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POLICY BRIEF

Social exclusion and gender equality in Africa: Implications for the MDG indicators

Policy goal

To influence the adoption by ECA member States of social development indicators in particular MDG indicators that would enable more effective measurement of the social inclusion of women and promotion of gender equality in Africa.

1.0 Introduction

It has become widely accepted that promoting gender equality (women having the same opportunities in life as men) and women's empowerment is essential to achieving human development, poverty eradication and economic growth on the African continent. Several global and regional frameworks were developed to support promotion of gender equality. The international level gender equality supportive frameworks include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (1975); and the Millennium Declaration (2000). Recent relevant world conferences, including the Cairo Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (1994), Beijing 4th World Conference on Women - Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, (2002), have confirmed the strong link between gender equality and socio-economic development.

At the regional level, the principle of equality and non-discrimination between men and women is enshrined in the founding legal instrument of the African Union and also in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981) that provides for the elimination of discrimination against women and for the protection of their rights. The Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000) recognizes the key role that women play in development in general and calls upon the African Union to adopt a gender parity principle. The AU's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) endorsed in 2001 by African Heads of States and Heads of

Governments spells out gender equality as one of the core principles that underscore the new strategic vision for the long term-development of the continent.

The AU Heads of State and Government have adopted two instruments specifically to address gender issue's, namely the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa adopted in 2003 in Maputo; and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa adopted at the AU Heads of States Summit in Addis Ababa in July 2004, which requires States to respect normative standards on women's human rights.

African countries have undertaken some actions to promote gender equality and promote the inclusion of women in mainstream development. They have ratified the international and regional instruments and many have been consistently reporting on their domestication of the instruments. Fifty-one of the 53 African Member States have ratified the CEDAW, and 17 have signed the Optional Protocol by the end of 2007. Some countries have aligned their national legislation to the provisions of CEDAW. Twenty-one countries had ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and peoples' Rights, relative to the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) and 22 countries had signed but not ratified. The Africa region 'Outcome and Way Forward document' that emanated from Beijing Plus Ten review process in 2004 indicated achievements made towards improving gender equality to include: increased awareness on gender equality; policy reforms; improved legislative frameworks; and institutional development at the national level in many countries. Positive developments made in some countries include the establishment of national policies and strategies for gender equality; adherence to international and regional instruments for the protection of the human rights of women; increased diversity in the mechanisms promoting and monitoring attention to gender equality; attention to resource allocations through gender-sensitive budgeting; the recognition of the critical role played by NGOs in awareness-raising, advocacy, monitoring and programme delivery; and efforts to engage men and boys more actively in the promotion of gender equality.

Despite these notable improvements in the policy, legal and institutional frameworks, gender inequalities still prevail particularly in accessing: secondary and higher education; productive resources such as assets such as land, capital, and technology; basic infrastructure (water, energy, roads); agriculture and rural development services; basic health services; employment opportunities and decision-making processes. Women and girls are still heavily disadvantaged. For example, women continue to have less access to education than men; they continue to have less employment and advancement opportunities; their role and contribution to national development are neither recognized nor rewarded; the wage gap between men and women is still wide; women continue to be absent from decision-making; and, although they bear the brunt of conflicts, women are generally not included in peace negotiations or other initiatives in this regard. The persistence of gender inequality in all sectors compounds the achievement of the MDGs and overall socio-economic development in Africa.

Translating the commitments of African leaders on realizing gender equality to reality requires more information to understand how and why women are socially excluded and proposals on how governments can adequately address the promotion of gender equality in the MDGs. It is in this context that this policy brief aims to fill this information by addressing the following

questions pertinent to social exclusion and gender equality in Africa; (a) How and why are women socially excluded in development in Africa?; (b) What are the existing gaps in measuring the social inclusion of women and promoting gender equality in the current MDG framework?; And (c) What additional MDG indicators should countries adopt to effectively address the social exclusion of women and promote gender equality?

2.0 How and why are women socially excluded in development in Africa?

Existing literature indicates that it is important to achieve gender equality in four broad inter-related areas: economic, social, political participation and women’s human rights (as shown in table 1). These four areas also closely reflect the major areas where women are socially excluded.

Table 1 Overview of the different dimensions of gender inequality

Dimension of capability	Form of gender inequality
Economic participation	Gender discrimination ¹ in access to and control over resources such as land, property, agricultural inputs, extension services, employment, and a wide range of livelihood opportunities. Women and girls are disadvantaged.
Social participation	Gender discrimination in access to essential public services such as education, health, water, energy and social security and protection, community and family support.
Political participation	Gender discrimination in participating in decision-making processes, e.g. in political institutions and policy-making organization, consultation, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. African women do not always participate in public and private (in the home) decision-making spheres to bring their priorities and needs into the agenda.
Women’s human rights	Women’s human rights are human rights violations that women face simply by virtue of being a woman. Women suffer various human rights violations that men do not, such as being deprived of schooling, forced marriage, and violence against women.

The major reasons behind the continued social exclusion of women and gender inequalities include patriarchal values; traditional and cultural norms; lack of economic dependence; limited or lack of access to education; under-representation of women in decision-making positions; and women’s lack of knowledge of their legal rights. The notion of male superiority over women is taught from a young age. The continued social exclusion of women is also an outcome of the low investments in the human capital of women at household and national levels.

¹ **Gender Discrimination** –refers to the systematic, unfavorable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender, which denies them rights, opportunities or resources.

3.0 What are the existing gaps in measuring the social inclusion of women and promoting gender equality the current MDG framework?

3.1 Economic participation

The existing MDG framework captures well under MDG 3 gender differentials in the non-agricultural sector through the indicator *Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector*. However important gaps in tracking gender equality are evident in the following areas: poverty; gender dimension of unemployment; women's ownership of land; access to credit; and women's participation in the informal sector (where most women are economically engaged). Although poverty in Africa is known to be high among women, the current MDG reporting framework does not adequately reflect the issue. Evidence from research indicate that some households headed by women face higher levels of poverty due to constraints faced by women in accessing productive resources and joining the labour market. It is important to engender the monitoring of poverty by providing sex-disaggregated data on poverty.

Women in Africa experience greater challenges in accessing decent jobs than men as reflected by higher unemployment rates in the case of North Africa and higher representation in the informal sector all over the continent. Indicators that track the gender dimensions of unemployment and underemployment are therefore important in monitoring the inclusion of women into both the formal and informal labour market. While there has been an increase in female presence in the formal sector, the informal sector remains dominated by women due to historically high levels of female illiteracy and gender segregated roles in the economy. Most women in Africa are therefore dependent on fields such as small-scale trading, agricultural production and food processing as major sources of income to meet livelihood needs. Even within this gender-segregated mould, women's capacities are not being fully exploited due to their limited access to production resources. Within the African context, secure access and control over land, access to credit, technologies, extension and technical capacity are important with respect to the areas where women are economically dominant. Indicators reflecting women's ownership of land and property and access to credit are important in ensuring that monitoring of the MDGs reflects improvements in gender equality.

3.2 Social participation

The improved access of women and girls to social services such as education, health, water, sanitation and energy sources are key determinants of their ability to be able to engage in productive opportunities and to secure their overall well-being. However while some of the MDG indicators capture the gender dimensions of participation in primary, secondary and tertiary education, and literacy for the age group 15-24, gaps remain in other important aspects of social capabilities. Additional areas that need to be addressed include sexual and reproductive health, women's nutritional status, access to antenatal health services and emergency treatment for maternal health, and access to antiretroviral treatment (ART). The reasons are founded on the fact that Africa has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world. Most deaths are due to poverty, HIV/AIDs, shortage of qualified health personnel, adequate health facilities, access to health facilities, illiteracy and lack of knowledge on the importance of pre-natal care.

In Africa, women remain at a higher risk of contracting HIV. The percentage of adults living with HIV who are women increased from 54% in 1990 to 61% in 2007. HIV prevalence among the 15 to 24 year old age group is up to six times higher for women than for men in most countries. Women are more vulnerable to HIV infection because of their low nutritional status, limited education and employment opportunities and low social status. Once infected women are more likely to avoid or postpone seeking care due to constraints based on gender, among which include, stigmatization, domestic and reproductive responsibilities and the costs of travel to the health service center and treatment. It is important that gender inequalities that make women be more vulnerable to HIV/AIDs are addressed and sexual and reproductive rights are enforced. In this regard it is essential to have indicators that can monitor improvements in voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) services and access to anti retroviral treatment (ART).

3.3 Political participation

Participation of women in decision-making at all levels from household, to community and national is important in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Their participation influences the extent to which gender equality concerns and women's specific issues are mainstreamed in the national development agenda, including poverty reduction strategies and resource allocation mechanisms. Therefore, assessing women's power to influence policymaking, legislation enactment, institutional setting, planning, and resource allocation is key for monitoring all the MDGs.

The current MDG 3 captures decision-making through the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament. However, this indicator alone might not capture adequately the status of women's participation in decision-making. There is a clear need for the design of supplementary indicators that would embrace a more pluralistic view of the role of women in decision-making at different levels including representation in local councils, and in higher public and private sector positions.

3.4 Women's human rights

According to ECA's African Gender and Development Index (AGDI), and follow up process for CEDAW, and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the recognition of women's human rights are important for the achievement of gender equality. Some African countries are still beset by widespread practices, which are inimical to the advancement of women, of which violence against women and girls constitute the most pervasive. As a form of violence, harmful traditional and cultural practices negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as their rights to life, education, health and bodily integrity. Examples include female genital mutilation (FGM), early/enforced marriages, child betrothal and polygamy. Thus, additional indicators are required for monitoring progress being made in the elimination of these practices.

4.0 What are the suggested supplementary indicators to monitor inclusion of women and gender equality in the MDGs?

The proposed supplementary indicators to strengthen and ensure the social inclusion of women as both beneficiaries and effective participants in development shall mainly relate to filling in the gaps in connection with improving the economic, social and political power of women and

girls in addition to providing a basis for monitoring their human rights in line with laid down international treaties. The recommendations on suggested supplementary indicators to monitor the inclusion of women in the MDGs are presented for each MDG.

4.1 General recommendation

For all indicators where applicable, both old and new indicators (in the currently existing MDG framework and in the supplementary framework) must be measured using data disaggregated by sex. This is important because firstly, it provides an indication of the gender gaps and secondly where the data is also disaggregated by age, it will measure the incidence of exclusion of younger women, who are more vulnerable compared to older women and men as a whole.

4.2 Suggested additional indicators

Goal 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

- % population in informal and formal sector by sex
- % population in the formal sector by sex
- Ownership of agricultural land by sex
- Share of unpaid work between women and men
- Access to extension services by sex
- Access to agricultural credit by sex

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

- % of children registered at birth by sex and locality

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

- % of women at all levels of decision making
- % of women in parliament and local governance.
- % of women in decision making in private and public organizations
- Share of men and women's labour in unpaid work
- Incidence of gender based violence per 100,000 women/year
- % of gender based violence perpetrators convicted
- Reduced incidence of FGM and early marriages

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

- Percentage of female population within 2 hours travel distance of basic emergency obstetric care
- Proportion of women in the reproductive age (15-45) who have access to prenatal care at the primary health care level
- Proportion of population in the reproductive age (15-45) who have full access to reproductive health services at the primary health care level by sex
- Prevalence of contraceptive use by sex.
- Age at marriage by sex
- Child bearing among girls aged 15-19 years
- Proportion of pregnant women who are anemic

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases

- Proportion of population with access to preventive and treatment medication by sex.