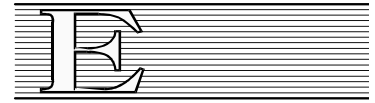




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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
African Centre for Gender and Social Development**

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**Strategies to Enhance
African Women's Rights Observatory**

A. Introduction

Observatories can be defined as technical centers, as well as political and advocacy spaces that will facilitate learning and networking, particularly if they have an in-built mechanism of information dissemination and outreach. The Beijing Platform for Action recommended the creation of National Observatories on the advancement of women in each country. It is within this context that an African Women's Rights Observatory (AWRO) on gender equality, women's rights and empowerment of women was envisaged, to compile national data and provide a continental and regional perspective on the status of women.

The African Women's Rights Observatory (AWRO) is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme, Regional Gender Programme (UNDP/RGPA) and the African Centre for Gender and Social Development of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA / ACGS). It was set up in 2008 through a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two stakeholders with the overall objective to establish an Observatory to track progress and consolidate data on African women's rights, thereby functioning as a tool for advocacy.

The specific aims of the AWRO are to:

- Serve as a comprehensive source of data on research findings and resources, institutions, emerging information, developments and events on women's rights in Africa;
- Track and report on progress African countries are making in the area of women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Facilitate periodical report identification of good practice and constraints, as well as strengthen networking and sharing of information in the area of gender mainstreaming;
- Provide a network of users and content providers;
- Provide a regional perspective on the status of women in Africa;
- Provide a database for African researchers and activists and various stakeholders to access country-specific or subregional data regarding women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Encourage countries to develop adequate monitoring systems of their own based on their own national data.

AWRO's information gathering is currently focused on three thematic areas, which have been chosen based on various considerations - such as availability of information and the potential impact they might have on all other aspects of women's rights, promotion and protection. The three areas are: participation of women in public and political decision-making, violence against women, and women's economic rights with a specific focus on the right to land. However, AWRO also indiscriminately retrieves and uploads information relevant to African women's rights. In the long-term, apart from widening the geographic coverage of countries, the AWRO will also aim to expand beyond these thematic areas.

B. Current status

The AWRO has three distinct components:

- i) The first is a website, which keeps abreast of new developments in the area of women's rights and informs all concerned and interested actors. The electronic mode of a website

allows information to be updated by the minute and can also function as an early warning mechanism when gross violations of women rights are reported. In addition, demand has been made by interested parties to increase the interactive nature of the website so as to provide a platform for the dynamic exchange of ideas, knowledge and information on women's rights in Africa. Thus, this provides a justification to revamp the website to serve its target audience more effectively.

- ii) A newsletter is also published on a quarterly basis, which is circulated to all member States – in both electronic and hard copies. Currently, the fourth issue of the newsletter is underway and the theme is the impact of conflict on women and their role in conflict resolution and peace building. Beyond current information, the newsletter carries analytical articles related to the specific focus of a particular issue.
- iii) A series of in-depth studies are being conducted to complement and reinforce the data on the website. The AWRO has completed a research study on women and land rights in 10 selected African countries. The aim of this study was to collect and analyze available data on women's land rights and participation in related decision-making processes. Furthermore, it aims to share good practices, lessons learned and recommended solutions with member States.

Also, a series of national studies on violence against women is being produced within the framework of the Sixth Tranche of the Development Account and its project on “Enhancing capacities to eradicate violence against women through networking of local knowledge communities”. The study aimed to measure the prevalence of different forms of violence against women, in five African countries (one per subregion), and analyse its causes and consequences. It also identified gaps in knowledge and data collection, and emphasized good practices and successful strategies adopted to combat violence against women. This study has now been extended to five additional counties.

Additionally, a report on women's rights is in progress, based on information and data generated through a questionnaire focused on AWRO's three thematic areas. The questionnaire has been administered to 18 countries.

Research and analysis will be part of AWRO's core activities. So far, research gaps and research themes are defined based on the thematic focus. The work of ACGD such as the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI) also provide pointers for research gaps.

One of the emerging key issues from the experiences of AWRO from the last three years is that there is a paucity of reliable data and systematic information to assist member States in the design of effective interventions strategies to ensure gender equality at the national levels. AWRO aims to be a useful tool towards building such a knowledge base. However, consolidating and building upon AWRO's outputs requires the commitment of member States and partners to provide information and data from their respective sources.

C. Main objective and strategies to enhance AWRO

The main objective is to enhance effectiveness and the interactive nature of AWRO in the access and dissemination of up-to-date information related to women's rights in Africa.

Three main strategies will be followed to achieve the above objective:

1. AWRO website will be re-structured and updated to enhance user-friendliness and ensure all information is focused and highly relevant.
2. Support of member States and other partners will be engaged in acquiring timely and up-to-date data.
3. Overall management of AWRO will be reviewed to increased overall efficiency.

D. Re-structuring and updating AWRO website

AWRO website contains a lot of useful information but the content will be re-structured so that it facilitates ease of navigation for users. Additionally, certain areas will be updated to ensure it is of highest relevance. The subtopics and highlights of information covered are outlined below:

➤ *About Us*

- Background – This is a section under which the background history, objective and mission of AWRO, as well as management structure is presented to the reader;
- Advisory Panel- This is a section under which the name, brief biographic data and picture of AWRO Advisory Panel members will be made available, any changes in the position of the members or any useful news about the members will be updated;
- Panel Meetings- Report of Panel meetings, as well as working photos will be presented; and
- Contact Info- Contact information of the Director and other staff members will be available.

➤ *Thematic focus areas –*

i) *Participation of women in decision-making*

This section of the website will give a brief analysis and overview on the status of women in both public and private sectors. The analysis will provide the numerical representation of women relative to men. Beyond the numeric representation of women, the section will provide information on the policy, legal, programmatic influence of women in decision- making. The analysis will indicate developments and persisting gaps and needs to be updated on regular bases.

The section will also provide a link to already recognized data base of women leaders and recognized personalities mainly for their work in the promotion and protection of women's rights. Previously, attempt has been made to develop a guideline and to document women leaders in Africa; this process can be re-launched if there is a lack of good documentation in this regard.

ii) *Violence against women (VAW)*

This section will provide summary of available information on VAW, legal and policy developments and indicates measures that need to be taken to curb the challenges. The summary will be updated on regular bases.

iii) Women's land rights

The overview under this section provides information and data on the labour investment of women on agricultural land, access to land use and ownership by women compared to men. Statutory and customary law opportunities and limitations that hinder women's access to land rights will be presented. Information will be updated regularly.

There will be country specific information for each of the above thematic areas and the following information will be available under the drop down list of countries

For each thematic area:

- Definition, overview and relevant provisions of global, regional and national resolutions/subregional treaties;
 - Overview of progress / challenges related to thematic area in each country – including national legislation;
 - Graphs / analysis on indicators related to thematic area;
 - Country research outputs – this will be transferred from the current resources section;
 - Recent news related to thematic area – link to News Archive;
 - Global, regional and national initiatives on the thematic area;
 - Progress report made by the country on the specific topic to CEDAW or the AU under the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality; and
 - The latest concluding comments made by the CEDAW Committee for the country.
- *Monitoring of commitments / initiatives on women's rights*
- Introduction to available monitoring tools (CEDAW and AU reporting guidelines, etc.);
 - Ratification and reporting of CEDAW, Solemn Declaration, African Women's Protocol and AU Convention on Governance and Elections (Consolidated matrix available and to be updated on regular basis);
 - National laws related to women's rights – to be expanded; and
 - Indicators, quantitative data and graphs showing progress and remaining challenges by using different data sources.
- *Resources*
- Directory of global and regional resolutions on women's rights - definition, overview and relevant provisions of global, regional and national resolutions / subregional treaties;
 - Documents, reports and policy briefs;
 - National gender policies – a link to e-network can be included here; and
 - Databank of domestic court cases upholding women's rights – this will be re-formatted to be made more user-friendly. This also needs to be placed prominently on the home-page since this is a unique dataset.

➤ *AWRO's publications*

AWRO commissions research and also undertakes studies in-house on the three thematic areas. The outputs are peer reviewed, and some of the studies are already online. The outputs will be made more visible and presented in an accessible way.

➤ *Women's rights organizations and other institutions*

- Regional women's organizations – this will be consolidated, edited and formatted in web-friendly tables;
- National Gender Mechanisms – a link to the e-network will be included here.

➤ *Upcoming Events*

This will be expanded to include international conferences, regional conferences and commemorations, dates of elections, dates of recurrent commemorations related to women's rights in Africa.

➤ *News Feeds and Highlights*

This relies on RSS feeds from other relevant websites. The list will be revised and updated to include other useful sources such as Solidarity for African Women's Rights. Furthermore, a summary of top news on women's rights will be tracked and disseminated.

➤ *Useful Links*

This will be expanded to include the e-network, Gender Divisions of other UN Regional Commissions and also other organizations which produce outputs on women's rights – i.e. Gender Links, Women and Law in Southern Africa.

New additional features

- A mechanism will be put in place to allow the **online submission of data** by relevant parties for specific sections of the website. However, posting of information on the website will need an approval of a moderator.
- To increase the interactive nature of the website, a moderated **discussion forum** will be added where users can raise questions for debate, post requests for information or even submit a draft report for comments.
- The website content will be available in both **English and French** to enable access for a wider audience.

E. Support and engagement of partners

Experiences of successful observatories reveal the necessity for nurturing local actors to collect information and expand the knowledge base of the observatory. Such an exercise of engaging local actors, both governmental and non-governmental institutions will further increase the awareness on the

importance of using and sharing research-based knowledge at the level of policymaking and implementation as well as for advocacy.

Despite the improving trend in access to online information, it is still a challenge to acquire up-to-date information on women's rights. This requires a deliberate engagement of member States and other partners, particularly in the following areas:

- Newly enacted legislation relating to the rights of women;
- Data on monitoring commitments / instruments at the national / regional level;
- Court cases that have challenged existing discriminatory laws or practices;
- Success stories that have mobilized action for promoting women's rights;
- New studies and research on the three thematic areas or on wider aspects of women's rights;
- Participation in completing surveys for research studies;
- Contribution of articles to AWRO newsletter; the article could be on new policies or laws and how that can potentially impact the rights of women or summary of a research finding or summary of a high profile campaign with a positive impact from which lesson can be learned;
- Identifying and communicating areas of research gap and entry points for collaboration; and
- News alert on emerging issues and developments.

Furthermore, at the upcoming Committee on Women and Development meeting, to be held in Addis Ababa on 17 – 20 May 2011, participants will be asked for suggestions of organizations and institutions, on who will be able to provide up-to-date background information. Additionally, recommendations will be sought of names of consultants who have the expertise and capacity to carry out the required country studies.

F. Management of AWRO

External management

➤ Advisory Panel

The AWRO Advisory Panel is composed of senior gender experts and representatives from government and non-governmental organizations, research and academic institutions, multilateral agencies and women's civil society organizations.

The role of the Advisory Panel is to provide general guidance and recommendations on the way forward, as well as to comment and provide guidance on the annual work programme of AWRO. The panel is expected to promote the establishment of national observatories to serve with data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings and contribute to knowledge-based advocacy.

The first Advisory Panel meeting of AWRO was held in Addis Ababa at the United Nations Conference Center from 20-21 April 2007. The main objective of the meeting was to introduce AWRO to a pool of experts and to invite them to be part of developing the Observatory.

Liaison between the Advisory Panel and the ACGS/ECA is an area that needs further improvement and will be one of the tasks of the newly appointed ACGSD Fellow (see below).

➤ *National observatories*

National observatories do exist in some countries. These centres work hand in hand with other government institutions, such as the National Institute of Statistics, to ensure that gender is mainstreamed at all levels and collect gender disaggregated data to inform policy processes. These existing national observatories have the potential to support the regional observatory as well as to populate it with information. Thus, technical support has to be provided to member States to enrich their national observatories through alerting and inviting staff members to training workshops on gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis. Furthermore, it is crucial that liaison between AWRO and these national observatories is enhanced through the ACGSD Fellow to ensure a regular flow of communication.

Internal management (ACGSD)

➤ *Focal point in the Division*

An ACGS Fellow is currently being recruited with specific expertise on gender and women's rights. This individual will be assigned the task of collecting and collating relevant information to be uploaded onto the AWRO website. Additionally, the Fellow will handle periodic liaison with the Advisory Panel and the national observatories to ensure an open dialogue and constructive exchange of timely information. The task manager in UNECA shall handle all quality control issues.

➤ *Website moderator*

An individual is required to moderate all content and conversations which will be part of the discussion forum on the website. Additionally, the role of this person will be to screen data contributed through the online submission before posting onto the website. This individual will also be required to pick out the top news stories from the RSS News Feeds for the News Highlights section.

➤ *Website manager*

One individual will be required to handle the technical aspects and answer queries related to website management – for instance, in cases of difficulties in uploading or retrieving information either by users or the AWRO team itself. Discussions will be held with the IT Division as to whether they will be able to provide regular support in this area.

➤ *French translator*

A committed person shall undertake and manage the translation of information into French – particularly those which require regular update, such as the news features.

Annex

Brief questionnaires on

- a) *National observatories*
- b) *Names and address of 2-3 leading consultants on women's rights in respective countries*