
Ninth African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing+20)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
17-19 November 2014

Aide-memoire

I. Background

The Beijing Platform for Action was adopted nearly two decades ago by the then 189 Member States of the United Nations at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action identified 12 critical areas of concern that needed to be addressed in order to ensure equality, peace and development. The Platform remains a relevant framework for addressing gender inequality and women's advancement. The 12 critical areas of concern form the nexus of women's empowerment, justice and human rights and, if addressed, could spur countries to achieve gender equality. The Platform was further reinforced by the Beijing Declaration, which reaffirmed the commitment of Governments to eliminate discrimination against women and to remove all obstacles to equality. Governments also recognized the need to ensure a gender perspective in their policies and programmes. The Declaration reflected a new international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for women globally; it remains a statement of political commitment by Governments to work towards equality between women and men, with a special focus on women's empowerment. The fourth World Conference on Women also mandated the Commission on the Status of Women to regularly review the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The 10-year review (Beijing+10) noted that significant steps had been taken by Member States to introduce gender equality policies and legislation. This progress was particularly notable in the promotion and protection of the human rights of women, where emphasis had been placed on defining legal and policy frameworks. The 15-year review, which took place in 2009, noted the tremendous progress that had been made in the ratification of regional and global treaties affecting women. Most countries had also pushed through legal reforms and developed policies, thereby providing frameworks for implementation at the national level. The review underscored the importance of high-quality, comparable, policy-relevant, sex-, age- and gender-disaggregated data in order to formulate policies for gender equality and women's empowerment. At the eighth African Regional Conference on Women, which was held in Banjul from 16 to 20 November 2009, the participants adopted the Banjul Declaration on the Strategies for Accelerating the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action. The Declaration identified the following 7 strategic areas that Africa needed to focus on in order to address the 12 critical areas identified by the Platform:

1. Economic empowerment of women through poverty reduction, employment creation, social protection and use of information and communications technology
2. Peace, security and development
3. Violence against women
4. Representation and participation of women in all areas of decision-making
5. Sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS
6. Climate change and food security
7. Financing for gender equality

The Declaration further committed member States to renewing and intensifying resource mobilization efforts, improving national strategies, and increasing institutional, financial and human resources in order to accelerate the achievement of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

II. Ninth African Regional Conference on Women (Beijing+20)

In March 2015, at the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the world will gather to review the progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, 20

years after its adoption. The review process will provide an opportunity for multi-stakeholder consultation and awareness-raising on the commitments made, with a view to galvanizing accelerated action. Prior to that, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Union Commission (AUC) will convene a ministerial meeting to review the progress made in the past 20 years on the continent. The resulting regional report will inform the global report to be presented at the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The regional report will set out the main achievements, obstacles and recommended actions for each area of concern and highlight individual country experiences.

The Beijing+20 review process is taking place within the context of the ongoing negotiations on the development agenda beyond 2015. In 2011, Africa initiated consultations to articulate its priorities for the global development framework that will succeed the Millennium Development Goals, given that Africa played only a limited role in the formulation of the Goals. A participatory approach led to the formulation of the common African position on the post-2015 development agenda, involving stakeholders at the national, regional and continental levels from the public and private sectors, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, including women's and youth associations, and academics. The common African position was prepared mindful of not only the Goals but also the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, structured dialogues on technology, the President of the General Assembly's "Setting the Stage!" initiative, and high-level political forums). Africa was one of the first regions to come up with a comprehensive common position on the post-2015 development agenda.

The Beijing+20 regional report will be presented at a three-day regional ministerial review conference, which will consist of a two-day meeting of experts followed by a one-day ministerial meeting. The expert segment will be attended by government representatives, observers from women's groups, civil society organizations, academic institutions, media, members of parliament and experts from other organizations, with a view to discussing and approving the regional report, consolidating its main findings, preparing a draft ministerial declaration and actionable recommendations, and setting out the way forward. The recommendations will form the basis for the plan of action to be implemented by the member States.

The ministerial segment of the conference is expected to endorse and formally adopt the regional report, which will then be submitted to the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women as Africa's input into the global Beijing+20 report.

III. Objectives of the Conference

The main objective of the Conference is to provide African member States with an opportunity to systematically review their accomplishments, as well as to garner consensus on how to address the challenges affecting the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. The review is taking place at a time when Africa is changing to align with global shifts, the new phase of globalization, and accelerated economic integration driven by information and communications technology. Africa is undergoing structural transformation and using its economic growth to meet the continental priorities on gender equality and women's empowerment.

A. Specific objectives

1. Review the regional African report, which outlines progress made and challenges encountered, and sets out strategies and actions for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment on the continent;
2. Identify key areas that Africa needs to focus on in the next decade and build consensus on gender-related priority areas of concern and the way forward;
3. Define Africa's input into the global review of the Beijing Platform for Action, which is due to take place at the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in March 2015 in New York;
4. Prepare for Africa's participation in the Beijing+20 global review;
5. Commit to a revitalized regional strategy, with a clear road map on how to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

B. Expected outputs

1. A well-documented, facts-based, accurate synthesized regional report highlighting the progress made, challenges encountered and opportunities for Africa to fully implement the Beijing and Dakar Platforms, which will feed into the global report on the Beijing Platform for Action;
2. A ministerial outcome document (to be known as the Addis Ababa declaration) setting out a specific strategy to be adopted by Africa to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

IV. Participants

The Conference will be divided into two segments: an expert segment and a ministerial segment. The expert segment will draw representatives from national departments for gender issues, as well as experts from ministries working in areas such as health and HIV/AIDS, agriculture, youth empowerment, human rights, climate change and the environment, employment and social protection. Agencies of the United Nations, civil society organizations, international and regional organizations, academic institutions, members of parliament and the media will be able to participate as observers. The ministerial segment will be attended by ministers responsible for gender and women's affairs.

V. Date and venue

The Conference will be held at the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa from 17 to 19 November 2014.

VI. Working languages

The Conference will be conducted in English and French, with simultaneous interpretation in both languages.

VII. Further information

For further information about the Conference, please contact Keiso Matashane-Marite, tel.: + 251 11 544 3337, e-mail: matashane-marite@un.org, copying Berhanu Tesfaye, tel.: + 251 11 544 3760, e-mail: BTesfaye@uneca.org.