

**SUB-REGIONAL MEETING ON THE DECADE REVIEW OF THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF BEIJING PLATFORM OF ACTION
WEST AFRICA**

**13 – 15 April 2004
Abuja, Nigeria**

SYNTHESIS REPORT

1. The sub-regional meeting on the decade review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action and other initiatives took place from 13 to 15 April 2004, in Abuja, Nigeria. It was organized by the Sub-regional Bureau of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Women' Affairs and Youth Development of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

I- Opening ceremony

2- The meeting was formally opened by the Permanent Secretary, representing the Honourable Minister of Cooperation and Integration in Africa of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mr. Lawan Gana Guba. Three addresses were given at the opening ceremony by:

- Mrs. Aminata DIBBA of the Gambia, outgoing Chairperson of the ECA Intergovernmental Committee of Experts, Office for Africa
- Mr. Halidou OUEDRAOGO, Director, ECA Office for West Africa, representing the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa
- Mrs. Rita Akpan, Hon. Minister of Women's Affairs and Youth Development of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

II – Participants/Attendance

3- Twelve of the fifteen West African countries attended the meeting, amongst whom were 7 Ministers responsible for gender and women development issues, in the persons of:

- Mrs. Massiatou LATOUNDJI LAURIANO, Hon. Minister of Family Affairs, Social Protection and Solidarity, Benin
- Mrs. Maria Gisele GUIGMA, Hon. Minister of Women's Development, Burkina Faso;
- Mrs. Jeanne PEUHMOND, Hon. Minister of Family, Women's and Children's Affairs, Mali
- Mrs. BERTHE Aissata BENGALY, Hon. Minister for Women's Development, Children's and Family Affairs, Cote d'Ivoire
- Mrs. ABDOUL Wahid Halimatou, Hon. Minister of Social Development, Women's and Children's Affairs, and Population, Niger
- Mrs. Rita AKPAN, Hon. Minister of Women's Affairs and Youth Development, Nigeria

- Mrs. Saayo Goyoti N'DADIYA, Minister of Social, Women's and Children's Affairs, Togo.

4- Representatives from the African Union, African Development Bank (ADB), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), FAO and UNIFEM attended the meeting.

5- In her address, Mrs. Rita Akpan, Nigerian Minister of Women's Affairs and Youth Development, recounted past international meetings on women that had been organised, from the Mexico meeting in 1975 to the 1995 meeting in Beijing which provided the platform for action that has now become the reference framework for improving the status of women.

6- She reviewed the twelve key areas that are of vital importance for Africa, laying special emphasis on the added value that was to be gained by integrating the gender dimension into government policies. She welcomed the fact that significant progress had been made in various fields, including education, health, and women's involvement in decision making, and praised the ongoing efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and alleviate poverty, especially among women.

III. Election of the Bureau

7- Following informal consultation amongst the seven ministers present in Abuja, the bureau of the meeting was proposed, and adopted, as follows:

Chairperson: Nigeria
Vice-Chairperson: Burkina Faso
Rapporteur: Mali
Vice Rapporteur: Sierra Leone

IV. Introductory remarks

8. In her introductory remarks, Ms Josephine Ouedraogo, Director of Africa Center for Gender Development at UNECA (ACGD), acknowledged the presence of 6 ministers in charge of women's affairs from 6 countries in the sub-region.

9. She gave an overview of the process of the decade review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. She emphasized that the continental process includes 3 major steps: the national, the sub-regional and the regional levels which will be concluded by the 7th African Regional Conference on Women on Beijing + 10, due to take place in October 2004 at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

10. Mrs. Ouedraogo concluded her introductory remarks by stressing the importance for representatives of secretarial ministries to attend meetings.

V. Overview of progress and challenges in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment since adoption of the Beijing Global Programme in 1995

11- The presentation was made by Mrs. Josephine Ouedraogo, based on a document prepared by the ECA African Centre on Gender and Development.

12- Mrs. Ouedraogo presented the global situation in relation to the key elements under the 10 priority areas that are of direct relevance to the situation of women and/or the girl child: women and poverty, education and training, women and health, violence against women, women in conflict situations, women in economic life, women and the media, women and the environment, women's fundamental rights, women and AIDS, and the girl child.

13- Overall, in all these domains, it is noteworthy that governments have accepted to acknowledge that there is a correlation between the specific situation of women and discriminatory attitudes and the persistence and aggravation of problems in each of these sectors. All the countries have shown a political will to promote gender equality. However, there is a huge gap between adoption of policies and their effective implementation. This can be seen most clearly in the aggravation of poverty and in the fact that, despite the multiplicity of poverty eradication policies and strategies to date, women still represent the highest proportion of the poor.

14- According to Mrs. Ouedraogo, the situation of women in Africa is worse than in other parts of the world. Africa, she stated, has made tremendous progress in terms of improved access by women to political life and to decision making organs. The African Union's adoption of parity, and the recent election of a woman to head the Pan-African Parliament are clear indications of this.

15- Concluding, Mrs. Ouedraogo declared that if African women were lagging behind, it was simply a reflection of the African continent's slow economic and social development. She also noted that the African feminist movement itself had grown weaker since Beijing.

V- Outcome of the group discussions on progress since Beijing and current constraints and challenges

16- The participants approached their discussions from four angles.

17 – The first part comprised a general assessment of the results so far and the challenges to the quest for gender equality and women's empowerment.

18 - The participants noted in this connection, that despite government efforts to factor these considerations into national policies and action plans, political commitments were far from translating into effective implementation. The concept of equality between men and women does not always find acceptance, in the society and among very many leaders.

19- All the countries have included the Millennium Development Goals in their national poverty alleviation strategies. Participants expressed concern that although the HIPC funds were socially beneficial; their effect in the long term was to add to the debt burden. They recommended that part of the funds be channelled exclusively into programmes that genuinely seek to boost women's productive capacities, and the objective in the long term should be to achieve total debt cancellation. The participants also underlined the need to take measures that will highlight the economic value of non-trade activities by women.

20- Notwithstanding the delay by some countries in submitting their national reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the participants noted that the instrument is used widely in most countries as a tool in their advocacy for the enactment of new laws in favour of women.

21 - Gender issues are not systematically addressed in government or parliamentary discussions on political or institutional reform. It is still difficult for gender issues to be included in national budgets because the requisite technical expertise is lacking and disaggregated gender-based data are unavailable. The participants noted that the Development and Gender Inequality in Africa Index introduced by the African Centre for Gender and Development would be instrumental in redressing these shortcomings..

22- Despite the proliferation of armed conflicts in several countries in the sub-region since Beijing, and their particularly violent impact on women, women continue to be sidelined in decisions on conflicts and conflict prevention. However, women's organizations, acting under the umbrella of the Mano River Women's Network for Peace, were awarded a prize for their contributions to peace.

23- Differences in the way that globalization impacts on men and women have not been adequately highlighted in studies. Its impact has been both positive and negative. Open markets and the proliferation of new technologies have led to a massive foreign currency drain to Northern countries.

24- The second part: evaluation of progress achieved with regard to the 12 priority actions of the Beijing Platform for Action.

25- Of the many examples cited by the participants, three deserve particular mention:

- Specific projects and programmes containing a gender component were implemented in all countries as part of national poverty reduction strategies;
- Many specific actions were embarked upon, aimed at promoting the education of girls and rural women, eg. provision of scholarships, incentive package for teachers in rural areas, support to the study of sciences by girls;
- The majority of countries are implementing family planning programmes and are taking action against AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

26- Third part of the discussion: institutional development. Participants noted that all the countries had introduced mechanisms to promote the advancement of women.

27- Arrangements for consultation across the sub-region are virtually inexistent, and participants sought the help of organizations and agencies in setting up such mechanisms.

28- Fourth segment of the discussions: constraints and challenges, actions to be undertaken on five fronts:

29- In the social environment, certain beliefs and traditions continue to pose an impediment to gender equality. Growing religious fundamentalism in the sub-region is a real threat to the fundamental rights of women.

30- In the political sphere, governments need to show a more sustained political will to appoint more women to decision making posts.

31- On the economic plane, poverty eradication efforts are undermined by the non-acknowledgement of the economic value of unpaid work provided by women and by the narrow scope of economic assistance programmes to enable women to establish micro-businesses. One other major problem noted lies in the fact that no value is attached to labour provided by both male and female family members in rural areas.

32- The feminist movement in the sub-region has been in decline since Beijing, yet, this movement is an irreplaceable force in the promotion of women's rights and gender equality.

33- The participants identified the following as some of the major problems in the sub-region: the alarming rise in the spread of HIV/AIDS, particularly among women and girls, the growing incidence of forced prostitution of women and girls, and the non-inclusion of a gender dimension in regional and sub-regional development frameworks such as NEPAD.

34- The participants made the following recommendations for the attention of political leaders and development partners:

- Focal points on gender issues should be given a higher profile by making them part of sectoral ministries;
- More data should be broken down according to gender, and statistical services should be strengthened;
- Women should be systematically included in conflict resolution mechanisms;
- Women's capacities to access opportunities for training, trading, access to capital and business opportunities in the economic sector at national and sub-regional levels should be strengthened;
- Better consultation between the United Nations agencies to ensure the efficacy of their interventions;
- Affirmative action in favour of women as regards appointments to political posts in regional intergovernmental organizations such as ECOWAS and UEMOA;
- The need for regular networked consultation among ministries responsible for women affairs throughout the sub-region;
- The gender dimension is still not adequately taken into account in the preparation of national budgets because the right methodological instruments are lacking. The participants took note of the programme of the ACGD this regard and urged the ECA to continue its efforts in this direction.

VI- Contribution of sub-regional organizations and agencies

35- Five organizations and agencies presented a brief account of their contributions to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in West Africa: the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and FAO.

36- ECOWAS: The most notable action taken by ECOWAS has been the process, begun in 2002 with assistance from partners, to map out its own internal policy on gender. The process is nearing completion and has already led to the transformation of the West African Women's Association into a Centre for Gender and Development. Also, a division has been created within ECOWAS to deal with gender issues, and its officers have received training in the adopting the gender approach and on developing a programme on the gender dimension of conflicts.

37- UEMOA: The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) comprises 8 francophone countries in the sub-region. Its policy on gender covers 9 of the 12 priority areas under the Beijing Platform for Action. Its presentation highlighted its activities in relation to:

- education and training for women
- promotion of intra-Community trade: the Regional Solidarity Bank is one of UEMOA's major contributions in the sector
- the fight against HIV/AIDS

38- FAO: the FAO, through its regional office, has been active in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the following areas:

- Integration of gender-related data into agricultural surveys, with the aim of enriching monitoring and evaluation programmes on the Beijing Platform;
- Capacity building for planners and programme heads in the field of gender analysis, and assistance in the formulation of sectoral policies having a gender component;
- Advocacy for 10% of the national budget to be allocated to agricultural development
- Support towards research into a better understanding of the way in which HIV/AIDS is spread.

39- UNIFEM: The presentation by UNIFEM centred on the following points:

- 1) Women's economic security
- 2) Strengthening women's leadership roles
- 3) Combating violence and promoting women's rights
- 4.) Gender and HIV/AIDS
- 5) Gender, Peace and Security

VIII - The challenge posed by HIV/AIDS in the quest for gender equality and women's empowerment

40- Mrs. Wambui Karanja, Senior Social Affairs Officer at the ECA presented a document prepared by the African Centre for Gender and Development. Mrs. Karanja indicated that the AIDS pandemic aggravates poverty by reducing investments, which in turn, limits opportunities for job creation.

41- UNAIDS estimates that. in 2020, 115.5 million persons will die of AIDS worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa, 20% of the present workforce will be affected.

42- HIV/AIDS has more harmful effects on women and girls in the home because of their inability to have healthy sexual relationships. It is worth noting, however, that treatment drugs are available to varying degrees in all the countries.

43- During the discussions, participants gave examples of specific preventive and curative actions being undertaken in their countries to combat AIDS. Some countries have created a Ministry in charge of HIV/AIDS, an indication of the political will to eradicate the pandemic.

VIII- Closing ceremony