

FOCUS ISSUE 8: GENDER

I. Overview of Commitments

Africa:

Key **African Union (AU)** declarations on gender issues include:

- ♦ The African Union adopted the **Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa** in 2003, a supplementary protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.
- ♦ The **Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA)** is an important instrument for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Through the Solemn Declaration, African heads of State and Government committed themselves in 2004 to report annually on progress towards the goal of gender equality.
- ♦ The **African Plan of Action to Accelerate the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action for the Advancement of Women** (1999) was formulated within the framework of the mid-decade review of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action, which was conducted through the Sixth Africa Regional Conference on Women, held in 1999 at the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- ♦ The **Addis Ababa Declaration on Violence against Women** (1997) was endorsed by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 1997. The Declaration is an important stepping stone towards formulating an African charter on violence against women, providing the framework for national laws against female genital mutilation.

Given the cross-cutting nature of gender, a range of **other sectoral AU commitments** that are also relevant include the following:

- ♦ **Abuja Declaration** on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases (2001);
- ♦ **Bamako Declaration** on Reduction of Maternal and Neo-Natal Mortality (2001);
- ♦ **Maputo Declaration** on Malaria, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Other Infectious Diseases (2003);
- ♦ **Ouagadougou Declaration** on Employment and Poverty Alleviation and its Plan of Action and Follow-up Mechanism (2004);
- ♦ The **Maputo Plan of Action** on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (2006);
- ♦ Abuja call for **Accelerated Action Towards Universal Access to HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Services in Africa** (2006);
- ♦ **Migration Policy Framework for Africa** (2006);
- ♦ **Ouagadougou Action Plan** to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Women and Children (2006); and
- ♦ Plan of Action of the **AU Second Decade of Education for Africa** (2006-2015).
- ♦ **African Health Strategy 2007-2015**;

Sub regional commitments:

- ♦ In August 2008, the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Heads of State and Government signed a **SADC Gender and Development Protocol**. The Protocol elevates the commitments made in the 1997 SADC Gender and Development Declaration into concrete, time-bound and legally binding actions that accelerate efforts to achieve gender equality.

The protocol also seeks to integrate gender into development and actively close the gender gaps that have a bearing on poverty alleviation and attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The **ECOWAS Gender Policy** development process was initiated in 2000 and the gender policy document was finalised in 2003. The establishment of the following institutions were approved at the January 2003 Summit in Dakar - a Gender Technical Commission, a Gender Division within the Executive Secretariat, and the transformation of ECOWAS Gender Development Centre -- providing the necessary structures and frameworks for gender mainstreaming. Furthermore, the meeting of the Council of Ministers held in July 2004 strengthened the gender programme, by adopting the Gender policy document, the administrative structure of the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, a Strategic Plan framework and guidelines on the structures and mechanisms of the Gender Management Systems (GMS) for ECOWAS. The result of these processes has placed ECOWAS on solid footing for the effective mainstreaming of gender issues in the region.

International Community:

At the international level, a number of commitments on promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women have been made, including:

- ◆ The 1947 **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, which commits member States to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice.
- ◆ **Millennium Development Goal 3 on Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women** calls for the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary schools, in addition to tracking progress in the proportion of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector and the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments.
- ◆ **The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), agreed at the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women**, is a commitment to promote an active, visible policy of gender mainstreaming in all government policies and programmes. Gender mainstreaming is advocated in each of the Platform's 12 critical areas of concern¹, including all those that support the efforts and needs of women in poverty and the economic empowerment of women.
- ◆ The **2005 World Summit** outlined specific measures to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive gender discrimination. The Summit re-emphasised priority areas including, *inter alia*, women's right to own and inherit property, secure tenure of property and housing, and equal access to productive assets and resources, such as land.
- ◆ The **Monterrey Consensus** made specific reference to gender equality and empowerment through a commitment to developing financial mechanisms that facilitate outcomes in line with overall development goals including gender equality.
- ◆ Paragraph 42 of the 2005 **Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness** makes reference to gender equality and objectives. In Paragraph 21b of the **Accra Agenda for Action** agreed at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Ghana in September 2008, donors agreed to address the root causes of conflict and help ensure the protection and participation of women.

¹ The 12 critical areas of concern are: poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, economic disparity, power sharing, institutions, human rights, mass media, environment, and the girl child.

- ◆ The **International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)**, held in Cairo in 1994, made an early case for the linkage between gender equality and women's health and education.
- ◆ Most **major multilateral and bilateral agencies** have pledged support for gender equality and empowerment including in successive **G8 Summits** from Kananaskis in 2002 onwards.

II. What has been done to deliver on these commitments?

Africa: Progress towards meeting commitments on gender

1. In 2004, the African Union adopted the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA) as an instrument for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women. Through the Solemn Declaration, African Heads of State and Government committed themselves to report annually on progress towards gender equality. To assist member States in their reporting responsibilities, Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs and Gender, at their First AU Conference held in Dakar, Senegal in October 2005, adopted the *Implementation Framework for the SDGEA* and the *Guidelines for Monitoring and Reporting on the SDGEA*. To date only seven member States have submitted their reports.

2. On 26 October 2005, a protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights -- the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa -- received its 15th ratification and the Protocol entered into force. This marked a milestone in the protection and promotion of women's rights in Africa, creating new rights for women in terms of international standards.

3. Many African countries have prioritized women's health as an area of concern. This has resulted in increased attention to the reproductive health and rights of women, encouraging breast-feeding and other infant feeding options, making facilities available for the management of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS, and raising awareness among men on their responsibilities in reproductive health. In many countries, progress has been made in offering i) free or subsidized sexual and reproductive health care services and commodities and ii) affordable preventive health services for rural populations, as well as in training grassroots health providers. The "ICPD at 10" Review noted that 95 per cent of the 43 countries now target men in an effort to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

4. The African Union (AU) has now developed their first Gender Policy. This document encapsulates Decisions and Declarations of Assembly of the Heads of State and Government and other global commitments on gender and women's empowerment and demonstrates the continued leadership of the AU in advancing gender equality in the continent.

5. The Gender Policy provides a mandate for the operationalisation of Assembly commitments. It is accompanied by a comprehensive ten-year Action Plan, which will guide the implementation of these commitments by AU organs and complement ongoing implementation of these commitments at the national level and regional level.

6. Preparations are underway towards a review of the global Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). The next cycle marks the mid-decade assessment of the BPfA, exactly 15 years since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. In order to benefit from this process, the ECA has started a review process, which will culminate in a Regional Ministerial consultation, and adoption of the Continental report on the BPFA+ 15. A survey will collect both qualitative and quantitative data as the basis for developing an indicator results "map".

7. In the momentum of its fiftieth anniversary celebrations, ECA in partnership with the African

Union and the African Development Bank convened the sixth African Development Forum focused on Action on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Ending Violence against Women in November 2008. The forum adopted a Consensus Statement and Plan of Action for Ending Violence against Women and Girls, Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women. The statement identifies the following priority actions that can have far-reaching impacts: Africa-Wide campaign to eliminate violence against women and girls; financing for gender equality, women's empowerment, and ending violence against women and girls; and reliable data on gender equality, women's empowerment and violence against women and girls.

8. ECA's African Women's Progress Scorecard (AWPS) measures policy performance regarding women's advancement and empowerment and tracks government progress in ratifying, implementing and monitoring relevant conventions and documents on gender equality and women's rights including CEDAW, the Women's Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the BPFA and ICPD.

9. Results from the AWPS shows that countries under review have met less than half of their commitments. Most progress is being made in the social dimension particularly in relation to commitments to health in the context of ICPD. More progress is needed in terms of commitments to women's rights in the context of CEDAW and the African Women's Rights Protocol and in the economic area, particularly with respect to increasing access to technology and land. In the political area, least progress is being made in relation to the commitment regarding the UN 1325 conflict resolution and support for women's quotas and affirmative action.

Development Partners: Support for gender equality and women's economic empowerment

10. Donor support for gender equality, since the 1995 United Nations World Conference in Beijing – which marked a milestone in international commitments to gender equality issues - has been improving. More resources are being devoted to gender equality targets, particularly in social sectors.

11. The DAC gender equality policy maker identifies activities financed by ODA that are focused principally or significantly on achieving gender equality and women's empowerment – implying that the activity is “intended to advance gender equality and women's empowerment or reduce discrimination and inequalities in sex”. Sixteen out of a total of 23 DAC member countries reported on the DAC gender equality policy maker for aid disbursed in 2005-2006. Around 30 per cent of bilateral aid allocated by sector was focused on gender equality dimensions - up from 20% in 1009-2003 and 25% over the period 201-2005. Bilateral ODA to gender equality has clearly been rising - both in ratio and in real terms². The figure for Africa is higher than the global average with over a third of all bilateral ODA allocated (US\$1.8 billion out of US\$5 billion) targeting gender equality issues.

12. The international financial institutions and multilateral development banks have also realigned their commitment to gender equality and women's advancement by mainstreaming policies and strengthening institutional arrangements to achieve gender-related objectives. The African Development Bank's (AfDB) Gender Plan of Action (GPOA) reflects a commitment to promote gender equality by mainstreaming gender issues in its activities and supporting the efforts of member States to attain gender equality objectives. The share of gender-responsive loans at the AfDB increased from 15 per cent in 1998 to 38 per cent in 2004.

13. The World Bank has increased its share of projects incorporating gender issues in the design stage from 68 per cent in 2001 to 87 per cent in 2004-05. The World Bank has also recently developed the Gender Action Plan (2007-2010) of which there will be an initial investment of US\$

² As not all DAC members report the gender equality focus of their ODA, the gender policy marker covers only a part of the total reported bilateral ODA that is allocated by sector in 2005-2006. Figures are average per year.

24.5 million over four years aimed at leveraging greater resources through grants and low-interest loans to developing countries.

14. While development partners are committed to increasing ODA, there is no certainty that women and men will equally benefit from such increases in aid. The Paris Declaration (PD) is important in this regard because the current changes in aid modalities - with their increased focus on increased ownership - provide opportunities to strengthen the promotion of gender equality in the context of development aid. Similarly, the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) makes a significant commitment to moving towards visible gender equality in aid programmes and is thus a powerful tool to strengthen the responsiveness of governments and development partners. Both the PD and the AAA provide the frameworks and good practice principles for fostering gender equality as a priority development issue.

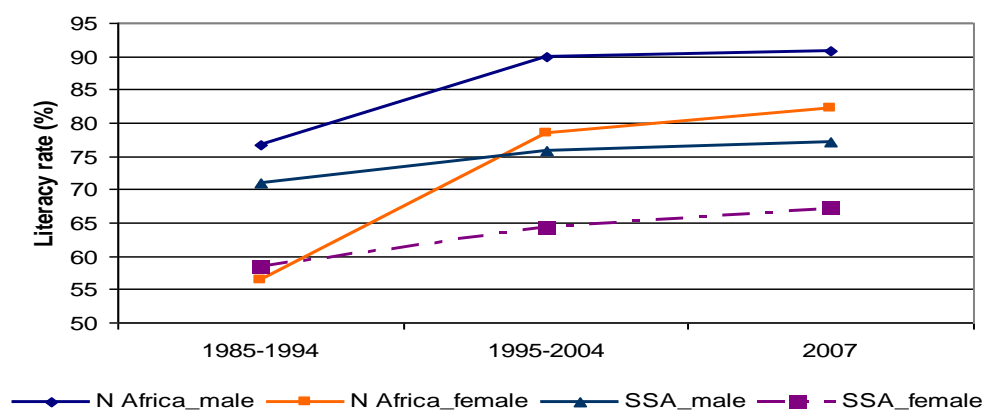
15. According to the 2007 Global Monitoring Report (GMR), despite strong policy commitments to gender equality, implementation has been disappointing and, as a result, several donors are in the process of fine-tuning their approaches, recognising the importance of both gender mainstreaming and specific actions to reduce gender inequalities and empower women. Greater attention has been paid to gender in project design rather than in implementation – but as yet very little attention has been paid to monitoring and evaluation, results and financial commitments to gender issues. There is wide agreement that high-level leadership, technical expertise, and financial resources will be key to ensuring that donor agencies’ gender policies are implemented.

III. What have been the results?

16. There have been improvements in access to primary education -- however African women still have the highest illiteracy rates in the world. Through improvements in access to primary education, young female literacy rates in Africa have improved. North Africa has achieved the strongest gains with young female literacy rates, which rose by over 20 percentage points from the 1980s to 2007. At the same time, the literacy rate for young women in sub-Saharan Africa increased from 58.6 per cent for the period 1985-1994 to 67.3 per cent in 2007.

17. Despite this progress, the gap between the female and male literacy rates is not decreasing fast enough, especially in the sub-Saharan region where the ratio of female to male literacy rate has remained rather static over the last decade at around 0.87. African women continue to have the highest illiteracy rates in the world – and in some countries this measure is rising.

Figure 1: Female literacy rates in Africa are lagging behind male literacy rates



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics Online Database, www.uis.unesco.org.
 Notes: SSA = sub-Saharan Africa; N Africa = North Africa.

18. In 2005, 33 million students were enrolled in secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa, an increase of 55 per cent from 1999. However, the latest figures reveal that young girls' access to post-primary education is not improving vis-à-vis the situation for boys and, indeed, gender parity has deteriorated at the secondary level in recent years (the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for the secondary enrolment rate decreased from 0.82 in 1999 in 2000 to 0.80 in 2005). Notwithstanding this aggregate picture, a number of African countries have achieved or are on track to achieving the goal of gender parity in secondary education.

19. Africa has still by far the lowest number of children in school. Only 58 per cent of school-age children are actually enrolled in school. School retention also remains a challenge. According to the 2008 Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report, the median survival rate to the last grade of primary education (63%) was lower in sub-Saharan Africa compared to other regions in the world.

20. Female-to-male school enrolment, retention and completion rates continue to favour boys in the majority of African countries. Worldwide, once girls have access to school, they tend to do better than boys.

21. Few African countries are making progress towards achieving gender parity in tertiary education. While more women than men worldwide were enrolled in higher education institutions in 2005 (the global GPI was 1.05), in sub-Saharan Africa the average GPI in tertiary education worsened between 1999 and 2005 from 0.68 to 0.62.

22. A considerable gender gap still persists in the courses chosen by women to study. For most countries for which data are available, women represent less than one third of science-related students but over two-thirds in humanities, arts, education, social sciences, business, law, services and health and welfare. This choice increases the difficulties faced by women in finding a decent job in the formal economy once they have left tertiary education.

23. **Women continue to face considerable barriers in African labour markets. Women continue to face considerable barriers in African labour markets as a result of lack of education, inadequate access to training, discrimination, and** cultural attitudes about their role in the workplace. However, official figures provided by the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicate that there is very little difference between the unemployment rates of adult women and men in Sub-Saharan Africa.³ In 2006, it was estimated that both the female and male unemployment rate stood at 9.7 per cent.

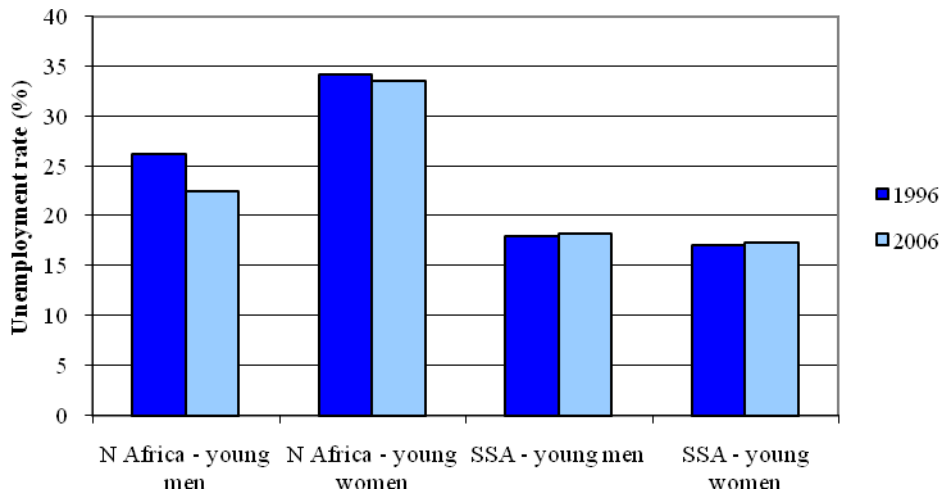
24. **In contrast, young women are less susceptible to unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa. This does not imply, however, that young women in sub-Saharan Africa have better access to the labour market; rather, they do not have the "luxury" to actively search for a job and hence take up employment in the informal sector, or are remaining outside the labour force, which are both not reflected by unemployment figures. At the same time, young females in North Africa continue to face barriers to gaining a job in these countries, which is captured by unemployment figures.**

25. Given difficulties in measuring the rate of unemployment in Africa and the reality that most Africans cannot afford to remain unemployed⁴, it is crucial to analyse the situation of women in the informal economy, where most African women are working, mostly in lowly paid and often dangerous jobs. In this respect, as witnessed across the continent, women are highly represented in the informal sector as employees, entrepreneurs or unpaid home-based workers (Chen 2001). As discussed in Chen et al. (1999), a neglected aspect of the contribution of women to the informal sector is home-based work, varying from 32 percent in Kenya to 77 percent in Botswana and Zimbabwe.

³ See ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market Version 5 CD-ROM.

⁴ See ECA (2005) for more details.

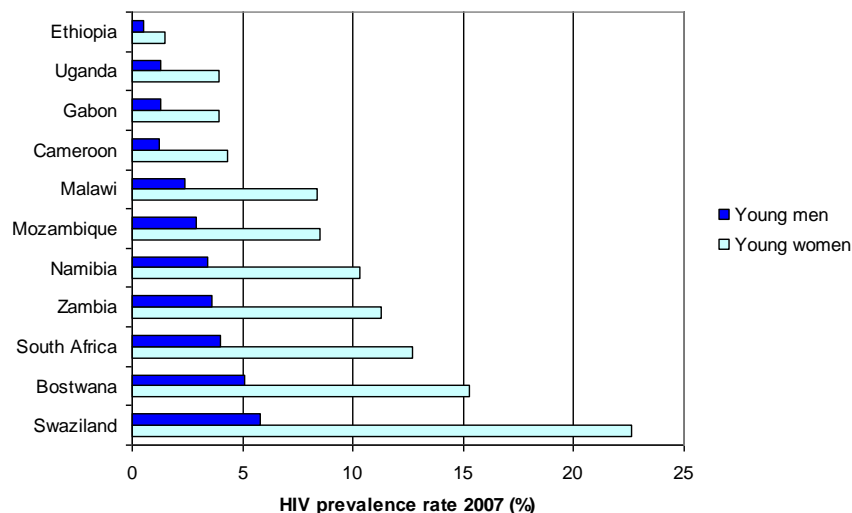
Figure 2: Unemployment continues to be a major problem for Africa's youth



Source: ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market Version 5 CD-ROM; 2006* -preliminary estimates.
 Note: N Africa = North Africa; SSA = sub-Saharan Africa

26. **HIV/AIDS is not gender-neutral. More women are currently living with HIV/AIDS than men in Africa.** Women in Africa experience considerable vulnerabilities to a range of illnesses, particularly HIV and AIDS. In this respect, it is widely acknowledged that HIV and AIDS has severe socio-economic impacts on both sexes but is not gender neutral. Women and girls bear the brunt of the epidemic because they are more susceptible to infection, they are the main caregivers, and, when the breadwinner is gone, they have to support the family with limited resources.

Figure 3: HIV prevalence rates vary but are always higher for young women



Source: UNAIDS (2008)

27. The proportion of women infected by HIV is high and is increasing on the continent. As of December 2007, women constituted 61 per cent of infected people in sub Saharan Africa up from 57 per cent at the end of 2003 (UNAIDS 2008). HIV infection is highest among young women (15-24

years old) who are about 3 times more likely to be infected with HIV than their male counterparts. The vulnerability of African women and girls to HIV infection is integrally linked to underlying gender inequalities to productive resources, societal norms, and the limited ability of women to negotiate safer sex practices.

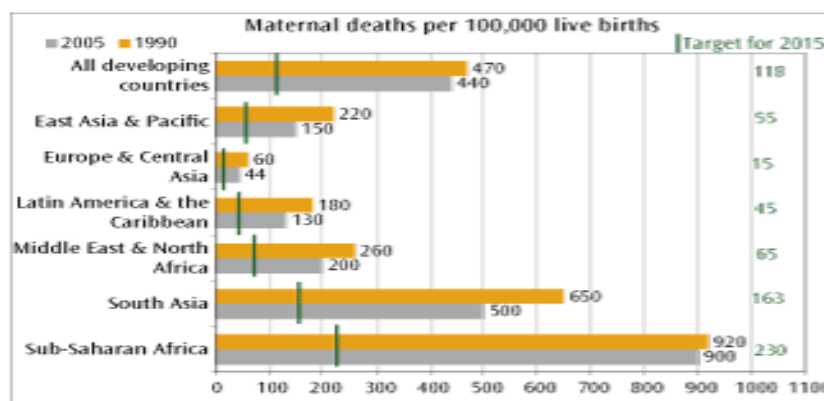
28. Efforts to address the gender dimensions of HIV and AIDS have been multi-pronged, aimed at strengthening prevention, mitigation, treatment and care. Through extensive and targeted prevention programmes, several African countries have significantly cut their HIV prevalence rate while some have succeeded in keeping infection rates low. The adult HIV prevalence rate in sub-Saharan Africa declined from 5.8 per cent in 2001 to 5.0 per cent in 2007. Even though a decrease in prevalence rates has been recorded, as noted earlier, more women are currently living with HIV and AIDS than men.

29. Africa continues to have the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. Maternal mortality continues to be a major challenge facing the African continent. In 2005, there were 900 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in sub-Saharan Africa, barely down on the figure for 1990 (920 per 100,000). In contrast, the ratio in Northern Africa has dropped from 250 to 160 deaths per 100,000 live births.

30. One of the factors behind maternal mortality in Africa is the high rate of adolescent pregnancies.⁵ Girls in sub-Saharan Africa have the highest rates of early marriage and early motherhood, as well as the highest mortality rates for young mothers and their babies. The adolescent fertility rate in sub-Saharan Africa reached 144.2 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in 2000. While this has fallen to 131.8 in 2005, this rate still represents a large percentage of young women who are prematurely removed from the education system and labour market because of early motherhood. They also face the risk of dying during childbirth.

31. A majority of these deaths and disabilities are preventable, being mainly due to insufficient care during pregnancy and delivery. Only 42 per cent of births in the African region are attended by skilled personnel and also a high percentage of deliveries take place in areas where newborn births are usually not recorded. As a consequence of maternal deaths and disabilities, infants and children also suffer. Tragically, when a mother dies, her new-born child is most likely to die. The older children, most often girls, have to leave school to take care of household chores.

Figure 4: Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest number of maternal deaths in the world



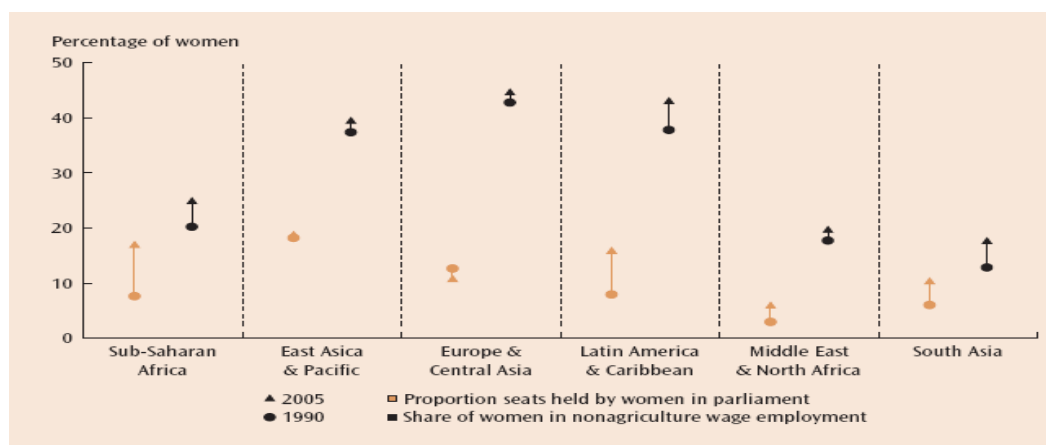
Source: Global Monitoring Report, GMR, 2007

⁵ See mdgs.un.org.

32. **Women’s political participation is improving, albeit at a slow rate.** Women’s political representation in national parliaments is an important indicator of their capacity to influence decision-making, including policies, strategies and resource allocations. Progress in this area has been steady, but very slow overall and uneven by region. Between 2000 and 2008, the proportion of women’s seats in sub-Saharan parliaments has only increased from an average of 13.5 per cent to 17.3 per cent, [although up to 19.8 per cent in countries that have introduced quotas].

33. In twenty countries over 30% of parliamentary seats are held by women. Where quota systems exist⁶, there has been some increase in the visibility of issues affecting women, as well as, to some degree, in mechanisms for ensuring the broader inclusion of women in decision-making. The greatest progress has been registered in North Africa where the percentage of parliamentary seats occupied by women reached 8.3 per cent in 2008, up considerably from 2.2 per cent in 2002.

Figure 5: Progress in share of women non-agricultural wage employment and proportion of seats in parliament held by women



Source: World Development Indicators, 2006

34. New pressures have mounted in many African countries to increase the number of women in parliament. Africa, which previously had the lowest rates of female participation in politics, has seen the fastest rates of growth in female representation of any world region. However, despite the encouraging trends in women’s political empowerment in some countries, generally the level of women’s involvement in politics is still low in Africa.

IV. What are the key priorities?

35. As highlighted in Section 1, African governments have committed to improving gender equality and women’s empowerment through both global and regional declarations, plans of actions and policy frameworks. Despite these efforts, progress remains inadequate, particularly in terms of implementing these commitments. Both African governments and development partners have a role to play in accelerating implementation efforts.

⁶ Such as in Uganda and South Africa.

Actions by Africa:

- ◆ Ratify the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa;
- ◆ Accelerate the preparation of strategies for the implementation of the Protocol and the SDGEA;
- ◆ Allocate funds to support African women entrepreneurs through credit and training, including providing counselling and mentor programmes, and expanding access to relevant training e.g. vocational literacy, developing business plans and financial management.
- ◆ Develop an approach to education that encompasses both supply and demand-side issues, and also addresses gender imbalances, particularly in terms of barriers for girls and young women to access post-primary education;
- ◆ Enhance access to gender-sensitive health services, especially in terms of sexual and reproductive health, through a multi-pronged approach that also tackles the underlying causes of gender inequalities in access to health services and their vulnerabilities to diseases, especially HIV and AIDS.

Response by development partners:

- ◆ Support AU member States in implementing their gender equality and empowerment commitments as contained in national development strategies, including by investing in regional and national strategies underpinning the SDGEA and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa;
- ◆ Ensure that strategies to achieve gender equality are clearly integrated in the emerging aid architecture processes and structures.
- ◆ Support the development of indicators on economic empowerment under MDG 3; and
- ◆ Commit financial resources to support mechanisms and structures that implement and promote land reform initiatives.