

Regional Round-up on progress in implementing the Beijing Platform of Action in light of the upcoming 25th Anniversary of the platform *Spotlight: Africa*

Spotlight: Africa and the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

African Ministers and representatives of African Governments met at the fourth session of the African Union Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, "*Realizing women's rights for an equal future*", to discuss the state of play of gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment in the context of the upcoming twenty-fifth anniversary of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in Addis Ababa, from 28 October to 1 November 2019.

The meeting output which was conveyed as a political declaration emphasized three strong over-riding focus.

Firstly, there was the recognition "that deep-seated negative traditional and cultural practices, and negative social norms that persist in some African countries, continue to put women and girls at a disadvantage"; hence, it stated that there would be "a high premium on eliminating gender stereotypes, transforming gender norms and repealing discriminatory laws, for the effective realization of the rights of women and girls in Africa, in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Maputo Protocol, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063, "The Africa We Want".

Secondly, the Declaration stated that "peace is a critical prerequisite for sustainable development", acknowledged "the considerable efforts made by member States towards peace consolidation, prevention and conflict resolution, and the integration of women in uniformed forces" and argued that women should be provided "with a formal capacity to engage in peace making, prevention and conflict resolution, and human rights management, in line with the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) (S/RES/1325)," which is "essential for women's effective participation in peace and security".

Thirdly, it recognized "the immense progress made



Women attend a community meeting held at the UN Women multipurpose centre in the Ngam refugee camp.
Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

Highlights of the celebration of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) include review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by the 73rd United Nations (UN) General Assembly; the Sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64, March 9, 2020) and events curated under the umbrella *Generation Equality: Realizing women's rights for an equal future* led by UN Women; and the intergovernmental process under the leadership of Mexico and France. In the run up to CSW64, which produced a political declaration on the BPfA, a number of national and regional meetings and conferences on women in the context of Beijing+25 took place in 2019. Some regional meetings occurred at ministerial level where ministers and government officials agreed to specific outputs including political declarations and regional reports. This Update presents a snapshot of the important elements from the African region. Future Updates will focus sequentially on Asia, Latin America & the Caribbean and the Arab & European regions.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the landmark visionary agenda for the empowerment of women and girls, the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. 2020 is also the five-year milestone in the adoption of the Sustainable Development Agenda. In recognition of this, the South Centre's Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Gender (SDCCG) Programme is issuing this bi-weekly update on the state of play of discussions on gender and development issues in the context of the BPfA.

in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the promotion of gender equality and women's rights across the continent".

Participants at the meeting highlighted the following areas of progress in the implementation of the BPfA in the African region:

- Achievements made in promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls;
- Continued education for girls and the promotion of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (referred to as STEM) are crucial;
- Evidence of progress in strengthening institutional mechanisms for gender equality (which as they noted is "continuously overshadowed by inadequate financing and a lack of capacity to make measurable impact");
- Reduction in maternal mortality rates across the continent, reduced rates of new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths;
- An increase in advocacy on the elimination of violence against women across the continent, although challenges remain;
- The progressive legislative, policy and programmatic efforts to ensure women's and girls' rights to education, access to social protection, prevention and criminalization of gender-based violence, and the constitutional and legal right to inherit;
- The efforts made by member States in increasing the participation and representation of women in decision-making structures while noting "the slow and uneven progress across the continent in the representation and participation of women in decision-making at all levels, including in governance, conflict resolution and peace building, the private sector, the media, and climate policy and governance".

Slow progress was flagged with respect to:

- The continuing low participation rates of women in the labor force, women's disproportionate responsibility for the burden of unpaid care work and their representation in higher unemployment, and often among the working poor;
- Additionally, the majority of working women in Africa have remained concentrated in the informal sector, where decent work is often lacking;
- The security of tenure and rights to land and property remain uncertain for women and "in

this regard, the adoption and implementation of robust policies matched with adequate financing are required".

Ultimately, African ministers and government officials committed to the social and economic inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in all priority actions, to accelerate implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Looking towards the 64th Meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women which took place in New York in March 2020, the meeting also developed key messages to guide Africa's position in the political declaration which was adopted at the CSW64.

Six themes were highlighted for Africa's position at CSW64. A selected number of exemplary elements are presented below. (A future edition of the South Centre Beijing+25 Update Series will explore these messages in detail and in comparison to other regional efforts.)

1. Eliminating all discriminatory laws, practices, negative stereotypes and social norms that are based on culture and not aligned to international and constitutional commitments to human rights:

Engage in and support the transformation of negative cultural and religious institutional practices and sensitize institutional leaders, to eliminate discriminatory practices against women and girls and advance their rights (item c);

2. Investing in education, training, science and technology for women and girls to promote their equal access to employment and eliminate occupational segregation:

Promote the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, referred to as STEM, for girls attending primary, secondary and tertiary education; and promote technical and vocational education and training for women and girls who are out of school (item b); and Eliminate wage gaps and institutionalize equal pay for work of equal value (item d);

3. Strengthening and repositioning gender machineries as key drivers for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with appropriate capacity and resources to deliver on their mandate:

(a) Ensure adequate technical skills, institutional mechanisms, and human and financial resourcing of gender machineries (item a); and Harmonize the mandate of gender machineries in Africa to coordinate, monitor and hold accountable all public and private institutions, for delivering on gender equality and women's empowerment and achieving the gender-related Sustainable Development Goals (item d);

4. Improving and scaling-up social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls:

Build women's resilience to trauma and shocks, including those caused by natural disasters, humanitarian crises, armed conflict and climate change (item a); and Invest in gender-responsive, sustainable and accessible infrastructure and services for women living in rural areas (item d);

5. Implementing the women, peace and security agenda, United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) (S/RES/1325) and related resolutions:

Encourage member States to adopt national action plans under United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) (S/RES/1325), on women, peace and security (item c); and Increase the participation of women in peace operations, negotiation processes, mediation and preventing and countering violent extremism (item d);

6. Eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls as a prerequisite for gender equality and women's empowerment:

Accelerate efforts and engage traditional leaders to eliminate violence and harmful practices against women and girls, including child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) (item a); and Address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, particularly among women with disabilities, the elderly, refugees and internally displaced persons who are women (item d);

7. Investing in and ensuring meaningful participation of women and girls in productive sectors, particularly agribusiness and agricultural value chains, to increase wealth and reduce poverty:

Reform the customary and statutory laws that impede women's access, control and ownership of land and other productive resources to facilitate their full participation in economic activities (item a); and Uphold human rights principles and eliminate the exploitation of women labour, and the degradation of land and misuse of natural resources, by appropriately regulating multinational and national corporations engaged in large-scale agriculture, mining, mega-projects and commercial logging (item h);

8. Closing sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive statistical and analytical gaps to ensure gender-responsive planning, budgeting and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063:

Improve the collection, analysis and use of data disaggregated by sex, age, disability, together with gender-sensitive data (item a); and Strengthen national statistical systems to generate, manage and disseminate gender-responsive data

from, and across, different data ecosystems, especially where data sets are fragmented and isolated (item e);

9. Accelerating the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 3 on universal health and well-being for all, to reduce the prevalence of disease in women and girls, and to mitigate the disproportionate burden of care affecting women:

Implement the Committee on the Status of Women, resolution 60/2 on Women, the Girl Child and HIV, towards ending the unequal burden of the HIV epidemic, including in conflict and post-conflict situations (item c); Reduce maternal mortality rates and prevent deaths of newborn babies and children under the age of five years (item d); and Expand social protection services for women and girls with chronic diseases, such as HIV and cancer (item g).

Source: Adapted from the *Political Declaration and Key Messages and Priority Actions on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action*, African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing+25), Addis Ababa, 28 October - 1 November 2019.

Previous Beijing+25 Updates:

No. 1, 13 March 2020 – Political Declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women

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