

Preface

The development of an index that best suits the needs and aspirations of the continent is timely as the region takes stock of progress in gender equality through the accountability processes of ICPD +15 and Beijing +15 reviews of 2009. The African Women's Report (AWR) is also being launched at a time when the world observes 30 years of existence and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The core objective of the New Partnership for Africa's Development is to underscore the importance of Africa's lead role and ownership in finding solutions to problems affecting the continent. The gathering of information and data is vital to achieving this goal.

Premised on the absence or inadequacy of data on issues pertaining to the legal, social, economic and political fields, the AWR has demonstrated and indeed affirmed the need for African countries to place statistical development, especially the gathering of gender statistics on the front burner of development efforts. Such steps will provide early warning signs of gaps in policy design and implementation in country efforts to meet goals and targets set in the area of gender equality under international, regional and sub regional frameworks.

Through the prism of the limited data that was made available for the report, a diagnosis of continuing gender inequality in the aforementioned fields has nevertheless been made.

The report highlights difficulties that countries are facing with respect to the full realisation of women's rights due, among other things, to the persistence of negative cultural and religious beliefs and attitudes towards women. High Maternal Mortality Rates as highlighted during the ICPD and Beijing +15 regional reviews of October and November 2009 and further established in the AWR is an issue of catastrophic concern.

The AWR also demonstrates the different and changing dimensions of gender inequality being experienced in some countries, especially with respect to child health where there are increasing signs of male stunting, malnutrition and school drop out rates. These outcomes are not an indication of the need to reduce investments in affirmative action in favour of the girl child. They rather demonstrate lack of precise and targeted planning and implementation using tools such as disaggregated data.

This edition of the AWR is technical in nature, given that it is based on the use of a technical tool, the African Gender and Development Index and thus makes it distinguishable from previous flagship reports of the African Centre for Gender and Social Development. The report in its present form reaches out to a wide range of users such as politicians, technocrats, civil society organizations, academia, researchers and development agencies. It is with a view to ensuring that the report can be used and understood by an even wider audience that the UNECA has produced the accompanying Synopsis.

It is the hope of the UNECA that the report will be used as a resource for change, knowledge building, information sharing and policy formulation in Africa.