

INFORMATION SERVICES: RESEARCH

Room No 1/078, 90 Plein St, Cape Town, 8000
Joy Watson: Telephone: (021) 403 8242; Fax: 403 8118
E-mail address: jwatson@parliament.gov.za

4 February 2005

The Southern African Development Community Declaration on Gender and Development

1. Introduction

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development (henceforth the Declaration) is one of the most important regional instruments that aims to promote and protect the socio-economic, political and cultural rights of women. The Declaration is based on the premise that gender is an area where considerable agreement already exists and where there are substantial benefits to be gained from closer regional co-operation and collective action.¹ It is important to note that all SADC member States have signed and ratified or acceded to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), or are in the final stages of doing so. The Declaration was signed by Heads of State in Blantyre, Malawi on 8 September 1997.

The Declaration notes, in its Preamble, that while some SADC States have made considerable progress towards gender equality and gender mainstreaming, disparities between women and men still exist in the areas of legal rights, power sharing, decision-making and access to and control over productive resources. The Preamble also notes that efforts to integrate gender considerations in SADC sectoral programmes and projects have not sufficiently mainstreamed gender in a co-ordinated and comprehensive manner.

2. Structures for Promoting Gender Equality

The Declaration endorses the decision by the Council of Ministers at a meeting in Namibia in February 1997 to put in place an institutional framework for advancing gender equality. These include:

- The establishment of a Standing Committee of Ministers responsible for Gender Affairs in the region.
- The adoption of the existing Advisory committee consisting of 1 representative from Government and 1 from non-government organisations in each member State, whose task is to advise the

¹ Section B, Preamble of the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development

Standing Committee of Ministers and other Sectoral Committees of Ministers on gender issues.

- The establishment of Gender Focal Points whose task is to ensure that gender is taken into account in all sectoral initiatives and is placed on the agenda of all ministerial meetings.
- The establishment of a Gender Unit in the SADC Secretariat consisting of at least 2 officers at senior level.

3. Commitments in the Declaration

3.1 *Place gender firmly on the agenda of the SADC Programme of Action and Community Building Initiative.*

The Ministers responsible for gender and women's affairs adopted a short to medium term Plan of Action for gender in 1999. This Plan of Action sets the following objectives:

- Ensure the development of a policy and institutional framework for gender mainstreaming in SADC at national and regional levels.
- Cultivate and promote a culture of gender equality in SADC and respect for the human rights of women.
- Facilitate the achievement of gender equality in access to economic structures and control of resources in the SADC region.
- Strengthening of existing national, and facilitation of regional networks of women decision-makers.
- Facilitate the promotion of peace and stability in the region and evaluate the impact of war and conflict on the social, economic, psychological and emotional development of women and children.
- Build capacity and training.

3.2 *Ensure equal representation of women and men in the decision-making of member States and SADC structures at all levels and the achievement of at least a 30 percent target of women in political and decision-making structures by 2005.*

Recent statistics from the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) show that by the end of 2003, for the first time, women had broken the 15% barrier across all national Parliaments.² Globally, women currently comprise 15.6% of the combined numbers of both Lower and Upper Houses. However, so far only 15 countries have managed to reach the 30% threshold of women in national Parliaments, a figure widely considered to signify the point at which women can make a meaningful impact on the work of Parliament.

² <http://www.ipu.org>

3.3 Promote women's full access to and control over productive resources such as land, livestock, markets, credit, modern technology, formal employment and a good quality of life in order to reduce the level of poverty amongst women.

Women in SADC countries constitute the majority of the poor. Their activities are largely confined to agricultural production for domestic consumption and labour intensive tasks such as water and firewood collection.³ In the formal sector, women continue to work mainly in the low-paid, poorly regulated and under-organised sectors of the economy. This is problematic given that women constitute almost half of the economically active population. Within a political context where male hegemony and disparate power relationships between women and men are no longer acceptable, much work still needs to be invested into undoing this situation.

The unemployment problem is coupled with the fact that amongst the ranks of those who are employed, there is great disparity and inequity in how people are remunerated. This problem has gendered dimensions to it in that it is often women who are located in low-paying jobs. This is largely because the gendered roles traditionally ascribed to women by society, are not socially valued and rewarded in monetary terms. In terms of the triple role theory, women play an instrumental role in reproductive work, i.e. in nurturing and caring for children and the aged, in community work i.e. dealing with social issues that impact upon the collective well-being such as initiatives to raise funds for schools, churches etc and in productive work where they play an instrumental role in contributing towards the growth of the economy through formal/ informal employment. The workload of many women is therefore very intense and many studies have found that on average, women work longer hours than men and often get up earlier in the morning and go to bed later at night.⁴ Within this context, it is important that the gendered disparities of remuneration and the social values ascribed to the roles that women play, are subverted.

3.4 Repeal and reform all laws, amend constitutions and change social practices that subject women to discrimination and enact empowering gender sensitive laws.

The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women cannot be achieved without paying specific attention to the provisions contained in CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action that pertain to creating appropriate infrastructure and an enabling environment needed for the realisation of women's human rights. This constitutes the basis for the promotion of gender equity. Without the appropriate infrastructural mechanisms and an enabling environment, efforts to promote gender equity, will encounter significant obstacles. Particularly important are the need for constitutional and legislative review and the establishment of appropriate

³ The SADC MPs Companion on Gender and Development in Southern Africa, SADC Parliamentary Forum, 2002.

⁴ Moser, C (1994).

structures and processes within Government. This includes the establishment of women's machineries. It is also imperative that legal and structural changes must be adequately resourced.

3.5 Enhance access to quality education by women and men, remove gender stereotyping in the curriculum, career choices and professions

The education of girls and women is a critical component of the fight against gender inequity. The primary reason for this is that it provides girls and women with skills that will capacitate them to enter into formal employment and to generally enhance the quality of their lives. Women have historically not had the same access to education as men, which has contributed towards exacerbating a situation of systemic social and economic power imbalances. Girls are poorly represented in fields such as science and technology, which creates gender gaps in the employment sector.

3.6 Ensure that quality reproductive and other health services are more accessible to women and men.

Women's health and well-being is critical to their ability to participate fully in public and private life. Health is defined as being a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and is determined by the social and political context of women's lives, as well as by biological factors.⁵ Gender inequity serves to impact negatively on the quality of women's lives and on their health and well-being in general.

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) defines reproductive health as being a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive health system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implied that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capacity to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. This means that women and men have the right to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice as well other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility.⁶

3.7 Protect and promote the human rights of women and the girl-child.

The realisation of women's human rights is a critical component to eradicating gender inequity. Women's human rights should be protected within an appropriate constitutional and legislative framework. These rights should include, inter alia, rights to equality, human dignity, freedom and security of the person, freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of

⁵ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Article 89

⁶ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Article 94

religion/ belief, freedom of movement, freedom of trade/ occupation, the right to education and political rights.

3.8 Take urgent measures to prevent and deal with the increasing levels of violence against women and children.

Gender-based violence perpetrated against women is so widespread that it constitutes a global epidemic in its own right and cuts across geographic, race, class and cultural boundaries. The Global Report on Women's Rights argues that domestic violence is one of the leading causes of injury amongst women in almost every country in the world and is typically ignored by the State or only erratically punished⁷. It has been argued that violence against women has become so pervasive and systemic that it has become entrenched within many societies and is generally tolerated by institutions of the State. Fedler and Tanzer (2000) argue that the failure of many States to repeal oppressive laws, the non-enforcement of constitutional rights, and the role played by abusive government officials in condoning the levels of violence experienced by women, all contribute to the creation of an enabling environment within which violence against women thrives. Levinson suggests that there are four factors that, based on the extent to which they exist in conjunction with each other, determine the prevalence of violence in a society. These factors are the economic inequality between men and women, the level to which violence is used as a conflict-resolving mechanism, male authority and control of decision making and restrictions on women's ability to leave the home.⁸

3.9 Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and materials in respect of the human rights of women and children.

Access to information is a strategic resource in human development.⁹ Women and men do not have equal access to this resource. In addition, the media has generally played a role in contributing towards perpetrating the projection of stereotypical roles of men and women. Conventions of representing women, which have merged historically, have been very selective and deeply embedded in patriarchal systems of dominance. On the whole, the portrayal of women continues to be very conservative, perpetuating long-existing unequal relationships of domination and subordination.¹⁰ It is therefore critical that the media is used to subvert problematic stereotyping of women's role in society and in providing them with access to information that will serve to enhance the quality of their lives and eradicate systemic gender inequity.

4. References

- SADC Declaration on Gender and Development

⁷ Sourced from Mail and Guardian, September 1995: R Wright, "Beijing '95: Strike the women...."

⁸ 1989, quoted in Bunch et al 1998

⁹ The SADC MPs Companion on Gender and Development in Southern Africa, SADC Parliamentary Forum, 2002.

¹⁰ Gender, Advertising and Broadcasting, Commission for Gender Equality, 2004

- The SADC MPs Companion on Gender and Development in Southern Africa, SADC Parliamentary Forum, 2002.
- Moser
- Gender, Advertising and Broadcasting, Commission for Gender Equality, 2004