

United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)
Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
Expert Consultation on
“Priorities in follow-up to the ten-year review and
appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Declaration
and Platform for Action”
31 October to 3 November 2005
New York, USA

**Priorities in follow-up to the ten-year review and appraisal of
implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for
Action**

**Prepared by
Kibre Dawit ***

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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The two priority issues which require attention in the follow up to the ten years review and which FEMNET has been working on amongst the other critical areas are:

1. Decision Making and Political Participation

2. Women's Human Right.

FEMNET's Advocacy, Training, Networking and Communications Programmes allows FEMNET to interact with African women and thier organizations, to access information, facilitate and train women by addressing advocacy gaps, by providing a framework for regional interventions at the regional and international levels. FEMNET's advocacy program is at the fore front in addressing issues as stated in the critical areas of concern. In meeting the objectives for its work FEMET is engaged by enteracting with regional and international NGOs, women's groups, development organizations, the UN, African Union, NEPAD, etc.

The strategy that FEMNET uses is by being accessable to women's organizations through out the Region, to provide training, and frameworks for regional interventions which may be used at national level. Such frame works and information obtained from FEMNET may be adapted and be used at national levels through wome'ns organizations, NGOs and such development partners.

FEMNET as a regional and network organization advaoctes for effective policies at various levels including the AU, UN Organizations, NEPAD etc. directly interacting with institutions that interact with governments through out the continent.

PRIORITIES IN FOLLOW UP IN 10 YEARS REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF IMPLEMENTATION ON BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION

As articulated by the planning committee at a meeting in March 1994, the vision of the NGO Forum was to bring together women and men to challenge, create, and transform global structures and processes at all levels through the empowerment and celebration of women. It was also committed to equality, peace, justice, inclusiveness and full participation of all.

In line with these principles, the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) was the focal point for the preparation of the African women's NGOs' participation in the Fourth World Conference of Women held in Beijing in 1995. FEMNET also collaborated with other women's organizations as part of the follow-up activities to the Beijing NGO Forum and the parallel UN Intergovernmental Conference. These activities included:

- *Regional Beijing +5 Review Preparations:* FEMNET was one of the five regional women NGOs serving on the technical committee for the 6th African Preparatory Conference held in Addis Ababa from November 22-27, 1999, for the Beijing +5 Review held in New York from June 5-9, 2000, by a Special UN General Assembly; and
- *Monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action:* FEMNET developed a questionnaire in 1997 (in English and French) for assessing progress in the implementation of the Platform for Action (PFA). Out of the countries that were assessed, the overall pattern that emerged was that it was the NGOs, and not the state governments, that were making the effort in addressing the twelve critical areas of concern.

In 1999, representatives from governments and non-governmental organizations from thirteen African countries met in Nairobi for a workshop to train and share information on gender mainstreaming and assess the implementation of the Beijing PFAs. The Workshop was organized by FEMNET

in partnership with the EU through the network Women in Development Europe (WIDE). It was held on April 24-30 1999. Participants from various African countries shared information on basic gender concepts and discussed reports on the status of the implementation of the Beijing PFAs. The reports showed where these countries were in the implementation of the Platforms. The participants assessed the strategies that have worked, different methods of monitoring the implementation as well as the process known as Beijing +5. A plan of action, which included activities to be taken by individual participants, their organizations and FEMNET, was developed at this meeting for follow up to gender mainstreaming and the African and Beijing PFAs.

During the Beijing +5 review process through late 1999 to mid 2000, African women identified decision-making and political participation, globalisation or conflict, HIV/AIDS and women's human rights as the five critical areas of concern hindering advancement on the implementation of the Beijing PFA. International advocacy for policies and programmes to address these five critical areas of concern was critical to advance African women's development equality and other human rights. In line with the outcomes of the Beijing +5 review process, a continental sharing of experiences and lessons learnt was found necessary to move advocacy on the five critical areas forward. Strategic advocacy efforts by African women within organized civil society in relation to African states as well as to international Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) were needed to develop and effect gender responsive policies and programmes on the five critical areas of concern.

FEMNET thus focussed (and continues to do so) on building the capacity for international advocacy among African women. It was able to achieve this by providing expertise and support to African women seeking to advocate with the Civil Society Working Group (CSW) on the outcomes of the Beijing Plus Five Review process. FEMNET's Advocacy Programme sought to initiate a cohesive regional response by African women in civil society around the outcomes of the review process. The programme also addressed the existing advocacy gaps by providing a framework for regional intervention at the international as well as regional level. The direct beneficiaries of the programme were African women's NGOs and CBOs who engage with the CSW.

FEMNET has taken measures to mainstream gender concerns into poverty reduction strategies by including gender analyses of macroeconomic policies. The most recent initiative in this regard has been co-convening the African Union (AU)/ Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) Coalition conference on the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa that was held in Addis Ababa on September 27-30, 2005. The Conference emerged with strategies for, *inter alia* engaging policy makers on the impact of poverty on women due to patriarchal policies especially when coming up with national budgets. One such strategy was to reach out to organizations that have expertise in public taxation and expenditure studies to assist in costing existing budgetary allocations against key provisions, as well as producing a tool-kit on gender budgeting and implications for budget-based advocacy.

FEMNET has attended various workshops on strategies for the realization of women's rights. The most recent workshop was a sub-regional workshop on 'Realising Women's Rights Through Human Rights Education', in Kigali Rwanda on 19-21 October 2005. FEMNET attended as part of the SOAWR Coalition. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) found it necessary to organize this workshop on the education of women's rights with the general objective of supporting member states in the implementation of the BFAs, and particularly those on education on women's rights. The workshop proposed the

introduction of human rights in education curricula as well as revisiting the symbolism of vocabulary, illustrations and anecdotes used in curricula. A number of states had supported efforts for the promotion of gender equality in school curricula, which is a positive step in achieving the objectives under the Beijing Platforms for Action. FEMNET is involved in other activities organized by the ECA in the same regard.

Under its Communications programme, FEMNET has been at the forefront in producing and disseminating information on issues that affect women generally as well as developments on the activities around the Beijing PFAs. This has been done through producing two publications, *'Our Rights'* and *'FEMNET News'* which are disseminated to its members and partners on a quarterly basis. These publications have contributed to research on women as well as improved women's access to information on issues that are peculiar to their gender. Women, and particularly young women, acquire more knowledge about their health and their capacity to negotiate their reproductive and sexual rights is greatly enhanced. African women are thus more enlightened on how to go about agitating for their rights.

Further, FEMNET has developed a website where information such as upcoming conferences, events and other opportunities that African women's organizations need to have in order to participate in regional and international fora can be accessed. The website has positioned FEMNET as a first choice information resource on women's rights. It has proved to be an invaluable source of information on campaigns that revolve around the women's rights movement. Articles on women's rights generally are also posted on this website.

FEMNET also has a Documentation Centre which has up-to-date information on a variety of topics that address and highlight women's rights. This centre is accessible by members of the public and research organizations interested in the women's rights movement.

FEMNET's strategic goal is to remain a vibrant, functional and empowering information resource and advocacy centre for African women. FEMNET intends to continue, and improve, the documentation of African Women's experiences and expertise in the promotion of the goals of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action at the national, regional and international level. This will be done by *inter alia*, disseminating advocacy packages already produced by FEMNET hosting and participating in workshops that will result in the better use of media as a tool in advocating for women's rights as well as coming up with innovative ways of disseminating information.

FEMNET also intends to host an independent African CSO consultation meeting for effective participation in AU and other IGO processes affecting the continent to enable the appropriation of regional and international commitments for use at the national level. It will also organize training workshops, regionally and sub-regionally, for women leaders in decision-making positions or leadership skills as well as advocacy training on gender mainstreaming. African gender perspectives will thus be mainstreamed in regional and international policies.

By facilitating a regional capacity-building initiative, FEMNET aims to train African women and girls on advocacy skills so as to make them better advocates for gender equality. This will ensure that more women in the region are empowered and acquire better leadership skills that will enable them to engage effectively in governance and decision-making fora. The training will also create conditions for fair and balanced participation of women in these

fora.

With regard to mainstreaming gender concerns into poverty reduction strategies, FEMNET intends to train women's rights activists to become better advocates for gender sensitive budgeting and gender mainstreaming under its Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (PRSP). It expects to organize regional capacity-building workshops on gender budgeting with the goal of creating awareness on the importance of women's economic literacy with other networks. FEMNET will also enhance its capacity to implement its own programme to monitor and evaluate government programmes for gender impacts as well as organize two regional trainings in order to engender the PRSP.

Under its Advocacy Programme, FEMNET intends to build the capacity of women sub-regionally and regionally in conflict resolution and peace building initiatives. This will be done by training women in the region to be well grounded in negotiation, mediation and counselling skills to enable them to contribute to regional conflict resolution processes.

In general, FEMNET's projects are aimed at ensuring that African women contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Beijing Platforms for Action and the Millennium Development Goals particularly on issues that affect women. FEMNET advocates for the training of women's organizations in feminist analysis, strategic planning and a rights based approach to women's development.