

Beijing Plus Five Outcomes

Reflections for Southern Africa

Additional Gender Challenges For SADC

Apart from the emerging challenges identified in the Beijing + 5 Outcomes document, regional gender stakeholders meeting in May 2001 at a conference at Maputo, Mozambique identified two additional challenges that need to be urgently addressed for gender equality to be a reality in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). These are:

- More focus on human rights as a conceptual framework for gender planning and programming; and
- Mainstreaming gender, human rights and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) in all planning and programming processes.

Human rights framework for gender planning and programming

The struggle for gender equality has rightfully been rooted in principles of democracy and equality, which in turn make it imperative to respect and protect the human rights of women, men, boys and girls. The human rights, especially of women, are increasingly being recognized as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights, as declared in the following human rights instruments:

- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- the African Charter on the Rights of Women;
- the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol;
- the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women;
- the Declaration on the Right to Development; and
- the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action.

Gender activists in the region and across the globe have been lobbying for the closure of the gaps that exist between the rights of women and effective implementation, which largely derives from inadequate and inappropriate mechanisms and lack of resources at both national and regional levels.

The reality in most SADC countries is that gender programming and planning has not always been compatible with the fundamental principles of human rights, as articulated in the international human rights instruments. Although all but one country in the region (Swaziland) have ratified and acceded to CEDAW and other international instruments, a few have reformed their national legislation and administrative procedures to comply with the norms and standards of these international instruments.



There is therefore a need for domestication of international instruments, so that these can effectively provide a human rights framework for gender planning and programming. National practice in family, civil, penal, labour and commercial codes, and administrative rules and regulations need to comply with international standards for women to be able to fully enjoy their rights and fundamental freedoms. Currently, only Namibia, Malawi and South Africa have automatic domestication upon ratification of international conventions.

There is need to deal with this challenge and approach all gender and development initiatives within a human rights framework.

Mainstreaming gender, human rights and HIV/AIDS in all planning and programming processes

The need to mainstream gender, human rights and HIV/AIDS in all programming and planning has become a prerequisite for development initiatives. This is because gender inequality is a key variable in the incidence of HIV/AIDS, where women's limited control over their sexuality puts them at higher risk of contracting the HIV virus. In the same breadth, HIV/AIDS is both a gender and human rights concern, especially in cases of conjugal rights of spouses, willful transmission of the virus and access to drugs. The trend has been that as gender disparities increase, the epidemic is affecting women more, who bear the negative consequences of the gender imbalances, including being at higher risk of infection, care-giving, and other related responsibilities.

Willful transmission by partners and lack of women's control over their sexuality, limited access to drugs, care facilities and coping mechanisms make HIV/AIDS a critical human rights issue. The dynamics of gender relationships and roles, which are often culturally shaped and determined, have a strong bearing on the way HIV/AIDS is impacting on development initiatives and processes in the region.

Gender Implications for HIV/AIDS:

- Although HIV/AIDS affects both men and women, women are more vulnerable because of biological, epidemiological and social reasons.
- The epidemic is fueled by situations where macro policies have led to an increase in gender disparities.
- The feminization of poverty is a key characteristic of the socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS.
- The protection of the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls is critical.

- Gender norms influence the way in which family members experience and cope with HIV and AIDS deaths. The burden of care often falls on females, while orphaned girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school than their male counterparts; and
- Women's socialization, which expects them not to appear knowledgeable about their sexuality, puts them at a greater risk of being infected.

This engendered human rights approach to HIV/AIDS and development is key to the success of development efforts in the region. Organizations working in the areas of gender, human rights and HIV/AIDS need to adopt a holistic approach and mainstream each of these components and dimensions into their programmes and activities for their efforts to bear fruit. If organizations continue to approach the issues as independent variables, the goals of development will remain elusive.

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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