

Beijing Plus Five Outcomes

Reflections for Southern Africa

Towards 2005 and Beyond: Governments Set New Targets

World governments meeting in New York in mid-2000 at a review process known as Beijing + 5 identified some obstacles, setbacks and emerging challenges hindering the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPFA). The governments recommitted themselves to the BDPFA and further committed themselves to take further action and initiatives to overcome the hurdles and address the emerging challenges. These include globalization, economic disparities among and within countries, the debt burden for most developing countries, changing patterns of migratory flow of labour, HIV/AIDS and growing problems of drug and substance abuse.

One fundamental shift is the drive towards a human rights framework for mainstreaming gender and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS). This has been based on the recognition that all human rights – civic, cultural, economic, political and social, including the right to development – are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and are essential for the realization of gender equality, development and peace. New targets have been set in light of the emerging challenges and setbacks. These include acceleration of action, additional action and change of strategy in some instances.

Education

With the recognition that the gains that had been made in areas such as education are being eroded, world governments, including SADC governments, set new targets for these areas. Through the Beijing Outcomes document, the governments pledged their commitment to ensure policies that guarantee equal access to education and the elimination of gender disparities in education, including vocational training, science and technology, and completion of basic education for girls, especially those in the rural areas.

In order to achieve this, the world governments expressed their commitment to “accelerate action and strengthen political commitment to close the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2005 and to ensure free, compulsory and universal primary education for both girls and boys by 2015.”

Women’s human rights and violence against women

The realization of the need to protect the human rights of women, as a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and development, calls for a review of laws and policies to ensure the protection and enjoy-

ment of their rights. Therefore, governments committed themselves to strive to remove discriminatory provisions “as soon as possible, preferably by 2005”. Special priority was given to the need to protect women and girls against all forms of violence, including physical, psychological and sexual violence. The 2005 target is maintained, and the issue was highlighted as a top priority by governments.

Health and the challenges of HIV/AIDS

Health is one of the areas where major inroads had been made prior to Beijing. However, these gains have since been reversed in most countries in southern Africa. This is largely due to Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs), general shifts in economic trends toward privatization, general poor economic performances, and the unprecedented effects of HIV/AIDS.

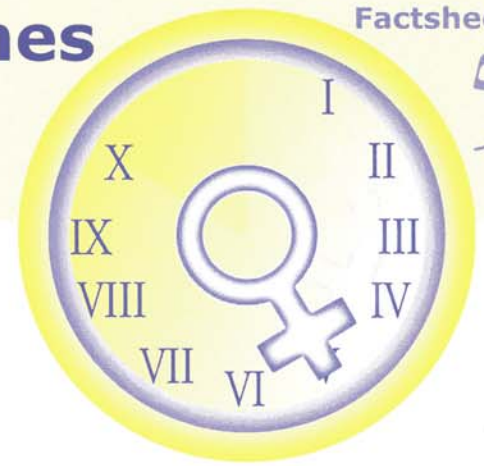
Governments pledged to adopt policies and implement measures, as a matter of urgency, to address the gender aspects of emerging health challenges, such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and other diseases that have a disproportionate impact on women’s health, because of their socio-economic status and their biological make up which makes them more vulnerable to being infected and being affected.

A fresh commitment was made to ensure universal access to quality health care and sexual reproductive education throughout the life cycle of women and men by 2015. Particular attention was given to reproductive health, and part of the commitment was to give full attention to the promotion of mutually respectful and equitable gender relations, particularly meeting the educational and service needs of adolescents to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality.

Economic empowerment

Women are not fully participating in the economic development of nations, despite the commitments made at Beijing to promote their participation. The review process indicated that five years after the commitments, women are still generally marginalized and confined to the service and support sectors, and the informal sectors that have low remuneration.

The Beijing review Outcome document developed in New York highlighted that fundamental economic restructuring experienced by developing countries with economies in transition has led to a lack of resources for poverty-eradication programmes aimed at the empowerment of women.



Governments reiterated their commitment to redress this situation through mainstreaming a gender perspective into key macroeconomic and social development policies. One strategy identified in the Beijing +5 Outcome document is the incorporation of a gender perspective into the design, development, adoption and execution of all budgetary processes. This is envisaged to promote equitable, effective and appropriate resource allocation and establish adequate budgetary allocations to support gender equality and development programmes that enhance women's empowerment. The governments further committed to strive to reduce the disproportionate number of women living in poverty, and in particular rural women, by implementing national poverty eradication programmes.

Institutional mechanisms at all levels

A key area where governments reconfirmed their commitment is in the establishment and reinforcement of existing institutional mechanisms to provide frameworks for advancing gender equality for development.

Although most SADC governments had taken steps in this regard, the review process highlighted the need for a more concerted effort and collaboration with civil society, particularly women, for these efforts to be more effective. To facilitate this process, a commitment was made to develop the capacity by universities and national research and training institutes to undertake policy-oriented and gender-related research and impact studies to enable gender specific knowledge-based policy-making at national levels.

There is need to inform the women of the SADC region of these new targets so that they can explore the implications for their efforts towards gender equality and development. The achievements and persistent or new obstacles should constitute a global framework for the identification of further actions and initiatives to overcome obstacles and to achieve the full and accelerated implementation of the BDPFA.

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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