The Sixth African Development Forum (ADF) opened at the UN-Economic Commission of Africa headquarters in Addis Ababa yesterday with a plea for countries to walk the talk and prioritize financing for gender equality.

Setting the tone, Ethiopian President Atato Girma Woldegorgis reminded the delegates that “We need to produce achievable plans and real results. We are running out of time and we must now be clear to the G20 who met last weekend in Paris that the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals.”

By Rosemary Okello

The African Union Chairperson Jean Ping cited provisions of the Constitutive Act, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights to the Rights of Women in African and the Somalian Declaration on Gender equality in Africa as examples of the AU’s commitment to advancing women’s rights. Currently 26 member states have either signed or ratified the Protocol on Women’s Rights.

Botha was not satisfied with a promise by the chair that the matter be discussed later in the day during a breakaway session. “I don’t think it was well handled because it goes to the nerve of this forum, therefore warranting special attention. It deserved more unprovoked acknowledgment,” Botha said.

Most of the delegates interviewed expressed high expectations that ADF VI would come out with a strong statement on this and other incidences of gender violence. “It’s significant that (the issue) be given life at this conference, otherwise it will be a long time before we can celebrate this year’s theme,” emphasised a delegate who declined to be named.

“I think there is a discrepancy between what people think about Islam, what some practice and the real Islam because I can tell you that Islam is one of the religions that truly empowers its women,” said Professor Mazahir Osman, the Secretary General of The International Muslim Women’s Union of Somalia.

Ishasan Kogahli, who has served twice as the Minister for Health and Internal Affairs in Sudan, added “Islam doesn’t perpetrate violence against women...of course there are isolated cases of violence, but it shouldn’t be generalised.”

Botha stressed, however, that conferences such as this should not mince their words about the flagrant violations of women’s rights that continue to occur under their very noses. “It’s only when we have liberated women from all forms of violation that we can speak of true liberation,” Botha said.

The stoning of 13 year old Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow that sent shockwaves around the world last month formed a somber backdrop to yesterday’s meeting, with delegates calling for a strong statement of condemnation from ADF VI.

For the 400 delegates from around Africa meeting in the Ethiopian capital, next door to Somalia, the brutal stoning under sharia law (see accompanying story) brought home the cruel realities of papers, facts and figures on culture, religion and gender violence. “We are meeting here talking about issues of gender based violence and all morning, no one has said anything regarding the Somali girl. I think it’s important to note, at this forum, that something needs to change,” said Mbuiyuolo Botha who works for Sonke Gender Justice in South Africa.

In an interview shortly after the plenary session in which he raised the issue, Botha said that it is in forums such as this that religious and traditional leaders as well as politicians should be held accountable for such flagrant violations of human rights. “Traditional leaders are custodians of morals, who else and where else are these harmful practices better raised?”

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A girl of 13 begged for mercy moments before a mob buried her up to her shoulders and stoned her to death. The Somali youngster is said to have pleaded “Don’t kill me, don’t kill me,” before her horrific execution in front of a 1,000-strong crowd.

A boy is thought to have been shot dead amid the appalling scenes inside a football stadium in Kismayu, a rebel-held port. According to Amnesty International, the girl was 13 and had been raped by three men. Officials say she was 23 and had confessed adultery before an Islamic court. The stoning, which took place on October 28, is the first public killing in war-torn Somalia for two years.

Amnesty’s Somalia campaigner, said: “This was not justice; nor was it an execution. This child suffered a horrendous death at the behent of the armed opposition groups who currently control Kismayu. This killing is yet another human rights abuse committed by the combatants in Somalia and again demonstrates the importance of international action to investigate and document such abuses, through an international commission of inquiry.”

Amnesty said pathway through the stoning nurses checked whether Aisha was still alive. They pulled her body out of the ground to ascertain she was still breathing before the stoning continued.

A Unicef statement said: “She sought protection from the authorities, who then accused her of adultery and sentenced her to death. A child was victimised twice - first by the perpetrators of the rape and then by those responsible for administering justice.” The agency said the incident high-lighted the vulnerability of girls and women in Somalia, which has suffered civil conflict for the past 17 years.

Abdoulaye Janneh, UN Under Secretary General and Executive Secretary of ECA, said that despite legislation aimed at promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment, implementation is weak. “We must emphasise the adoption of an innovative and well thought out Action Plan that will ensure a transformational intervention in all our three sub-themes, namely action on gender equality, women empowerment and ending violence against women in Africa.”

The African Union Chairperson Jean Ping cited provisions of the Constitutive Act, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights to the Rights of Women in African and the Somalian Declaration on Gender equality in Africa as examples of the AU’s commitment to advancing women’s rights. Currently 26 member states have either signed or ratified the Protocol on Women’s Rights.

But he acknowledged that the new challenges of food insecurity, climate change, migration, and water and energy shortages threaten the fragile gains made. “Although these issues affect both sexes, their impact on women and children are more catastrophic,” said Ping.

Donald Kaberuka, President of the African Development Bank, the third partner in the Paris Declaration principles on New Aid Modality and Building capacity of women ministries and that of the civil societies.

Gender equality, she said “is an effective means to reduce poverty, increase economic growth and accelerate the achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals.”
An infuriating, yet widespread, feature of our society is the way that blame is heaped on women whenever something goes wrong, especially in relationships. This is particularly painful when couples are unable to have a baby, with the blame always leveled against the woman. She is forced to be known otherwise.

Yet, in many cases, women go through harrowing-experiences with many women experiencing pregnancy problems lies with the man. Similarly, the cost of doing sperm analysis - the main test done to establish if a man is fertile or not costs under US$20 in most public hospitals in Kenya and other African countries.

Conversely, a woman’s hormonal analysis and tubal tests costs at least US$250 in the cheapest private outlet. In view of the cost and the fact that close to 50% of couples experiencing fertility problem with the man, would it not be better and cheaper for the men to undertake fertility tests before requiring their wives or partners to do so.

When I arrived at one of the leading private hospitals in Nairobi and requested to undertake a semen analysis, the nurses at the reception looked at me with astonishment and asked a raft of questions: Has a doctor sent you? Are you having problems having children? Are you inspecting yourself? Is your wife fine? Are you sure you want to do this? All these questions were intimidating to me, but I gathered the courage to do it.

One of the nurses cautioned me that issues of fertility are very depressing and I needed counseling first. This annoyed me, since health care professionals rarely raise the same concerns when a woman asks to do a fertility test. They receive neither counseling nor preparation for the outcome of such tests, because the society thinks being infertile is part of a woman’s reproductive health problem.

When I arrived at the hospital, the man came back, beckoned me from other patients in manner that suggested something was wrong with me. I followed him into a room in the hospital’s basement. Here, we met three women who were having tea. Without uttering a word, he gestured to them to leave the room immediately. I was then ushered in an extra small cubicle within this room that had a bed. It is at this point the laboratory technician removed a small bottle from his pocket.

“This is where you are expected to place your semen after masturbation,” he said, speaking in very low tones. He gave me the option to do it in this small cubicle or a place near the hospital, since the semen is usually expected in the laboratory within 30 minutes from the time the sample is collected. I opted to do it outside the hospital. However, the whole process I had gone through and the secrecy behind the test confirmed many things. It was abundantly clear that health providers are part of those perpetuating this myth that fertility issues are only a woman’s issue.

They are also to blame for the intense stigma and fear around male fertility testing or semen analysis. I wondered if this is the treatment I had to go through, would any other man have the nerves to do it?

Similarly, what I went through was the complete opposite of treatment a woman receives in the same hospital. When she walks into the hospice and requests for hormonal or tubal test, no one raises eyebrows. The only question she is asked is if she has the money for the tests? For women, being infertile is seen as very normal and acceptable thing. For a man, it is out of place and improper. These perceptions and attitudes have seen many women subjected to physical, emotional, and verbal violence by their husbands and in-laws if they cannot conceive. When in reality, the problem lies with the man, usually glorified as prolific and a hero who has put up with a barren woman.

This state-of-affairs needs urgent attention by men and women who believe in gender equality and women’s human rights. A robust campaign enlightening the public, men in particular, of the man’s contribution to infertility, and why he should undertake semen analysis, needs to commence immediately.

Until we project issues of infertility as both a man and woman’s problem and why men should shoulder part of the burden, then women will remain disposable or infantilised - not just in the infrasocial treatment.

Arthur Okwemba is a Kenyan journalist with the African Woman and Child Feature Service. This article is part of the Gender Links Opinion and Commentary Service that provides fresh views on everyday news.
OUT AND ABOUT IN ADDIS
Wake up and smell the coffee
By Mercedes Sayagues

For the last 60 years, Tomoca has been roasting, blending and serving Ethiopia’s finest gourmet coffee. Established by an Italian and now run by Ethiopians, the coffee house is a small museum of local coffee history. It boasts the original trimmings imported from Italy: bronze Art Deco scales, thick wooden counters, and a blackened roasting machine from Torino. Ancestral paraphernalia, from maps to bibelots and folk paintings, tell a history of devotion to brewing the finest coffee. And the colours – deep reds, ochre and browns – make you feel as warm as the welcome from patrons and staff alike.

Owner Wobayhu Woube runs Tomoca, as her father did. From supervising the roasting to advising customers on the best roast for their taste, she keeps an eye on every aspect of the business.

Tomoca is near the Old Post Office in Piazza, the Ethiopian barista will brew the blend of your liking: Bar, heavy-bodied and earthy; Turco, a medium roast; Swedish, a light aromatic roast, and the lightest of all, USA.

The coffee is so delicious you will want to take some home. One kg of beans or ground, cost $80. Local chambelone and ginger tea, and ginger to flavour the coffee are other tempting options.

One of the street, you can buy a jebena, the handsome Ethiopian coffee clay pots with a narrow spout for Birr 25, and six tiny cups and saucers for Birr 50. Equipped with coffee beans and coffee pots, your dedicated reporters explored the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

The beans are roasted on a charcoal brazier, pounded with mortar and pestle, ground and put into the jebena filled with boiling water. Tradition calls for burning incense in a small mortar when pouring the first cup, and having three servings, each with its own name: abel, halategena and bereka.

Try to attend a coffee ceremony. Yod Abyssinia, near the hotel Desalegn, features it, although the place is posh and touristy. For a simpler experience, try Yedi Buna or Yohemina Kaffa restaurants, both on Mickey Leland St.

After all, we are in the birthplace of coffee. Experts estimate the only native coffee trees in the world are here. Coffee beans derive their name from the Kaffa forests where it first grew wild, and the Ethiopian word for busa.

Coffee was part of traditional ceremonies in Africa and Yemen. Today, it fuels the art of friendship and conversation – as well as countless late-night conference sessions. Enjoy!

There is nothing in culture or religion that condones or advocates the subjugation of women, let alone violence against them, Catholic nun Auxillia Ponga and Muslim Imam Handemine Ould Salek have said.

In an interview with the ADF Today, Ponga, Gender Advisor at the Commonwealth Secretariat, and Salek, who heads a network of Imams for the main donor agencies, said violence is prohibited in all the holy books.

The two were speaking ahead of a plenary meeting to discuss how culture has fuelled gender based violence.

“There is no religion or culture that would perpetuate bad things. All the holy books have one thing in common they talk about being morally upright and doing good to each other,” said Ponga.

She said if women were literate and had more self esteem they would be able to read religious books and analyse the texts for themselves. They would discover that their religion does not condone violence or women’s subservient to men.

“Men like to quote the verse, about women submitting to their husbands, without referring to the next quote that tells them to love their wives as they love themselves,” she said.

Ponga, who once headed Zambia’s gender division in government, said it is not logical for a person to say they are religious and then harm another in the name of culture. “If you are religious and believe in God, then you will adhere to the tenets of what is written in your holy book, that is that you will love your wife as you love yourself and do no harm to your neighbour. Which could be simpler than that,” she said.

Salek, on the other hand, is exasperated that Islam is once again being pointed out as the religion that fuels gender based violence. “Islam protects women, the holy Quran exhorts men and do no harm to your neighbour. What could be simpler than that,” he said.

Referring to the recent stoning of thirteen year old Somali girl Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow for alleged adultery, Salek said some countries that institute Sharia law do it out of a point of ignorance.

While saying Sharia law is Islamic, Salek said that it cannot be applied in the piecemeal fashion that it is happening now, where it is being used to harm or punish women or forcing them into harmful traditional practices like genital mutilation.

“There are stringent conditions that have to be met before Sharia laws can be instituted, you need to have properly versed adjudicators or magistrates, the country must totally adhere to the tenets of Islam, which is not the case in many cases where there is Sharia,” he said.

His network will use the ADF TV forum to teach people that Islam is not about terrorism, it does not condone any kind of violence against women and children.

More importantly, Salek says people must know the differences between religion and culture. If people were as religious as they claim, other than religion there would not be any form of violence against women and girls.

“If societies have cultures that promote gender based violence, then those must be dealt with separately and not confused with religion because religion is clear, it says no to any form of violence.”

How much do you know?

The ECA has provided several background documents to the conference. This quiz will help you assess how much you know. Look out for the answers in the third and last issue of ADF Today on Friday!

1. How many African countries have laws penalising female genital mutilation?
   A. 11
   B. 16
   C. 21

2. Which country in Southern Africa that has the highest percentage of women in Parliament – 37%?
   A. Angola
   Mozambique
   South Africa

3. Which African country that has no women in its Cabinet?
   A. Central African Republic
   B. Libya
   C. Togo

4. What is the average number of staff dealing with gender at the headquarters of the main donor agencies?
   Fewer than 10
   Fewer than 20
   Fewer than 30

5. How many key donor agencies include gender into their measures in most of their programmes and strategies?
   3
   9
   12
**Climate change taxes African women**

By Dingaan Mithi

Rising food prices across the globe is a daily headache for many. Particularly in the most vulnerable societies, climate change is already taking a heavy toll, including threatening crops and increasing food insecurity. Finding long lasting and sustainable solutions to climate change is becoming a global emergency. The whole world is feeling the pinch, with the most impoverished, especially women and children, most affected.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), agriculture, forestry, and fisheries are among the most climate-sensitive sectors. Changes in rainfall patterns contribute to severe water shortages or flooding, and rising temperatures cause shifts in crop growing seasons.

In many Sub-Saharan African countries, such as Malawi, smallholder, rain-fed agriculture underpins most rural livelihoods and national economies. Research conducted by Action Aid found Malawi has experience escalating weather related disasters since 1970, with a drought and subsequent flood in 2002 causing a landmark food crisis. Since then, the country has been undergoing food crises caused by erratic rains and regular floods.

In Malawi’s southern district of Phalombe, close to the Mozambican border, women walk long distances to access maize at the Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (AMARDAC) depots. Olwe Keyala, who has 7 children, acknowledges that unpredictable rainfall is causing hunger in her household. She adds that it is difficult for the women to access water to embark on irrigation farming, as it is expensive. The dry season is drier than in the past, and a dam built just a few months ago is already dry. It is a similar story in Chiradzulu district, where food shortages mean women struggle to walk long distances to the commercial city of Blantyre, selling vegetables to earn a small income to buy maize. Stella Chimera has three children and walks for 6 hours with her baby on the back to sell vegetables Blantyre. She gets k150 (about 1 US$) which is far from enough to buy some maize husks for her three children to survive.

“I leave at 3 am with my child at the back, we arrive at 8 am in the morning, after selling the vegetables, I use the money to buy maize husks, maize is expensive,” she says.

Miriam Sabola of the University of Malawi says climate change and rain variability are major challenges already facing agricultural productivity. She observes that rural people have developed traditional adaptive strategies to cope with effects of climate change on agricultural productivity, but need support to sustain these practices. “Most agricultural livelihood activities are linked to rainfall levels and frequencies which have been varying. The farmers have developed some adaptive strategies such as crop diversification, conservation agriculture and irrigation farming, but lack capacity for implementation,” notes Sabola.

Senior research fellow at the Centre for Agriculture Research and Development (CARD) based at Bunda College of Agriculture, Charles Jumbe, says bio-fuel production offers opportunities for developing countries due to the availability of abundant land, and cheap labour force. Jumbe also adds that higher agricultural demand can increase income for rural farmers, if bio-fuels can be utilised coupled with advancing technology, which is now focusing on using crop residues such as grass and wood chips.

However, Jumbe also warns that unregulated development of bio-fuels can cause great damage to the environment and the diversion of scarce natural resources, such as land and water, all going to the production of bio-diesel.

Emiel Van Zyl, head of microbiology and natural resources at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa observes that Africa has a high potential for bio-fuels as energy provides a key role to sustainable development.

He also downplays arguments that food price increases result from bio-fuel development. “We should have a sustainable way of bio-fuel production and hold hands to make bio-fuels work, let us understand our own crops and learn to manage them better,” he stressed.

Dingaan Mithi is a Malawian journalist and writer. This article is part of the Gender Links Opinion and Commentary Service that provides fresh views on everyday news.

**La femme dans les institutions rwandaises**

Un sacré coup de pouce de la Constitution

Par Nelly Baziwumve

Depuis plus d’une centaine d’années, la parité entre les hommes et les femmes a cessé de progresser. Si la parité désigne une égalité entre les hommes et les femmes, elle prend un sens plus restreint au moment où elle n’est appliquée qu’à la seule vie politique. Même si certaines femmes ont jusqu’à ce jour occupé des fonctions de choix dans l’histoire de certains pays, le rôle politique de la femme n’a pas été pris en compte.

Cette supposée révolution n’a ainsi rien fait pour reconnaître, ni valoriser la place des femmes au-delà de leurs rôles traditionnels de mère et d’épouse.

L’Afrique en particulier, est encore à son stade préliminaire. Certains pays commencent à comprendre le rôle primordial que peut jouer la femme dans le développement durable d’un pays.

Au Rwanda par exemple, dans le but de favoriser l’unité et la réconciliation nationale dans un pays qui a été profondément meurtri par l’apparition ethnique, problème qui a été sollicité par le génocide de 1994, la Constitution rwandaise, apportée en 2003, garantit le principe de la démocratie de consensus dans le cadre duquel le parti au pouvoir peut présenter des candidats au poste de présidente de l’Assemblée nationale ou du Sénat.

Cette même loi suprême prévoit que sur les 80 élus constituant la Chambre des députés, 53 doivent être issus de partis politiques, 24 doivent être des femmes suivant le quota obligatoire de 30%, en plus de la clause qui demande à chaque parti politique de présenter un tiers de femmes sur sa liste de candidats.

En sus des clauses prédéfinies dans la Constitution, le président rwandais, Paul Kagame, avait émis le souhait de voir le nombre de femmes parlementaires augmenter, c’est-à-dire dépasser les 48,8% qui existaient déjà au sein du premier Parlement de l’après guerre.

Sélon lui, cela encouragerait les autres femmes à briguer d’autres postes à différents niveaux et les femmes joueraient ainsi un grand rôle dans le développement de ce pays.

Ce qui explique qu’avec les élections législatives de septembre 2008, les femmes rwandaises ont été nombreuses à se faire inscrire sur les listes électorales pour pouvoir élire et se faire élire.

Actuellement, le Rwanda est devenu le premier pays au monde à avoir un plus grand nombre de femmes au sein de la Basse Chambre du parlement avec plus de 56% d’élues, détrônant du coup la Suède qui a longtemps été le pionnier en la matière.

Selon certains analystes sociaux, la nomination d’une femme au sein d’une institution contribue largement à forger la réputation d’une nation. De plus, elle est considérée comme un bastion de la responsabilisation des femmes sur un continent où les hommes ont toujours tendance à être en majorité dans les cercles de pouvoir.

Quelques points clés pour le renforcement des capacités des femmes

1. Autonomisation économique
   • Réformer les institutions foncières.
2. Production agricole
   • Renforcer les capacités des femmes à la propriété
   • Renforcer leurs droits en matière de législations sur l’héritage, le divorce et la violence
   • Assurer des opportunités pour les femmes à la gestion de politiques alimentaires et agricoles
3. Emploi
   • Fournir des formations en particulier les plus pauvres et les moins instruites
4. Commerce
   • Faire l’accès des femmes au crédit
   • Faire une analyse quantitative de l’impact du commerce en ordre pour mieux formuler des politiques
5. Autonomisation sociale
   • Éliminer les fiers de scolarité et verser des allocations directes aux ménages
   • Créer un environnement scolaire sûr pour les filles et les femmes
   • Accroître le nombre d’enseignantes pour qu’elles soient des modèles
   • Veiller à ce que les femmes acquièrent les compétences qu’exige le marché du travail grâce à des formations appropriées
6. VIH/SIDA
   • Assurer un accès équitable du traitement anti-rétroviral aux hommes et aux femmes de tous âges
   • Tenir compte des besoins en matière de soins dans les systèmes de protection sociale et dans les soins dispensés à domicile
7. Santé
   • Encourager l’affiliation et d’autres options alimentaires pour nourrir
   • Mettre en place un système efficace de prise en charge des maladies sexuellement transmissibles (MST), notamment le VIH/SIDA
   • Fournir des services de santé gratuits ou subventionnés en matière de reproduction
   • Formuler des soins préventifs abordables aux populations rurales
   • Formuler des programmes ciblant les hommes pour qu’ils prêvent les grossesses non désirées et les MST
   • Fournir une feuille de route pour réduire la mortalité maternelle et infantile
   • Appliquer des programmes de prévention de la transmission du virus de la mère à l’enfant
8. Eau
   • Le recours aux techniques modernes de pompage
   • Investir dans l’amélioration de l’accès à l’eau
9. Gouvernance, paix et sécurité
   • Favoriser l’élection des femmes aux municipalités et au parlement
   • Renforcer les programmes de formation aux différentes fonctions de responsabilité pour les femmes
   • Augmenter les investissements et appliquer des pratiques telles que la mise en place de systèmes de sélection transparents dans les partis politiques
   • L’accès au financement public
   • Sensibiliser les électeurs
   • Sensibiliser et informer l’opinion sur le rôle que jouent les femmes en période de conflit
   • Obtenir des statistiques fiables tenant compte de l’égalité homme-femme
10. Changement climatique
    • Renforcer la participation des femmes à la prise de décision
    • Encourager les gouvernements à intégrer la problématique humanitaire-femme dans leurs politiques de développement durable et de change-ment climatique

Source: Document de synthèse du sixième forum pour le développement de l’Afrique (ADF VI)
L’autonomisation de la femme, c’est renforcer la nation

hungry, working at the construction site is hard

tion sites and factories.

formal sector that puts food on the table. Jobs range

the southern district of Addis Ababa.

the main means of survival for Ethiopia's millions

mission for Africa (ECA) conference centre where

native?" asks 23 year old Natan Tayou.

thing you did not believe in," she chuckles.

teasing him that you've made a lot of money from

including women in every deal, saying that there were

Mining Charter that made sure that all new min-

as deputy president, Mlambo Ngcuka championed

her passion: women's empowerment.

August, Mlambo-Ngcuka has turned her attention

signed in sympathy with the former president in

African National Congress (ANC), Mlambo-Ngcu-

being forced to resign as president by his party, the

crisis in South Africa that resulted in Thabo Mbeki

before ADF VI.

need it back," she declared in an interview shortly

Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and De-

the women of Africa is that they need to seize the

over being the first woman deputy president of South

cool caftan and declares that she has "no regrets"

By Colleen Lowe Morna

From political to economic empowerment

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka walks into her third

industry is no longer a preserve of the men. Women

too have adapted to the harsh economic conditions.

too have adapted to the harsh economic conditions.

have formed a family band and made a DVD

(1 never thought of myself as lead sing-

) the former deputy

president is planning

her next moves, includ-

ing the possibility of a

founding for the child, where she be-

lieves empowerment

must start.

Newly returned

from Kerala, India,

where she studied the

informal sector, Mlam-

bo-Ngcuka is a well-

known advocate of

breaking what she calls the "inter-generational

cycle of poverty."

"You and I are

middle class because

someone in our family

tree broke the cycle and

brought us a bet-

ter life. I'm convinced

that it is not govern-

ments that will break

the cycle of poverty,

but rather households.

And we know that the

most reliable people to

empower households,

the ones who can break

the cycle of poverty,

are women."

Critical that she did not use her space suffi-

- ciently as deputy president under a boss who ap-

pointed 42% women to his cabinet and "could be

relied upon to take radical decisions where women

were concerned" Mlambo-Ngcuka vowed to use

whatever influence she still has to advance wom-

en's empowerment.

With 32% women in parliament and 40%

in local government - well over the averages

on the rest of the continent - South Africa is

regarded as a model of women's political em-

powerment in Africa. But the former deputy

president says that numbers are not enough.

“We have a critical mass but for it to have rele-

vance it must change things. I could have done

more with the space I had. Space is still there,

and we have to use it.”

By Joyce Chimbi

Can ADF VI empower the informal sector?

Outside of the walls of the Economic Com-

mission for Africa (ECA) conference centre where

ADF VI is underway, the informal sector provides

the main means of survival for Ethiopia’s millions of

unemployed young people.

The UN complex is located in Kazanchiz, in

the southern district of Addis Ababa.

For the young people in this town, it is the in-

formal sector that provides the main means of

support. Jobs range from working in the transport industry, to construc-

tion sites and factories.

“You can’t be choosy otherwise you will go

hungry, working at the construction site is hard

work and the pay is not good but what is the alter-

native?” asks 23 year old Natan Tayou.

"In a day I am paid about 20 birr (about $ 2)

but I come here every morning and work. There

are days when I go home and feel like I can’t do it any-

more, but what will become of my mother, I am the

man in the house."

"Just us there is discrimination against women,

there’s also discrimination against the youths," says

Zelaleme Tilahun. "Look at this taxi. It’s all right

for them, hanging or screaming to attract

passengers, do you think it is by choice?" It’s an

indication that the youth are neglected, we have all

floated the transport industry, all of us living from

hand to mouth.”

Contrary to popular belief, working in the taxi

industry is no longer a preserve of the men. Women

Key facts

• No African country has reached gender par-

ity in wage employment. Those that have

come closest are South Africa (45.9%); Botswana (47%);

Ethiopia (40.6%) and Namibia (48.8%).

• Women dominate the informal sector, and

especially the survivialist sector of the infor-

mal sector.

• Women produce 60 to 70 percent of the

food in Africa but only own a fraction of the

land.

• Women bear the major responsibility for

household water supply and energy for

cooking and heating, as well as for food se-

curity. Climate change exacerbates existing

inequalities.

• While most African countries are likely to

meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of gender parity in primary ed-

ucation, only eight countries have achieved

gender parity in secondary education.

• The percentage women living with HIV in-

creased from 54% in 1990 to 79% in 2006.

Women are more vulnerable to HIV for bio-

logical, social and economic reasons.

• At 900 per 100,000 births, maternal mortal-

ity in Africa is the highest in the world.

• Women’s representation in parliaments in

Africa ranges from 2% in Egypt to 49% in

Rwanda. With 42% women in cabinet South

Africa has the highest level of women in

cabinet. Libya, with no women at all in its

cabinet, has the lowest level of women’s repre-

sentation.

• Despite many years of public education, Afri-

can countries continue to be beset by a

range of harmful traditional practices, the

most common being female genital mutila-

tion (FGM), early/forced marriages, child

betrothal and polygamy (UNFPA, forth-

coming).

Source: Achieving gender equality and women’s em-

powerment in Africa: Progress Report.