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## **THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S DECADE**

***Theme: Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE)***

## **I. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

The idea of a Women's Decade was hatched in 1975 by the United Nations at the First World conference on Women that was held in Mexico City. Since then, African women have been involved, and continue to participate in local and international consultations on women's rights and gender equality. African women's contributions have enriched discussions at the subsequent Women Conferences in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).

At their Extra-Ordinary Meeting of Ministers of Gender and Women Affairs in Maseru, Lesotho in December 2008, the Africa Union (AU) Ministers for Gender and Women's Affairs called on the AU to declare 2010 – 2020 as African Women's Decade, and undertake wide consultations to ensure that the Decade is a success. The Ministers' proposal was adopted by Assembly Dec. 229 (XII) which declared 2010 – 2020 as African Women's Decade.

The Commission then organized a Brainstorming Roundtable at the premises of the AU Permanent Mission to the UN on 01 March 2009 at the margins of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW); which provided an opportunity for the Ministers' meeting in New York and for African Women Leaders to reflect on the Decision on the Women's Decade.

The objective of the Brainstorming Roundtable was to notify Hon Ministers of the Assembly Decision and to brainstorm on the African Women's Decade roll out as proposed by the Maseru meeting. They requested the Commission to hold a meeting of National Gender machineries to develop a Road Map by May 2009.

Subsequently the Commission convened a meeting of Gender Machineries from 6 to 8 May 2009, back to back with a meeting on reporting on the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA), in which a draft Road Map for the rolling out of the Women's Decade was developed.

The Commission finalized the draft Road Map developed in Banjul, for presentation to the Experts and Ministerial meeting of Ministers in charge of Gender and Women's Affairs scheduled for 16 to 21 November 2009 back to back with the 8<sup>th</sup> African Regional Conference on Beijing +15.

Thereafter, in an effort to kick start the activities of the Decade, the Women Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD) held a one day Planning Meeting in March 2010 on activities to be carried out in preparation for the launching of the AWD at the margins of the 54<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which was being held in New York from 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

The AU took advantage of the presence and participation of Gender Ministers, Experts and CSOs at the 54<sup>th</sup> CSW Session to hold the Planning Meeting, as this provided an opportunity for the AU Commission to agree on the roll-out activities for the launching of the African Women's Decade. The Meeting therefore discussed activities to be carried

out at the local, national, regional and continental levels, agreed on the time lines as well as set up Working Committees while identifying thematic leaders for the 10 themes of the Decade.

The adoption of the AU Gender Policy by the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government at their February 2009 Session, and its implementation offers an opportunity for the advancement and achievement of gender equality between men and women, as well as facilitating the inclusion of gender issues in the African agenda.

## **II. THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S DECADE**

The Decade will be implemented in two phases. The first phase will be from 2010 to 2015 and the second phase will be from 2015 to 2020. There will be reviews in 2015, back to back with the MDG Review and at the end of the Decade in 2020.

### **Aim of the African Women's Decade**

The aim of the African Women's Decade is to advance gender equality by accelerating implementation of Dakar, Beijing and AU Assembly Decisions on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), through dual top down and bottom up approach which is inclusive of grassroots participation.

### **Objective of African Women's Decade**

The objective of the African Women's Decade is to re-invigorate commitments to accelerated implementation of agreed global and regional commitments of gender equality and women empowerment (GEWE). Special focus will be on these ten themes:

1. Fighting Poverty and Promoting Economic Empowerment of Women and Entrepreneurship
  - i. Attain decent work for women and equal opportunity in employment, promotion and movement towards parity at the work place
  - ii. Create employment and services by supporting Women entrepreneurs particularly in informal sectors, including Small, Medium Enterprise (SME), Medium Enterprise (ME) and grow them to big businesses
2. Agriculture and Food Security
  - i. Achieving Food Security and Fighting Hunger
  - ii. Increased Women access to agricultural land, farm inputs, credit, technology, Extension services, Irrigation and access to water through water harvesting, boreholes, etc.
  - iii. Link women to markets through value addition of their products including agro-based supply chain, creating new markets for their produce including organic food stuffs.
3. Women's Health, Maternal Mortality and HIV/AIDS
  - i. Improve Women's Health,
  - ii. Reduce Maternal Mortality
  - iii. Address HIV/AIDS

- a. Address HIV/AIDS inappropriate burden on Women and girls on infections, spread and increased workload, as well as unequal access to ARV's, good nutrition and formal medical services.
4. Education, Science and Technology
  - i. Achieve Parity in Education at secondary and tertiary levels and achieve higher retention rates for girls
  - ii. Increased literacy levels of women through adult education
  - iii. Contribution of Women Scientists and Information, Communication and Technology
5. Environment and Climate Change

Identify Women's role in mitigating climate change, as custodians of the environment, making sure they benefit from the new global packages to fight climate change
6. Peace and Security and Violence Against Women

Work with the African Union Peace and Security Department (PSD), The Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the Panel of the Wise in relation to United Nations Security Council Resolutions: 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889, with particular focus on Violence Against Women (VAW), peace building and reconstruction.
7. Governance and Legal Protection

Jointly with Political Affairs, Women, Gender and Development Directorate will support women's participation in political and electoral processes in countries undergoing elections during the decade as well as in the implementation of gender issues in African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), national action plans. Jointly with the Office of the Legal Counsel and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Commission) achieve universal ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and its domestication.
8. Finance and Gender Budgets

Increased Women access to financial resources from Government budgets through gender budgeting, financial markets targeting economic stimulus packages and specialized funds from development partners to support Women projects aimed at empowering women economically, and mobilize resources through FAWO as well as mobilizing resources for the implementation of Decade activities in general and priority areas in particular to achieve Decade targets
9. Women In Decision Making position

Implement AU parity principle in line with AU gender policy and ensure targets for equal opportunity of Women in decision making positions, in the Political (Legislative), Judiciary and the Executive are achieved

10. Mentoring Youth (Men and Women) to be champions of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Energizing the African Women's movement, and mentoring young women and Men leaders and professionals, both in Africa and the Diaspora to be champions on Gender Equality and women's empowerment.

### **Guiding Principles**

1. Sufficient resources for the programmes and activities that will be put in place for the Decade.
2. Safeguarding the gains so far made by women.
3. Funding for gender equality and women empowerment programmes, scaling up and ring fencing budgets for women programs from current economic crisis.
4. Benchmarking mechanism to ensure the implementation of decisions taken regarding the Decade.
5. Opportunity to linking up with the grassroots.
6. Focusing on the implementation of all policy documents that have been adopted by Member States. Achieving targets arising out of AU Head of States commitments as well as at global level and ensure sustained political will.
7. Working with development partners to complement what Africa wants to do.

### **Programmes**

A variety of programmes are being initiated in line with the AU Gender policy and the Gender Action Plan. The Fund for African Women is the vehicle for mobilizing resources for the decade activities, under the AU's Development Pillar in its Strategic Plan.

### **Methodology**

In each Member State, it is expected that National Committees would be set up composed of all segments of the society. These Committees will propose one good practice Project for each theme per year. In this case one Project per country will be supported per theme per year from the AU Fund; as a result 54 projects will be supported for each of the 10 years, leading to 540 projects being supported during the Decade, under the AU Fund for Women. Projects to be supported are those already existing but requiring additional support to boost them for a year.

### **Committees**

The Commission has established criteria for working committees to drive the activities of the Decade. These Committees will operate at three levels, The National, Regional and Continental.

1. **At the National Level:** National committees will consist of ten members representing the ten themes of the decade.
2. **At the Regional level:** A Ministerial Working Committee of 10 will work closely with the RECs. Each Region will choose its core UN Agencies.
3. **At the Continental/AU level:** A Working group of 30 has been put in place to process programmatic aspects of the projects submitted under the Decade. It is composed of the one person per Region drawn from Member States, Pan African

Parliament (PAP), Economic, Social and Cultural Council ( ECOSOCC), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Pan African Women Organization (PAWO), African Union Women's Committee (AUWC) and Member States. This committee will work hand in hand with the steering committee for the Fund for African women to appraise financial aspects in line with the Lilongwe Declaration.

### **III. THE CONTINENTAL LAUNCH OF THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S DACADE: 10 TO 15 OCTOBER, 2010; NAIROBI KENYA**

The Continental Launch took place in Nairobi Kenya on the 15 October 2010. This Launch was preceded by important forums, including:

- **NGO Forum and Thematic Caucuses 7-8 October**
- **Decades Working Committees- 9 October**
- **Experts Meeting – 10-11 October**
- **Ministerial Meeting – 14<sup>th</sup> October**

The climax was on the 15<sup>th</sup> October, the International Rural Women's Day, which was chosen for the Launch in line with the theme of the Decade, which is "**Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**". This historical Launch coincided with the Silver Jubilee of the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women which ended in 1985.

The Launch was attended by the African Union (AU) Heads of State and Government, First Ladies, Vice Presidents, AU Ministers of Women, Gender, Social Development, UN Agencies, Men champions for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Gender Activist, Grassroots women, Development Partners, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Academia, the Private Sector, among others.

#### **Further Information**

For more details on the African Women Decade (AWD), please visit the AWD website at <http://www.africanwomendecade.org> and also on the African Union Website: <http://www.africa-union.org/root/AU/Conferences/2010/april/wgd/wgd.html>