

Beijing Plus Five Outcomes

Reflections for Southern Africa



SADC on the Global Gender Map

The United Nations General Assembly lit a flame for gender in 1975 at Mexico when it proclaimed the year as an International Women's Year, putting gender on the map of global development. Since then, this flame has been rekindled and fanned at various levels, further strengthening and defining a clear and concrete gender agenda at national, regional, sub-regional and global levels, and also building and strengthening the global women's movement.

The general global shift toward a human rights approach to development, anchored on principles of democracy and equality, provided the impetus for the UN General Assembly to take its commitment further by declaring 1975-1985 a Decade for Women, challenging the world to make a commitment and to examine the rights and status of women. This was envisaged to challenge national governments to take action and place gender on the development agenda.

This declaration of commitment triggered a global process and programme of stock-taking, which saw the world converging at a mid-term review meeting at Copenhagen in 1980 under the sub-theme "Employment, Health and Education". At this stage, the emphasis was more on identifying and outlining the obstacles and hurdles that hindered women from participating fully in the respective areas of development. These included generally poor global economic performance and structural imbalances, especially in developing countries.

The Copenhagen process was followed by an end-of-decade world conference to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women and this was run under the theme "Equality, Development and Peace" at Nairobi in 1985. This conference further emphasized the importance of women to participate as both agents and beneficiaries in the development processes. This particular gathering was especially important in that it defined the obstacles and further took the steps to set concrete measures and strategies towards overcoming them, thus consolidating the global agenda for gender. These were articulated in the outcomes document, *The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women* adopted by the conference, which also set the year 2000 as the timeframe for implementation.

The Forward-looking Strategies document was innovative in that it not only recommended measures for dealing with the obstacles to the advancement of women, but also identified those that were emerging as potential hurdles to the gender agenda of *equality, development and peace*. The strategies were sensitive to the dynamism of societies and "provided guidelines for a process of continuous adaptation to diverse and changing national situations at speeds and modes determined by

overall national priorities, within which the integration of women in development should rank high."

The flame burns at Beijing

All these efforts and actions culminated in the historic Beijing conference in 1995, the largest gathering of women ever held. The Beijing process was historic in that it was more participatory and inclusive than its predecessors, with women from governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), individual activists and lobbyists among others, coming together to share experiences at sub-regional preparatory meetings and subsequently at Beijing. Africa had converged at Dakar in 1994, to agree on the critical issues for the sub-region, in preparation for the world meeting at Beijing.

Two major outcomes of this fourth World Conference on Women were a declaration by participating governments of their commitment to the principles of equal rights enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The world governments, through this declaration, pledged their determination to intensify efforts and actions to achieve the goals of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the advancement of women, to ensure the empowerment of women and their full participation in development processes by the year 2005.

In furtherance of this declaration, the meeting defined a global Platform For Action (PFA), which provided a framework and agenda for the empowerment of women for the next decade. The PFA identified 12 critical areas that needed urgent redress for gender equality, and called for concrete action and measures in this regard. The 12 critical areas are:-

- The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women
- Inequalities and inadequacies in access to education and training
- Inequalities and inadequacies in access to health care and related services
- Violence against women
- The effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation
- Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources
- Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels

- Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women
- Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women
- Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media
- Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment
- Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl-child.

Strategic objectives were also identified for each of the critical areas. These have since been the global rallying points for gender advancement, with national differences in prioritization.

SADC regional priorities

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) as a region identified six of the 12 critical areas as their regional priorities, and programmes and policies have, and continue to be, put in place around these. The critical areas include:

- institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming gender;
- economic access;

- protection of the human rights of women and children;
- power-sharing and decision-making;
- women in the context of armed conflict and peace-building; and
- gender capacity-building, training, networking and information dissemination.

All member states are also urged to pay attention to the equally important area of monitoring and evaluation. These formed the basis for a regional Plan of Action for gender, which has been implemented within the general policy framework of the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, signed by Heads of State and Government in 1997. The implementation of the SADC plan of action for gender is spearheaded by the SADC Gender Unit, the institutional structure put in place to coordinate the mainstreaming of gender at the regional level.

Other key stakeholders have also taken up the challenge, with a gender plan of action for parliamentarians being adopted in 2000 to define specific actions that parliamentarians should take at national and regional levels to facilitate the implementation of the SADC gender action plan and the Beijing Platform For Action (BPFA) from which it is drawn. Suggested areas of intervention by the region's parliaments include "legislation, budgetary processes, oversight of the executive and the constituent relations."

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