than men. Besides, the Departments in charge of women and girls' affairs and the organizations representing them still need better understanding of poverty-alleviation documents and programmes.

Most of the current programmes were initiated prior to the Beijing Conference. Except for health care, few are the initiatives or new programmes that have been launched. The initiative for the education of girls ended in 1999 but its positive results have not yet been popularized and its achievements consolidated.

## **1-2 Commitments by regional organizations**

The joint OAU/ADB/ECA secretariat was established to follow up and ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the Dakar Platform. Through the African Centre for Women (ACW), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was mandated to support the coordination, follow-up and evaluation activities of the African Committee set up to coordinate the implementation of the Platform and the Programme at the continental level. ECA was also mandated to ensure that the objectives of the Dakar Platform was adequately pursued.

### **Raising the institutional status of the African Centre for the Woman**

To enable ECA to adequately carry out its mandate, it raised the institutional status of ACW, strengthened the Committee on Women and Development (CWD), ensured that the gender approach is mainstreamed in all its activities, and organized a Forum on developing new opportunities for younger generations.

ACW fulfilling its responsibility to follow up on the Dakar and Beijing Conferences, ACW has organized four subregional follow-up meetings: in November 1997, in Dakar, for West Africa; in June 1998 in Bangui for Central Africa; in October 1999 in Rabat for North Africa; and in February 1999 in the Seychelles, for Eastern and Southern Africa. These meetings addressed issues pertaining to achievements made with regard to national plans of action and progress reports on the implementation of the Platform and the Programme.

Furthermore, ACW has laid down follow-up guidelines and indicators, provided technical assistance to Mauritius and South Africa in the development of their national plans of action on gender equality, advised the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) on mainstreaming the gender approach in economic development and planning programmes. ACW has assisted Guinea and the Niger in the area of human rights and led various training and research activities. The Centre has also appointed two regional advisers specialized in women's rights and women's empowerment, respectively. The services of these regional advisers are given free of charge to governments, upon request.

### **Strengthening the Committee on Women and Development**

The mandate of CWD, formerly African Regional Coordinating Committee for the Integration of Woman in Development (ARCC), a consultative organ which coordinates policies in favour of women, was increased in 1997. The Committee's terms of reference include:

- (a) Periodically examining progress made in the implementation of the Platform;
- (b) Mobilizing resources for the implementation of action plans at the sub-regional level;
- (c) Organizing exchange of information, data and experiences on countries' policies for the advancement of women.

CWD has actively embarked on advocacy to sensitize African decision-makers to women's issues. It saw through the adoption, by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU, of a resolution to speed up the implementation of the Dakar Platform and the Beijing Programme. Notably, that resolution recommends the creation of a post of Adviser to Heads of State on gender issues and calls for the systematic involvement of women in OAU statutory meetings.

### **Applying gender analysis to ECA activities**

Every ECA division and Subregional Development Centre (SRDC) has a focal point for gender issues.

## Developing new opportunities for younger generations

The forum on this subject was held as part of activities to mark the fortieth anniversary of ECA. It enabled young girls and boys from various places to express their concerns about the present and visions for the future of Africa. The OAU strives to mobilize African political leaders for the implementation of the Platform and the Programme, and African Heads of State and Government and Ministers of Economic and Social Development have adopted resolutions endorsing the recommendations of the Platform.

Since 1990, the OAU has gradually been establishing, within its structures, a political and strategic framework for the protection and advancement of children. It has designed the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The organization's fight against the most intolerable and most abusive forms of child labour, endorsed by the Summit of Heads of State and Government in June 1998, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, is a giant step in this direction.

The OAU set up a special committee in 1997 to examine the status of children in war-torn countries and to further its campaign for the ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The Addis Ababa Declaration adopted in 1998 during the Summit of Heads of State and Government affirms their commitment to the eradication of HTPs affecting the health of women.

With regard to education, the OAU showed its commitment to universal education in Africa by proclaiming the period 1997-2006 the "Decade for Education in Africa" during its thirty-second Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in 1996. The Decade's programme of action, officially launched in 1997, was designed with the support of UNICEF and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Its objectives include to expand education and reduce all disparities, especially between boys and girls and between rural and urban areas. Other objectives of the Decade's plan of action which, if implemented, would likely have an impact on the status of the girl-child include improving the quality of education and vocational training and strengthening capacity building. Harmonizing the educational policies of countries, also advocated by the Decade programme, should improve exchange of experiences and best practices with regard to girls schooling.

The setting up by OAU of the African Women's Committee for Peace in 1998 was meant to ensure women's effective participation in all peace actions and to empower them to clearly express the needs and concerns of refugee and displaced women and children.

As for the African Development Bank (ADB), in fulfilling its mission to work for the economic and social development of Africa, the Bank was involved at all stages of preparation and implementation of the Dakar Platform and the Beijing an has shown its commitment by integrating the gender approach in its policies and programmes. A gender perspective now has to be taken into account in formulating all strategies and evaluating country projects. Specifically, the Bank has:

- (a) Systematically applied gender analysis to projects submitted to it for financing;
- (b) Trained team leaders and heads of departments on gender issues and set up interdepartmental advisory committees on women's affairs;
- (c) Strengthened the capacity and budgetary resources of the Unit responsible for women's affairs;
- (d) Increased funding for women's advancement and child protection activities, especially within the framework of poverty-alleviation programmes.

### 1-3 Impact of the commitments

It is important to note that these commitments mainly have a political impact for no programme or initiative capable of jumpstarting real action in favour of the girl-child has actually been launched in the continent. Even the objective of the major action initiated in the area of education through the OAU Decade plan has eluded the control of national and regional institutions because the implementation is highly dependent on external financing.

Generally, the declarations made are not accompanied by mechanisms to implement them. Also, no mechanism has been established to compel institutions to render account of their fulfilment of their commitments. The strategic choices, priorities and internal constraints of each institution have therefore taken precedence over their political and moral

obligation to women and girls. ADB, for instance, has no statistical data for evaluation in connection with the increased funding earmarked for gender-related actions or women and girls' affairs.

The actions of the OAU, ECA and ADB in this area are virtually uncoordinated. Resolving these shortcomings demand that in the second phase of the implementation of the Platform and the Programme these institutions see to it that commitments made for the advancement of the girl-child are concretely implemented at the regional level, ensure that the conclusions and recommendations of the Forum on youths organized to mark the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of ECA, or similar meetings, be used as a basis for defining actions to undertake.

## 1-4 Commitments by NGOs

Besides communities and decision makers, some civil society organizations (CSOs) are fully committed to education, health and rights. Thus, IAC organized a regional meeting in Dakar in 1997 and a symposium in Banjul, the Gambia, in 1998, for religious leaders and health personnel on genital mutilation as violence against women. The symposium adopted declarations and recommendations.

The Forum of African Women Educators (FAWE) has been very active in sensitizing policy makers in favour of the girls' education and has established a scholarship scheme in many countries. Such other regional or subregional NGOs as the *Société des Femmes Africaines face au SIDA*, the Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), the *Association des femmes africaines pour la recherche et le développement* (AFARD), the network of African Women Leadership in Agriculture and Environment (AWLAE) and the *réseau des femmes de l'Afrique centrale* (RESEFAC) have been very active in their areas of intervention. Undoubtedly, as mentioned in many country reports, cooperation between governments and NGOs, is the driving force for the implementation of the Platform's recommendations.

These actions have, among other things, made it possible to popularize the objectives of the Platform, carry out advocacy activities to stimulate national and international institutions, conduct pilot experiments and mobilize communities. However, their outreach is limited because of

the dispersion of interventions, poor coordination between the government institutions and the NGOs involved, weak capacities and meagre resources.

### 1-5 Commitments by African countries

African governments have explicitly acknowledged the have prime responsibility for the achievement of the objectives of the Dakar Platform and Beijing Programme. They have therefore pledged to implement the various institutional, legal and political measures contained in the national plans of action designed after the Beijing Conference. These measures include:

- (a) Establishing mechanisms or offices responsible for issues relating to the girl child;
- (b) Providing universal education and raising the level of girls' school enrolment;
- (c) Setting-up adequate health care services;
- (d) Securing the legal protection of the child, especially against violence, and promoting her/his rights;
- (e) Setting-up structures to empower young girls to actively participate in the implementation of the Platform and the Programme.

## 2. Follow-up mechanisms at the regional, subregional and national levels

The Dakar Platform identified a number of regional, subregional and national follow-up mechanisms whose supplementary actions should facilitate integration of the Platform and Programme's recommendations in the programmes and policies of governments and development institutions, as well as evaluation of the actions undertaken.

**At the national level**, three types of mechanisms have been established taking into account the specific context of countries. They are coordination structures, technical mechanisms and focal points; and are described as follows:

- (a) Coordination mechanisms are generally national follow-up committees set up by Ministries in charge of women affairs and responsible for the implementation of national plans of action. These mechanisms have facilitated the involvement of other ministries, NGOs and youth and women's organizations in the implementation process;
- (b) Technical mechanisms are made up of sectoral units in charge of gender issues within major ministerial departments, as in Egypt and Kenya, for instance;
- (c) Focal points are the resource persons responsible for monitoring the mainstreaming of national plans of action in their own sector.

In Tunisia, coordination of the implementation of the Platform and the Programme is carried out by the Ministry responsible for women and family affairs which has sub-contracted it to NGOs. The Ministry reports quarterly to the higher Council on woman and the family chaired by the Prime Minister. As for Egypt, it has set up a national follow-up commission made up of twenty experts and has specialized committees within various ministries.

**At the regional level,** ACW has played a basic strategic role in the implementation of the Platform's recommendations. To this end, it has relied, internally, on the support of the Joint OAU/ECA/ADB secretariat and the ECA coordinating mechanisms supervised by the Conference of Ministers of Economic and Social Development.

Externally, ACW cooperates with CWD which it has helped to revamp. This Committee has been meeting twice a year to address issues relating to the implementation of the Platform.

At the technical level, ACW has facilitated the development of national plans of action and progress reports by drawing up guidelines, performance indicators and models for use at the country level. The Centre's contribution to the high-level meetings of ECA has helped to keep the objectives of the Platform on the agenda of major debates on the economic and social development of the continent.

The African Commission on Human and People's Rights and subregional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development

Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) are also mechanisms involved in the implementation of the Platform and the Programme.

**At the international level**, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child is the formal follow-up mechanism of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It examines periodic reports from member States. These reports contain gender-disaggregated data and are reliable sources of information on the status of children in Africa and in the World.

### 3. Results and recommendations of follow-up conferences and meetings on the platform and the programme

Since 1994, numerous meetings regional, subregional and national consultations have been held on the implementation of the Dakar Platform and the Beijing Programme. These meetings have helped the actors to sharpen their strategies, prepare plans of action and adopt common positions. The meetings were meant to evaluate actions taken in implementation of the Cairo Plan of Action on Population and Development, of the recommendations of the World Summit on Social Development and of the World Summit for Children, or to brainstorm on issues relating to the girl-child. With regard to education, a series of fruitful consultations held led to the proclamation of a Decade for universal education whose programme of action was adopted by the eighth Conference of African Ministers of Education held in Harare in 1999.

The two mid-term evaluation meetings to assess the implementation of the recommendations of the Jomtien Conference held in 1996, respectively in Yaounde for West Africa and Central Africa and in Johannesburg for Eastern and Southern Africa; the African Conference on the empowerment of women through functional literacy and the education of girls held in Kampala; and the seventh Conference of Ministers of Education held in Durban, South Africa, from 20 to 24 April 1998 all emphasized the need:

- (a) To prepare adequate policies and plans of action to enrol and keep young girls in school;
- (b) To develop opportunities for young girls;
- (c) To ensure the safety and well-being of young girls at school;
- (d) To provide incentives to encourage young girls to study science and technical subjects;
- (e) To take measures to prevent the exploitation of housemaids.

The Amman Consultation held in June 1995 to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations of the Jomtien Conference enabled Africa to compare its results with those of other regions. The Conference, which established a new vision for education, stressed the link between the respect for gender differences and the education of girls; made the education of girls an absolute priority; and recommended that educational systems should remove the cultural and political barriers to gender equality and pay attention to the differences between girls and boys. Moreover, by drawing attention to the crucial importance of early childhood by establishing that learning begins at birth, the Jomtien Conference helped to popularize the adoption of a comprehensive approach to learning.

Concerning FGM, the joint ECA-UNICEF-UNFPA meeting examined the common commitments of the Cairo Programme of Action and the Beijing Programme of Action in light of the reproductive health needs of adolescents. ACW and UNFPA organized an international training seminar on FGM, in Addis Ababa, from 27 to 29 March 1997, with the main objective of preparing a model for integrating FGM eradication activities in the reproductive health, population and development programmes of UNFPA.

These meetings strengthened the political will of African leaders to adopt common positions, strengthen synergies among the institutions involved and formulate strategies to be used at the regional and subregional levels. However, coordination of the operational activities need to be improved to increase the effect of actions and improve follow-up of the recommendations adopted.

## 4. Progress made

In this connection, the following three observations need to be made:

- (a) Most importantly, almost all African countries lack reliable mechanisms for collecting and using data to prepare indicators on the status of the girl-child
- (b) The sectoral analysis that follow is based on political and institutional provisions made by governments in the areas of education, training and legal protection of the girl-child. It takes into consideration the interactions of various factors affecting her status;
- (c) It is necessary to analyse the situation of the girl-child holistically as her status can only be improved by a combination of factors some of which will result from long-term actions taken within the framework of the sectoral policies of countries.

### 4-1 Progress made in the area of resource mobilization

One point of note is that data available is insufficient for evaluating resources actually used for activities to improve the status of the girl-child. It is generally difficult to quantify funds allocated for the implementation of the recommendations of the Platform and the Programme. However, analysis of country reports shows that the situation varies from country to country. Thus, in Kenya, Namibia, Tunisia, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire, budgetary allocations for women's programmes have increased by 20 per cent, 50 per cent, 15 per cent, 20 per cent and 70 per cent, respectively, since 1995.

It is, nonetheless, true that structural adjustment constraints prevent many countries from allocating more resources to sectors that mostly concern the girl-child. Few are the countries which have successfully organized round-tables on the funding of their action plans. Ministries irresponsible for woman and children's affairs are not usually involved in negotiations between governments and their financial partners and therefore are unable to present and defend their projects.

## 4-2 Progress made with regard to policies and programmes

### Education and schooling

According to a 1999 report of UNICEF on the State of the World's Children, which focuses on education, primary school enrolment in Africa rose by 61 per cent for boys and 51 per cent for girls during the period 1990-1996; and by 28 per cent and 23 per cent respectively, in secondary schools during the same period. A few countries, including Algeria, Botswana, Cape Verde, Malawi, Egypt, Mauritius and Zimbabwe, were able to reach significant enrolment ratios of over 90 per cent. Fifteen countries have almost attained the set objective of education for all.

The gaps between the school enrolment ratios for boys and girls are gradually being bridged through large-scale social mobilization campaigns for the enrolment of girls, carried out in several countries during the past few years. Kenya and Mauritius have attained parity in the enrolment ratios of girls and boys in primary schools.

Satisfactory results have been achieved by introducing incentives and using original strategies. Thus, Malawi and Uganda adopted in 1994 and 1997, respectively, policies in favour of compulsory primary education. This policy has enabled Malawi to increase the school enrolment ratio by 80 per cent. In Uganda, the granting of free primary education to four children per family has doubled the school enrolment, raising the number of children attending school from 2.6 million to 5.2 million.

Egypt has introduced community schools which are a model of active learning, especially for girls, and which encourage the full participation of parents and communities. Kenya has attained its parity objectives in education by using a multidimensional strategy that focuses on the training of actors for gender issues, qualitative and quantitative research food support, the setting-up of mobile community schools for single mothers and remote areas, and the readmission of girls who had abandoned school due to pregnancy.

Zambia has developed an innovative "Programme for the advancement of girls' education" which emphasizes that the family should be the first place for raising awareness



about gender discrimination between girls and boys; that involvement parents in sessions bringing together parents and pupils is a major factor for success. The Ministry of Education has defined the criteria for judging schools' respect for gender differences. These criteria include schools having to maintain student enrolment ratios of at least 45 per

### **Box 1** **Mainstreaming the** **girl-child in** **national plans of** **action**

Twenty-three countries have included the theme of "the girl-child" in their national plans of action for the implementation of recommendations of the Dakar Platform and Beijing Programme. Some have changed the appellation of their ministries responsible for women or family affairs, redefined the missions of these ministries and created structures responsible specifically for children's affairs. Youths are members of the national follow up committees on the Beijing Programme of Action in the 43 countries.

Moreover a number of non-governmental structures such as the Children's Parliament and the association of mayors committed to the defence of the rights of the child have been set up. These are appropriate fora for young people to express their views and for actions to be mobilized for the benefit of the youths. Twenty-two countries have follow-up committees on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Côte d'Ivoire, members of the Children's Parliament take part in the deliberations of commissions responsible for examining the budgets of the various ministries and can therefore influence them to take their concerns into account. The setting up of such bodies has however, helped to improve cooperation between the State and NGOs.

cent for each of the sexes and at least 40 per cent for either of the male or female teaching staff, separate toilets and a non-sexist education.

In Senegal, the girls' school enrolment project has been helping to improve the gross enrolment ratio of girls in formal schools since 1994. Social mobilization, with the personal involvement of the Head of State, increased enrolment in the first year of primary education by 41,5 per cent in 1994 and by 53 per cent in 1996. Committees have been set up throughout the country; and mobile schools, regularization of the status of pupils not registered in the civil status office and girls' school enrolment were introduced in 1997. The country went on to establish an observatory on gender issues in education to apply gender analysis to the educational system and stamp out gender-related prejudices from schools and textbooks.

Surveys carried out in several countries show that the gap between the sexes can be more easily reduced when this issue has been taken account of right from the initial planning stages. Generally, Eastern and Southern

African countries have made significant progress in the area of gender equality in schools. The equity and school improvement project of Guinea has helped to raise the gross school enrolment ratio from 40 per cent to 53 per cent in five years in the rural areas and girls' enrolment from 29 per cent to 42 per cent during the same period. All the activities of this project, which has a food and health element, were designed to have an impact on the status of the girl-child.

The schooling of girls is increasingly being seen as useful to the girls themselves and as a fundamental human right because of its palpable effects in curbing fertility and maternal mortality; and in improvement family health and welfare, income, agricultural yield, women's output and economic performance in general. The recommendations of the Jomtien Conference on universal education, the Ouagadougou Conference on girls' education and ICPD prepared the ground for the implementation of the strategies of the Dakar Platform and the Beijing Programme as regards girls' education.

However, education programmes have yet to take full account of infants by providing alternative care and development programmes. This concern is beginning to grow in several countries. The surveys conducted in the form of pilot projects in South Africa, Namibia, Mauritius, Nigeria and Botswana and the childcare programme in Kenya, have demonstrated the relevance of nursery schools which take into account the physical, emotional, cognitive and cultural development of the infant with the full participation of the community.

The success of the mobilization actions taken in these countries lies in their having helped to increase the school enrolment of girls and keeping them in school. Through qualitative and quantitative research it has been possible to find relevant solutions to the problems caused by the low enrolment of girls in schools or the interruption of their schooling.

## Health

All the countries acknowledge that good health is a necessary and essential condition for development; that the health of youths and adolescents is all the more important as it determines their future welfare and life.

ICPD took a giant step in this domain, having helped to remove the taboos on the reproductive health of adolescents and on their sexual life, although adequate answers to these issues have not yet been found.

## Box 2

Strategies for reducing the gap between the gross school enrolment ratios for boys and girls.

The most successful countries in this area based their strategies on the following five points:

- a) Designing an educational programme aimed especially at reducing the gap in the school enrolment of girls and boys;
- b) Formulating clearly defined objectives; adopting a result-oriented approach; and opening up to innovations;
- c) Considerable political and financial commitment;
- d) Constant social mobilization and the participation of all the actors concerned in the follow-up of the activities;
- e) Close coordination of the activities of all the actors involved.

Moreover, the environment for the implementation of health programmes has improved. The changes that have taken place have given room for the conduct of many surveys, studies and research that have provided useful data on the sexual behaviour of adolescents in terms of intensity and precocity<sup>1</sup>. These studies have shown that 80 per cent of the girl's aged 20 are more or less sexually active. Most girls have their first sexual intercourse at the age of 15 or 16 in most countries. The incidence of AIDS, especially among young girls is also better understood.

Many countries have established reproductive health programmes or reinforced the existing ones, improved their legal frameworks and facilitated the action of NGOs, the private sector and youth organizations in the area of reproductive health. Youth centres for attending to the problems of and counselling adolescents have been set up in Tanzania, Senegal, Kenya and South Africa. They provide a wide range of quality services.

According to United Nations statistics, the fertility rate in Africa has been dropping steadily over the past five years; the average is put at 5.31 children per woman - a significant improvement. It is estimated that, since 1980, fertility has dropped by a third in North Africa and 2

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<sup>1</sup> Blanc, A. and Way, A.: Contraceptive knowledge and use and Sexual behaviour: a comparative study of adolescents in developing countries. Demographic and health surveys, Macro International.

per cent in West Africa. Infant mortality is gradually dropping though it is still higher in Africa than in the other developing regions of the world. Out of every 1000 births, there were 86 deaths during the period 1995-2000<sup>2</sup>.

Information on methods of contraception is now more available than ever before. The survey carried out in Kenya, Rwanda and Zimbabwe on population and health shows that 90 per cent of young girls said they knew at least one contraceptive method; 60 per cent of young girls use at least one method in Cameroon<sup>3</sup>.

With regard to food, Senegal and Madagascar have introduced two community projects on nutrition. These have considerably improved the eating habits of children and mothers and the incomes of households through the implementation of a good strategy of community involvement.

Uganda seems to be a model in the primary prevention of HIV/AIDS. Here, school clubs to fight AIDS have been set up. In many countries, the Association of African Women against AIDS gives guidance to young girls on AIDS prevention methods. AIDS remains a matter of great concern, though the anti-AIDS strategies and methods used are far from overcoming the virulence of the pandemic.

## Legal Protection

All the countries acknowledge that children have the right to social and legal protection against all forms of violation and aggression against them given their vulnerability; that this protection is even more crucial for girls who are under the yoke of numerous social and cultural constraints. Consequently, 46 out of 53 African countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Most African countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child or are party to it. Measures are increasingly being taken to ban genital mutilation. The new legislation in force is helping to establish an appropriate legal framework for gender equality and there are the achievements on the part of women are tangible.

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<sup>2</sup> It varies from 86 still births out of 1000 births in East Africa to 95 still births out of 1000 births in Southern Africa

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Adolescent Girls and their Rights, 1997.

West African, East African and Southern African countries have striven to adapt their national legislation to international conventions. The subregional cooperation in legal matters has been reinforced. Although these efforts have yet to bear fruits, they have however helped to introduce social and political dialogue on issues relating to the girl-child.

## 5. Constraints and challenges

### 5-1 Political and institutional barriers

Although the missions of ministries have been broadened to include children's matters, most of the departments concerned have not been given the required financial support. For this reason, they have relied more on information and education campaigns than embarking on consistent, long-term actions. Young girls are now represented in bodies set up to follow-up the implementation of the Platform and the Programme; but no strategy has been developed to tackle all their concerns, concerns which are often embedded in sectoral plans of action where they can only receive partial attention. This is the fact even for countries that have included "the girl-child" in their national priorities.

Given the cross-cutting nature of issues relating to woman and the girl-child, the mechanisms responsible for these matters are neither able to adequately coordinate the actions taken by various actors, nor to influence the sector's policies.

Indeed, apart from SADC, which made a Declaration on Gender in 1997 and which supervises the implementation of the Platform and the Programme in the subregion, subregional institutions have not fully embraced the objectives of the Platform and the Programme. Women are not adequately represented in these bodies. Girls are completely left out. Follow-up of the commitments made within the OAU would certainly be better if "Women's Unity" were reinforced as women themselves recommended.

### 5-2 Financial constraints

The recommendations of the Platform and the Programme are being implemented in an internal context of structural adjustment and foreign debt burden worsened by an external context of falling public aid flows

The number of African countries that have adopted laws on violence against women and girls has increased. One of these is Senegal whose National Assembly made new laws in January 1999 reinforcing child protection in general and the protection of the girl-child in particular. The legislation aims to abolish and severely punish acts of genital mutilation, sexual harassment, rape, pedophilia and the corruption of minors. A follow-up committee guides the public on the scope of these laws. An observatory for women and girls' rights, comprising various human rights organizations, women's groups, representatives of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry in charge of family affairs, has been set up by decree.

Like Togo, Djibouti and Egypt which have adopted laws against FGM and violence against women and the girl-child, Mali and Kenya have drawn up ambitious plans of action for the elimination of genital mutilation. Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire have now legislated against sexual harassment and forced marriage. In 1996, Burkina Faso took legal measures providing for the prosecution of any parent, person or accomplice involved in FGM.

Social mobilization have been used to sensitize the public to the rights of the child. Children's Parliaments, associations of mayors committed to the defense of children, the initiative of villages involved in the defense of human rights (Senegal) and associations of communicators and traditional rulers have successfully committed themselves to this cause. Twenty-two countries have national committees which effectively monitor compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Eleven countries have ratified Convention N°138 of ILO, which establishes the minimum working age as 15 years.

Finally, the Council of Ministers and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU adopted, in July 1998, the Addis Ababa Declaration indicating their commitment to banning HTPs.

### Box 3 Measures taken by several African countries to reinforce the legal protection of the girl-child

to Africa. All the country reports pointed to the insufficiency of resources and countries' difficulty in mobilizing them, although no donor has been able to specify the exact amount of funds allocated for the girl-child. It is important to collect and analyse such information for the evaluation of the implementation of the Platform and the Programme.

## 5-3 Constraints on education and school enrolment

The school enrolment of girls can only be increased if there is improvement in the educational system as a whole. Unfortunately, over the past few years, armed conflicts, economic pressures related to the

external debt, structural adjustment policies and population growth have been the major factors of regression in the education for all objective set by most countries.

There are still many cultural and social set-ups that inhibit the enrolment of girls in schools, especially those that help to keep women in a subordinate position, thus hampering the mental, social and emotional development of the girl-child.

The performance of school systems is poor. Syllabuses are of poor quality and are ill-adapted to the needs of girls. A third of the number of children enrolled in primary schools drop out before reaching primary Five - mostly girls living in the rural areas. The increased number of school drop-outs shows that the objective of increasing the enrolment ratio, which was meant to be a priority, cannot be an end in itself. The problem of girls dropping out of school remains unresolved even in countries that have attained parity at the primary school level. In Africa, the ratio of pupils repeating a class in the primary school is one to ten, as against one to thirteen in Latin America or East Asia. Of all the developing regions, Africa has the lowest primary school enrolment ratios. The paradox of it is that the continent is experiencing a sharp increase in the number of children of school age. According to UNESCO and UNICEF estimates, this number will further rise by 52 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa during the period 1995-2020. This mirrors the magnitude of the challenge to be faced. Declarations on education for all are not always accompanied by measures to fight inequalities. Hence there is a wide gap between actions to be taken and those actually taken. Very few countries have established reliable mechanisms and procedures for effectively absorbing the largest possible number of underprivileged girls and children into the school system and keeping them there at all levels.

The extreme poverty of households has been a major handicap to the education of girls. Poverty veils the ability of girls, dampens their self-esteem and hampers their capacity to progress in school. According to ADB statistics, 40-45 per cent of the people in Africa south of the Sahara are living in poverty. Of these poor people, 30 per cent belong to the groups that are 70 per cent women. Under the circumstances, the status of the girl-child is further determined by the revenue she generates from her activity as hawker or housemaid or by the assistance she can give her mother in taking care of her younger ones. In the

urban areas, where education is subsidized, the payment of school fees, which are introduced to recover costs, leaves parents almost without an option. The students who abandon school are mostly girls. Aid services for children are hardly included in educational programmes. Consequently, girls are often kept at home to look after their younger brothers and sisters while their mothers are involved in outdoor activities. In the urban areas nursery schools are limited and costly.

The debt burden coupled with structural adjustment policies have reduced public investment in the education sector. Countries that allocate over 4 per cent of their GDP to education are finding it difficult to maintain their current enrolment ratios in schools. Reducing the disparities between girls and boys requires not only huge investments but also well-targeted strategies.

Although investment in education is generally considered to be the best form of investment, it must be noted that budgetary allocations to this sector remain grossly insufficient to meet the needs. Thus, World Bank loans, which are the main sources of funding for education in Africa, dropped from about \$US 400 million in 1993 to about \$US 50 million in 1996. In 1998, such funding amounted to \$US 300 million. The loans granted by the International Development Assistance (IDA), which amounted to US\$ 417 billion in 1993, were steadily reduced, down to just about \$US 132 million in 1996.

Debt servicing reduces the ability of countries to invest in the social services. The World Bank put Africa's public debt at \$US 223 million in 1997. The institution further stated that 33 of the 44 most indebted countries in the world were African countries. Africa spent as much money on debt servicing as it did on education and health put together – about \$US 12 billion in 1996.

#### **5-4 Health-related constraints**

Public investments in the health and food sectors remain insufficient on the continent when compared to the magnitude of the problems to be solved. On the average, 25 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) is devoted to health in Sub-Saharan Africa. The highest percentage of GDP devoted to this area is 2.5 per cent – 5 per cent at most. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to significantly improve the health of the people in general, and that of the girl-child in particular.

Also taking its toll is the AIDS pandemic which is currently the biggest challenge facing African youths and adolescents. It is estimated that AIDS could reduce to nothing the successes achieved in infant survival in many countries, especially in Central Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa. The United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) forecast that the infant mortality rate in Zimbabwe and South Africa

#### **Box 4**

**Lack of data disaggregated by sex, age and zone for applying gender analysis to education and training.**

Very little research has been carried out on the education of the girl-child. The data available on the issue are insufficient. Very few countries have survey and research programmes or have improved their statistical systems to include a gender perspective applicable to educational matters. Also, very few of them have steady flow of statistical data on enrolment ratios that could be used to analyse trends in this area since the past six years. Data disaggregated by gender and age are generally insufficient.

The insufficiency of gender-disaggregated data and poor knowledge of the problems of young people are, in fact, an obstacle to the planning of relevant actions for girls. The fact that the Dakar Platform does not have quantified data on the status of the girl-child is itself a handicap. Statistics on girls are often confused with those on women. Hence the urgent need to produce indicators for measuring progress in this area.

could rise by 100 per cent by the year 2000 due to AIDS. Of the 8 million AIDS orphans in the world, 90 per cent live in sub-Saharan Africa. Uganda is said to harbour 11 per cent of the AIDS orphans, Zambia 9 per cent, Zimbabwe 7 per cent and Malawi 6 per cent. UNAIDS further states that the number of children with HIV-positive parents is higher than that of the AIDS orphans.

The AIDS pandemic has obvious medical, and deep socio-cultural and economic impact. In fact, AIDS has a real impact on infected children for the fact that in the most affected countries, millions of these children have lost their parents and depend on other people for all aspects of their development. Very few of such children are likely to complete their primary education, and a large number of them are likely to be maltreated or tortured. Affected girls face even greater problems due to their inferior status compared to boys. Some cultural practices encourage old men to have sexual intercourse with young girls in order to keep fit or to be cured of AIDS.

The rights of girls as concerns reproductive health are not sufficiently taken into account. As a result of early pregnancy, a large proportion of births are given by adolescent girls, compromising the health of the

mothers and their children. The fertility rate of adolescent girls is particularly high in Central Africa (206 births/1000 girls), West Africa (158 births/1000 girls) and East Africa (145 births/1000) girls<sup>4</sup>

Lack of access to information on contraceptive methods and services is responsible for the increasing number of clandestine abortions committed by the adolescents. These abortions account for a large proportion of the high maternal mortality rate in Africa. According to a survey conducted by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 72 per cent of the deaths of mothers under the age of 19, in Nigeria, are attributable to abortion-related complications. This problem is difficult to solve as is young girls' lack of access to appropriate services for post-natal care, genital mutilation problems and similar needs. Girls' access to such services are also limited by the reactionary habits and attitudes of health personnel. The high maternal mortality rates show the precariousness of the childbearing conditions; Africa alone accounts for 40 per cent of the maternal deaths across the world.

FGM and other HTPs remain widespread. It is to be noted that some countries such as the Gambia have openly shown support for excision, and there are twenty-eight countries involved in this practice at various levels. Lessons learnt from many countries which have made laws on these issues indicate the need to use a combination of strategies, involving combining legal provisions with other actions to sensitize and mobilize communities for the abolition of these practices.

## 5-5 Constraints relating to legal protection

### New forms of infringement on the rights of the child

The economic exploitation of children is one of the most intolerable infringements on their most fundamental rights, but not much action has started being taken against it. Girls are particularly exposed to these infringements which seriously harm their development. The placement of children, which traditionally used to be part of the educational process has been abused by the local and cross-border networks run by middlemen who control the trade in young girls who are taken from the villages to towns and even abroad.

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<sup>4</sup> The World Youth, Population Reference Bureau, 1996.

In fact, the exploitation of housemaids is as much a matter of concern as it is widespread and socially accepted. The placement of boys is usually taken to be a form of apprenticeship while the labour of girls is seen more strictly in monetary terms. The affected girls are exposed to considerable physical and psychological risks involving harassment, sexual aggression, prostitution, emotional troubles, harrying and other forms of abuse. The participation of women in informal economic activity currently stimulates the demand for more cheap child labour that can only be met from the rural people. The rapid boom of this business boosted by poverty and child trafficking can no longer be overlooked. Hence, measures have to be taken to eliminate it.

The inadequate protection of young girls in countries at war is also a matter of concern. In fact, since 1996, 20 African countries have experienced various forms of armed conflict which have produced 8 million refugees, half of whom are children, and 30 million displaced people. According to WHO, 550 million people in 35 countries were directly or indirectly affected by conflicts during the period 1990-1995<sup>5</sup>.

Women and children suffer very serious harms during and after conflicts, including physical and mental attacks, rape, malnutrition and continuous displacement. These conflicts disrupt social structures and cause the displacement of families and the destruction of communities and systems of social protection. Children are deprived of education, the right to a nationality, a name and a civil status. Under such circumstances, the situation of girls is much more precarious as the mother, herself, is faced with very serious problems. Some children become heads of household having to cater for their younger brothers and sisters in the absence of their parents.

Laws and conventions on the rights of the child are not adequately enforced. Although the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by all the States, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child has only been ratified by 12 countries whereas at least 15 States are required for it to enter into force.

The failure of the present regulatory and institutional frameworks to deal with such problems as the employment of young girls as housemaids helps to perpetrate their exploitation. The main obstacles here are the

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<sup>5</sup> WHO Pan-African Centre for training for emergency situations, 1995.

incompatibility of the minimum age for employment with the compulsory age for leaving school, the inaction of labour inspectors and the usually private nature of such practices.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

The guiding questions used in evaluating the implementation of the aspect of the Platform and the Program relating to the girl-child helped participants at the sixth Africa Region Conference on Women to discuss the following seven points:

- (a) Including in national plans of action issues on to “the girl-child” as a crucial and separate domain;
- (b) Formulating strategies for including the specific needs of the girl-child in women’s empowerment programs;
- (c) Adopting methods for facilitating girls’ access to better health care and education;
- (d) Promoting inter-generational dialogue, especially between mothers and girl-children;
- (e) Preparing an indicator for monitoring the situation of the girl-child with regard to sexual violence, sexually transmitted diseases in general, HIV/AIDS in particular, and the effects of early motherhood on the health of children and girls;
- (f) Identifying ways and means of speeding up implementation of the aspects of the Platform and the Programme relating to the girl-child at the national, subregional and regional levels, taking into account trends over the past few years.

The following recommendations were made for each of the sub-topics below:

**6-1 Mainstreaming issues relating to the girl-child as a crucial and separate area in national plans of action:**

1. Policies should be formulated specifically on the girl-child.
2. Issues pertaining to the girl-child should be included in the priority areas defined for the next five years.

**6-2 Mainstreaming the specific needs of the girl-child in programmes for women's empowerment:**

1. Creating a conducive environment for building the capacity of and empowering the girl-child.
2. Strengthening the actions of governments, NGOs and CSOs to improve the status of the girl-child, especially as regards education, health care and legal protection.
3. Ensuring that laws protecting the girl child are implemented, especially at the local level;
4. Adopting multisectorial approaches in dealing with issues relating to the girl-child.
5. Pursuing sensitization and advocacy at all levels in favour of the rights of the child.

**6-3 Adopting approaches to facilitate the girl-child's access to better health care and education**

**Education**

1. Establishing and developing pre-school education in all the countries.
2. Establishing compulsory and free primary education, at least during the first nine years of schooling.
3. Providing financial support to poor families who cannot send their girls to school beyond the nine years.

4. Organizing campaigns to sensitize and mobilize communities and parents to keep girls in school;
5. Sensitizing teachers, boys and girls to gender issues and sexual violence in school.

### Health care

1. Ensuring that girls have access to medical services and check-up.
2. Providing free medical care to girls.
3. Setting up education systems within age groups.
4. Paying special attention to the needs of the refugee girl-child.
5. Integrating in school curricula such health-related issues as sexual behaviour, reproductive health and the use of drugs.

### 6-4 Preparing follow-up indicators for evaluating actions taken in favour of the girl-child

Countries should gather basic data to evaluate the progress achieved and prepare, in particular, qualitative and quantitative indicators on the following areas:

### Education

1. Level of involvement of parents and the community in issues relating to the girl-child, including education, early marriage and genital mutilation.
2. Level of involvement of guidance counsellors working with the school administration.

### Health care

1. Implementing HIV/AIDS prevention programmes focused on the girl-child, through sex education seminars, the media and alliances of youths of the same age group.

2. Improving parents' knowledge on reproductive health issues.
3. Increasing the number and implementation level of measures to protect the girl-child.
4. Increasing the level of involvement of girl-children in programmes carried out for them.
5. Increasing the level of involvement of the media in promoting and reinforcing self-esteem in the girl-child by broadcasting positive messages about and images of woman in general, and the girl-child in particular.

### Legal protection

1. Establishing national committees to ensure effective implementation of laws.
2. Setting up community consultative groups comprising children and establishing other meeting fora at the level of districts.
3. Translating laws governing the protection of the girl-child into local language, especially in the rural areas.
4. Regularly reviewing laws at the national and subregional levels.
5. Improving and strengthening girls' leadership in mixed fora.
6. Integrating the concerns of girls in all relevant sectors and areas, contrary to the current practice that confines them to departments in charge of women affairs.

### Follow-up indicators on the status of the girl-child

These should state:

1. The rate of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS infections by gender and age.

2. The share of the national budget allocated to matters relating to the girl-child.
3. The level of awareness of mothers on the consequences of some socialization practices on the girl child as compared to boys.
4. The impact of FGM on the reproductive health of women and girl-children.

### **6-5 Strategies for speeding up the implementation of the recommendations of the Platform and the Program with regard to the girl-child**

1. Adopting a participatory approach in identifying and integrating the needs of the girl in development plans and programmes.
2. Encouraging the participation of youths in activities of national and international interest.
3. Setting up Children Parliaments and children consultative groups to help sensitize them to legal and discrimination issues.
4. Sensitizing the media, CSOs, including religious and community leaders, and mobilizing influential persons at the national level for the protection of the rights of the child as a fundamental aspect of human rights.
5. Setting up pressure groups to press for the ratification and implementation of conventions and laws protecting the girl-child.
6. Setting up a multisectorial committees involving the government and NGOs responsible for defining the objectives for improving the status of the girl-child.
7. Preparing national programs of action for promoting and protecting the rights of the girl- child.

8. Enacting and implementing laws against sexual violence and harassment against the girl-child; and establishing a legal support structure for victims of such acts.
9. Amending the penal code to reflect the seriousness of sexual violence as a crime.
10. Promoting laws against HTPs and raising the minimum age for marriage to 18 years.
11. Mobilizing the public sector and NGOs for the fight against the sexual exploitation and the trafficking of young girls.
12. Mobilizing funds to finance programmes targeted at the girl-child, such as the 20 over 20 per cent initiative; improving the use of existing resources. Ensuring that governments allocate 20 per cent of their budget and 20 per cent of their Official Development Assistance to the social sector.
13. Taking urgent measures against domestic and cross-border child trafficking networks.
14. Establishing mechanisms and designing instruments for evaluating plans of action.

## **6-6 Strengthening inter-generational links within the family**

1. Drawing up policies against sexual harassment in school, with the involvement of children and teachers.
2. Sensitizing family members to the consequences of cultural attitudes that inhibit dialogue on such issues as sexuality.
3. Encouraging the girl-child to take part in discussions on issues of interest to her.
4. Sensitizing boys and men to the need to change attitudes as regards discrimination and violence against the girl-child.

5. Establishing educational programs for parents, especially in the form of parent-children workshops.

## **6-7 Strengthening partnership among stake holders of programmes for the advancement of the girl-child**

1. ECA, UNFPA, UNICEF and other major agencies should pool their efforts to support governments in the implementation of action plans.
2. Agencies of the United Nations system should mobilize resources to help CSOs implement the recommendations of the Platform and the Programme.
3. Many more NGOs should join and struggle alongside the International Network of girls in pressing for the visibility of issues relating to girls in the activities of the United Nations, especially the Human Rights Commission, and to promote the relevant conventions and ensure their implementation at the national level;
4. ECA and OAU should participate in the implementation of regional and subregional programmes on the girl-child and set up structures to help eliminate violence against her.

The Workshop on the girl-child acknowledged that this issue should be addressed through a integrated approach that includes other critical areas identified in the Platform and the Programme.

## Appendix: Guiding questionnaire for the workshop discussions

### 1. Methodology-related questions

Experience has shown that better knowledge about the group classified as the girl-child allows actions to be better targeted and increases the accuracy of results

1.1 Which specific methods, approaches and tools have been developed for understanding the situation of the girl-child?

1.2 Which mechanisms have been established to promote integrated strategies for improving the status of the girl-child?

1.3 How can censuses and other surveys be used to build a data bank on women and girl-children?

### 2. Relevance And Feasibility Of Programmes Focusing On The Girl-Child

Given that some countries have taken the girl-child as a priority area while others have addressed the issue as part of other sectors.

2.1 Can the girl-child be made as a priority area?

2.2 Should the needs and concerns of the girl-child be dispersed for consideration in many different sectors?

2.3 What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the options?

2.4 How can integrated strategies be implemented in favour of the girl-child?

### 3. Questions On Inter-generational Dialogue Between Women And Girls

3.1 How do women concretely address the concerns of girl-children?

3.2 How can youths be made to effectively lead the demands for their empowerment?

3.3 What are the solidarity drives that bring women and girls together?

4. Questions On The Content Of Projects And Programmes For Young Girls

Many children, especially girl-children, are deprived of the support they ought to get from their families because of poverty, but their chances for a balanced development need to be safeguarded. Faced with this challenge:

4.1 How can the access of girls to better information and health care services adapted to their needs be ensured at all stages of their lives?

4.2 How can gender issues be best integrated in AIDS-prevention programmes?

4.3 What are the best strategies for keeping girls in school?

4.4 What are the best ways of involving parents in educational and health care activities for youths?

4.5 How can the needs of girl-children in special conditions (servants, refugees or displaced girl-children) be met; that is, their education, health care and legal protection, in order to minimize their vulnerability?

4.6 What are the most relevant indicators for understanding the status of the girl-child?

4.7 How can the involvement of national stakeholders and international partners in matters concerning the status of the girl-child be increased?

4.8 What initiatives can be taken at the national, subregional and regional levels for the advancement of the girl-child?

5. Questions On Regional And International Mechanisms

5.1 What do you think of the mechanisms identified by the Dakar Platform for monitoring the status of the girl-child as a specific priority area?

5.1.1 Adequate? 5.1.2 Inadequate?

5.2 Considering the experiences of the first five years of the Platform's implementation, what strategic actions can be taken to improve the effectiveness of these mechanisms?

5.3 How can the actions of the national, subregional, regional and international mechanisms involved in the advancement of the girl-child be better coordinated?

5.4 What role should ACW play in the advancement of the girl-child?