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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
African Centre for Gender and Social Development**

Seventh Session of the Committee
on Women and Development

17-20 May 2011
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Aide Memoire

1. INTRODUCTION

African governments have over the years endeavoured to address gender inequality issues since the beginning of the first decade on the advancement of women meeting held in Mexico in 1975 and agreement on the Nairobi Forward-looking strategies in 1985. Following the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) document at the regional level indicated that achievements had been recorded in many African countries, such as increased awareness on gender equality; policy reforms; improved legislative frameworks and institutional development at the national level. Some countries adopted national policies and legal frameworks for the protection of the human rights of women; broadened the range of mechanisms for promoting and monitoring gender equality; and paid attention to resource allocation through gender-sensitive budgeting. Despite these notable improvements, it is still not adequate to elevate African women to the desired level. Added impetus through strengthening policy approaches, effective implementation of laws and protective mechanisms, and innovations in financing gender equality is required to accelerate progress and change to a level that will make a fundamental difference in the lives of women of Africa.

2 BACKGROUND

With the gender equality gains that have been recorded in the 15 year review of the implementation of the BPFA, it is important that countries take measures to advance and not regress in their efforts. There is thus a need to reinforce and guard the gains made, while simultaneously accelerating the implementation of the BPFA. In addition to continued efforts to enhance capacities of member States to implement the BPFA, the 15 year African review of its implementation represented an important milestone, and presented an opportunity for governments, under the coordinating role of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), to determine the extent of their progress and identify ways to move the agenda forward.

Many recent and key developments have occurred for the advancement of women rights in Africa. Internationally, coinciding with the 10th anniversary of UNSCR 1325, the Security Council, during a Ministerial-level Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, endorsed a set of indicators to measure progress in the protection and empowerment of women. The African Union's recent launch of The African Women's Decade: 2010-2020 is an example of the high level focus gender is continuing to maintain at the regional level. The theme for 2011 is *'Health, Maternal Mortality and HIV'*.

ECA organised The *African Development Forum VI* (November 2008), in partnership with the African Union (AU) and the African Development Bank (AfDB), the theme of the Forum was: *Action on Gender Equality, women's empowerment and ending violence against women*. The aim of the Forum was to review the progress made towards gender equality, women's empowerment and on ending violence against women (VAW), in order to identify the major constraints and to articulate concrete actions required to accelerate progress.

In October 2010, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa also hosted the 7th African Development Forum. The goal of the forum was to contribute to mainstreaming climate change concerns in development policies, strategies, programmes and practices in Africa. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to include the voices of women and youth in these discussions.

The outcome document of the General Assembly held in October 2010 on the MDGs, and the Secretary General (SG)'s report deals with gender equality and women's empowerment. Paragraph 72 of the Outcome Document where States explicitly referred to relevant international human rights treaties, namely the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Other positive language in respect of women's human rights is the commitment by States to strengthen national laws, policies and programmes designed to prevent violence against women, and to 'ensure that women have access to justice and protection'. Importantly, the Outcome Document also refers to States' obligation to end impunity for violence against women and girls by ensuring these crimes are investigated, prosecuted and punished.

3 ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN AFRICA – THE ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT (CWD)

ECA is mandated by the General Assembly (GA) to assist Member States in the implementation of global resolutions, and through its statutory organ, the Committee on Women and Development (CWD). The restructuring of the CWD was discussed and approved in the CWD Ministerial Session of November 2009 Banjul, The Gambia which is in alignment with other statutory organs. The CWD is now composed of Senior Experts (at least at Director's level) from ECA Member States representing the National Gender Machineries and experts from line Ministries depending on the theme of the session. The CWD is expected to fulfil the mandate conferred to it by African governments through the Banjul Declaration, which calls on it to, among others, provide adequate technical support for our development efforts and to move swiftly to annually monitor and report on progress made in implementing the relevant development programmes and plans, and to ensure that the follow-up to the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action is included in the work plan of the Committee on Women and Development of the Economic Commission for Africa.

Aside from the broad mandate, the CWD is specifically mandated to, amongst others:

- Serve as a technical regional forum of experts that deals with gender and women in development issues;
- Periodically review progress in the implementation of Global and Regional Platforms for Action (including the Beijing Platform for Action and its related processes);
- Review and evaluate the activities carried out in the region in the framework of the relevant programmes for the advancement of women;
- Assist member States to define and promote measures to follow-up the implementation of the regional and globally agreed programmes of action on gender and women in

- development and encourage the integration of gender dimension into development policies, plans and programmes;
- Serve as the regional advisory body of the UNECA and provide guidance to the Commission in formulating its work programmes on Gender, Women in Development on sectoral activities, emerging issues as well as follow-up actions in the implementation of international and regional programmes;
 - Identify and highlight the major economic and social development issues and concerns with a view to promoting policies and strategies for gender equality and women's advancement in collaboration with the other technical committees of ECA;
 - Report to the Conference of African Ministers of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development on the activities and programmes on women in development covered at the sub-regional and regional levels.¹

The achievements of the CWD are numerous, and through this organ, the African Centre for Gender and Social Development has benefited from high level technical input from diverse experts to enrich its programmes. More specifically, some of the achievements of CWD to-date include the following:

- Putting women's issues on the agenda of the ECA Conference of Ministers of Finance and Economic Planning;
- Articulation of the aspirations and needs of African women as expressed in the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action; The promotion of African women to participate in decision-making processes at national, sub-regional and regional. Also, quotas for increasing women's political representation are another visible achievement for some countries in the region, including in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia.
- Mobilizing and preparing African governments for effective implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action; and
- Undertaking periodic reviews of progress in the implementation of strategies for the advancement of women, i.e. the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Regional Conferences on Women, in November, 1999, October, 2004 and November 2009 respectively.

4. THE 7th SESSION OF CWD – PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES & OUTPUTS

Following the fifteen year review of the BPPFA and the adoption of the Banjul Declaration (see annex), ECA aims to provide support to Member States to implement the seven priority areas identified in the Declaration with the support of African gender experts who are elected into the CWD by virtue of their role in the various National Gender Machineries including Ministries.

The upcoming 7th CWD Session will serve as a platform for Member States to exchange ideas whilst reviewing and providing technical guidance to ECA in its plans to support Member States to take the Banjul Declaration and other processes forward.

¹ Proposal for restructuring the Committee on Women and Development (CWD)

The overarching objective of the 7th CWD Session is to examine and discuss a coherent program for implementing the Banjul Declaration. The session will also discuss the strategy developed for implementation of Beijing +15 recommendations, as well as review the effectiveness of the African Women's Right's Observatory that serves as a comprehensive source of data and information on research findings, best practices and events on women's rights in Africa. It tracks the progress of African countries in the area of women's human rights. Also under discussion will be the E-Network of African Gender Machineries, whose major objective is to build the capacity of national machineries for more effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and to create an electronic platform that supports the achievement of gender equality goals of women in the region. The discussions on the knowledge platforms are aimed at ensuring that member States are able to provide input on how the tools can best be utilised.

The specific objectives of the meeting are as follows:

- To review the draft report on recent trends in national mechanisms for gender equality in Africa;
- To review the draft report on the Beijing +15 Follow-up Strategy;
- To discuss the African Centre for Gender and Social Development Division (ACGS) 2010-2011 biennial work programme;
- To review the report on the status of Gender Inequality in Social, Economical and Political Sector: Implication for the implementation and monitoring of relevant international and regional commitments and social protection.
- To share information on the Africa UNITE Campaign on Violence against Women and the Interregional Project: Enhancing capacities to eradicate violence against women;
- To review and discuss the E-network of African Gender Machineries as a platform for information-sharing and advocacy;
- To review the use of the African Women's Human Rights Observatory (AWRO) as a knowledge sharing tool;
- To share the Compendium of Best Practices in Gender Mainstreaming: The role of African women in conflict resolution (2010);
- To hold roundtable discussion on emerging gender issues
- To brief and experiences sharing by AUC, UN Women, RECs and Member States.

5. EXPECTED OUTPUTS

By the end of the meeting, the following will have been achieved:

- Endorsed report on recent trends towards national mechanisms for gender equality in Africa
- Endorsed Follow-up Strategy to the Beijing +15 Review
- Endorsed the report on the status of Gender Inequality in Social, Economical and Political Sector: Implication for the implementation and monitoring of relevant international and regional commitments and social protection.
- An understanding of the ACGS 2010-2011 biennial work programme;
- Heightened awareness of Africa UNITE Campaign on Violence against Women and the Interregional Project: Enhancing capacities to eradicate violence against women

- Strategy on how to strengthen the E-network of African Gender Machineries and the African Women's Human Rights (AWRO) as knowledge platforms.
- A meeting report of the Session

6. EXPECTED OUTCOME

In view of the Banjul Declaration that committed Member States to renewing and intensifying resource mobilization efforts, improving national strategies, and enhancing institutional, financial and human resources in order to accelerate the achievement of the goals of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action as well as the Millennium Development Goals between now and 2015, the outcome of the meeting is clarity on the agenda for action by different stakeholders going forward. The Committee shall guide the work of Member States towards developing specific action plans with clear points of action, supported by adequate resources to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

7. DATE AND VENUE OF THE CONFERENCE

The meeting is scheduled to take place at the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 17 to 20 May 2011.

8. PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The meeting will be attended by government experts from Gender and Women's Affairs Ministries, Regional Economic Communities and ECA. Depending on the thematic focus of the meeting, CWD technical experts (experts from other ministries) will also participate in this meeting.

9. MODE OF DELIVERY

The conference will be conducted in English and French with simultaneous interpretation.