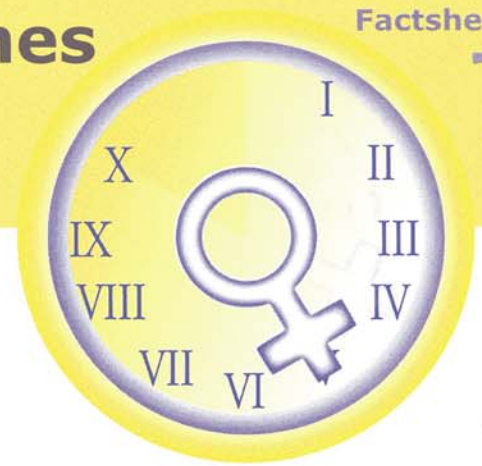


Beijing Plus Five Outcomes

Reflections for Southern Africa



Gender Plan of Action for SADC Parliaments: Five Years After Beijing

Regional parliaments have positioned themselves to be major players in advancing the gender agenda. This is based on the recognition that parliaments have a role to play in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform For Action (BDPFA), the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development and the regional plan of action for gender. Crucial to this role is their pivotal influence in:

- legislation;
- budgetary processes;
- oversight of the executive; and
- constituent relations.

Challenges relating to above from a gender perspective and proposed measures, constituted a gender plan of action for the region's parliaments five years after Beijing, which was adopted at a regional seminar on parliamentary action on the Beijing + 5 review process in Gaborone, Botswana in 2000.

The Plan of Action for Gender in Southern African Development Community (SADC) Parliaments has been developed by the SADC Parliamentary Forum (SADC-PF) and is informed by the need for parliamentarians to access and effectively utilize gender information in order to strengthen their capacity in advancing the gender agenda in the region. SADC-PF, in collaboration with the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre Women In Development Southern Africa Awareness (SARDC WIDSAA) programme, has embarked on a project to engender SADC parliaments for, amongst other goals, more effective policy and law making. The project has initiated, activities around:

- gender capacity-building and training, where Members of Parliament (MPs) have been sensitized to gender issues and equipped to appreciate and analyze information and projects from a gender perspective;
- advocacy and lobbying training from a gender perspective;
- support for the establishment of a regional caucus of women MPs;
- packaging gender and development information for MPs, including gender and development guides, flyers and procuring gender and development books;
- attachment of women parliamentarians to observe elections from a gender perspective; and
- creating a database of women parliamentarians in the region.

In pursuance of this, regional parliaments identified measures to be taken at both national and regional levels to facilitate the implementation of the BDPFA and cope with the emerging challenges identified at

the Beijing +5 mid-term review at New York in 2000 and articulated in the Outcomes document.

National level challenges:

- Although half of SADC parliaments have at least 15% women in parliaments and two have neared 29%, most SADC countries are still far from achieving the 30 percent target of women in parliament and decision-making by 2005, although some have already had their last round of national elections before the set date. There is need for governments and political parties to ensure that their processes create an enabling environment for this target to be reached.
- Women's caucuses and committees in most regional parliaments remain insufficiently developed to fully facilitate the national machinery role of monitoring government commitments.
- Most male MPs are still largely unaware of the role they could play in supporting the gender agenda. The challenge remains to sensitize male MPs to participate in advancing the gender agenda and ensuring that the targets set for 2005 are met.

Regional level challenges

- Partnerships and linkages at national and regional and inter-regional levels should be established or strengthened to ensure the successful implementation and monitoring of the regional gender plan of action.
- Activities should be undertaken for capacity-building, networking and institutional transformation, in support of the regional goal for institutional mechanisms and structures for gender equality and development.
- Women's significant involvement in the prevention and transformation of conflicts as well as peace-building is yet to be achieved, in line with the regional goal of improving women's participation in conflict resolution and peace-building initiatives.
- Parliamentarians should familiarize themselves with and work towards supporting the implementation of the SADC programme of action for women in politics and decision-making.

Regional caucus mechanism established for women MPs

One of the key regional challenges identified is an effective mechanism to facilitate networking among SADC women MPs to ensure implementation of the BDPFA and the regional action plan for gender. In April 2002 in Luanda, Angola, a Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus was launched. It aims to bolster national women's parliamentary caucuses, build networking and accelerate the regional agenda on gender and women's empowerment perspectives within SADC parliaments. The "added value" of the Caucus is that it is flexible mechanism, with a man-

date to independently address issues at national and regional levels. It supplements activities of the parliamentary committees responsible for gender equality, where existing structures or numbers of women in parliament face constraints in advancing the agenda and reshape policy.

The Caucus is a regional body of approximately 322 women parliamentarians out of about 1800 parliamentarians in SADC, and as an integral part of the Forum has strategic linkages with the SADC Gender Unit and national parliaments. The Executive Committee of the Caucus comprises all Chairpersons of national women parliamentary caucuses. The objectives of the Caucus are to:

- build and strengthen skills and competencies for gender mainstreaming and empowerment amongst women MPs;
- provide practical follow up and monitoring of the implementation of the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development (and Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls);
- engage leaders of political parties in six countries scheduled to hold elections in 2004-2005 and lobby for a minimum of 30 per

cent women candidates on their election nomination lists for parliaments;

- profile the need for women in positions of power and decision-making and prospective women candidates for parliamentary elections;
- facilitate the involvement of women MPs in election processes in the region;
- lobby parliaments for increased budgetary allocation of resources for HIV/AIDS programmes and activities;
- facilitate political training, formal and informal networking; and
- enhance the participation of women in peace-building and conflict resolution processes in SADC.

The SADC parliaments' plan of action can provide a window of possible opportunities for collaboration and partnerships. Gender organizations need to develop sustained linkages and engagement with parliamentarians, and facilitate their role of reviewing laws, practices and policies, scrutinizing the budget for gender sensitivity and establishing caucuses and other structures where they do not exist, as momentum gathers towards 2005.

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.

For more information contact:

SARDC WIDSAA

15 Downie Avenue, Belgravia,

P.O. Box 5690, Harare, Zimbabwe

Tel 263-4-791141/791143 Fax 263-4-791271

Email: widsaa@sardc.net or sardc@sardc.net

Website: <http://www.sardc.net>

UNIFEM-SARO

7th Floor Takura House, Kwame Nkrumah Ave,

P.O. Box 4775, Harare, Zimbabwe

Tel 263-4-792681 Fax 263-4-704729

Email: nomcebo.manzini@undp.org

Website: <http://www.unifem.undp.org>