



Editorial

The current issue of Gendernet provides a general review of the status of African governments in implementing the gender equality commitments around key critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). We focus on women's empowerment in relation to the economy, poverty, human rights and the rights of the girl-child. Whilst none of the issues are new, Gendernet aims to keep the debate alive and to remind governments and NGOs to continue the important work of meeting the BPFA commitments as they underpin achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

The importance of the BPFA is confirmed by the declaration adopted by the representatives of governments at the forty-ninth session of the CSW on the 4th of March 2005. The declaration reaffirmed the BPFA and welcomed the progress made thus far towards gender equality but also noted and recognized the obstacles that still persist. The government representatives emphasized that the full and effective implementation of the BPFA is essential to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Declaration.

It is important to acknowledge that efforts to promote gender equality globally and in Africa have gained momentum on several fronts over the past 12 years. This momentum has been facilitated by the various goals endorsed by member States in a number of commitments and declarations that include BPFA, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), otherwise known as the women's international bill of rights, the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

On the issue of governance, avenues for addressing gender equality concerns have been explored through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the gender equality indicators included in its African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and the Economic Commission for Africa's (ECA) African Governance Report (AGR) published in 2005.

It is heartening to note that 51 of the 53 African member States have ratified CEDAW, and 17 have signed its Optional Protocol, which provides a mechanism for reporting State violations. Some countries have gone a step further and aligned their



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national legislation to the provisions in CEDAW. Even more encouraging are the attempts already underway to engender poverty surveys conducted during the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) and processes. These surveys portray a clearer picture of the "feminization of poverty" and provide the basis for more in-depth gender analysis in macroeconomic and socioeconomic policies.

Countries are also aiming to achieve the MDGs by aligning them to their national planning processes. Further, most member States have established institutional mechanisms for addressing gender equality and women's empowerment. More importantly, some governments are increasingly integrating the question of gender in national budgets, and this has triggered more transparency and gender responsiveness in public expenditures.

Despite the progress made, twelve years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and the BPFA, governments have recognized that passing laws and policies alone does not bring about substantial gender equality or even equity and respect for women's human rights. Evidence from review processes point to major implementation gaps that threaten to jeopardize the translation of gender commitments into action and outcomes.

We call for more efforts to address a number of critical challenges that impede progress in addressing the uneven distribution of remunerated and unremunerated work and the invisibility of women's unpaid work in national accounts. Much more needs to be done in domestication of international instruments on women's rights, enforcement of existing legislation and compilation of gender-disaggregated data.

We hope this issue will be useful in supporting your own work. We welcome your comments and input and invite you to check our website regularly for more information and updates on the activities of ECA in the area of women's empowerment.

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Gendernet is produced by the African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGS) of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in collaboration with the ECA Information and Communication Service (ICS). It is printed in-house by the Publications and Conference Management Division (PCMS). For comments, contributions, suggestions and clarifications, write to:

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Changing Contexts in the Struggle for Gender Equality

The global struggle for gender equality has been gaining momentum since the first women's conference in Mexico (1975). As a result of the adoption of various United Nations conventions, including CEDAW (1979), progress is slowly occurring. In 1995 international collaboration received a significant boost with the development of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). It became a reference framework to which global, regional, sub-regional and national groups in Africa turned their attention and over which citizens could hold governments and international institutions accountable.¹

The African women's movement grew stronger with numerous NGOs collaborating across communities, nations and regions. NGOs work on every conceivable issue and many of the 'traditional' community-based and locally managed associations are taking advantage of new technologies, organizational innovations and international assistance. Other NGOs, such as the Grassroots Women Association of Kenya (G-WAKE), the Sudan Advocacy Mission and Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON) have grown into umbrella or national organizations and are involved in training, advocacy, building networks and delivering services.²

Between 1995 and 2006, African-based NGOs sent representatives to meetings and consultations where decisions were being made or initiatives developed to improve the status of women, including United Nations conferences, where NGOs hold consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Among the highlights of such meetings was an NGO Forum on the implementation of the BPFA held on October 6-7, 2004³

¹ H. Mejri, "Interview with Josephine Ouedraogo: Consolidate Progress Achieved by Women to Better Meet Development Challenges;" 2004.
<http://www.uneca.org/fr/Beijing/Interview%20JO.htm>

² T. Pearce, Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action: An Evaluation of African Nations on the Progress of Women. Report Submitted to ACGD-UNECA Addis Ababa, 2003. Pg 5.

³ "Women, Law and Development in Africa," African Shadow Report Adopted in Addis Ababa, October 2004 for Beijing + 10. pg 1.

in Addis Ababa under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). One of the newly formed African women's initiatives, the African Development Fund collaborated with ECA in supporting the participation of women's NGOs. Approximately 320 women representing over 200 organisations across Africa were in attendance and issued a communiqué, the contents of which are incorporated in this issue.

The work of local and national organizations has been complemented by other institutions. Chief among these are the various agencies of the United Nations, including the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), UNIFEM, UNFPA and ECA.

The momentum generated by all these initiatives has resulted in substantive changes. Among others, the issue of violence against women including harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) has initiated wide public discussions and revisions of existing laws. In addition, the African Women's Rights Protocol has advanced women's equal rights to property inheritance and women's reproductive

Box 1

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA):
12 Critical Areas of Concern

- Women and Poverty
- Education and Training
- Women and Health
- Violence Against Women
- Women and Armed Conflict
- Women and the Economy
- Human Rights of Women
- Women in Power and Decision-Making
- Women and the Media
- Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women
- Women and the Environment
- The Girl-Child

Source: Division for the Advancement of Women.
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/index.html

rights. Furthermore, in accordance with the 30 percent benchmark of women's representation in decision-making set in the BPPA, women's representation, particularly in parliaments, is on the increase. Rwanda, Mozambique, South Africa, Burundi and Tanzania have reached the 30 percent benchmark⁴ and Africa now has the first female president, Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

In September 2000, the Millennium Summit organized by the United Nations drew attention to poverty eradication and sustainable development. Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and

⁴ IPU. 2007. www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

accompanying indicators were developed aimed at a more coherent approach to development with an emphasis on collective global responsibilities and the need to pay attention to the negative impact of runaway market competitiveness.⁵ The target date of 2015 was set, to reduce or eliminate gender disparities and improve the quality of women's lives (see box 2). The 2003 Human Development Report noted that gender equality is at the core of reaching the MDGs.⁶

With slightly over 7 years to the 2015 MDGs target dates, there is a greater

⁵ World Bank. *Millennium Development Goals 2000*. www.developmentgoals.org/about_the_goals.htm

⁶ UNDP. *The Human Development Report 2003*. pg. 50

Box 2

Millennium Development Goals in Africa

GOAL 1- Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Countries likely to achieve targets by 2015
Poverty: Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Lesotho, Libya, Morocco, Mauritius, South Africa, Tunisia, and Uganda.

Child malnutrition: Botswana, Chad, Egypt, Gambia, Mauritania, Sudan, and Tunisia.

Overall undernourishment: Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Ghana, Libya, Malawi, Morocco, and Tunisia.

GOAL 2- Achieving Universal Primary Education

Countries likely to achieve targets by 2015
Enrolment and completion rates: Algeria, Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, Gabon, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia and Zimbabwe.

GOAL 3- Promoting Gender Equality and Empowerment

Countries likely to achieve targets no later than 2015

Eliminate primary level disparity: Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe.

Eliminate secondary level disparity: Algeria, Botswana, Lesotho, Libya, Namibia, Tunisia and Rwanda.

GOAL 4- Reducing Child Mortality **Countries likely to achieve target by 2015**

Reduce by two-thirds the under-five mortality rate: Algeria, Cape Verde, Egypt, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco, Seychelles, and Tunisia.

GOAL 5- Improving Maternal Mortality

Countries likely to achieve target by 2015
Reduce by three-quarters the maternal mortality rate: Algeria, Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, Gambia, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco, and Tunisia.

GOAL 6- Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases

Countries likely to achieve target by 2015
To halt by 2015 and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS: Algeria, Botswana, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

To halt by 2015 and reverse the incidence of Malaria: Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Central Africa, Comoros, Egypt, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Rwanda.

To halt by 2015 and reverse the incidence of Tuberculosis: Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Gabon, Gambia, Libya, Madagascar, Morocco, South Africa, Swaziland, Tunisia, and Zambia.

GOAL 7- Ensuring Environmental Sustainability

Countries likely to achieve 2015 and 2020 targets

Integrate principles of sustainable development into policies and reverse loss of environmental resources: Algeria, Cape Verde, Egypt, Gambia, Libya, Morocco, Swaziland, and Tunisia.

Halve by 2015 the number of persons without sustainable access to safe drinking water (rural): Algeria, Botswana, Burundi, Egypt, Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, and Tunisia.

Halve by 2015 the number of persons without access to basic sanitation (urban): Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Libya, Mauritius, Morocco, and Tunisia.

GOAL 8- Developing a Global Partnership for Development

Requires the developed nations to address the special needs of the developing world in terms of employment, affordable drugs, debt issues, and technology needs.

Source: Economic Commission for Africa. *MDGs in Africa: A Challenge for Change*. <http://www.uneca.org/mdgs/story/14april06.asp>.

urgency for action. ECA in its report to the 40th session of the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, in April 2007, noted that to date, only a few African countries are on track to meet the MDGs. Northern African countries are the high performers, while Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) lags far behind. While progress has been made in improving the gender parity in education, the especially in high-level education, greatest areas of concern remain MDGs on gender equality and maternal health. Other areas of only modest progress are women's access to basic infrastructure and health services, and political and economic participation of women.

At the regional level, the inauguration of the African Union Commission (AUC) in 2002 affected the context in which initiatives are developed. AUC has a gender parity of 50 percent men and 50 percent women at the level of the commissioners. In addition, the speaker of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) is female. The AU adopted the Declaration on Gender Equality and the Protocol to the African charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa in 2005 and 2003 respectively.⁷ This protocol calls for laws, backed by sanctions, prohibiting the harmful treatment of women including FGM, forced marriages, widowhood rites and the banning of old women into witch camps.

In addition, AU has initiated development indicators. The emphasis here is to monitor the implementation of the commitments of African nations. Such initiatives provide recourse for organizations and individuals working within and across individual nations. They also indicate that the continent has developed frameworks and does not rely only on external directives. Africa now seeks cooperative assistance rather than merely working under external pressures. Regional frameworks also facilitate the critical assessment of externally initiated programmes or projects.

ECA has developed the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI) in 2004⁸, as a composite index for measuring gender equality, changes in gender relations and the impact of gender policies over time.

⁷ ECA: Ibid, pg. 32.

⁸ ECA. The African Gender and Development Index, 2004. Addis Ababa.



African Ministers and experts endorsed the AGDI during the Seventh African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing+Ten) held in Addis Ababa in October 2004.

Member States have also acknowledged AGDI as a tool for monitoring the empowerment of African women and their participation in the NEPAD process, especially in the context of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The AGDI was also recognized by African policy makers as an opportune tool to help streamline reporting on various regional and international conventions and documents on gender and women's rights. It consists of two parts: a quantitative measure, the Gender Status Index (GSI) and a qualitative measure, the African Women's Progress Scoreboard (AWPS).

Field studies on the AGDI were undertaken in 12 countries, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia and Uganda. Currently, ECA is preparing AGDI's extension to 26 additional countries.

Feminization of Poverty

The BPPA noted that the “failure to adequately mainstream a gender perspective in all economic analysis and planning and to address the structural causes of poverty as a contributing factor to the feminization of poverty”. Development plans are expected to address women’s concerns, to mainstream gender issues and to develop indicators to monitor implementation. Since the Beijing Women’s World Conference policy frameworks and strategies have adopted an inclusive approach towards gender concerns and women’s participation.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSPs) are one of such frameworks that are prepared by governments through a participatory process involving civil society. Where the PRSP process has been done well with adequate participation of all groups in the country, women’s poverty issues are included in the country’s poverty reduction plan of action. The first generation PRSPs have provided valuable lessons especially on addressing women’s concerns and it is hoped that the second generation will take these lessons on board and address women’s poverty adequately. MDG 1 focuses on reducing, by half, the number of persons living on one dollar or less per day and halving the percentage of people suffering from hunger.⁹ Africa is the poorest region in the world, with women comprising about 70 percent of the urban and rural poor. Female-headed households are on the increase and are poorer than those headed by males. Rural women face the most challenges. Overall, women lack education, access to resources such as land, time and capital, as well as financial services. Beyond farming, women are still mostly found in the resource-strapped informal sector where income is low and unstable and where government protection is minimal. As a result of retrenchment, following Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and neo-liberal globalization policies, the informal sector has become overcrowded with workers struggling in survivalist economic activities that do not increase productivity.

The overall economic growth shows far

⁹ ECA, *The Millennium Development Goals in Africa: Profiles and Challenges*, 2005. Addis Ababa



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more positive development than the realization of gender parity. From just below 3 percent in 1999, the economic growth curve has kept on going up, reaching 5.2 percent in 2006. The positive performance has been maintained not only in oil-producing countries but also in a significant number of oil importing countries.¹⁰ However, for most African countries, real growth rates remain low relative to their development goals. To ensure that women also benefit from the growth that the continent is starting to enjoy, distributional issues need to be addressed. Pro-poor growth policies are important to ensure women benefit and do not remain forever in the poverty trap.

Achievements

48 African governments have developed PRSPs, but not all strategies address gender issues (e.g., Zambia’s land policies). In terms of achieving MDG goals, only fourteen nations are likely to achieve MDG 1; Most of these nations are in Northern Africa while SSA still trails behind.

¹⁰ ECA, *Millennium Development Goals Report*, 2007. Report to the Conference of Ministers responsible for Finance, Planning, and Economic Development. April 2-3, 2007.

Certain burgeoning initiatives have become widespread, including micro-credit schemes, entrepreneurial training programmes, gender budgeting analyses and land allocation projects. The use of gender budgeting tools have become quite common as these put more resources into women's hands but require constant lobbying by NGOs and feminists.

Obstacles

In rural areas, agricultural outputs are often affected by poor weather patterns, civil unrest and poor long-term planning. Above all, macro-economic policies, aimed at poverty reduction are often not gender-sensitive. Globalization has had mixed results for Africa

and for women. Overall, the prices of African commodities (except oil and other minerals) have been falling. Further, the introduction of SAPs has resulted in women spending much-needed income on health and other forms of care-taking due to the withdrawal of government funding and subsidies in the health sector.

There is a need for macroeconomic policies to integrate tools for gender mainstreaming in the policy development process, and gender-sensitive indicators for monitoring and evaluation of their use. Data that are generated from such tools will help to focus attention on reducing gender disparities especially in areas such as access to resources.

Women in the Shadows of Economic Policies

Although African women's participation in the labour force has overall been high compared to other regions of the world, the problem lies in the fact that it is generally in the agricultural and informal sector labour. Both are less protected by government regulations in terms of wages, benefits, and access to resources than the formal sector. Men are more likely to be found in the formal sector and across Africa, female income tends to hover around 50 percent of male income levels.¹¹ Both in the formal and informal sectors, women tend to occupy lower-waged, often part-time work.

With globalization, African women are increasingly sought for home-based or unskilled jobs that carry few benefits and expose them to sexual abuse, unfairly depressed wages, very uncertain hours and other exploitative practices in most countries.

Governments must go well beyond merely documenting women's participation in the work force. More attention needs to be paid to application of gender analytical frameworks and concepts in order to better understand women's contributions to national economies; the significance of unpaid

work in sustaining the communities; and the link between gender inequalities and the excess burden of work on women. Gender equality concerns need to be put at the centre of macro and microeconomic policies.

SPOTLIGHT ON Sabahar, Making a Difference with Silk Production

Silk production is making inroads for skilled Ethiopian women who are single parents. Sabahar, an Ethiopian textile company is an initiative that works closely with the Ethiopian Agriculture Research Organization and the Ministry of Agriculture to promote cocoon production as a supplementary income-generating activity for farmers and women's groups.

Sabahar aims to ensure fair trade and employment principles are respected and in the promotion of silk

production and processing in Ethiopia. Sabahar has established networks to facilitate direct purchase from the increasing number of rural households producing cocoons. Sabahar has more than 60 women, spinning silk on a drop spindle and receiving significant income from the company for their work. The women are generally skilled in spinning cotton and can spin 50 cocoons in an hour, which results in about 20 grams of silk.

For more details, contact sabahar@gmail.com

¹¹ UNDP: *The Human Development Report 2005*. Table 26.

When development policy planning starts to focus on unpaid work and the care economy, it will be possible to develop strategies to alter gender imbalances in the labour sector and the economy in general.

Female vendors in the informal sector often become the scapegoats during economic crises and are targeted as the cause of rising prices. Women tend to bear the brunt of harassment, especially in cross-border trade. Similarly, female rural migrants are perceived as the instigators of urban malaise (overcrowding, prostitution, inadequate sanitation, etc.). Women become the scapegoats when the real issues of inadequate services in urban areas remain largely ignored by governments.

Achievements

One of the main developments has been increased opportunities for training and availability of credit. Over the last few years there has been proliferation of micro-credit schemes. In many countries, this has opened opportunities for women to access financial resources outside the formal banking institutions. Rotation credit associations all over Africa have been adopted and aligned to formal banking systems. Loans often depend on local groups standing as guarantor rather than the borrower's physical assets. Many governments have been directly involved in these programmes, working with national and international NGOs as well as banks. Typical examples of credit schemes in Africa are; Credit Unions (Mali, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Uganda); solidarity groups based on the Grameen model (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Djibouti and Niger); and village banks (Ghana, Guinea, Niger and Senegal). In Morocco, the Zakura Micro-Credit System based on the group solidarity model has led to clients diversifying their investments and thus increasing incomes.¹²

As women's contributions to national economies is becoming more and more evident with the value of the household economy estimated to be up to fifty per cent

¹² F. Mourji. *Impact Study of Zakura Credit Program 2000*. www.unctf.org/english/microfinance/reports/technicaZakura.htm



Jynki Pilke

of national¹³, several countries are developing time-use surveys that will allow governments to better understand the workload of women and their contribution to productivity. To support these initiatives, ECA has developed a guidebook for mainstreaming gender perspectives and household production into national statistics, budgets and policies in Africa. The guidebook offers a compendium of methodologies, materials and tools for integrating women's and men's unpaid work and household production into sound policymaking, implementation and evaluation.

Obstacles

Global capitalism depends on cutting costs in order to enhance profits. One major area is the cost of labour. Since the 1980s, the social rights and benefits of workers have declined all over the world and there is a tendency of disinvesting in the social welfare, especially in the medical coverage and childcare. Without the government policy commitment, women depending on uncoordinated schemes such as micro financing, women will remain secondary players in the economy. Further, each nation needs to obtain additional finances to meet the costs of new programmes. For instance, Zambia has calculated that in the "lower case scenario" it will need \$US 559.1 million in 2006 to \$US 901.6 million in 2015 from donors to meet the costs of MDGs. Yet, it acknowledges that donor flows have always been volatile and unpredictable. It acknowledges the need for improved transparency and accountability on its part.¹⁴

¹³ ECA, "A guidebook for mainstreaming gender perspectives and household production into national statistics, budgets and policies in Africa, Working Document", 2004

¹⁴ C. Mphuka. *The Cost of Meeting the MDGs in Zambia 2005*. Report submitted to CSPR, JCTR and CCSD.

Human Rights of Women; More Resources Needed to Implement Progressive Legal Frameworks

In order to raise awareness regarding women's human rights, emphasis has been placed on human rights education. ECA's ACGSD is monitoring with the AGDI the level of human rights education and how African countries are meeting the commitments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Generally, the AGDI findings show that the laws and plans are not adequately followed up with resource allocation. NGOs, however, are working diligently to raise awareness.

Governments are expected to strengthen legal frameworks that promote the rights of women and to domesticate all international and regional instruments on women's rights. After ratification, all conventions are supposed to be implemented. For Africa, this means ratifying and implementing CEDAW, the Protocol to the African Charter for Human and People's Rights and the Rights of Women and the many subregional or national declarations (e.g., SADC's 1997 Declaration on Gender and Development).

The practice of FGM is now classified as a violation of women's human rights. It is still widely practiced in Africa, but its form varies from country to country (excision, cliterodectomy, and infibulations). Prevalence varies widely from about 5% in the Democratic Republic of Congo to 98% in Somalia. By the end of 2006, 17 of the 31 nations practicing FGM had criminalized it. Several States in Nigeria have also outlawed FGM. Governments are now involved in outreach programmes and/or funding to discourage the activity. NGOs have invested a lot of resources in advocating for the elimination of the practice. In Kenya, Senegal and Uganda, other puberty rites are now used as substitutes for FGM. In many countries progress is being made on this front through joint NGO and government effort.

Where is the money for women's rights?

Assessing the role of donors in the promotion of women's rights and the support of women's rights organizations.

This report is the result of ongoing action research initiative launched by AWID. It aims to explore trends in the funding landscape and to propose possible strategies for women's organizations to get the needed resources for the struggle for women's rights. Click on <http://www.awid.org> for more.

Achievements

Many governments are involved in educational or outreach programmes and/or funding to raise awareness. NGOs are in the forefront of stamping out the activity and the AU Protocol came into force in November 2005 after 15 nations had ratified it. The African Court on Human and People's Rights was established in 2004 with 23 signatories.



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Female Genital Mutilation

All forms of female genital mutilation (FGM) involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia. Different types of FGM are known to be practiced in at least 28 African countries today. The types of FGM include:

- I Excision of the prepuce, with or without excision of part of, or the entire clitoris
- II Excision of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora
- III Excision of part or all of the external genitalia and stitching / narrowing of the vaginal opening
- IV Infibulation: Removal of the clitoral hood, the clitoris, the labia minora, the labia majora, and stitching together of the two sides of the vulva, leaving a

very small hole to permit the flow of urine and menstrual blood. The most common form of FGM is excision of the clitoris and the labia minora accounting for up to 80% of all cases; the most extreme form is infibulation, which constitutes around 15% or all procedures.

- V Unclassified types of FGM: These include pricking, piercing or incision cauterization by burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissues; scraping (angurya cuts) of the vaginal orifice or cutting (gishiri cuts) of the vagina; introduction of corrosive substances into the vagina to cause bleeding or herbs into the vagina with the aim of tightening or narrowing the vagina.

Source: Committee on the Status of Women

Obstacles

The main obstacles include cultural, religious, and other resistance to the implementation of human rights, thus problems are ignored when brought to light. For instance, FGM is purely a cultural tradition without legal, social or health justification. Budgets are not

developed to educate, conduct research, or implement new policies, for example in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Uganda. Where new Sharia laws are rapidly spreading, such as in Northern Nigeria and Niger, women are consistently treated unequally under the new criminal systems.

Countries that have criminalized harmful traditional practices by law

- 1. Burkina Faso (1995)
- 2. Djibouti (1995)
- 3. Egypt – Ministerial Decree (1997)
- 4. Ethiopia (2004)
- 5. Ghana (1994)
- 6. Guinea (1965 and 2000)
- 7. Ivory Coast (1997)
- 8. Kenya (2001)
- 9. Mali – Ministerial Decree (2002)
- 10. Niger (2002)
- 11. Senegal (1999)
- 12. Tanzania (1998)
- 13. Togo (1998)
- 14. Chad (2003)
- 15. Benin (2004)
- 16. Central African Republic
- 17. Nigeria

Source: Inter-African Committee (IAC)

Protecting the Rights of the Girl-child

Contained in the Dakar Platform for Action of 1994, the rights of the girl-child were an important contribution of Africa to the BPFA. Governments were asked to eliminate all forms of discrimination as well as negative cultural attitudes and practices against female children. Basic to all of this was the educational, nutritional, and healthcare of the girl-child. The very definition of masculinity and femininity has tended to put females at a disadvantage within a given culture even though expectations and expressions vary across cultures. All sectors of society are involved and awareness must be raised for all groups: parents, community leaders, school officials, religious leaders, and the children themselves.

The African Charter focuses on the problem of child abuse and exploitation. Human trafficking, prostitution and pornography need more attention in Africa. Workshops, conferences and national campaigns are needed to help build awareness about early marriage, rape, sexual harassment in schools, and the vulnerability of girls to the spread of HIV /AIDS.

Achievements

Education is perceived as a major force that empowers girls. Aside from the policies on universal primary education, there's growing attention to curriculum content for combating local attitudes. Progress made on this front is crucial. The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) works with community groups, national governments, international foundations, and NGOs to build capacity in gender analysis, link up with policymakers and develop special educational programmes. Also, by 2005, only Somalia had yet to ratify the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. Seventeen nations, including Djibouti, Egypt, Namibia, Rwanda and Tunisia have identified girl-child concerns as a priority area: to eliminate FGM, build capacity, enforce existing policies, and develop programmes for empowerment.

Obstacles

There are still indigenous societies in existence that need to reformulate their activities to raise girls giving them similar opportunities to boys, including adequate health, education, food, leisure time, access to technology, personal



confidence and employment. The Sande Society in Liberia in training girls for marriage sometimes keeps them out of school for up to 3 years.¹⁵ Many parents still remove female children from school to assist in economic survival or help pay for the education of male children. Investing in girls is often perceived as a high investment risk. Finally, too few governments pay attention to the growing problem of human trafficking, prostitution, and pornography and the role of the Internet in exacerbating the problem.

The text is a summary of the report Meeting the Commitments of Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment. African Performance. For the full report, please visit www.uneca.org/acgd

Saying "No" to FGM: An example from Guinea

On 6 November 1999, the women of Kouroussa in Guinea deposited their knives publicly and made a solemn declaration to stop FGM. Soon after, they were followed by women in several other prefectures of the country.

In support of these efforts, the Inter-African Committee (IAC) national Committee in Guinea Conakry, in collaboration with the World Bank, started a project aimed at supporting the women to find alternative sources of income. The project provided funding and organised training in the fields that women themselves

had identified as potential sources of income. These included food processing, growing vegetables, textile production and basic financial management. The initiative has continued to grow as women have joined campaigns to eliminate FGM and other organizations have started to support their work.

Source: Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC). IAC is a non-governmental, non-profit international organization, established in Dakar, Senegal in 1984. IAC is promoting women's rights by campaigning against harmful traditional practices.

Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty

(Martha Chen, Joann Vanel, Francie Lund, James Heintz with Renana Jhabvala and Christine Bonner)

This report by UNIFEM marks the fifth anniversary of the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the tenth anniversary of the BPFA. It argues that unless governments and policymakers pay more attention to employment and its links to poverty, the campaign to make poverty history will not succeed and the hope for gender equality will flounder on the reality of women's growing economic insecurity.

Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality and the MDGs: A WEDO Information and Action Guide (Available in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese)

This Information and Action Guide makes a goal-by-goal case for gender equality to be seen as essential for achieving all the MDGs, not only as a goal in its own right. *Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), 2005*

CSW Roundtable: The Role of the United Nations in Promoting Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women: Progress Made and Future Opportunities

The 60th anniversary of the Commission on the Status of Women is an important milestone in the work of the United Nations to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and is an occasion to assess the achievements of the United Nations in this area. The roundtable discussion held on 10 November 2006 provided an opportunity for a broad exchange of views between experts and practitioners on the indispensable role of the United Nations in achieving progress over the last 60 years. It also examined how the current reform process underway in the United Nations offers a unique opportunity to discuss the vision for the future and accelerate efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. For a summary of the discussion, go to <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/>

CSW to meet on "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl-child"

The fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place from 26 February to 9 March 2007. Based on this theme, an online discussion was held from 14 August to 8 September 2006. DAW, in collaboration with UNICEF, also organized an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the theme. The EGM was hosted by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, from 25 to 28 September 2006.

Launching of the e-network for national gender equality machineries in Africa

The e-network is the outcome of a project carried out by the Division of Advancement of Women (DAW) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and UNECA. The e-network serves as a tool to enhance knowledge management and communication

within the national gender machines, as well as to strengthen networking among national machineries at the sub-regional and regional levels to accelerate the implementation of Beijing Platform for Action. The information portal serves as an arena for information sharing and exchange, and a discussion forum. Visit the site to find out more and sign up for the thematic e-discussions in www.uneca.org/ngmafrica

The African Civil Society Forum on the theme: Building UN/NGOs Partnerships for Democratic Governance through the MDGs

22-24 March 2007

The Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO) and the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), in cooperation with AU and ECA, organised the African Civil Society Forum "Building UN/NGOs Partnerships for Democratic Governance through the MDGs" that took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 22-24 March 2007.

The purpose of the Forum was to bring together representatives of national, regional and international NGOs from Africa to explore the most effective ways to work with the United Nations system and to partner with and impact on African institutions, such as AU, ECA and NEPAD. Concrete recommendations were produced for input into the Ministerial Declaration of the ECOSOC High-level Segment of July 2007. For more information, visit: <http://www.ngocongo.org/> or <http://www.uneca.org/gpad>

Launch of the African Women's Rights Observatory (AWRO)

The reporting on BPFA, MDGs, ICPD + Ten, CEDAW and other related agreements and declarations has to a great extent shown the need for an African Women's Rights Observatory through which information gathered can be shared and accessed by all stakeholders from governments to community-based organizations (CBOs), and from NGOs to individuals. The Observatory, a centre of excellence on women's rights, will regularly track and report on how African countries are achieving the specific and interrelated objectives on women's rights and establish a monitoring base for BPFA and other related women's human rights instruments. The Observatory was launched in collaboration with ECA's African Centre for Gender and Social Development and UNDP's Regional Gender Programme for Africa Bureau (RGPAB), 20-21 April 2007 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Reports on specific thematic areas and progress towards gender equality in African countries will be published in hard copies as well as on the Observatory website.

For more information: please email ecainfo@uneca.org