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Seventh African Regional Conference on Women
Decade Review of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing
Platform for Action (Beijing+10)

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SYNTHESIS OF THE NATIONAL PROGRESS REPORTS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DAKAR AND BEIJING PLATFORMS FOR ACTION

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ACRONYMS

ACGD	African Centre for Gender and Development
AWCPD	African Women Committee on Peace and Development
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
CWD	Committee on Women and Development
DAW	United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBIs	Gender-Budget Initiatives
GER	General Enrolment Ratios
GFPs	Gender Focal Persons
ICPD-PoA	International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action
INGOs	International Non-governmental Organizations
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NER	Net Enrolment Ratios
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
IPRPS	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programmes
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPE	Universal Primary Education
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

Part 1: THE OVERALL CONTEXT FOR ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: AN OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The following report is a synthesis of data and information contained in national reports submitted to ECA/ACGD by African member States. The primary objective of the exercise is to present achievements and challenges encountered by member countries in their efforts at the implementation of the Beijing platform for Action (BPFA). Towards this end, the report is organized in four parts as follows: besides this introduction and the section on the general Context of the report, part two presents data on 11 critical areas, indicating that despite achievements, African women still face daunting challenges especially with regard to poverty, lack of access to productive resources including education, health and employment. Part three addresses the critical area of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women showing that despite their importance in gender mainstreaming, these structures lack the requisite human and financial outlay necessary for effective implementation of the BPFA. Part four concludes the synthesis by summarizing the achievements, obstacles and by reiterating what needs to be done by governments to achieve gender equality vis à vis, the necessity of commitment at the highest of level of political authority, accountability for lack of implementation and the imperative of addressing gender inequality from a broader perspective that examines the fundamental issue of equality and power in societies.

1.1. The Context: Ten Years After Beijing

In 1995, the UN member States gathered in Beijing, China to add to the momentum started in Mexico City 20 years earlier, to drive women's agenda forward and underline the inseparable link between women's equality, empowerment and sustainable development. Ten years after that historic Conference during which BPFA was adopted, Africa will join the rest of the world to review the Decade. Within this framework, and following the mandate assigned to ECA by the UN General Assembly and under the auspices of Committee on Women and Development (CWD), the Commission is expected to facilitate and coordinate the evaluation of the implementation of the BPFA. This process will take place at 3 levels: 1) at the national level countries using the questionnaire prepared by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) prepared their national reports; 2) ECA/ACGD organized five sub-regional meetings as follows: East Africa, 2-4 June 2004, Kigali, Rwanda; Central Africa, 19-21 April 2004, Brazzaville, Congo; North Africa, 14-16 April 2004, Tangiers, Morocco; Southern Africa, 26-29 April 2004, Lusaka, Zambia and West Africa, 13-15 April 2004, Abuja, Nigeria and 3); at the regional level ECA is in the process of convening the Seventh African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing + 10). Finally, the outcome of this Conference will be presented to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) through DAW.

1.2. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their Implication for Africa

The MDGs were set in September 2000 at the Millennium Summit in which UN member States outlined eight goals and accompanying indicators that convey commitments for development and poverty eradication. As in BPFA, the MDGs underline the importance of gender equality, education, health and environmental sustainability, among others, in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. The MDGs call for a new approach to development that hinges on the collective global

responsibility and reduced market competitiveness. The target date of 2015 was set for reaching these goals. Monitoring the progress of each nation and region began soon after. A major concern has been the lack of data in Africa, on a wide range of indicators including those on per capita income, health, education and public expenditures. Only general estimates can be given and in many instances, even these cannot be obtained. Nonetheless based on present trends and available data, UNDP estimates that much of Africa might not achieve any of the goals by 2015, and indeed reversals are occurring in trends, especially in the case of poverty. There are important exceptions to the gloomy picture painted for the continent to be discussed more fully as achievements from countries are recorded.

1.3. The Economic Context of Women's Changing Status and the Effects of Globalisation

Efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa gained momentum during the so called the "lost decade" of the 1980s and part of the 1990s. Structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), numerous civil wars, political instability, corruption, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and debt burden slowed economic recovery. Estimates indicate that almost half of the African population survives on less than $1 per day. However, data from African Economic Report, 2004 indicate that the continent is making progress, for example, "In 2003, Africa was the second fastest growing region in the developing world, behind Eastern and Southern Asia". Thus, real GDP grew at 3.8 percent in 2003 compared to 3.2 percent in 2002. However, major challenges lie ahead in reducing gender gaps, as African economies are not growing faster than demographic increases. The situation of women has been exacerbated by globalisation, to the extent that national economies are tied to a global market through trade regulations, global regulatory institutions, and the rapid movement of finance capital and commodities across borders. An important component of globalisation is the negotiations by World Trade Organisation (WTO). These negotiations have definite gender implications that are not addressed by participating nations. For instance, ban on agricultural subsidies has had profound effects on women in Africa, since a wide spectrum of subsides in industrialised countries continue unabated with far reaching ramifications especially on issues of competitiveness. Thus, although there have been pockets of progress, the context of development has been harsh for African women since Beijing.

1.4 From International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (ICPD PoA) to World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)

In addition to the Beijing Conference, the UN has organized several major conferences during which the international community has re-affirmed their commitment to gender equality. For example, ICPD-PoA calls for member States to pay particular attention to gender issues relating to protecting the rights of girls and women, women's health status, women's empowerment and gender based differentials in education. Likewise, the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 that culminated in World Summit for Sustainable Development, held in August 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa, reiterated the fact that sustainable development cannot be achieved without women's active involvement in environmental management; the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen (1995), underlined women's rights as one of its key commitments through the achievement of equality and equity between men and women.

1.5. Progress on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Adopted in 1979, CEDAW, is known as the women's international bill of rights. Progress is being made in recognising the monumental volume of discriminations women face. Fifty one (51) of the 53 African member states had ratified this convention by February 2004. Algeria reports that it is reviewing reservations against CEDAW. However, despite high level of ratification, implementation of the Convention has been slow. Cultural resistance and constant persecution of NGOs established to deal with gender issues as well as inadequate funding for programmes, ministries and institutions, are some of the problems that African countries must address. Also, 17 countries have signed the Optional Protocol to CEDAW. In addition, 31 African countries have signed the Additional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. However, only 3 countries have ratified it.

1.6 New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Changing Status of Women in Africa

NEPAD is first and foremost a framework for the renewal of the African continent. The Initiative is predicated on the fact that despite being one of the most richly endowed regions of the world, Africa remains the poorest continent, NEPAD calls for a reversal of this abnormal situation. NEPAD focuses on peace, security and governance as a precondition for development. The ideals encapsulated in the NEPAD programme of action cannot be achieved without partnership between African women and men committed to promoting the advancement of African women and gender equality as a prerequisite to long-term structural transformation of African economies. One way to mainstream gender in the NEPAD process is to underline the critical role played by women in the socio-economic development process by reporting on countries' achievements and challenges in reducing gender inequalities in the NEPAD Annual Report.

PART 2: MEASURING PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CRITICAL AREAS OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION (BPFA) AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OUTCOME DOCUMENT

WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

2.1   Women and Poverty

Africa is the world's poorest and economically worst performing region. According to the World Bank[1] the number of people living on less than $1 per day in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has grown between 1990 and 1998 from 47.7% to 48.1% of total population respectively. Generally, female-headed households, especially those headed by widows and divorced women; suffer more acutely from incidences of poverty than those headed by males. Surveys on poverty conducted in most countries during the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) process confirm the feminisation dimension of poverty. For instance, women constitute 62.1% of the poor in Rwanda; 52% in Burkina Faso; 73% in Niger; and 64% in Mali. The South African government has instituted the Integrated Sustainable Rural Strategy and has put in place programmes addressing poverty eradication at national, provincial and local levels. Most of the countries point to lack of strong gender analysis in the macroeconomic policy as a constraint to poverty reduction.

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[1] World Bank, Poverty Net Site

2.2   Gender Perspectives and National PRSPs

Most African countries are addressing extreme poverty within the framework of PRSPs and many are incorporating issues of gender equality and women's empowerment in these programmes. Algeria, Angola Egypt, Eritrea Malawi and Tanzania have PRSPs designed to enhance women's participation in political, economic and social spheres through affirmative action. The Tanzanian PRSP contains discussion of gender differences in poverty incidence that distinguishes between income and non-income measures of poverty and analyses of differences between households and within households; Burkina Faso I-PRSP provides descriptions of measures used to address the economic activities of rural women; the Rwanda I-PRSP also includes one of the more specific plans for targeting safety nets for the new poor and particularly for women, while Mozambique's I-PRSP provides gender-differentiated analysis on education. In incorporating gender concerns into national PRSPs, governments have worked with NGOs and other stakeholders. A comprehensive understanding of women's poverty must take cognisance of the fact that men and women experience poverty differently. This is imperative if policies and programme interventions are to be re-oriented to discern and address women's specific problems. Most African countries, which have initiated PRSP processes, have made general reference to gender and poverty without specifying the methodologies and tools to be employed in systematically integrating gender dimensions in the PRSPs. The approach is still women in development (WID) orientation as opposed to mainstreaming gender into PRSPs process.

2.3   Gender Perspectives in National Budgets

Gender responsive budgeting implies ensuring sustained resource allocations for pro-poor growth and introducing transparency and accountability in the budgeting process. To date, only a few countries in Africa incorporate gender perspectives in their national budgets popularly termed – gender budget initiatives (GBIs) – some countries are in the process of initiating gender-responsive budgeting (Malawi, Namibia) and others are either creating awareness or building capacity to engender their national budgets (Ethiopia, Zambia). Mauritius has set up a Committee on gender responsive budgeting, whose mandate is to ensure that the design, implementation and monitoring of the national budget is gender responsive through generation and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data (GDD), carrying out gender analysis of sectoral budgets and local communities in terms of inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes. Even in countries that are implementing gender responsive budgeting, GBIs are not universal in that they are targeted to only a few ministries. Thus, not enough attention is given to the analysis of the budgetary process and the impact of allocation of resources in addressing gender inequalities. However, Tanzania and Mozambique in particular are examples of good practice in that they have gone beyond rhetoric to introduce GBI in a number of key ministries including Finance and Planning. The development of GDD, as called in the BPFA, is imperative for closing gender gaps in national budgets. As in accounting for women's work in the systems of national accounts, implementation of GBI has tremendous implication for poverty reduction. Currently, national budgets favour boys and men at the expense of women and girls. For instance, in reporting on women's access to education we have noted the significant gender imbalances, especially at the second and third levels of education, it stands to reason, therefore, that men benefit more from educational expenditures than women. Systematic incidence-analyses of budgets in more advanced economies have consistently demonstrated the socio-economic injustices of gender-blind budgeting. Examples of good practices in this respect are South Africa and Malawi that have conducted gender audits to assess their human resource capacities and financial resource allocation. South African Office of the Status of

Women conducts annual audits to assess compliance by national departments to the provisions of the National Policy Framework.

2.4   Micro-credit Schemes for Women

A wide variety of micro-credit programmes are now available across the continent, designed to address e.g. inadequate cash flow, micro-enterprise investments and financial emergencies. Other goals include poverty reduction, increased household and community empowerment and business training or capacity building for women. Rotating credit associations in Nigeria, Angola, Uganda and Ghana have adapted their operations to the modern environment combining indigenous methods of credit rotation with formal banking, management, training and advising. These schemes tend to draw on methods of savings and credit already familiar to African women. Thus, the emphasis has been on group-based loans and savings using credit union models that are common in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Mauritania, Mali, Tunisia, Tanzania, Uganda, Algeria and Togo. The second type of micro-credit schemes is 'Solidarity Groups' based on the Grameen model to be found in, for example, Djibouti, Algeria, Cameroon, Niger, Benin, Madagascar and Burkina Faso. In Algeria, women account for 45% of beneficiaries. Loans depend on group guarantees rather than physical assets and many of these programmes are reporting encouraging successes but lack of management expertise, low ability to generate savings, distance from services, lack of information and continuing problems with high interest rates for the very poor are some of the problems encountered by women. The most significant fact to note is that women tend to repay their loans with a 95-98% repayment rate. During this review, a few countries report attempts by governments to increase women's access to micro-credit. For example, the Botswana Finance Assistance Policy stipulates that women should provide 10% collateral towards request for loans for projects as opposed to 15% requirement for men; Namibia cites Affirmative Action Loan Scheme of the Agricultural Ministry for women; the Malawi Gender and Community Services Ministry has linked women to lending institutions: government deposits collateral with commercial banks to enable women access credit and has removed male guarantor previously required; the Eritrea's National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) micro-credit scheme is targeted at women; while in Egypt, national campaigns have been launched to help women obtain ID cards that enabled them gain access to several credit schemes. Women's Development Funds in various countries provide women entrepreneurs with credit to establish small and medium enterprises (Egypt, Ethiopia, Gambia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe). Women account for 30.5% of micro-credits in Algeria.

2.5   Women's Access to Land

Direct ownership of land has tremendous implications for food production. In Africa women produce food for domestic consumption and participate significantly in cash cropping, yet, women's land ownership remains a problem that is not receiving sufficient attention from governments. Because of the African traditional land tenure systems, most women have insecure rights to land through their husbands and other male relatives. Reforms have had limited effects, because ownership and access is grounded in customary laws where change has been slow to effect. Nevertheless, countries are beginning to recognise the critical link between increased agricultural productivity and food security and women's ownership of land without intermediaries. The South African White Paper on Land Reform stipulates that priority should be given to women. In many countries on the other hand, divorced women find themselves at a disadvantage as they cannot inherit land from their fathers, nor can they lay claim to their ex-husbands' land.

2.6 Women's Share of Paid Employment and Labour Force Participation

Female employment rates for SSA compares favourably with employment rates in more advanced countries. However, data from national reports and other sources indicate that African women are mostly to be found in agriculture and in the informal sector where they form the majority of workers (e.g. 70% in Mali, 60% in Angola and 58.1% in Burkina Faso). In these sectors, they are generally found at the lower ends of the informal sector with small farms and micro-enterprises, such as food vending, brewing, tailoring, craft works, etc. Retrenchments in the formal sector have resulted in overcrowding of the informal sector with very low incomes. Thus women's jobs do not necessarily lead to empowerment. Support to these sectors should include policies to end harassment of the informal sector operators by government authorities in cities. The agricultural sector also needs support in terms of policies specific to women including ensuring the recording of their contribution in systems of national accounts. Currently, women's share of employment in the formal sector is very small (e.g. 25% in Tunisia, 20% in Republic of Guinea, 23% in Burkina Faso, 29% in Kenya, 20% in Algeria, and 21% in Mali) relative to men and their pay is normally lower than men's pay for the same work.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2.7 Striving Towards Basic Education for All

During the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, world leaders reaffirmed their commitment to provide basic and quality education for boys and girls and to close gender gaps. One of the MDGs is on universal primary education (UPE). Many national reports point out that the State has the responsibility to provide education for all and to reduce gender differentials in education. Basic education is also identified as an area of focus/priority for most countries, yet only a few countries report providing UPE (Malawi, Algeria. Djibouti Morocco, Tunisia, Tanzania, Botswana and Uganda). In 2002 Djibouti instituted a law to keep children in school up to 16 years. Introduction of UPE is reported to significantly increase girls' enrolments, as normally they are the ones most affected by rising educational costs and cost recovery in education. A few countries report increased gross enrolment ratios (GER) and net enrolment ratios (NER) for both boys and girls. For instance in Ethiopia, the total enrolments are reported to have increased by 107% in the past five years; doubled in Eritrea between 1991-2001 from 24.8% to 46%; Tanzania NER increased from 79.3 to 86.7 between 2002 and 2003; in Mali 42.3% to 64% between 1996 and 2002; in Senegal 59.7% to 71.6% between 1996 and 2002; in Burundi 39% in 1996 to 67.3% in 2002; and in Mauritania, 45.5% in 1990 to 91.7% in 2003. Algeria and Tunisia have almost reached 100% enrolment for boys and girls. On the other hand, NER and GER have declined in a number of countries: e.g. NER dropped by 12% between 1990 and 2002 in Zambia and in Liberia, the decline was from 18.7% to 14.5 between 2000 and 2002.

2.8 The Imperative of Closing Gender Gaps at the Secondary Level

Secondary education for girls and women is inversely correlated to unsustainably high levels of fertility, infant, child and maternal mortality rates, among other problems. A few countries report having achieved parity between boys and girls or reducing gender gaps (e.g. Malawi, South Africa, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia,). In Tunisia and Algeria, girls at secondary level comprise 55.6% and 58.8% of the total respectively. The trend at this level shows increased gender imbalances in education especially in West Africa Sub-region. As pressure from multilateral donors has mounted to

concentrate on the provision of UPE, secondary education in general and the enrolment and retention of girls and women in particular has been adversely affected. For instance, Malawi reports that since the introduction of UPE in 1994, secondary education has received low priority. The result in many countries has been high drop out rates and repetition of classes thereby greatly exacerbating gender gaps in secondary level education. Even countries with UPE have not managed to significantly reduce gender gaps in secondary school enrolment, in most countries, a higher proportion of boys than girls go on to secondary education and have a higher probability of completing this level of education than girls.

2.9 Reducing Gender Differentials in Higher Education

During the first two decades of their independence African governments invested heavily in the education infrastructure. The result was spectacular growth in all facets of education especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. However, available data indicate that consequent to the socio-economic crisis of the 1980s and part of the 1990s, regional per capita expenditure on education fell and was compounded by decline in real value of grants and concessional loans from rich countries. The result has been quantitative and qualitative decay in the education infrastructure, evidenced by lack of physical equipment, flight of teachers and falling enrolment ratios at all levels. At the same time, enrolments have been increasing faster than the capacity to plan for or finance this growth. According to UNESCO the average annual increase in higher education enrolment for sub-Saharan Africa of 7.2% in the 1990s was the highest in the world. And yet, tertiary enrolments ratios for the population 20-24 years of age in Africa remains the lowest in the world normally less than 25%. At the university level the average participation for women has been even lower. To address gender imbalances, some countries have instituted affirmative action and gender friendly policies aimed at increasing women's access and participation (Kenya, Ethiopia, Senegal, Rwanda**,** Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Seychelles). In Nigeria, 70% of the Northern states provide scholarship at all levels for female students.

2.10 Eradicating Illiteracy Among Women

Countries have committed themselves to halving levels of illiteracy by the year 2015, not only because literacy is a critical socio-economic intervention for participation in the development process, but also because ability to read, write and calculate is a fundamental human right. And while African countries have made tremendous progress in reducing relative levels of illiteracy rates, African women continue to experience some of the highest illiteracy rates in the world - in some instances the absolute numbers of illiterate women have been on the rise. Policies to back interventions such as distance and non-formal education are needed to reduce illiteracy among women. At the moment, only a few countries report having aggressive policies and programmes for adult training, distance and non-formal education to eradicate illiteracy among women.

2.11 Reducing Gender Differentials in Science and Technology

Reducing gender gulfs in science and technology is an imperative if Africa is to participate effectively in the global economy. Gender gaps at the university level: are particularly pronounced in science fields, mathematics and computer sciences. And yet research indicates that gender inequities in these fields have little to do with cognitive abilities of female students and more with socio-cultural environmental factors. To redress the gross under-representation of women in science and technology in higher education, countries need innovative and aggressive strategies that address the fundamental

misconceptions about girls' ability to undertake careers in science, mathematics and technology related disciplines. These efforts would have to be directed towards societies at-large but must also include modalities to encourage sustained interest of girls in science and mathematics at the <u>first and second levels of education</u>. Curricula change to promote science for African children in general and for girl-children in particular is critical and must be integral to strategies to promote the development of science and technology – some countries report scholarships schemes for women who excel in science subjects. The practice is worthy of emulation by other countries.

HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

2.12 The Deteriorating Health Status

The paradox of health situation in Africa is that even though countries report an increase in health provision (e.g. Eritrea, Djibouti and Ethiopia), available statistics indicate that in Africa, the overall health situation is poor and declining precipitously. The interaction between HIV/AIDS, food insecurity, low economic productivity, low levels of education have left the continent in a crisis. Even though women live longer than men, as in most regions of the world, life expectancy among African women is low and still falling. The probability of African women in SSA surviving to 65 years is only 31.1％. In SSA, HIV/AIDS is only part of the problem since women still frequently die in childbirth: the chance of dying during childbirth or pregnancy is 1:13. High levels of pregnancy related mortality, compounded by the HIV/AIDS scourge and other STIs are reported as a major challenge by a number of countries (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Zambia).

2.13 Focus on Reproductive Health

Countries report considerable progress in lowering fertility rates attributable to increased prevalence in contraceptive use and increased average age at marriage. On the other hand, Eritrea reports abortion and their complications as one of the major causes of hospital admissions, while in and Zambia deaths emanating from abortions are a problem. Other countries report decline in the proportion of births attended by a skilled professional. Uganda has programmes targeting youth with information and services on adolescent reproductive health. Malawi has launched National Reproductive Health Policy while South Africa has provided free maternal health care since 1994. Most countries have national programmes on family planning aimed at lowering the fertility rate. In Comoros, the high rate of fertility, early marriage and the high prevalence of unplanned pregnancy make the situation of women very precarious. Maternal health is grossly exacerbated by inadequate access to antenatal services and trained birth attendants. Despite an avalanche of data indicating a direct relationship between antenatal care, birth attendants and safe delivery most communities lack these facilities. Long distance to health care centres is another limiting factor to access. At the same time, Kenya reports increased health facilities for home care deliveries while Seychelles has almost 100% hospital births as opposed to the Gambia where only 18% of births take place in a hospital setting. High maternal fatalities continue unabated despite the fact that countries report efforts by their governments to address the issue (e.g. Djibouti, Burundi, Kenya Liberia, Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia) Rise in HIV/AIDS related illnesses, illegal abortions, ill-equipped public institutions to handle pregnancy related complications are some of the challenges that require urgent attention. Botswana notes progress in this area and indicates that maternal, child health and family planning facilities are available in every clinic. Seychelles has maintained a low mortality rate, recording 5 maternal deaths between 1992 and

2002. This is an outstanding achievement given the fact that maternal mortality ratio for SSA is 940 compared to 440 in developing countries.

2.14 Addressing Infant and Child Mortality Rates

Progress has been made in reducing infant and child mortality rates attributed to the provision of clean water and extended immunisation programmes. However, the larger picture is one of unacceptably high levels of infant and child mortality rates. The traditional childhood diseases are compounded by malaria and HIV/AIDS pandemic. National reports indicate various strategies to reduce incidences of infant and child mortalities including integrated maternal and child heath services, backed by immunisation programmes (Botswana, Eritrea, Malawi, Mali Niger, Nigeria and Togo). The deteriorating health situation has been considerably aggravated by: food insecurity leading to serious malnutrition and stunting; flight of health personnel, especially doctors and nurses; declining expenditures on health, precipitated by SAPs; and rapid demographic increases, and the like. For example, Liberia cites malaria and malnutrition as being among the major causes of fatalities among children, while 39% of its children under 5 are stunted, 26% are underweight and 6% are severely wasted. In Central African Republic the infant mortality rate has increased from 158 per 1000, in 1995 to 194 per 1000 in 2000 due to reduction in vaccination for the children and malnutrition.

2.15 Confronting the Impact of HIV/AIDS on Women

Analyses indicate that HIV/AIDS is the greatest challenge to Africa's long-term development prospects. Of the approximately 42.3 million people living with HIV worldwide, about 27.9 million are in sub-Saharan Africa – there are great disparities within SSA countries with as low levels of prevalence as 1.4% in Senegal to as high as over 35% in Botswana. Strong commitment at the highest level to HIV and STIs management explains the success stories of Uganda and Senegal. HIV/AIDS is particularly problematic because caretakers – women – have been hit the hardest. The percentage of adult prevalence that is female is steadily rising in most countries. However, even in countries where overall adult prevalence is low or has been reduced, the proportion that is female is still on the rise. According to UNAIDS[2] "African women are being infected at an earlier age than men, and the gap in HIV prevalence between them continues to grow". The burden of HIV/AIDS among women is a major issue due to its impact on their health, on the care of children and the elderly and on women's productive work. At the end of 2001 women accounted for 52.6% of HIV/AIDS cases in Sub-Saharan Africa, by the end of 2002, the figure was 58%. Much of the problem has been attributed to Africa's growing poverty and women's increased dependency on male partners/ husbands. Strategies to contain the pandemic include integrating gender issues into HIV/AIDS programmes and establishing AIDS Councils (Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia). Seychelles, Djibouti and Angola provide antiretroviral therapy for prevention of mother-to-child.

GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRATISATION

2.16 Power-sharing at the National Level

A number of countries have gone beyond rhetoric to enact laws and institute policies and plans

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2004 Report on the global AIDS epidemic, p. 10

grounded in their Constitutions to enhance women's participation in decision-making process (Egypt, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Gambia, Lesotho, Liberia, Uganda). Women in some countries have been fortunate to have their countries' Constitutions developed at a time when the women's movement has been active. Women's movements in these countries were therefore, able to negotiate on a better political climate. For instance, in Eritrea, 50% of the members of the Constitution Commission participated in the constitution-making process were women, while in Swaziland women provided inputs into the Constitution. Lesotho and South Africa, as part of their efforts to transform their electoral processes, have appointed women to head their electoral commissions. Increased advocacy at the sub-regional, regional and international levels, electoral systems reforms, willingness of men to create space for women are key factors that have provided impetus to women's political participation.

2.17 Women in Decision-Making Positions

Women are underrepresented at all levels of political decision-making structures in Africa. In many countries very little progress has been made since 1995. Nigeria points out that despite general acceptance of the need for gender balance in decision-making at all levels, a gap between de jure and de facto inequalities has persisted. While most countries endorse gender equality in their Constitutions, there is a persistent lack of enforcement mechanisms. Some countries have instituted affirmative action measures to redress imbalances (Eritrea, Tanzania, Uganda**,** Rwanda) in decision-making, while other countries have gone further to extend these affirmative action initiatives beyond Parliament, to provincial and local councils (Uganda and Rwanda). Notable increase in women parliamentarians has been recorded over the years e.g. Burkina Faso, Rwanda, South Africa. In Tunisia the leading political party has created a post of Under Secretary General in charge of women affairs and 26% of the Central Committee members are women. The appointment of women as Prime Minister and Vice-President in Mozambique and the Gambia respectively, indicates that women are ready to serve at the highest level of government if given the opportunity. Several countries have women Speakers and deputy Speakers (Egypt, South Africa, Swaziland, Cameroon). In this connection BPFA[3] notes that "women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved".

African women's participation in parliament has not radically changed since the adoption of the BPFA in 1995. The average representation of women in African Parliaments is estimated at 14%, which is comparable to the world average at 15%. This average however masks significant disparities between African countries. For instance, while Rwanda has the highest representation at 49% and more than 30% is recorded for Mozambique and South Africa, Niger has 1.2% women parliamentarians. Significant increase in women's participation in decision-making structures seems to be correlated to quota systems and affirmative action – Rwanda, with the highest level of representation has a minimum (1/3) of seats reserved for women. Where quota systems exist as e.g. Uganda and South Africa, there has been some visibility of issues affecting women, as well as, to some degree, mechanisms of ensuring broader inclusion of women in decision-making, while Tanzania has included provisions for women's participation in Parliament and Local Councils in its Constitutions.

2.18 Women and the Judiciary

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, UN, 1996, p. 109

Judicial representation in Africa is one of the lowest. In many cases there are no women at all at senior levels of the judiciary. In Eritrea, as part of the nationwide reforms, 22% of women were elected as community court magistrates and in 2003, young women were given a three-year legal training and assigned to communities to serve as court interpreters, advisors and gender-issues advocates. In Rwanda, a real exception, women's share in the highest court (Court Suprême) is more than 41% with a woman as the President. In the highest court of Republic of Guinea and the Republic of Congo, there are 3 women. In Central African Republic women comprise 12% of the Judiciary. Kenya is also substantially represented with women accounting for 36.4% of the Judiciary. Egypt appointed its First Woman Judge in 2003, followed by appointment of 3 other women judges shortly afterward, while South Africa has 2 women judges in the Constitutional Court and has adopted a Justice Gender Policy.

2.19 The Growing Significance of NGOs as a Governance Issue

NGOs are making significant impact on women's status in almost all countries. Today, NGOs are strong agents within emerging civil societies at the regional and global levels, working on every conceivable issue in all countries. Divided by structural location, they exist at the international (INGOs), national (NGOs) and community (CBOs) levels. In addition to providing services that are beyond the capacity of governments, many women see NGOs as a credible avenue for capacity building. They are increasingly involved in advocacy and training in democracy and holding leaders accountable. NGOs are working in several sectors with the government and the private sector including, health, education, micro-credit, advocacy, capacity building as well as monitoring and evaluation. Many people view them as an important part of governance processes. At the international level, their involvement in development issues has won NGOs special status as consultative organisations with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). At the local level, numerous NGOs are working within the framework of bottom-up participatory approach with local organisations. NGOs have continued to provide funding, technical skills and education for women's empowerment throughout Africa, especially in the area of engendering national PRSPs. In Rwanda women NGOs mobilized the network called "Pro-Femmes/ Twese Hamwe that has played an active role in the return of peace and the end of armed conflict. They organize several activities that build a culture of peace among the population. Morocco reports that NGOs are becoming real government partners and that mutual collaboration is improving women's situation. In Central African Republic, NGOs have lobbied and contributed to mobilize women in decision-making and parliament. In several countries such Djibouti, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, women NGOs have played a critical role in reducing FGM.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

2.20 Implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
      (CEDAW)

The passage of CEDAW in 1979 was a major victory for women globally, since without the explicit recognition of pervasive discrimination against women, countries could remain silent on women's human rights or argue that particular practices are traditional and acceptable. With CEDAW, discriminatory cultural practices or beliefs that go against equality can no longer be justified. However, progress has been slow and activists are frustrated by the strategies of governments to circumvent the goals of CEDAW. A major concern is the extent to which governments continue to profess commitment to the principle of equal rights for women, but behave differently when it comes to

implementation. Countries have instituted various measures in an effort to harmonise their national legislation with CEDAW and have reformed national legal and administrative instruments accordingly (Egypt, Gambia, Mauritius and Tunisia); others have instituted national CEDAW committees for implementation and follow-up (Gabon, Guinea, Rwanda). While most countries have amended laws affecting rights of women (Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Togo and Tunisia), some are currently amending their nationality laws to guarantee total gender equality (Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi). Eritrea and Guinea have translated CEDAW into local languages and disseminated it widely among women.

2.21 Violence Against Women

Violence against women and the girl-child or gender based violence (GBV) include, among others: abduction for marriage; executions for adultery; rape; extreme forms of FGM; wife beating; widow inheritance; long periods of seclusion after husbands' death; and early marriage. Infringement of women and girls' fundamental human rights varies across space and time and in intensity and prevalence. Violence against women and the girl-child has significant emotional and psychological costs in addition to other issues related to lost productivity, health, loss of self-esteem, and the like. The violence is in direct contradiction to the objectives of equality, development and peace. Because of increased poverty, rapid social change and the proliferation of conflicts, GBV is becoming progressively more rampant. Rape and other forms of violence are systematically employed as weapons of war against women and girl-children in warring countries. Recently, Kenya, Zambia, Swaziland, South Africa report high incidences of domestic violence. Egypt has a programme to combat FGM in 40 villages and Tanzania has a national plan of action to combat FGM. Countries have undertaken measures including rigorous enforcement of existing laws and involvement of traditional institutions in the fight against all forms of GBV. (Ethiopia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, and South Africa). National actions plans have been developed in some countries, bills passed in others, support units and shelters for battered women, have been created (Botswana and Zambia). In order to encourage women to report rape cases, Botswana now reviews rape cases in camera. In countries where there is no such mechanism women refrain from reporting abuse and rape cases (Egypt, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia). The maximum penalty for rape has been increased to 20 years imprisonment in Ethiopia. South Africa reports a high level of harassment in schools (approximately 34%) and incidences of rape. In recent years, the South African Cabinet has approved an "Anti-Rape Strategic Framework" which seeks a balanced approach to deal with victims and perpetrators. Swaziland has a hotline that enables the public to report cases of violence while Zambia has established a Sex Crimes Unit under the Police Service. Most countries however lack comprehensive policy to deal with GBV due to lack of data and because cultural beliefs and practices give legitimacy to some forms GBV. In Central African Republic 45% of women are victims of physical violence, particularly in the household. In certain rural areas of Mali, the rate of forced marriages among girls is estimated to be as high as 80%; while in Comoros and in several other countries, it is considered as one of the main cause of school drop out among young girls**.**

2.22 Women and Armed Conflict

For decades, African women and children have paid a disproportionate price for the various protracted civil wars that have ravaged the continent. The disproportionate burden of war on women and children is evidenced by the fact that according to UNHCR a vast majority of African refugees 70-80% are women and children. In countries that have been marred by civil wars (Angola, DRC,

Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Sudan etc.), women are victims of rape and other forms of extreme physical violence. The problem is compounded by disintegration of family units as husbands and male children participate in the conflict thereby increasing the financial burden of women while their traditional means of livelihood in the agricultural production is inexorably disrupted. Countries report on-going programmes to rehabilitate women (Eritrea, Liberia, Malawi). But many other have no laws protecting women and girls living in conflict situations. In Liberia women were not only forced to fight a war they did not start, they were forcefully conscripted into the ranks of rebel armies. During the war, women were forced to marry rebel fighters against their will, while others were forced to cohabit with the rebels because of easy access to food. Reports from war torn nations indicate escalation of incidences of violation and abuse of women's human rights, including deliberate and arbitrary killings, disappearances, torture, rape, sexual violence and arbitrary arrests and detention. Increasingly, the international community is demanding greater involvement of women in peace processes. Given the opportunity, women have demonstrated capacity to participate in peace making, peace building and post war reconstruction, as evidenced by the establishment of the "Mano River Union Basin Initiative" the "Women of the Great Lakes Peace Initiative" the "Inter-Congolese Dialogue" and the African Women Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD). The AWCPD, a joint OAU-ECA Initiative, was established in 1998 to function as an advisory body to the Secretary General of the OAU and the Executive Secretary of ECA to enhance the contribution of women to peace and development efforts in Africa. The Mano River initiative received an award from the UN Secretary General in 2003 for the protection of Human Rights.

In Burundi women participate in the peace process through the follow up commission for the implementation of the Arusha peace agreement and through the commission for the rehabilitation of the victims. In Mali the government has organized activities to bring the army closer to the population. Towards this end, high-level army officers have been deployed in all ministerial departments, including the women affairs ministry. In Central African Republic, women tired of incessant conflicts took new initiatives in 2002 and presented a memorandum for peace to the international community. The Tunisian "Comité des Dames du Croissant Rouge" created by women is active in promoting a culture of peace. In the Republic of Congo, women were active in all activities related to the return of peace and took an active role in the National Forum for the Reconciliation and in the International initiative for the mediation in 1998. In 2001, women participated in the national reconstruction dialogue and also organised a national conference for women on the same issue. In Rwanda, after the genocide, the government set up a fund to give assistance to the survivors, among whom the women and the orphans are the majority. However, the goal of involving women fully and consistently in the process of peace-making, peace-building and post war reconstruction is far from being achieved.

WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

2.23 Women's Access and Participation in Information Technology (IT)

Women's access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Africa is extremely limited. Several countries have instituted measures to address this challenge, for instance, in Kenya women are taking advantage of the improved telecommunication services, particularly access to mobile telephones, to promote their businesses, while the enrolment of women at the media training institution has grown ten-fold. Other countries have national strategies for gender sensitization and training for media reporters (Tanzania and Uganda). Burkina Faso, Mali, Uganda and Tanzania have national policies on ICT dedicated to the promotion of women and gender issues. The Uganda Women Media Association owns a radio station that broadcasts programmes on women issues. In Zambia, women are

represented in community radio station boards. In many countries, poverty, lack of electricity and limited infrastructure in rural areas, is a hindrance to the spread of ICTs. In Niger women use community radios to promote women's issues and to create a women networks: "Le Conseil Supérieur de la Communication" is headed by woman. In Republic of Guinea the number of women involved in ICTs and the media in general has doubled to 39% of journalists; while Tunisia has 7 feminine newspaper titles and 34.38% of people working in the media are women; in Togo, 51% of women have access to at least one type of media instrument. In Mauritania 78% of illiterate women have no access to any media as compared to 18% of educated women who lack access, and in Mali, 34% of women have no access to any form of media.

2.24 Media Portrayal of Women

The domination of media by men affects women adversely, e.g. Malawi notes the gender insensitive language, sexist advertisements, folklores that depict women as subordinates and inferior. Malawi, South Africa and Uganda note the increasing degrading use of women including pornography as a result of the proliferation of ICTs. Women journalists that normally hold lower professional positions find it difficult to access stories. Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia note that women visibility in the media is only among the younger age groups while Malawi and South Africa note that women tend to generate news as beauty contestants, sex workers and home-workers. Mauritius report that gender equality is hardly considered newsworthy. Some, countries are confronting these imbalances. For instance, in Mauritius, two sexist advertisements have been banned as a result of the concerted effort by the gender and media watchdog. Mauritius records the highest level of women representation in the media as presenters (49%). The Tunisia government initiated a strategy to sensitize the population about the culture of equality, the aim being to fight against traditional stereotypes, which present women as inferior. Mali is fighting against the negative traditional media portrayal of women, through National Centre for the Documentation and Information. In Burkina Faso the government has efforts to improve the women's image through the media, by adopting a code on the language used in advertisements. The Egyptian National Council for Women (NCW) has established a Media Watch Unit to monitor the content of media messages and to recommend corrective measures. Local TV channels have been created and the Radio and Television allocated funds to raise awareness on women's issues. In Togo, creation of women networks involved in media and ICTs have played a key role in the advancement of gender agenda. In Mali, women in media are organized in NGOs and networks to promote women and gender concerns. In Mauritania, the Ministry of communication has provided schools in rural region with solar radios. Kenya Association of Media Women is giving attention to the employment policies in media houses and the chances of upward mobility for women.

2.25 Using Media to Advance the Gender Agenda

In Burkina Faso, the minister in charge of women affairs, organizes fora to debate and discuss modalities on how to improve media portrayal of women. In Liberia, women have increasingly turned to the media to enhance networking and advocacy. Women groups use media to discuss HIV/AIDS, disarmament and demobilization of female combatants, status of refugees and internally displaced persons among other issues. The Namibian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting through its Multi Media Campaign on violence against women, advocates combating violence against women and children and has enactment the Domestic Violence Act. Media watch organizations have been

established in Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius and Seychelles. Other countries have conducted gender and media baseline studies (Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia).

WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

2.26 The Effects of Environmental Degradation on Women

Of the 42 countries reporting 30 indicate environment to be a priority issue. This is in consonance with the fact that Fifty-two African counties are parties to United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). According to UNEP[4] In sub-Saharan Africa, 61 % of the population lives in ecologically vulnerable areas. The Rio Conference that adopted Agenda 21underlined, as did BPFA, the critical role of women in sustaining a viable and stable environment. The Conference also emphasized the imperative of reducing extreme poverty because of the link between poverty, environmental degradation and the central role of women in this process. In Africa women form a majority in food production and spend an inordinate amount of time gathering fuelwood and hauling water from dams, rivers and stagnant pools for domestic use that leads to water-borne diseases. The negative impact of environmental degradation on women is being addressed by NGOs, which demand greater participation of women in decision-making process.(Tunisia and Mali). Togo is promoting usage of "ressources ligneuses" as domestic fuel to reduce the women's burden in this area.

2.27 Involving Women in Policy Formulation for a Better Environment

Numerous countries target women in their action plans relating to environmental stability and sustainable development policies, e.g. Malawi produced its Environmental Platform for Action and focuses on increasing women professionals in natural resources management and environmental decision-making. Tunisia has integrated its programmes for sustainable development that allows women to manage and preserve natural resources. In Tanzania, women are involved in environment management, where they are equally represented as their male counterparts. In Burkina Faso women participate in management of resources of the villagers through the "Comités Villageois de gestion de Terroirs", and a fund has been created to support economic and social activities related to the natural resources. The national plan for the conservation of the environment in Cameroon has a woman head and focuses on women's priorities related to the environment. The Ethiopian Environment Policy integrates sectoral issues and ensures full participation of women in environmental decision-making, resource ownership and management. Mali women have been given a preponderant role in formulating an environment policy.

THE GIRL CHILD

2.28 Protecting the Human Rights of the Girl-child

Of the 42 countries reporting, 18 identified the Girl-child as an area of priority. The girl-child in Africa faces unacceptable and daunting challenges. She is underrepresented in the education sector, has a disproportionate share of household tasks and is disadvantaged in terms of access to leisure and health services, and is being infected with HIV at a faster rate than the boy-child. Deprived of her childhood, she now has to take a new role as head of household as the numbers of HIV/AIDS orphans

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[4] African Environment Outlook: Past, Present and Future Perspectives, UNEP 2002

increase unabatedly. The human rights of the girl-child are also violated through physical and emotional abuse. In addressing the plight of the girl-child, most countries are concentrating on access to education. Almost all countries have ratified the Convention for the protection of the children while several countries report having mechanism for the follow up of the convention. Although countries report that there are legislations to protect the girl child, there is need for effective strategies for implementation of the conventions and legislation. She is frequently neglected in socio-economic development, because she is by virtue of being a girl, culturally undervalued. As a redress strategy, Egypt focuses on education, combating early marriage. Liberia notes the Sande society, where girls are trained for marriage, which in some instances can take up to 3 years: the practice is keeping girls out of schools. Namibia launched its Girl Child Association in 2001 to enhance girls' empowerment through capacity building courses. Djibouti has a plan of action for children from 0 to 6 years focusing on physical, emotional and psychological development. But countries report increasing trafficking in girl-children that are subsequently forced into slavery and prostitution.

PART 3: Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

3.1   National Mechanisms

African governments have established diverse gender structures to handle a wide range of development issues from a gender perspective: this is as it should be if governments are to successfully mainstream gender into their policies, programmes and structures. The gender machineries range from Committees and Departments within ministries, to fully-fledged Ministries. Most countries report the existence of gender focal points in various ministries, while others have established women's affairs departments in line ministries and have gender focal points at district level (Ethiopia, Lesotho, Cameroon, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe) to ensure incorporation of gender issues at local level. Gender focal points are said to have provided a valuable link between Women's/ Gender Affairs and line Ministries. Although machineries are tasked with different functions depending on their governments' priorities concerning women, functions of almost all of them translate into mainstreaming gender in policy formulation, gender equity and equality, monitoring the Platforms for Action and CEDAW, as well as advising government on gender issues. In Mauritius, Burkina Faso and Namibia, working groups comprising gender focal points (GFPs) have been set up to advise gender ministries on issues related to the GFPs.

South Africa, Gabon, Zambia, Ethiopia and Egypt have offices/ councils in Presidents' offices which is important for visibility. In Gabon the Prime Minister 's office has a department in charge of gender and family issues. The South African Office on the Status of Women model is replicated in Provincial governments where "Gender Offices" are housed in the Premiers' offices. Its Joint Monitoring Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women monitors progress in the advancement of the status and improvement of the quality of life for South African women. Tunisia has an institute of research "le Centre de Recherche, d'Etudes, de Documentation et d'Information sur le Femme" (CREDIF), which encourages research on women's conditions. Niger has created an institute called "L'Observatoire national pour la Promotion de la femme » (ONPF) designed to undertake research on women. Mali has a similar structure termed "le Centre National de Documentation et d'information sur la Femmeet l'Enfant (CNIDIFE). The Egyptian Council for Women established an Ombudsman Office in 2002 to receive complaints from women regarding gender discrimination. The office has appointed lawyers and installed a toll-free hotline. It assigns lawyers to poor women who

would otherwise not afford to file court cases. Complaints cover gender discrimination at the workplace, personal status law, domestic violence and inheritance.

3.2 Developing and Implementing National Plans of Actions

Most countries have formulated gender policies (Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Republic of Guinea, Namibia, Senegal, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe); or have programmes in place for specific gender issues (Botswana, Central African Republic, Gabon, South Africa and Tunisia); others have national councils on women (Botswana, Egypt, Mauritius, Mauritania, Burundi, Mozambique, South Africa Tunisia), while women's NGO Coalitions established in Botswana**,** Rwanda, Zambia Gambia**,** Rwanda**,** and Kenya are at advanced stages of setting up machineries to implement and coordinate their national Platforms for Action. Malawi and Seychelles report monitoring policy implementation through reports, meetings, field visits symposia and workshops. Djibouti, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo and Senegal report that although they have institutional mechanisms in place, there is still need to intensify efforts in building capacities for monitoring, evaluation and following-up the implementation of plan of action for integrating gender dimensions in national development policies. South Africa has a mechanism for developing GDD through the national gender focal points and the national Statistical Services; while Kenya has produced GDD on health, agriculture and education.

PART 4: Summary and Conclusion

4.1 Achievements

From the 42 national reports, sub-regional reviews and other assessments from which this synthesis derives, development in Africa continues to present tremendous challenges and there is still much concern over gender gaps and women's empowerment. However, there is evidence of progress in a numbers of areas. For instance, countries have made progress since 1995 in **educational** enrolments, especially at the first level, and even at the secondary and tertiary levels more women are participating than in 1995. Many Francophone and/or countries in the Northern sub-region have registered reduced male/female ratios in both primary and secondary education, although major challenges remain in raising secondary and university level education for entire populations. Literacy levels have also declined in a number of counties while some countries report structures and modalities for women's educational training. Similarly, there have been some gains in the **health** sector: life expectancy has increased in some countries; while in others, especially in Northern sub-region, fertility levels have decreased; maternal mortality rates have also decreased in a few countries; and in almost all countries, there are HIV/AIDS control structures in place and policies regarding the spread of STIs. In addition, there are broader population policies that go beyond the narrow focus on population control to dealing with other reproductive issues such as maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and adolescent sexuality. Women's participation in **parliament/decision-making** has increased since BPFA was adopted and a few countries in Africa, especially in the Southern sub-region, show commitment to reduce gender gaps – Rwanda, Mozambique and South Africa have achieved exemplary representational levels in that they are beyond the UN requirement of 30% representation. Regarding women's human rights, the ratification of CEDAW by 51 countries is a major achievement even though, as indicated previously, implementation remains problematic. In addition, several countries reported that they had instituted national plans for the implementation of CEDAW, and many have ratified the United Nations conventions that protect women and children. Increasingly, the issue of involving women in the **peace**

process is beginning to receive much deserved attention. Recently, African Heads of States adopted a Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. The Declaration calls for the establishment of an "African Trust Fund for Women for the purpose of building the capacity of African Women" and focuses specifically on women in rural areas. The AU has gone beyond the UN 30% target for representation to achieving a 50/50 Gender parity within the Commission

4.2   Obstacles to Empowerment

Insufficient economic growth, debt burden, lack of appropriate macroeconomic policies, and economic mismanagement, are some of the factors retarding poverty reduction in Africa. For almost all the countries, gender gaps characterise the **educational ladder** but are most intense at the tertiary level. Women continue to be marginalized in IT and science fields which limits their employment opportunities and remuneration, and has implications for those investing in women and girls in terms of returns to their investments. Attrition rates, repetitions and high levels of illiteracy among women and girls, as well as inadequate education infrastructure are some of the major constraining factors to women's access to education. **The health sector** has been devastated by the challenge of HIV/AIDS with serious implications for child and maternal health and life expectancy. HIV/AIDS is the biggest development challenge facing the continent in generations with catastrophic effects on long-term development efforts. The greater and rising infection rates among women and girls has serious demographic implications in the long-term if the trend is not arrested. Women and girls have limited access to health facilities including retroviral drugs. The burden of care in female single-headed households, with unprecedented number of orphans and declining incomes is a crisis that is weighing heavily on African women. At 940 per hundred thousand maternal mortality rates remain unacceptably high. Little progress had been made vis-à-vis the widespread violations of women's **human rights** and gender discrimination is still widespread: among the injustices and violence against women are: biases in the family against women and the girl-child, sexual violence and widespread rape. In most **decision-making structures** women are grossly under-represented. Quota systems are limited to a few countries. Decision making at the national level still falls well below the 30% recommended by the United Nations. The general consensus is that the ratification of conventions, constitutional revisions and new legal provisions for women do not have by strong political backing at the highest level and hence the resistance to implementation. Furthermore, education, work and health issues become secondary priorities under the threat of armed conflicts and civil wars that have ravaged the continent during the Decade under review. The establishment of gender focal points has not translated into strengthened mechanisms due to lack of requisite capacity in most countries and the fact that most GFPs are not in a position to influence policy changes in their respective sectors. Other challenges noted include lack of accountability monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

4.3   The Way Forward

In all the 42 countries reporting, there is consensus that policies and programmes of member States need to be gender responsive if the goals of poverty reduction and closing gender gaps are to be realised. Commitment at the highest political level is imperative – Uganda's approach to high levels of HIV/AIDS prevalence, cited as best practice, is a case in point. Botswana is managing its unprecedented levels of HIV/AIDS from the President's office. To some extent, lack of commitment and accountability at the highest level explains why despite many developments regarding laws, conventions, models and policies to alter the status of women across Africa, overall, huge gender gaps persist and in most countries empowerment continues to be a just a dream, while many new policies

and laws need to be developed in the future, the main emphasis must be implementation. Africa needs to place at the helm of all new programmes individuals who are action-oriented. The issue is not more paperwork and structures but implementation of policies. When programmes or policies fail to be implemented official responsible must be held accountable. These are changes that need to be initiated at the community and national levels.

Finally, in addition to the issue of high level policy commitment and implementation, African countries need to confront the fundamental question of equality and power as such. Inequality of power and advantage have been found in almost all human societies for millennia and have been the subject of philosophical debates and discourse for as long. Even in the so-called classless or stateless societies, studied by anthropologists, rudimentary forms of social, economic and political stratification exist. In short, societies are normally divided into patterned structure of unequal groups (class/caste etc.,) and power relations: the question is one of degree rather than kind, while the actual nature of stratification/hierarchy differs and varies enormously across space and time. And so, addressing gender equality in abstract, without confronting the issue of equality in terms of how societies are fundamentally structured and organised, is intrinsically flawed. Inequalities are inherently unjust and antithetical to human development and Socio-economic transformations and can only be resolved within a general framework of human equality rather than attempting to deal with gender equality alone. Inequality between human beings, as an organising principle, needs resolving in order to better appreciate calls for gender equality. The issues of equality and inequality in society need to be addressed because of the moral, political, social and economics implications and also because of the central place of stratification in the organizations of societies. For instance, is it moral to perpetuate inequalities in the life chances of individuals because of the agenda, class, caste and physical or mental disabilities? States should grapple with the issue of inequality as limiting human development per se, which in turn affects all actors in a society regardless of their gender. Approaching equality this way does not automatically mean that structural inequalities in general and gender inequalities in particular will ineluctably disappear or reduce appreciably in the short run, but it does, however, require communities and societies to address the ontological nature of our common humanity that is greater than the gender divide. Approaching gender equality and empowerment from this angle has greater value in that it addresses the issue of socio-economic efficiency as well as moral and political implications of excluding a large segment of society from life-chances: when equality is denied, the inherent issue of justice is at stake.