



Beijing + 5: What does it mean for Africa?

Progress assessed during the Sixth Regional Conference on Women and Beijing + 5

“I think delegates forget that words such as “forced marriages, female genital mutilation, marital rape and incest, which are disputed in the document, are at the very centre of people’s lives.”

Delegate from Togo

It is not surprising that the issues raising hot debate during the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in November 1999, were as varied and emotive as the totality of women’s lives. Participants called for debt conversions by African States to allow more expenditure on social sectors, especially poverty reduction. They appealed to all African governments to support peace and take measures against the exploitation and trafficking of

women and children. A continent-wide march against poverty, and application of the 20/20 initiative, were mooted. Governments were urged to reduce their military spending and promote a culture of peace, while promoting respect for the United Nations Charter on Territorial Sovereignty. A solidarity movement of high-level women was called for, to carry out sensitisation in countries at war and in countries producing arms. Countries were urged to train health workers and equip health centres with the necessary equipment for handling obstetrical emergencies, in order to reduce material infant mortality. The need for capacity building for women’s economic empowerment and implementation of a quota system of 50 per cent to enhance representation of

women in decision-making positions were underlined.

Delegates wanted UNIFEM and ACW to be strengthened with human, material and financial resources, given the quality and the quantity of the work that the two organizations perform. ECA, OAU and UNICEF were called on to support the fight against drugs in all forms, and derivatives “that put our boys and girls at risk.” Countries requested support from ACW in establishing mechanisms for collecting reliable gender-desegregated data and encouraging private, independent radio stations to foster production of special programmes, particularly for women. The Centre was also asked to strengthen co-ordination mechanisms among United Nations Agencies and establish institutional mechanisms for follow-up of national implementation of the Platforms for Action.

On a global level, progress made in the advancement of women was reviewed during the United Nations Special Session of the General Assembly, held from 5 to 9 June 2000, in New York. “NGOs had little opportunity” and, “there was little me-

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dia coverage” were often-heard comments among those who attended. The Session, titled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century,” elicited disappointment from many participants, over the insistence by some delegations, on re-negotiating the Platform for Action adopted in Beijing. The African NGO report described Africa as worse off than it was five years ago in terms of armed conflicts, with women becoming more vulnerable to violence and HIV/AIDS.

Some of the contentious issues raised include:

- A proposal by the G-77 to include the negative consequences of globalization and structural adjustment programmes, high costs of external debt servicing and declining terms of international trade that have impacted heavily on women;

- Lack of political will, commitment and the inappropriate application of structural adjustment policies, all of which have severely affected the health sector;

- Inclusion of the statement “sexual and reproductive rights as well the need for increased attention to sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS infection among women and girls” as an area requiring further action.

- The need for continued political commitment to gender equality, at all levels was underlined. Key challenges affecting the implementation of the Platform were identified as including:

- *Globalization*, with its

Editorial

During 1999 and the first half of 2000 most of our energy went into organizing a mid-term review of the progress made since the African Platform for Action was adopted in Dakar in 1994. This culminated in the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women, held in November 1999. At the conference, African states adopted a Plan of Action for speeding up implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms over the next five years. Following the African meeting the “Beijing +5’ Review took place in New York in June 2000.

The stock-taking process is the focus of this issue of GenderNet. From the outcomes of the Sixth Regional Conference and the Beijing + 5 review, we highlight areas in which progress has been made, as well as emerging issues that require urgent attention.

After a long absence we’re hoping to issue this newsletter two times a year again. We are interested in receiving comments and suggestions from our readers on the content and your suggestions on types of information that the newsletter should cover. Please take a moment to fill out our mini questionnaire at the end of this edition, or on our website: <http://www.uneca.org>

attendant characteristics of enhancing economic disparities and deepening inequalities among and within countries. There is pressure on countries to enact policy shifts in favour of more open trade and financial flows, privatization of state-owned enterprises and, in many cases, to lower public spending, particularly on social services, all with economic, social and political ramifications;

- *Feminization of poverty*: There is increasing gender inequality associated with deteriorating and unsafe work conditions and degradation of the environment. This is especially marked in the informal economy and in the rural areas.

- *Employment*. The level of participation of women in the labour force has risen in many countries. However, the application of certain economic policies

has had a negative impact on women’s employment, which has not been matched by improvements in wages or working conditions. Women continue to be employed in low paid, part-time, and contract jobs marked by insecurity and by safety and health hazards;

- *Allocation of resources and social protection*. Economic instability has undermined the capacity of states to provide social protection and security as well as funding for the implementation of the Platform for Action. It is imperative that all actors employ innovative approaches in allocating the existing resources more equitably. One such innovation is the gender analysis of public budgets, which is emerging as an important tool for determining the differential impact of expenditures on women and men.

Global Achievements and Obstacles in the implementation of the Platform for Action

A. Women and Poverty

Achievements

Considerable progress has been achieved in increasing recognition of the gender dimensions of poverty. Countries increasingly recognize that gender equality is one of the factors of particular importance for eradicating poverty. The pursuit of a two-pronged approach — that entails promoting employment and income-generating activities for women on the one hand, and providing access to basic social services, including education and health care on the other — has had some success. Micro-credit and other financial instruments for women have emerged as a successful strategy for economic empowerment.

Obstacles

There is widening economic inequality between women and men, a growing debt burden and excessive military spending in some countries. The impact of official development assistance, ODA, is limited due to the low levels of aid and inefficient use of these resources. Unequal distribution of unremunerated work between women and men, lack of technological and financial support for women's entrepreneurship, unequal access to, and control over, capital and resources (particularly land and credit and access to labour markets), as well as harmful traditional and customary practices, all contribute to

women's poverty.

B. Education and training of women

Achievements

Progress has been made in training and education of women and girls at all levels, especially in countries that have marshalled the requisite political commitment and allocation of resources. Measures have been taken to remove gender biases from education and training by initiating alternative education and training systems to reach women and girls in disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

Obstacles

Some countries lack the resources and political will needed to undertake such programmes. Other obstacles to progress in this area are, a lack of childcare facilities; the persistence of gender stereotypes in educational materials; the remote location of some communities and inadequate salaries in the teaching profession. Little progress has been made in eradicating illiteracy in some developing countries, thus aggravating inequality at economic, social and political levels.

C. Women and Health

Achievements

More attention is being paid to high mortality rates among women and girls as a result of malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS, water borne diseases, communicable and diarrhoeal diseases and malnutrition.

Reproductive and sexual health, and the recognition of the importance of involving men in family planning, is also receiving attention.

Obstacles

Investment in essential obstetric care remains insufficient in many countries. The approach to health and health care for women and girls is not holistic, partly due to the predominant focus of health care systems being on treating illness rather than maintaining optimal health. In some countries, insufficient attention is paid to the role of social and economic determinants of health and some negative impact of the increased trend towards privatisation of health care systems. Unequal power relationships between men and women also often make it difficult for women to negotiate safe and responsible sex practices. Adolescents -especially girls - continue to lack access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services, while the problem unsafe abortions has not been fully addressed.

D. Violence against women

Achievements

The active support of civil society, in particular women's organizations and NGOs, has played an important role in promoting awareness raising and support services. Education for law enforcement personnel, members of the judiciary, health care providers

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and welfare workers is being promoted. Efforts to eradicate harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation, have received national, regional and international policy support. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has appointed a Special Ambassador for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation.

Obstacles

There is inadequate understanding of the root causes of various forms of violence against women and girls. Discriminatory socio-cultural attitudes, along with economic inequalities, serve to reinforce women's subordinate place in society, leaving them vulnerable to violent attacks. Domestic violence, including sexual violence in marriage is still treated as a private matter in some countries, and there is a lack of comprehensive programmes to deal with the perpetrators. Inadequate data on violence further impedes informed policymaking and analysis, while preventive strategies remain fragmented and reactive.

E. Women and armed conflict

Achievements:

The adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is of historic significance. The statute provides that rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, pregnancy, sterilization and other forms of sexual violence are war crimes when committed in the context of armed conflict and are also, under defined circumstances, crimes against humanity.

Obstacles:

The targeting of civilians during armed conflicts, the displacement of people, and the recruitment of child soldiers in violation of national or international law, by state and or non state actors, have had a particularly adverse impact on gender equality and women's human rights. There has been an increase in all forms of violence against women, including sexual slavery, rapes, sexual abuse and forced pregnancy in situations of armed conflict. Girls are often abducted or recruited in violation of international law, into situations of armed conflict including, inter alia, as combatants, sexual slaves or providers of domestic services. Armed conflict creates or exacerbates the high level of female-headed households, which in many cases are living in poverty.

F. Women and the economy

Achievements

Research has been conducted on the barriers to economic empowerment faced by women, including the relationship between remunerated and unremunerated work. A number of tools are being developed to assist with these assessments.

Obstacles

The importance of a gender perspective in the development of macro economic policy is still not widely recognized. The majority of women work in the rural areas and in the informal economy as subsistence producers. Those working in the service sector receive meagre incomes, with no job security or unemployment benefits. Women with comparable skills and experience to men are

confronted with a gender wage gap and lag behind men in income and career mobility in the formal sector. Equal pay for work of equal value has not been fully realized. In some countries, women's full and equal rights to own land and other property, including through the right to inheritance, is not recognized yet in national legislation. The combination of remunerated work and care giving within families, households and communities leads to a disproportionate burden for women, as long as there is insufficient sharing of tasks and responsibilities by men. And women still perform the larger part of unremunerated work.

G. Women and power and decision-making

Achievements

An increasing number of countries are applying affirmative and positive action policies. National mechanisms and machineries for the advancement of women as well as national and international networks of women politicians, parliamentarian, activists and professionals in various fields have been established or upgraded and strengthened.

Obstacles

Despite general acceptance of the need for a gender balance in decision-making bodies at all levels, a gap between *de jure* and *de facto* equality persists. Women remain grossly under-represented in decision-making bodies in all areas, including in politics, conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, the economy, the environment and the media, which hinders the inclusion of a gender

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perspective in these critical spheres of influence. Initiatives and programmes aimed at women's increased participation in decision-making have been hindered by a number of factors including, human and financial resources for training and advocacy to enable women to consider political careers; gender-insensitive attitudes in society; low awareness of women limiting their engagement in decision-making; lack of a proactive approach by elected officials and political parties for promoting gender equality and women's participation in public life; lack of social awareness of the importance of balanced participation of women and men in decision-making; and unwillingness on the part of men of share power.

H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women**Achievements**

In many countries, progress has been achieved in terms of increasing the visibility, status, outreach and co-ordination of activities of national machineries. Despite their limited financial resources, they have made a significant contribution to the development of human resources in the field of gender studies and also contributed to the growing efforts for the generation and dissemination of data disaggregated by sex and age, gender-sensitive research and documentation.

Obstacles

Inadequate financial and human resources and a lack of po-

litical will and commitment are the main obstacles confronting national machineries. The situation is exacerbated by insufficient understanding of gender equality and mainstreaming within government structures, as well as prevailing gender stereotypes, discriminatory attitudes, as well as competing government priorities. In some countries the machineries operate with unclear mandates, are marginalized within the national government structures and lack disaggregated data (by sex and age). Activities of national machineries have also been hindered by structural and communication problems within, and among government agencies, and insufficient links to civil society.

I. Human rights of women**Achievements**

There has been some progress in the area of legal reforms and steps taken to realize women's *de facto* enjoyment of their human rights. Legal literacy and awareness campaigns have increased at all levels, with women's NGOs contributing to raising awareness that "women's rights are human rights."

Obstacles

A large number of reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have been registered. At country level, discriminatory legislation as well as harmful traditional and customary practices and negative stereotyping of women and men still persist. In many countries, women have insufficient access to the law, resulting from: illiteracy, lack of legal literacy, information and resources, insensi-

tivity and gender bias, and lack of awareness of and respect for the human rights of women by law enforcement officials and the judiciary.

J. Women and the media**Achievements**

The establishment of local, national and international women's media networks, has contributed to global information dissemination, exchange of views and support to women's groups active in media work.

Obstacles

Development of, and access to Internet infrastructure by women, is limited, especially in developing countries.

K. Women and the environment**Achievements**

Some national environment policies and programmes now incorporate gender perspectives. A number of projects have been launched to preserve and utilize women's traditional ecological knowledge, including that of indigenous women, in the management of natural resources, and preservation of bio-diversity.

Obstacles

Women's limited access to technical skills, resources and information, due to gender inequality and other factors, has impeded their effective participation in decision making regarding the sustainable environment. Environmental policies and programmes lack a gender perspective and fail to take into account women's

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roles and contributions to environmental sustainability.

L. The girl-child**Achievements**

Some progress has been made in creating support mechanisms for adolescent girls who are pregnant or mothers, increasing attendance in science and technology classes and expanding

opportunities to access non-formal education. Increased attention has been given to the health of the girl-child, including sexual and reproductive health of adolescents. More countries have introduced legislation to ban female genital mutilation.

Obstacles

Major obstacles include the heavy burden of domestic re-

sponsibilities on girls, inadequate nutrition and access to health services. Lack of finance often restricts access to education, which in turn limits opportunities throughout life. There is inadequate provision of the necessary information, education and services, to enable girls to deal with their sexuality in a positive and responsible way.

Recommendations

- Strengthen partnerships between governments, NGOs, civil society, and United Nations agencies, and build NGO capacity;
- Establish specific indicators for improved measurement of the progress achieved by governments and encourage Member States to integrate gender-desegregated data in national accounts, utilise the gender perspective in the national budgetary process and establish data-banks and institutions for producing gender-desegregated data;
- Strengthen institutional mechanisms responsible for promoting women and girls with human, material and financial resources, and upgrade their status;
- Promote the participation of men in the different national and international-level statutory meetings on women;
- Advocate for integration of the gender perspective in national planning through the participation of Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs in the ECA Conference of Ministers of Planning and promote a gender perspective in various departments of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF);
- Revitalize conflict-prevention mechanisms in Africa, promote traditional methods of resolving conflicts and involve women in them;
- Ban small arms in African countries and encourage women in the North to lobby against the manufacture and selling of arms;
- Appeal to countries of the North to make anti-retro-virus products for treating HIV/AIDS more affordable and accessible to the African population;
- Include women in the national delegations that participate in negotiations and debates at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), in order to ensure that the gender perspective is taken into account. Also, to lobby the WTO to grant a delay of 15 years to African States to allow them to fulfil the conditions set by the Organization;
- Establish a Development Bank for Women, spearheaded by the African Development Bank, ADB.

Related Processes: International Conference on Population and Development

The review of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) last year brought some alarming facts back to the world's attention. According to a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) write-up on the review, about 600,000 women worldwide still die every year and some 18 million are left disabled or chronically ill, due to preventable complications of pregnancy and childbirth. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 330 million new sexually transmitted infections occur annually, at least half of these among young people. HIV/AIDS alone accounts for 6 million new infections every year, increasingly affecting women, babies and young people. Sexual violence is endemic and lethal, both within and outside marriage. At least 150 million women who want to limit their childbearing do not yet use contraception. Universal reproductive and sexual health is, it seems, still far from being a reality.

Governments at ICPD agreed that in countries where maternal mortality is very high, skilled attendants should assist at least 40 per cent of all births by 2005; at least 50 per cent by 2010; and at least 60 per cent by 2015. Globally, skilled attendants should assist 80 per cent of all births by 2005, 85 per cent by 2010 and 90 per cent by 2015.

Recognizing that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is far more serious than had been understood in Cairo, the ICPD+5 document reiterated the importance of providing access to male condoms, called for wide provision of female condoms, and urged governments to enact legislation and adopt measures to prevent discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS and those vulnerable to HIV infection. The document called on governments, where feasible, to make anti retroviral drugs available to women during and after pregnancy, and to provide counselling so that mothers living with HIV/AIDS can make free and informed decisions about breastfeeding.

Governments agreed that youth (aged 15-24) are at high risk of HIV infection and specified that, by 2005, at least 90 per cent, and by 2010, at least 95 per cent, of young people should have access to necessary information, education and services to reduce their risk. This includes "access to preventive methods such as female and male condoms, voluntary testing, counselling and follow-up". The rate of HIV infection in young people was accepted as a central benchmark indicator, with the goal of ensuring a 25 per cent reduction in prevalence by 2005 in the most affected countries. Globally, prevalence in this age group should have gone down by 25 percent by 2010.

A 'Women's Coalition for ICPW' comprising 101 NGOs from every region (the majority being from developing countries) lobbied for women's and young people's health and rights. In the end, NGO and government proponents of the Programme of Action together won out over ideological opposition and political interests.

Status of Women in Africa on CD-ROM

ECA's African Centre for Women (ACW) officially launched the first edition of 'The Status of Women in Africa,' a new CD-ROM containing comprehensive gender-disaggregated data on African development.

The CD-ROM was launched at an Information Workshop for National Focal Points jointly organized by ECA and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), shortly before the United Nations General Assembly Special Session 'Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century', which took place from 5-9 June 2000.

Briefing delegates at the launch, Ms. Josephine Ouedraogo, Director of ACW, explained that the Centre's main objective in producing the CD-ROM was to provide statistical data on the status of women in Africa by country and by gender, where the latter existed. Stressing the usefulness of hard data as an instrument for planners and policy makers, Ms. Ouedraogo added that "no government action is credible without statistical data to justify choice of priorities and to monitor and evaluate measurable objectives of government."

The CD-ROM, which features audio and video as well as user-friendly, searchable data -- was enriched by feedback from participants at the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women held in Addis Ababa in November 1999. The content of the CDROM had been guided by the 12 critical areas of concern in the Platform. It seeks to develop a clear picture of the impact of the Platform on the lives of African women.

The CD-ROM is expected to serve as a tool for planners and policy makers as well as a catalyst to encourage governments to fill in the gaps in data and ensure that essential data is collected so that the true picture of the status of women emerges. A limited number of copies are being made available to governments.

For copies write to ecainf@uneca.org or download the web version from www.uneca.org

CEDAW

Burkina Faso: Positive Steps Taken, but Force of Negative Tradition Still Strong

The Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has recently been ratified by two more African countries, Mauritania and Niger. Somalia is the only country in Africa that has yet to sign the Convention.

In January 2000, the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which reviews reports required by States Parties to the Convention, met and took up the combined second and third reports of Burkina Faso and the third report of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mariam Marie-Gisele Guigma, Minister for the Development of Women, presented Burkina Faso's report covering the period 1989 to 1997. The report's most salient point was the need to involve women in decision-making so they could propose solutions to their own problems.

The Minister informed the Committee that women comprise 51.8 per cent of the country's population. About 44.4 per cent of Burkinabes — the majority being women, live below the poverty line. Despite considerable population movements and the development of towns, 84.6 per cent of

Burkina Faso's people still live in the rural areas and adhere to deep-rooted traditional beliefs and customs. The weight of customs, sexual prejudice and the lack of confidence among women themselves, inhibits their progress in political and public life. Yet, ironically, Burkinabe women have always played a determining role through their mobilization during elections, in which they predominantly vote for male candidates.

The report outlined Burkina Faso's compliance with the Convention in various areas, including health, women and civil law, equal rights to education and the rights of rural women. It noted that the fundamental mission of the Department for the Promotion of the Family, established within the Ministry for Social Affairs and the Family, was to stimulate and co-ordinate all legislative, administrative and economic measures to promote women's status and provide follow-up. These include measures to promote literacy and education among women and girls; to establish national committees against the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) and to fight AIDS; to improve the living standards of widows; and to conduct an information campaign on the Individual and Family Codes.

The Minister explained that the Family Code contains measures to protect women's rights, including the abolition of customs as a source of law for practices like forced marriage and dowry; the right of women to work without the spouse's authorization; the right to inherit a spouse's property; and the right of children to equal inheritance rights. Other legislation imposes penalties for FGM, rape, abortion, seduction of minors, public assault on chastity and good morals, incest, bigamy, adultery and inciting minors to debauchery.

The report stressed, however, that socio-cultural attitudes, traditional practices, reticence, ignorance of the law, illiteracy, the cost of legal action and the geographical remoteness of the courts, all limit women's access to justice. Various forms of violence and forced marriage are still practised. Young girls are viewed as mere property, and socio-economic problems prevent women from enjoying the equal rights provided for in the law. For instance, while the marriage code requires that both parents assume responsibility for their children, paternal power is often exercised. Consequently,

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problems arise particularly when the father dies and the children are not given to the mother but are shared out, with other property, among family members.

On the representation of women in public life, the Minister explained that the general statute provided for equal representation in public service, but women occupy only one third of the junior positions in this area. Women also remain under-represented in the country's elected offices. At the time Burkina Faso had only three women ministers out of the 35 members of Government. There were 10 women out of 111 members of the National Assembly and 27 women out of 154 members in the Chamber of Representatives. Out of 22 ambassadors, three were women, one of whom had been recalled to take up a ministerial post.

The Report stated that the government has defined education as a national priority and had implemented a successful plan for educating girls for the period 1994 to 2000 aimed at reducing the gender gap in that area. This was reflected in the budget increase for the national education policy from 10 to 12 per cent. The Minister stressed that political commitment has also been demonstrated in the creation of satellite schools, with an attendance by girls of 50 per cent. However, economic and sociological problems within the family encourage prioritizing the

education of boys. The weak representation of girls in the primary and secondary levels is mirrored in higher education and women's employment status in the country.

The report indicated that Burkina Faso has included the welfare of rural women in the national plan for the empowerment of women. Women do have access to agriculture services and finance, but discrimination against them persists, as a result of their unequal position within the home. Women's access to credit is similarly affected, the report said. Although decentralized credit institutions preferred to deal with women (as women reimburse loans more readily) the sums provided are inadequate and husbands often create obstacles to accessing such facilities. The report noted that also that in spite of the existence of a law for equal access to lands for men and women, customary and traditional laws that deny ownership to women, prevail.

In other areas, the minister noted that Burkina Faso has undertaken specific programmes for the benefit of handicapped persons including women. Prostitution and all forms of violence are punishable by law and trafficking in women and girls has been severely repressed.

Issues Raised

Members commended the efforts made by the Government of Burkina Faso to improve the

status of women. There seemed to be a genuine effort by the Government and non-governmental organizations to cooperate in achieving a genuinely improved situation for women, they observed. It was stressed, however, that legislation was not in itself sufficient to end such attitudes, as the main obstacles to Burkina Faso's full implementation of the Convention were of an economic, cultural and traditional nature. In addition to the serious problem with superstition, women had been indoctrinated by society into accepting the status quo. No law or policy could make headway without eliminating the perception of women's inferiority. The Government, public and private sectors, the media, as well as development agencies all needed to make supplementary efforts, to overcome the obstacles.

It was noted, for instance, that with 92 per cent illiteracy among women it was difficult for them to free themselves of traditional and cultural prejudices and practices. Female spouses in forced marriages are usually young girls, a situation that often leads to teenage pregnancy. The minimum age for marriage for girls in Burkina Faso is 17 years -- one of the lowest in Africa and in the lower 10 percentile in the world.

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The fundamental role of education and training, not only to eliminate illiteracy among women, but also to sensitize enforcement, teaching, health and judicial personnel was stressed. Noting that illiterate women could not readily access the judicial system, one contributor said legal literacy was of vital importance if women's lives were to be freed from violence and other discrimination in their private lives.

Burkina Faso's efforts to eradicate FGM were praised. It was noted, however, that the Ministry's programme for the protection of maternal and children's health did not cover abortion. Burkinabe women were commended for having taken the lead in accepting the female condom. They should make efforts for greater involvement of men in the use of contraceptives.

A contributor observed that in spite of the fact that 93 per cent of women were engaged in agriculture, women's involvement in this sector had not been mentioned as a priority in the report, for instance through making agricultural training programmes and the land-reform system more women friendly. Among the questions posed were: Was there a focal point for women in the Ministry for Agriculture? Were the micro-credit loans granted without collateral?

Hope was expressed that the

Ministry for the Development of Women had equal status to other Ministries, with the technical capabilities to implement the programmes listed in the report, and not just a token gesture.

Responding to members' comments and questions, Ms Guigma noted that it was too early to say whether the Triennial Plan had realized its aims. 7 per cent of the national budget had been allocated for reaching the Plan's objectives, but this was not sufficient. To address the deficit the Ministry was working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other international organizations to fulfil its needs for guaranteeing women's rights.

At a meeting held during the second half of last year, the Ministry for the Development of Women had been restructured and technical offices had been created to cater for specific programmes, for instance, non-governmental organizations.

The Minister also agreed that there were gaps between policy and the situation on the ground as a result of social and cultural factors. These had to be filled in before discrimination could be reduced. Through the years, there had been inertia among the women themselves, she said, but they were becoming more politically involved, even though the number of those holding public and elected offices was still unsatisfactory. It was up to

the women of Burkina Faso to increase those figures and work must be done to breakdown the cultural stereotypes, she concluded

Clemence Ilboudo, a member of the Burkina Faso delegation, explained that the Family Code had enshrined monogamy as the form most suited to marriage. However, it had authorized polygamy as an exception in special circumstances. During awareness campaigns before adoption of the Code, rural women had opposed monogamy as the sole criterion for marriage. It was difficult to impose on the population a form to which it was not accustomed. Similarly, in cases of witchcraft, accused women accused had recourse to tribunals, but it was difficult to address the social context. For instance, the family of an accused woman might accept a ruling in her favour, but it was impossible to break the solidarity of an entire village if it had already decided against the woman.

She concluded that women, like all citizens, had the right to recourse against violence, including matrimonial violence. There were often cases in which women, assisted by their families, benefited fully from the law. Women magistrates and judges were also willing to help, and there had been a number of indictments, she concluded.

Conflict in the Great Lakes Region; Key Impediment to Women's Progress

Introducing her country's report, ANASTASIE MOLEKO MOLIWA, Minister of Social Affairs and Family said that conditions of extreme poverty had been exacerbated by war and multifaceted crises. She stressed the fact that it was women and children who bear the brunt of the conflict.

The report noted the persistence of traditional views, which perceive women as lacking interest in, and being incapable of managing, national affairs. This attitude is occasionally perpetuated by women themselves, during elections for instance, when women vote overwhelmingly for male candidates.

The Minister stated that the Government had implemented a three-year programme (1997 to 2000), with the following objectives: to ensure the economic advancement of women through the women's enterprise initiative; to ensure their legal and cultural advancement through information on women's rights; to ensure their social advancement through training and the development of women's human capital and the status of women; and to protect the health of women and children by improving their nutritional status, developing primary healthcare programmes and reducing the daily workload of women.

The Government had also begun to elaborate a National Programme for the Advancement of Congolese Women. Scheduled for implementation in the period 1999 to 2004. The Programme would cover the 12 critical areas of concern of the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action. The new Government, which came into power on 17 May 1997, had established an advisory body -the National Women's Council - in accordance with the principle of equality in the Constitution (Article 2). The brief of the Council is to promote, protect and defend the specific rights of women through, among other things, ensuring the implementation of national policy with respect to the protection of women; harnessing all the vital national energies in fighting for the advancement of women; and proposing actions to be undertaken in that area in conformity with international recommendations.

In the economic field, the report identified obstacles as including the lack of access by rural women to land ownership; lack of leisure and appropriate technologies for rural women; the long distances they must walk to reach health centres; and insufficient access to credit and other production resources. Others are difficulties in supplying materials for conserving harvested crops and

moving produce; limited participation of women in community meetings; and the under representation of women in bodies responsible for drawing up economic and development programmes.

The Minister observed that obstacles to the advancement of women in the political and public spheres (Article 7) include the effects of ingrained attitudes, lack of solidarity among women, the maintenance of discriminatory legal provisions, women's ignorance of their own rights and their low levels of education. In Government representation at the international level (Article 8), women are only minimally represented in the diplomatic service. Out of 361 posts, only 18 are filled by women.

On equal access to education (Article 10), the report stated that the state of war and the population's overall poverty have made it difficult to achieve educational goals. While the right to work (Article 11) is recognized by the Labour Code for both men and women, the capacity of married women to conclude employment contracts remains limited owing to the faulty interpretation of article 3 of the Labour Code by employers, who require married women to produce an authorization from their husbands. Very few women enjoy a survivor's pension in respect of the employment of their late husbands. A married woman is not entitled to family benefits or family services, even if her husband is unemployed or poor. The report noted that the situation of rural wom-

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en (Article 14) had not changed. The restrictions on their opportunities for development have worsened and women continue to suffer from inability to own land, distance from health centres, and inability to obtain credit.

On measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women (Article 5), the report noted that sexual discrimination and stereotypical portrayals of women, have a cultural basis. The media plays a role in the exploitation of women by disseminating sensational information about sex and crime. Being under-represented in the decision-making areas of the media, women cannot contribute significantly towards changing such attitudes. In the rural areas, women still live with the taboos and interdicts maintained by men to make a mystique of their superiority and thus protect their status. An example is the belief among many local cultures that women must not eat foods such as eggs and game.

Regarding equality in marriage and family relationships (Article 16), the report stated that all the rights of the woman concerning conjugal relations are governed primarily by the Family Code, which had not changed at all since 1987. In particular, article 448 of the Family Code still contained the juridical incapacity of the married woman, the Minister said. The country's Labour Code stipulates that married women cannot be employed if there is express opposition by

their husbands. Regarding adultery, the Penal Code is more severe for women than for men. The Ministry was developing texts to eliminate all discriminatory provisions, she said.

The report noted that a network of non-governmental organizations was working to raise their awareness of the need to report violence against women. Legal clinics provide a space where female victims of violence can tell their stories and receive counselling and psychotherapy. Testimonies from women attending the clinics reveal that violence against women is related to matters of inheritance, divorce, polygamy, refusal to acknowledge paternity, alcoholism, dowry, lack of family communications, abuse of marital authority, interference by in-laws, management of the family budget and the weight of taboos and tradition.

On trafficking in women and exploitation of women for prostitution (Article 6), the report stated that there are no statutory provisions outlawing prostitution, although those who promote it may be prosecuted under the Criminal Code. Owing to the extent of poverty in the country, the incidence of prostitution is on the rise and adolescent girls are tending to become sexually active at an early age, frequently without taking contraceptive measures or precautions against sexually transmitted diseases or AIDS.

The initial report concluded that efforts still needed to be made at the legislative level, particularly with regard to married women. It said that women themselves

must make an effort to understand the importance and validity of the fight they must wage order to realize all their rights and participate effectively and without restrictions in development.

The second report recommended steps to be taken to abolish all discriminatory provisions in existing legislation and harmonize the various national legal texts in order to eliminate any contradictions. For example, the Government should ensure the establishment and rehabilitation of structures, initiate and sustain actions aimed at changing mentalities through grass-roots education, social and women's centres, rural radio, television and film, among other means.

The Minister concluded that overall, constraints to implementation of the Convention include the fact that political will was limited by the country's difficult situation over the last three years; society's disregard of negative practices as well as the disregard of women themselves; the lax attitude towards sanctions against those who violated women's rights; the difficult economic situation aggravated by the war; and the lack of awareness about the Convention.

She stressed the risk that the Government's commitment to promoting women's rights might yield no benefit without a context of peace.

tion of refugees; rape and the treatment of its victims; female genital mutilation; and the persecution of media, human rights ows

All-Party Burundian Women's Peace Conference

UNIFEM and the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation convened an All-Party Burundian Women's Peace Conference from 17 to 20 July in Arusha, Tanzania. Fifty Burundian women, including refugee and displaced women living outside the country, met as a special interest group to discuss peace in Burundi in the context of the Arusha All-party Burundi Peace Negotiations. An estimated sixty-five to eighty-five per cent of Burundian refugees are women and children, and the impact of the conflict on Burundian women has been particularly severe, characterized by rape, killing and forced displacement. The conflict has drastically reduced women's access to health care, shelter and food, which has resulted in a nutrition and reproductive health crisis.

The meeting focused on the transitional period and implementation of the Peace Agreement. For more information, please contact Jennifer Klot, UNIFEM, at jennifer.kiot@undp.org

Good Practices

Ugandan Police sensitized to needs of female clients

In 1999, the Child and Family Protection Unit of the Ugandan Police Force decided to organize training in order to sensitize police to better deal with violence and abuse of women and children. ECA (through a Regional Advisor with the African Centre for Women) provided technical assistance to start the programme, while the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) provided financial support for the production of training manuals. So far 325 Police Officers and civic leaders have been trained in five districts, which were selected according to crime statistics.

In districts where trained Child and Family Protection Officers have been posted the level of awareness of rights of children and women is very high and cases of domestic violence, rape, sexual abuse and so forth are being handled with sensitivity. Trained officers have also taken a proactive approach to crime prevention. This has also encouraged women and children to report crimes.

The International Association of Women Police (IAWP) has recognized the work done by the Child and Family Protection Unit in Uganda. As a result, Hellen K. Alyelk, the Officer-in-Charge and pioneer of the Unit, was appointed co-ordinator of Women Police in Africa by the IAWP management. It is expected that similar projects will be implemented in other African countries.

A gender sensitization and networking conference for African women police is planned for July 2001 in Uganda. The focus will be violence against women and children. The British Council will be a key partner in this activity.

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The meeting focused on gender specific issues with special attention on the transitional period and implementation of the Peace Agreement. Taking advantage of this new opportunity for women to have a voice in the process the participants formulated a set of recommendations towards an agenda on reconstruction and reconciliation that would guarantee women's rights to rebuild and govern Burundian society alongside men. For more information, please contact Jennifer Klot, UNIFEM, at jennifer.kiot@undp.org

Gender and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa

In Southern Africa, UNIFEM is participating in a global pilot project entitled "Gender Focused Interventions to Address the Challenges of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic." One of the major activities being implemented under the project is community-based research to determine the gender related socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwean communities. The research has revealed that women living with HIV/AIDS are often isolated by their families and alienated from society. Other challenges include high poverty levels, cultural responsibilities, and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS by family members. The research also found a distressing number of child-headed households, the majority being girls, where the parents were victims of AIDS.

The presentation of the research results induced a lot of debate and sparked more interest in the area of HIV/AIDS and gender. The media was identified as a strategic partner in the process of mainstreaming gender and HIV/AIDS. UNIFEM is working with both the electronic and print media to highlight stories of women and children affected by HIV/AIDS. For more information, please contact Stephanie Urdang, UNIFEM, at stephanie.urdang@undp.org

Congratulations to the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association.

On July 4th after a long review and much lobbying from the

Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, the House of the People's Representatives adopted the revised Ethiopian Family Law. Changes were made that strengthen women's rights and improve chances for women to have violations of their rights dealt with in a fair manner.

African Women Entrepreneurs show products and consider key issues at gathering in USA

From 10 to 15 May, the Third Global Women Entrepreneurs' Trade Fair and Investment Forum was held in Miami, Florida USA. A group of businesswomen from a number of African countries gathered to display their products and learn how to expand and improve their businesses during the Trade Fair and Investment Forum.

The theme was 'Women, Globalization, Trade and Investment: Tools for Job Creation and Poverty Eradication in the 21st Century.' "Speakers from the UN, academia, donor organizations, government and NGOs addressed the participants on subjects such as the role of government in the development of small end medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); electronic commerce ("e-commerce"); credit schemes; the implications of recent legislation passed by the US government concerning trade with Africa; and sources of support for participants who wish to export to the US. Useful information was provided regarding trade, investment,

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economic networking, product quality, patenting of authentic African products and access to information technology.

Among the information provided was a list of relevant websites, including:

www.aib-world.org offering useful information without membership charges.

www.sba.gov offering information in English, French and Spanish.

www.iacc.com is a website for the International Anti Counterfeiting Coalition.

www.inta.org is the website for the International Trade Mark Association.

www.wto.org is the website for the World Trade Organization

www.globalwomen.com is the website for Global Women in Business

Women as Partners for Peace Kigali

In June, the international Women as Partners for Peace conference was held in Kigali. The conference was organized against a backdrop of cross-border conflict and internal strife because of the serious consequences of war on the lives of women and children. Women from different parts of Africa, as well as other conflict-ridden areas of the world, deliberated on strategies to include women in more substantive ways in peace building processes. The

conference aimed to produce a tenable blueprint for the active involvement of women as partners in the entire peace process, from the local level to the decision-making of international negotiations, and to equip women with the requisite skills and tools to mobilize for lasting peace in their respective countries.

The keynote speakers at the opening plenary were UNIFEM's Regional Programme Director, Laketch Dirasse; UN High Commissioner for Refugees, HE. Sagato Ogata and Ambassador Swanee Hunt of Women Waging Peace.

For more information, please contact Laketch Dirasse, UNIFEM RPD for Eastern Africa at laketch.dirasse@unifem.unon.org

The African Centre for Women is one of the divisions of the Economic Commission for Africa. It's main areas of work are: Policy, gender mainstreaming, follow-up to the Platforms for Action adopted in Beijing and Dakar.

We are trying to make this newsletter more regular, timely and of relevance to the reader. We would appreciate feedback from you, including suggestions on of the kind of topics that you would like us to cover.

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