

Achievements, Obstacles and Challenges for SADC

The Beijing + 5 review exercise was a global process and most of the challenges and constraints in varying degrees apply to the situation in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). For the region, however, more focus should be placed on the emerging challenges regarding the six critical areas identified at the regional level:

- economic empowerment of women;
- women in politics and decision-making positions;
- institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women;
- protection of the human rights of women;
- women and armed conflict; and
- capacity-building, training networking and information dissemination.

It has also become apparent that some areas, where considerable gains had been made in the past, are re-emerging as challenges and needing urgent redress. For instance, the areas of health and education, which in the past had been considered oversubscribed and not highlighted as critical for SADC after Beijing, have fast become critical for most countries in the region. Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs) and the Human Immuno deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS), have increased levels of poverty and reversed the gains that had been made. There is need for new strategies which deal with emergent challenges while monitoring the gains already made. This should be linked to effective monitoring and evaluation, to which member states must pay special attention.

Women and the economy

Achievements

- Commitments being made at both global and regional levels to redress the imbalances and measures introduced to promote women's participation in the economy eg maternity and paternity leave, and research by the SADC Gender Unit on barriers to economic empowerment.

Obstacles

- ❖ A limited gender perspective in the development of macro-economic policy, including persistent gender stereotyping in participation of women and men in the economy.
- ❖ The lack of opportunities for effective diversification of women's involvement in agricultural production; women are still largely confined to rural subsistence agriculture or service sectors with low incomes, and their ability to balance participation in commercial agricultural production whilst maintaining food security is limited.
- ❖ Equal rights in access to, ownership and control of productive resources have not yet been fully recognized in national legislation in some countries.
- ❖ There is a lack of "family friendly" policies regarding the organization of work, making it impossible for many women to be formally employed.
- ❖ This is coupled with harassment of women in the work place that leads to lack of upward mobility and loss of jobs.
- ❖ The differential impact of economic globalisation and continued trade imbalances, coupled with rising poverty levels in SADC, have narrowed opportunities for women who are disproportionately poor to participate effectively in the trade sector; this is compounded by their limited ability to harness information technology for economic empowerment.



Women in politics and decision-making

Achievements

- Growing acceptance of the importance of women's full participation at all levels.
- Affirmative action policies (quotas) in some countries.
- National and international networks of women politicians, parliamentarians, activists and professionals.

Obstacles

- ❖ Participation of women at the highest levels has been hindered by the gap between the legal provisions and equality situation, which has persisted in practical terms.
- ❖ Under-representation of women in decision-making bodies, eg legislature, politics, conflict prevention, economy, media and hence lack of gender perspective in these areas.
- ❖ Lack of human and financial resources for training and advocacy for political careers.

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

Achievements

- National machineries have been instituted and strengthened in most countries and institutional structures have been put in place at a regional level.

Obstacles

- ❖ Inadequate financial and human resources for the effective functioning of these structures.
- ❖ Lack of political will and commitment in some countries.
- ❖ Insufficient understanding of gender equality and gender mainstreaming.
- ❖ Unclear mandates and marginalized location within the national government structures.
- ❖ Structural and communication problems within and among government agencies.

Protection of the human rights of women

Achievements

- Gender sensitive legal reforms in some countries and legal literacy and awareness programmes.
- Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination on all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by all but one country in the region (Swaziland) and acceding to and adoption of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW by some countries.
- Efforts continue to be made towards integrating the human rights of women in all sectors.

Obstacles

- ❖ Gender discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.
- ❖ War and conflict violating women's rights.
- ❖ Disharmony between international conventions and domestic laws.
- ❖ Lack of enforcement mechanisms for laws that protect women's rights.
- ❖ Insufficient recognition of women's reproductive and sexuality rights.

Women and armed conflict

Achievements

- Recognition of the differential impact of war and armed conflict on women and men, and the need for a gender-sensitive approach to the application of international human rights law, identified as one of the SADC priorities.
- The adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which provides that rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and other forms of sexual violence are war crimes when committed in the context of armed conflict.
- The importance of women's contribution in peace-building, peace-making and conflict resolution is being increasingly recognized.

Obstacles

- ❖ Under representation of women in decision-making positions at all levels (eg envoys, or special representatives of the United Nations Secretary-General in peace-keeping and peace-building, post conflict reconciliation).
- ❖ Lack of gender awareness in most of the areas of concern.
- ❖ Lack of sufficient resources to address the needs of refugees, and displaced persons, most of whom are women and children.
- ❖ Lack of training for personnel dealing with the needs of women in situations of armed conflict or refugees, and no specific programmes to rehabilitate women from the trauma.
- ❖ Excessive military expenditures by most governments at the expense of social services funding.
- ❖ Increase in general violation of the human rights of women.

Women and health

Achievements

- Several SADC countries have adopted guiding policies dealing with the urgent provision of quality and adequate health care, with special emphasis on improvement of women's health care.
- The recognition of women's reproductive health care by most countries, and the adoption of more comprehensive and integrated approaches to reproductive health provision, including increasing legal protection of women's reproductive rights and safe motherhood initiatives.
- Targeted gender training, communication and awareness programmes for government and traditional health service providers as well as communities.

- Increased collaboration between SADC governments and women NGOs, as well as involvement of the private sector in the provision of health care services, promoting more effective policy implementation.
- The SADC HIV/AIDS strategic framework and programme of action 2000-2004 that takes a multifaceted response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Obstacles

- ❖ A significant percentage of women in SADC still suffer from diseases related to poor or inadequate intake of food and lack of access to quality medical care. This is compounded by the disproportionate impact of old and new diseases on women, including HIV/AIDS.
- ❖ The poor economic performance of most SADC countries has hindered the full implementation of planned programmes and activities, reducing any potential or real gains by women who are most affected by poverty.
- ❖ Continued inequality of access to limited/inadequate health care facilities, which is further affected by the urban/rural divide.
- ❖ Continued limited focus on the sexual rights of women; sexual stereotyping and cultural norms and practices still hamper women's full empowerment in health matters.
- ❖ The health sector in most SADC countries continues to be a casualty of neo-liberal macro economic policies, and women disproportionately bear the social and economic burden of this fall out.

Gender capacity-building, training, networking and information dissemination

Achievements

- Although this area was not originally identified among the 12 in the Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action (BDPFA), it was added as a critical concern to regional development in the SADC region. Efforts have been made at both regional and national levels towards this.
- Training programmes and capacity-building initiatives have been undertaken at regional levels, eg lobbying and advocacy, gender-analysis skills and gender-budgeting training, among other initiatives.

Obstacles

- ❖ Limited resources, both human and financial.
- ❖ Resistance in some quarters to gender as a relevant approach to sustainable development.

Produced by Women In Development Southern Africa Awareness (WIDSAA), the gender programme of Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC). The WIDSAA programme is regional in focus and aims to be a catalyst and information service to the region's governments, parliamentarians, NGOs and agencies, the media and the public and the formulation of policy affecting women in SADC. This is done through the collection, production and dissemination of information and enabling the capacity to generate and use information. WIDSAA produced this series of seven fact-sheets with United Nations Fund for Women – Southern Africa Regional Office (UNIFEM-SARO). UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations that provides financial support and technical assistance to innovative programmes promoting women's human rights, their economic and political empowerment, and gender equality.

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