



## **CPS POLICY BRIEF 49**

**Gender and the 'New Africa Agenda':  
Examining Progress Towards Gender Equality In SADC**

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## INTRODUCTION

The 'new Africa agenda' promises a new path towards creating conditions for the sustainable socio-economic, political and cultural development of the African continent. It seeks to do this in a way that differs significantly from previous development plans and programmes – by promoting economic development through greater integration into the global economy and partnership with the developed world, particularly multilateral and bilateral aid donors and private sector investors, rather than merely through development assistance and aid.

Unlike previous developmental plans for Africa, the 'new Africa agenda' avoids putting the blame for Africa's developmental, political and social problems on its colonial experiences and the impact of the current unequal global economic system. Instead it seeks to design a remedy for the continent's long-term development based on even greater integration of Africa's economy into the global system. The New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is being held out as the central plan for this purpose.

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***Article 4(1) of the AU's  
Constitutive Act  
specifies that it "shall  
function in accordance  
with the promotion of  
gender equality"***

While lauding the new energy and renewed political commitment towards Africa's development, and the generally positive acclaim that this seems to have received from within the continent and from the developed world, the critics of the 'new Africa Agenda', particularly its development plan – NEPAD – question the likely effectiveness of a strategy that seeks to integrate Africa further into an unequal global economic system without seeking to reform it in any significant way.<sup>1</sup> Critics contend that this approach is bound to compound Africa's developmental problems. One of these problems is gender inequality. This paper seeks to examine the issue of gender equality as a priority within the 'new Africa agenda' broadly, but specifically within the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), and the progress made in promoting the interests of women in the region.

## THE COMMITMENT TO GENDER EQUALITY

What specific and explicit social, political, economic and other commitments does the new Africa agenda make in regard to promoting gender equality in the continent? At the continental level one of the key institutions driving the new Africa Agenda, the African Union, adopted in July 2004, 'The AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa'. Among others, the declaration commits member states to accelerating the implementation of specific social, economic and legal measures to deal with HIV/AIDs among women; expanding and promoting the principle of gender parity in the AU Commission and other organs of the AU; actively promoting the implementation of legislation

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, I, *The New Partnership For African Development and the Global Political Economy: towards the African century or another false start?*, Third World Network Africa, 26 April, 2002

guaranteeing women's rights to land, property and inheritance; and adopting specific measures towards the education of girls and the literacy of women. The declaration also commits member states to signing and ratifying the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. In addition to the AU declaration on gender equality, a number of articles amplify the AU's commitment to gender equality. For instance, article 4(1) of the AU's Constitutive Act specifies that it "shall function in accordance with the promotion of gender equality", and article 12(3) of the statutes of the AU Commission provides for the creation of a special unit in the Office of the Chairperson to coordinate all the activities and programs of the Commission relating to gender.<sup>2</sup>

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To amplify the importance of the commitment to gender equality in representation, Graca Machel (president of the Foundation for Community Development in Mozambique) stated in 2005 that "one of the major features [of the 'new Africa agenda'] is the importance of women and gender", adding that "our heads of state have to accept that 50% of Commissioners to the African Union Commission ... are women ... All the bodies of the African Union have to follow the same rule ..."<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), K.Y. Amoako, stated in a speech to the Executive Council of the African Union in 2004, that "promoting gender balance in all fields and expanding the role of women in decision-making is not merely a moral imperative. It is also a pre-requisite for effective poverty reduction and sustainable economic growth".<sup>4</sup>

However, pronouncements such as these do not necessarily explain and clarify the status of gender equality as a key priority relative to other key priorities of the 'new Africa Agenda'. Gender equality is an important priority for the new Africa agenda but competes with other, possibly more politically important and higher profile priorities in continental, regional and national structures. Therefore, it is no surprise that more often than not, gender equality is not one of the first key priorities mentioned especially during important and high-profile occasions such as meetings and/or summits with groups of donor countries and private investors from the developed world. The key priorities such as economic growth, fair trade, development, economic and political integration, infrastructure investment, peace, security and stability, usually receive greater attention. On occasions when gender equality receives similar attention, it is likely to be lower down the list of priorities. This tends to reinforce the firm

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<sup>2</sup> Teriba, Y, 'The AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa', (Presented at the conference on 'The Popularisation and Implementation of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa: The role of Parliament, 10th -12th October 2007, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>3</sup> Graca Machel, Lecture on 'Africa Policy: The African Agenda', (delivered at the Council on Foreign Relations, New York., USA), 10th May 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Amoako, K.Y, Address to the fourth Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 15th March 2004.

belief among many critics and gender activists that gender equality and women's empowerment are not as important, and that gender equality has become a cliché conveniently pushed into any development discourse mainly for purposes of achieving political correctness.<sup>5</sup>

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***Simply focusing on promoting the role of women in social and economic development is a severely limiting conception of women's empowerment***

Still, the 'new Africa agenda's' commitment to gender equality is sufficiently explicit and unequivocal, especially at the level of political rhetoric, and to the extent that it endorses a whole range of policy frameworks, programmes of action and declarations towards gender equality initiated by global, continental, regional and national organs and institutions. For instance, the agenda's NEPAD framework identifies as one of its main objectives, the acceleration of 'the empowerment of women'. NEPAD also states, as a long-term objective, the need to promote the role of women in all activities, through "promoting the role of women in social and economic development by reinforcing their capacity in the domains of education and training, by developing revenue-generating activities through facilitating access to credit and by assuring their participation in the political and economic life of African countries".<sup>6</sup> However, some commentators argue that this is a severely limiting conception of women's empowerment as it appears to focus undue attention at the micro level and especially on economic and income-generating measures. In this way, it is seen as failing to address the issue of gender equality at the macro and structural level where critical decisions affecting women are made. Critics also contend that it ignores some of the key non-economic and non-income-generating but crucial factors causing women's poverty and oppression. These include the legal environment, patriarchal social structures and cultural practices, as well as the fundamentally male-oriented developmental priorities and decision-making processes relating to public expenditure programmes in many African countries.<sup>7</sup>

The 'new Africa agenda' also endorses other global and regional commitments as well as declarations on women's rights. These include the Millennium Declaration and Development goals - particularly goal 3 (promoting gender equality and empowerment of women) and goal 5 (to improve maternal health); the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development; the 1998 Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children; the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women

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<sup>5</sup> The African Forum on Strategic Thinking and Acting towards the Earth Summit 2002 and Beyond, Report: *Sustainable Development, Governance and Globalisation*, Nairobi, Kenya, 17 - 20 September 2001, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Randriamaro, Z, *The NEPAD, Gender and The Poverty Trap: The NEPAD and the challenges of financing for development in Africa from a gender perspective*, Conference on Africa and the Development Challenges of the New Millennium, Accra, Ghana, 23 - 26 April, 2002, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Randriamaro, Z, (2002), op. cit., p. 7.

(CEDAW).<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, gender activists and women's rights organisations seem to have reached consensus that very little, if any, prospect for advancing the course of women's empowerment can be expected from the new Africa Agenda broadly, but specifically from its central developmental policy framework - NEPAD. Radical critiques of NEPAD believe that the plan essentially reintroduces some of the key elements of the 'Washington Consensus' set of policies usually prescribed in terms of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) for crisis-ridden developing countries, by the international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. These critics argue, therefore, that NEPAD is likely to worsen rather than advance the plight of the poor in the continent, particularly women.<sup>9</sup>

## SADC COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY

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***The SADC declaration, among others, commits member states to 30% representation of women in political and decision-making structures***

SADC adopted its Declaration on Gender and Development in February 1997,<sup>10</sup> pre-dating the AU declaration by about seven years. However, SADC's commitments are also articulated within the broad context of the 'new Africa agenda' and endorse the same continental and international declarations and statements of policy intent on women's rights and gender equality as endorsed by the AU and its predecessor, the OAU. The SADC declaration, among others, commits member states to 30% representation of women in political and decision-making structures; promoting women's access to and control over productive resources to reduce poverty among women and dealing effectively with the increasing levels of violence against women and children.<sup>11</sup>

SADC regional institutions and governments have also committed themselves collectively to advancing the course of women's empowerment and the mainstreaming of gender equality in all their activities.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the SADC declaration as a policy instrument, there are others such as the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), the SADC Regional Implementation Framework on Gender Development 2005-2010, the SADC Gender Programme, as well as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Added to these are the wide range of

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<sup>8</sup> Simwaka B.N, Theobald S., Amekudzi Y.P. & Tolhurst R, *Promote Gender Equality And Empower Women: meeting millennium goals 3 and 5*, British Medical Journal (BMJ) vol. 331, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2005; South African Commission for Gender Equality (CGE). Paper presented at the National Workshop on 'Enhancing the Participation of Women in The Law Making Process', Parliament, Cape Town, 25 - 26 July 2001.

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this position, see Randriamaro, Z (2002), op. cit.; Taylor, I (2002), op. cit

<sup>10</sup> Heads of State or Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), *A Declaration on Gender and Development*, 8 September, 1997

<sup>11</sup> Warioba, C, *Media Briefing From The SADC Gender Programme*, 11 August 2004, available at: [http://www.sadc.int/news/news\\_details.php?news\\_id=144](http://www.sadc.int/news/news_details.php?news_id=144)

<sup>12</sup> Lopi, B, *Gender & Poverty in the Context of Human Development, Health, Education and the MDGs*, COMMISSION FOR AFRICA Southern African Consultation, Lusaka, Zambia 13-14 December 2004, Southern Africa Regional Poverty Network, p. 3.

initiatives, policies and programmes of SADC institutions and the individual countries to advance gender equality. Altogether, these initiatives, declarations and policy statements commit SADC countries to a range of objectives, benchmarks and targets towards mainstreaming gender equality in general, and women's empowerment in particular.<sup>13</sup>

How has the SADC region performed in regard to empowering women and mainstreaming<sup>14</sup> gender equality?

## PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS IN SADC

In terms of measuring progress towards realizing gender equality, a set of measures can be used to determine performance. Given limited space in this paper, only one will be considered - the numerical representation of women in political and decision-making structures. Though widely used, it is a fairly crude measure as it does not account for the other crucial factors such as effectiveness, skills, the level and quality of participation by women representatives in decision-making processes in political and decision-making structures. Nonetheless, it is an important indicator that tends to receive greater public attention.

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***The average figure for the parliamentary representation of women in the region was 19.4%, well below the 2005 SADC target of 30%***

Have member states met the SADC target of 30% for female representation in their political and decision making structures?<sup>15</sup> Following the last round of parliamentary elections in the region between 2004 and 2005, the average figure for the parliamentary representation of women in the region was 19.4%, well below the 2005 target of 30%.<sup>16</sup> Very few countries in the region, notably Mozambique (33%) and South Africa (32.8%), had achieved the 30% target while others such as the DRC (12%), Zimbabwe (15.8%) and Angola (16.4%) fell below the average.<sup>17</sup> The average figure for women representation in the executive was the same (19.5%). Only two countries had reached the target - South Africa (42.9%) and Botswana (29.4%). Representation at local government level appears

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<sup>13</sup> SADC Gender Programme, Media Release, *Press Statement for the SADC Gender Programme, at the SADC Council of Ministers in Gaborone, Botswana*, February 2006

<sup>14</sup> The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defines 'gender mainstreaming' as "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality."

<sup>15</sup> See Heads of State or Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), *A Declaration on Gender and Development*, 8 September, 1997

<sup>16</sup> Figures obtained from Gender Links, South Africa at: [www.genderlinks.org.za](http://www.genderlinks.org.za) & a Press Statement by the SADC Gender Programme at the SADC Council of Ministers meeting in Gaborone, Botswana, February 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Figures obtained from a press statement by the SADC Gender Programme at the SADC Council of Ministers meeting in Gaborone, Botswana, February 2006

marginally better than for parliamentary and executive representation, with an average 22.7%. However, this slightly higher figure was mainly caused by a few best performing countries in the region, notably South Africa (28.2%), Mozambique (29.7%), Tanzania (34%) and the Seychelles (57%). Many others, such as Angola (1.2%), Zimbabwe (4.3%), Malawi (6.2%), Zambia (7.0%) and Mauritius (9.2%) had struggled well below the regional average, let alone the set target of 30%.<sup>18</sup>

The discussion above clearly shows that despite the glut of official declarations and statements committing the region to improving the plight and conditions of women, buttressed by countless other continental and international initiatives, implementation of the goals remains problematic. In fact the glut of policy statements and official declarations poses real risks, including lack of effective policy alignment and proper coordination, compounded by inadequate resources and lack of institutional capacity. There also appears to be more attention focussed on making grand official announcements and declarations on gender issues, at the expense of effective planning and coordination of implementation.

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***Many countries in the region appear not to have put in place proper plans and programmes with realistic targets as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms***

Implementation programmes and plans of action are increasingly being designed to realise the goals but such plans are few and far between, and more critically, suffer from poor management and lack of resources. In fact, many countries in the region appear not to have put in place proper plans and programmes with realistic targets as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Added to this are other important factors explaining the slow progress in advancing the course of mainstreaming gender equality. Firstly, many of the declarations and statements of policy intent still need to be translated from mere words into proper plans, protocols and realistic programmes of action. Secondly, effective implementation institutions, clear and implementable policies and programmes as well as allocation of adequate budgetary resources at local, national and SADC levels are critical input factors towards advancing the plight of women in the region.

Official acknowledgements abound not only regarding the slow progress towards greater female representation in political and decision-making structures in the region, but also with respect to other performance indicators in realizing the broader goals of gender equality, women's empowerment and eliminating poverty among the rural poor, particularly women. The lot of women, therefore, remains dire in the SADC region and other regions of the continent, notwithstanding the declarations and commitments of the 'new Africa Agenda', with continuing disparities and severe problems such as HIV/AIDS infections, lack of access to economic resources, discriminatory property/inheritance laws,

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<sup>18</sup> Figures obtained from Gender Links, South Africa at: [www.genderlinks.org.za](http://www.genderlinks.org.za)

poor health provisions and inadequate maternal health care services, poor levels of education, unemployment, poverty, violence and abuse.<sup>19</sup> Despite the existence of a plethora of regional gender structures<sup>20</sup> and relevant policies and programmes, effective implementation has been less than satisfactory, due mainly to lack of resources and institutional capacity among gender institutions. However, the biggest problem that needs to be dealt with urgently is the persistent practice, despite declarations to the contrary, among SADC and national institutions of defining the task of mainstreaming gender equality narrowly as the primary responsibility of gender structures alone, which poses the risk of 'ghettoising' the task, thus absolving democratic institutions and other mainstream state and non-state institutions of their responsibility to realise the policy goals of gender equality.

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*To achieve genuine improvements in the plight of women, greater attention needs to be focussed on macro, in addition to micro level, and structural barriers to women's empowerment and gender equality, particularly the legal, economic, social, cultural and political environments*

## CONCLUSION: FUTURE POLICY ACTION

Based on the discussion above, one of the key challenges facing the 'new Africa agenda' is for the key role players to clarify the status of gender equality as a priority relative to other key priorities. In addition, a limiting conception of women's empowerment within the NEPAD framework that focuses attention mainly on economic and income-generating reforms needs to be reviewed. This is important to guard against gender equality becoming a mere rhetorical political slogan, with the notion of women's empowerment narrowly defined for economic policy related purposes. To achieve genuine improvements in the plight of women, greater attention needs to be focussed on macro, in addition to micro level, and structural barriers to women's empowerment and gender equality, particularly the legal, economic, social, cultural and political environments.

It is critical for SADC institutions and national bodies to adopt gender equality and mainstreaming strategies that go beyond grand declarations and official statements of commitment, towards operationalising these declarations and turning them into concrete programmes and plans at local, national and regional levels. It is absolutely imperative that gender equality is mainstreamed as a primary goal in all areas of social and economic development, tied to concrete

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<sup>19</sup> Van der Merwe, S, (Deputy Minister, Foreign Affairs, South Africa), Keynote Address during the launch of the Department's campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Violence and Abuse of Women and Children, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2005. See also, South African Government, *Government's Programme of Action 2007: International Relations, Peace & Security Cluster*, at: [www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/poa/report/irps.htm](http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/poa/report/irps.htm); South African Commission for Gender Equality (CGE), paper presented at the national workshop on *Enhancing The Participation of Women in The Law Making Process*, Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> - 26<sup>th</sup> July 2001; Simwaka, B.N, 'Meeting Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5': Gender Equality Needs To Be Put On The Agenda', *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*, 2005, vol. 331 (1<sup>st</sup> October); SADC Gender Programme, *Press Statement at the SADC Council of Ministers meeting in Gaborone, Botswana, February 2006*.

<sup>20</sup> Examples include the SADC Secretariat Gender Unit, SADC Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus and the Independent SADC Gender Monitor.

implementation plans, effective governance institutions, clearly-defined performance indicators and realistic targets as well as adequate budgetary resources. Effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are also essential in ensuring that targets are met. In terms of meeting set targets for women's representation in political and decision making structures, the electoral, legislative, constitutional and the policy reforms already underway in many SADC countries need to be intensified and monitored regularly through appropriate and effective structures at national and regional level.