

The Regional Plan of Action to accelerate the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action for the Advancement of Women

(Period: 2000–2004)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Regional Plan of Action was formulated within the framework of the mid-decade review of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action. That review was conducted through the Sixth Africa Regional Conference on Women, held from 22 to 26 November 1999 at the Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The review was conducted in the form of national progress reports that were prepared by the Governments of most African countries with inputs from all the actors involved in implementing the action plans. Evaluation reports were also prepared by the Organization of African Unity, the Africa Development Bank, non-governmental organizations, the Economic Commission for Africa and United Nations agencies. The reports demonstrated great commitment to implementing the action plans that came out of Dakar and Beijing.

Most countries had allocated both financial and human resources to implementing national plans of action and had registered success in the past four to five years in such areas as increased school enrolment of girls, wider areas of coverage of health services, creation of women's groups for solidarity and collaboration, wider coverage of awareness-raising campaigns and programmes with regard to women's human rights, establishment of microcredit schemes, and expansion of adult literacy programmes. At least 15 of the reporting countries had formulated comprehensive national gender policies to guide other sectors in incorporating gender concerns in their policies, plans, and programmes. For the most part, the national plans of action included activities beyond the mid-decade review.

But the evaluation reports were also explicit about the problems that they had come up against in the implementation process, and in some cases they suggested ways of confronting these problems during the next phase. The Regional Plan of Action that follows addresses the most frequently raised problems with a view to providing a framework within which the problems can be resolved.

Statement of mission

The Regional Plan of Action is proposed to help implement the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action through national, subregional and regional plans of action. It is a synthesis of strategies and mechanisms proposed to address and resolve a number of issues that have been identified as posing serious constraints in the past five years to implementing the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action.

The issues fall in six categories:

1. While most countries had drawn comprehensive national plans of action for implementing the platforms, few had defined concrete strategies for coordinating the activities that were actually implemented by a variety of actors in a variety of sectors. Duplication of effort and consequent waste of precious resources at the expense of the targeted beneficiaries were a major concern in most countries. Although there was an attempt to assign the coordinating role to a particular structure in some countries, these structures for the most part lacked the necessary mandate or the accompanying tools and resources to carry out their role effectively.
2. Yet another weakness that was linked to the national plans of action was that they omitted well-defined mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation process, which should be predicated on a clearly formulated set of indicators. In the absence of such a mechanism, it was impossible to gauge accurately the level of progress made and thus correct the process as necessary.

3. Practically all countries were silent on the issue of accountability. While commitment to implementing the Dakar and Beijing Platforms was explicit, as demonstrated by declarations and resolutions the Governments adopted, the national reports were silent on the issue of accountability to the people who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of the platforms. Silence in this sense leads to negligence and lip service, which safeguard the status quo at the expense of the advancement of women, gender equality, and sustainable development.
4. In the platforms for action, gender mainstreaming in policies, plans, and programmes in all sectors was accepted as the most effective strategy for achieving gender parity. This strategy therefore places on all sectors the responsibility for implementing the platforms. Unfortunately, few countries to date have either formulated comprehensive national gender policies or drawn up gender-sensitive sectoral policies. At the same time, the presence of women in critical masses at decision-making levels continues to be elusive, thus pushing back even further the likelihood of a demand for accountability. It is imperative to ensure that those who attain decision-making positions have the necessary leadership skills and the capacity to analyse and evaluate policy and programmes from a gender perspective.
5. Insufficient resources continue to present an important constraint in implementing the platforms. Practically all the reporting countries cited this as a critical obstacle in the same way it had been declared responsible for the low implementation rate of the Nairobi forward-looking strategies. Yet it is also a fact that there are enormous quantities of national resources, a lot of which nationals take out of the continent for external spending or banking. Conversely, large quantities of financial resources enter the continent in different ways and for various purposes without seeming to make much difference to the perpetual cry of shortage. The issue of access and control of both external and internal resources therefore needs to be examined in depth in the light of its crucial position in successfully implementing the Platforms for Action.
6. In the recent past, a number of emerging issues have become pervasive and life threatening to the entire African society. They must be addressed directly and decisively by the Governments and the entire population. Two of the issues, HIV/AIDS and the problem of the needy and helpless, pose particular threats due to their size and their far-reaching effects. In most African countries, the level of poverty is growing by the year as the number of people who are living below the poverty line increases by the millions. The strength of the extended family to take care of these people, a role that largely falls on women, has been eroded to bare bones as evidenced by the number of beggars of all ages and street children in the cities. The question of where the responsibility lies for both the victims of HIV/AIDS and poverty must be answered and acted upon as a matter of urgency before it is accepted as a way of life and eventually becomes the demise of Africa.

The Regional Plan of Action examines the issues outlined above within the context of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action and the priorities selected for focus by the different actors. It proposes a framework within which strategies and mechanisms for addressing them can be put in place and activated, nationally, subregionally, and regionally. The ultimate goal of the Regional Plan of Action is therefore to accelerate implementing the Platforms for Action in the next five years, after which the accomplishments of the decade after the Beijing Conference will be evaluated.

II. Coordination machinery and strategies

Justification

It is up to Governments to implement the Dakar and Beijing Platforms, but NGOs, United Nations specialized agencies, and other structures are contributing to the exercise—locally, nationally, subregionally, regionally, and internationally. Since the Beijing Conference, many structures have been set up at every level to promote gender equality. Member States have made efforts to involve their institutions in formulating policies, programmes and plans with a view to translating the Dakar and Beijing Platforms into action. This poses a problem in eliciting the participation and cooperation of the myriad institutions of Government, civil society, the private sector, and NGOs. The national, subregional, and regional institutions suffer from ill-defined statutes and mandates, lack of skills in

gender analysis, inadequate financing and equipment, centralized authority, poor capacity to mobilize, unprofessional approach to the issue of gender, and lack of coordination.

The multiplicity of structures, diversity of strategies pursued, and poor coordination of activities constitute obstacles to the harmonious implementation of national plans of action and to realistic evaluation. Each of the countries needs to develop strategies and machinery for coordinating gender activities, to promote not only smooth implementation, follow-up, and evaluation but also remedial action and better planning. Indeed, the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms would be easier if all players established close links and shared information.

Vision

Each Member State regularly coordinates, through appropriate machinery located either in the Office of the President or the Office of the Prime Minister, the various activities conducted to promote gender equality among the various actors under the 12 critical areas of concern. Coordination makes it possible to avoid duplication of effort, save time and resources, and maximize impact.

Strategic objectives

1. Establish a National Consultative and Coordinating Committee at a very high level to promote gender equality. It should be located in the Office of the President or the Office of the Prime Minister with the minister responsible for women's affairs as its secretary. Other ministries and actors would be represented on this committee, whose responsibility would be to design, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of official commitments. The committee would be vested with the authority to enforce compliance with all official commitments and to ensure that they were implemented.
2. Build and enhance the capacity of the National Consultative and Coordinating Committee for gender and development.
3. Circulate official policy, programme, and planning documents among the partners.
4. Build or enhance the capacity of the United Nations agencies in each country to coordinate the promotion of gender equality.
5. Create or strengthen in each inter governmental organisation (IGO) at subregional level a gender unit responsible for following up the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action.
6. Strengthen the capacity of the existing gender structures in the regional IGOs to facilitate their role in following up the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action.

Strategic actions

National level

1. Establish a National Consultative and Coordinating Committee for the promotion of gender equality.
2. Provide gender training for all development partners.
3. Establish, under the leadership of the UNDP resident representative, a consultative and coordinating mechanism for United Nations agencies to support the implementation of the Platform for Action. This mechanism will work with the national follow-up teams responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Platforms.
4. Have United Nations agencies build skills in gender analysis and related skills.

Subregional level

Create or strengthen a gender unit responsible for the follow-up of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action in each subregional IGO.

Regional level

Strengthen the status and the human and financial resources of gender units in ADB, ECA, and OAU, to facilitate their role in coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating the implementation of the Platforms for Action.

Actors

Members of governmental, intergovernmental, and United Nations agencies, NGOs, civil society, and private sector officials, by becoming effectively involved, have an important role to play in promoting gender equity.

Indicators

1. Establishment and operation of National Consultative and Coordinating Committees for the promotion of gender equality.
2. Number of people and structures trained in the gender approach.
3. Number of people and structures receiving official documents.
4. Existence and operation of United Nations interagency machinery for the coordination and implementation of national plans of action.
5. Existence and operation of a gender unit in each subregional IGO.
6. High performance of the ADB, ECA, and OAU gender focal points.

Time frame

For the coming four years, each country should have an operational consultative and coordinating committee for the promotion of gender equality and a consultative and coordinating mechanism in United Nations country offices to support the implementation of national plans of action.

Resources

The necessary resources for establishing and operating these structures should come from governments, NGOs, civil society organizations and development partners.

III. Strategies and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the platforms for action

Justification

Through the Addis Ababa Declaration on the African Platform for Action on Women in June 1995, the African Heads of State and Governments “declared their solemn commitment to the principles, objectives and priorities enshrined in the African Platform for Action”; they also reaffirmed that “the implementation of the African Platform for Action is the primary responsibility of Africa Governments and peoples”. In this connection, they asked ADB, ECA, and OAU to “closely monitor the implementation of the Platform and to submit periodic reports thereon to the Council of Ministers and to [their] Conference”. Similarly, the Governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 committed themselves “to implement the [Beijing] Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all policies and programmes”. They also recognized that “it is essential to design, implement and monitor effective, efficient and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies and programmes at all levels that will foster the empowerment and advancement of women”.

Unfortunately, although most countries have already formulated and started to implement their national action plans, they have not been as efficient in creating mechanisms to monitor how the implementation process evolves so that they can evaluate it periodically. The national action plans in most of the reporting countries lack indicators to measure movement towards the defined objectives, or at best, the indicators have been inconsistently defined. It therefore becomes impossible to estimate progress made towards the overall goal of mainstreaming gender as a strategy towards sustainable development, equality, and peace. For a comprehensive solution to this problem, each country needs to develop ways to monitor and evaluate how well its platforms for action are being implemented.

Vision

Each country monitors annually and every five years evaluates the implementation of its platforms for action through a clearly defined mechanism with concrete indicators for each of the 12 critical areas of concern

Strategic objectives

1. Constitute a national follow-up team in each country, which will define clear indicators in the 12 critical areas of concern by which it will regularly monitor and evaluate implementation progress.
2. Ensure that the subregional IGOs develop appropriate tools with which to monitor and evaluate performance in gender mainstreaming.
3. Ensure that the regional institutions have monitoring and evaluation tools that they use regularly in following up their implementation performance.

Strategic actions

National level

1. Appoint staff specially in all the 12 sectors for the national follow-up teams, trained in—
 - formulating indicators for measuring progress made in the implementation process
 - analysing policy and programme to ensure that gender concerns are integrated
 - monitoring and evaluation processes
2. Formulate monitoring and evaluation tools.
3. Monitor annually the implementation process and biennial evaluation of progress made in the implementation.

Subregional and regional levels

1. Monitor and evaluate teams within the IGOs and regional institutions selected and trained in:
 - formulating indicators for measuring progress made in the implementation process
 - analysing policy and programme to ensure that gender concerns are integrated
 - monitoring and evaluation processes
2. Formulate monitoring and evaluation tools.
3. Monitor annually the implementation process and biennial evaluation of progress made in gender mainstreaming.

Actors

1. Selected staff from sectors representing each of the 12 critical areas of concern appointed by the highest authority within Government ministries who come together to constitute one national follow-up team for monitoring and evaluating the implementation process. Evaluation and monitoring teams in IGOs and regional institutions (ADB and OAU).

2. Trainers in formulation of indicators, policy analysis for gender audit, monitoring and evaluation processes. These should be constituted by ECA and the African Center for Women (ACW) in collaboration with OAU, ADB, other UN agencies, and subregional and regional training institutions.

Recommended Monitoring Indicators

Time frame

In the next four years, each country should have a trained national follow-up team that conducts monitoring and evaluation exercises for the national evaluation report due in 2004.

Resources

The cost should be shared among Governments, which should provide the team members, host the training workshops and carry out the monitoring and evaluation exercises, and among ADB, ECA, OAU, and UN agencies and the subregional and regional training institutions, who should help formulate and implement the training programme.

IV. Women and decision-making

Justification

Comprehensive development can happen only when women achieve better social, economic, and political status and take active part in the management of public affairs. In most countries, women are under-represented at every level of administration in the public or private sector. They account for less than 10 per cent of the legislature. Discriminatory attitudes and practices, family responsibilities, low income, little education, lack of self-confidence, the inability to control their sexuality and reproductive roles, and the non-competitiveness of women leaders all combine to prevent women from attaining positions of power. It is therefore the responsibility of each State to take the measures required to create an enabling environment that will allow women to participate more in development, enhance the capacities of women leaders and achieve social justice.

Vision

Each country has an adequate institutional framework for promoting equitable gender representation in decision-making bodies in the public and private sector, the legislature and political parties, and in international organizations.

Strategic objectives

1. Increase the number of women in decision-making positions.
2. Promote affirmative action to reduce gender disparities in decision-making organs.
3. Provide competent women with the opportunity to participate in decision-making.

Strategic actions

National level

1. Ensure that there is an irreversible critical mass of women in decision-making positions.
2. Ensure that women constitute 33 per cent of the national delegations attending all statutory meetings, nationally and internationally.

3. Ensure that men constitute 33 per cent of the national delegations for statutory meetings to discuss gender and women issues at national and international levels.

Subregional level

1. Provide women equal opportunities to head the subregional IGOs. Effective search for qualified candidates should be built into the normal recruitment process.
2. Ensure that at all times at least 50 per cent of the managers of the technical departments in the IGO are women.

Regional level

1. Make a concerted effort to ensure that the next OAU Secretary-General is a qualified woman.
2. Build into the recruitment policy an effective search for qualified female and male candidates in the posts of Secretary-General, assistant secretaries-general and technical directors.
3. When the Secretary-General is a man, ensure that three out of the five assistant secretaries-general are women, or vice versa.
4. In the soon-to-be-established African parliament, ensure that at least 33 per cent of the parliamentarians are women.
5. Ensure that women constitute at least 50 per cent of decision-makers in the soon-to-be-established African Monetary Fund, the African Court of Justice and the African Central Bank.

Actors

Governments bear responsibility for promoting women to decision-making positions.

Indicators

The number of women in decision-making positions at national, subregional, and regional levels.

Time frame

In the coming four years, Governments should take adequate institutional measures to promote the advancement of women into decision-making positions.

Resources

The necessary resources for establishing and operating these structures should come from governments, NGOs, civil society organizations and development partners.

v. Mobilizing resources for implementing the platforms for action

Justification

Countries implementing the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action, whose vision is equality, development, and peace, have encountered a preponderant shortage of resources due to lack of access and control of those resources at the individual, national, subregional, and regional levels. Existing legislation and economic liberalization policies, privatization, debt repayments, SAPs, and world trade terms respond unfavourably to the interests of the marginalized and the underprivileged in Africa, particularly women. Large and widening economic inequalities have resulted in insecurity, squalor, and inefficiencies, and they have undermined family systems at the risk of institutionalizing poverty. Recent reports show that the world's wealthiest 16 per cent uses 80 per cent of the world's natural resources. And yet, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights guarantees all people the right

to “freely dispose of their wealth and natural resources . . . at their exclusive interest . . . in no case shall a people be deprived of it” (article 21.1). The States shall “undertake to eliminate all forms of foreign economic exploitation, particularly that practised by international monopolies so as to enable their peoples to fully benefit from the advantages derived from their national resources” (article 21.5).

The problem of access to and control of resources applies equally to resources that originate from external sources as either loans or grants. Their distribution and utilization is often perceived as neither transparent nor equitable. Moreover, women benefit least from them, due to their absence in positions of decision-making and their limited access to and control of credit and productive resources due to socio-cultural causes.

African Governments have the moral responsibility and the protective role to eliminate the current situation of large inequalities and human misery aggravated by poverty because people have lost their access to and control of their national resources. They have the responsibility to create political, economic, and social stability by facilitating the exploitation of available national resources to shape the future of the nations for the benefit of the people. They need to formulate policies that will reconcile the imperatives of global markets with the national needs of the people, their welfare, cohesion, and the assurance of increased participation of women in decision-making at all levels.

Vision

In the planning period, attain an increase in the rate of creating national wealth while preserving the national resources and the equitable distribution of the benefits of economic and social growth and development, to forestall impoverishment of the poor and the powerless, particularly women.

Strategic objectives

1. Set up the Equality, Development and Peace Fund.
2. Allocate adequate resources to facilitate successful implementation of the Platforms for Action.

Strategic actions

To achieve the above objectives, governments should—

1. Establish the Equality, Development and Peace Fund, which will draw from a legislated contribution of 1 per cent of the income from natural resources exploited mostly for export, for example, minerals, forestry, oil, tourism, as well as industries in the export processing zones. The fund will be used to boost the implementation of the Platforms for Action. How potential recipients will gain access to this fund will be established in a participatory manner.
2. Establish a policy under which all external loans and grants contribute routinely 1 per cent of the income to the Equality, Development and Peace Fund, to ensure adequate availability of resources for effective gender mainstreaming. This is a short-term investment for long-term gains drawn from a society that operates from a gender-parity standpoint.
3. Ensure that privatization increases the number of national stakeholders and owners in the national economy through empowerment and fair competition in wealth creation for the nations. To this end, Governments should find a way to retain enterprises that are fully or partially privatized, until a critical mass of nationals including women are financially in a position to purchase and run them profitably. This was successfully done in Malaysia and in the Association of South East Asian Nations (SEAN) countries that have indigenized privatization.
4. Link negotiations for terms of debt repayment including debt relief with resources for the implementation of the Platforms for Action.

Actors

The actors are the governments, the national committees, the NGOs, the civil society and other collaborating institutions at national and international levels.

Indicators

Indicators include the level of budget allocation for Platform for Action implementation; levels of contribution to the Equality, Development and Peace Fund

Mechanisms and structures

The national coordination committee should be responsible for promoting and monitoring the mobilization of resources for the Equality, Development and Peace Fund from the sources stipulated above. The committee should also determine the financial needs for the implementation of the Platforms for Action in different sectors and what additional financial assistance the fund should allocate to each sector. It should also monitor how those resources are used. The fund, however, should be placed in the national ministry in charge of women and gender affairs, which should be responsible for implementing the decisions of the coordinating committee concerning the utilization of resources.

VI. Strategies and mechanisms for accelerating the integration of a gender approach in policies, planning and programming

Justification

Gender is a social construct linked to the norms of a given society. It constitutes a variable for differentiating, organizing, and structuring social roles and relationships. In describing such societal roles and responsibilities, gender analysis facilitates taking into account the economic and social roles of women and men and effectively integrates their specific constraints and strengths in development activities. Using a gender approach, a community can conduct activities that promote equal participation of men and women in its development at the same time as it achieves an equitable sharing of resources. For Africa to develop sustainably, its men and women must participate equally, but lopsided appropriation of resources and prevailing social norms do not allow women to play fully their role in development or to reap the benefit for their own well-being.

In adopting the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action, member States committed themselves to working for gender equality. They should therefore effectively integrate the gender approach in national policies, planning, programming, and project evaluation with a view to achieving the set objective. Five years since the adoption of the regional platform, however, there is still a long way to go to integrate the gender approach systematically in national policies, planning, programming, and project evaluation. This weakness is evident both in the state structures and in the civil society, private sector, and non-governmental organizations.

Vision

The public and NGO officials responsible in each country for implementing the national plan of action understand and use the gender approach in programme formulation and implementation.

Strategic objectives

1. Organize gender training for members of the National Consultative and Coordinating Committee for the promotion of gender equality, the national follow-up team, members of all sectoral committees or commissions responsible for implementing national plans of action, and all development partners.

2. Integrate national plans of action in all projects implemented by national and international partners.
3. Promote a system for collecting gender-disaggregated data and building related databanks in every ministerial department and structure responsible for national statistics, planning, and programming.

Strategic actions

1. Institutionalize systems for collecting gender-disaggregated data.
2. Establish gender-disaggregated databanks in the relevant structures.
3. Provide initial and refresher gender training for ministers, State officials and development partners.

Indicators

1. Engendered national plans of action.
2. Availability of gender-disaggregated data.

Time frame

Over the coming four years, each State should systematically use the gender approach in all official documents and monitor their implementation. The National Consultative and Coordinating Committee for the promotion of gender equality is appropriate for implementing the various measures, with the assistance of the development partners and the national follow-up team members of sectoral committees or commissions responsible for implementing national plans of action.

Resources

The implementation of this programme will require a close working relationship among States, NGOs, civil society organizations, and development partners.

VII. AIDS/HIV and its implications for women's empowerment

Justification

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is progressively wiping out the post-colonial gains of public health and economic development efforts of the last 30 years in Africa. It is ruthlessly killing the young and people in the prime of their productive life. Nearly 11 million Africans have died of AIDS alone at an average rate of 2 million per year and nearly 6000 per day, at a cost of up to US\$1000 per funeral (as for example, in Kenya). Infections gallop at the daily rate of 10,000 adults 15-49 years, mainly women, and 2000 children under 15 years, mainly girls. The birth rate, the only means of replacing the dead and dying, is only 72,000 per day, and it is declining. The prevailing neglect, mystery, myths, stigma, prejudice, and intolerance for a primarily public health concern continue to fuel the spread of a deadly disease that is contracted primarily through sexual intercourse, an act central to male and female relationships. Yet once again females find themselves disadvantaged due to social and economic dependence, and physical and physiological differences that expose them, more than their male partners, to infections. Young girls are at greater risk due to sexual abuse, forced marriage, prostitution, and myths that infected men can be cured by having sexual relations with a virgin, thus exposing the girl to tearing of the genitals, which accelerates infections. Elderly relatives with little means or support particularly carry the burden of orphans. The breadwinners die; families disintegrate, and poverty and despondency reign.

Prevention is better than cure. It is the key to slowing the spread of AIDS in Africa and curtailing its ultimate impact—devastation of African populations. Prevention strategies must address the structures that place the woman in a disadvantaged position in society and instead empower her to protect herself

and her children. Local resources must be mobilized to prevent infections and manage health care, not only to bury the dead.

Vision

The vision of the Plan for Action is to reduce the rate of HIV/AIDS infections by 50 per cent by 2004 by creating awareness and reducing the socio-economic devastation of HIV/AIDS. In this regard, it is noted that the incubation period in Africa is generally much shorter than the 20 years so far experienced elsewhere.

Strategic objectives

The strategic objectives include increasing resources to fight the disease and its effects, empowering women socially and economically, and demystifying or removing fear and the sense of mystery about HIV/AIDS through realistic information, education and communication programmes in the community.

Strategic actions

To demystify HIV/AIDS and reduce the spread of infection, central Governments have the responsibility to take strategic actions—

1. Formulate HIV/AIDS policy to check the spread of the infection and then to eradicate it through non-discrimination, demystification of the disease, and protection of both the infected and the uninfected.
2. Set up national HIV/AIDS committees or their equivalents that will develop national HIV/AIDS prevention and control programmes.
3. Legislate against all discriminatory practices that have implications on HIV/AIDS, promoting regulating the age of consent and controlling and prohibiting deliberate contamination of the uninfected by the infected.
4. Promote community-based health care (for example, as in Zambia), which encourages the infected to live positively within the community. The approach enhances information, education, and communication to reduce myths and subsequent isolation. It also empowers, involves, and protects the woman and caters for the orphans.
5. Prevent transmission through transfusion of infected blood, use of contaminated needles, syringes, surgical and dental equipment, and breast-feeding by infected mothers. To do this, Governments in close collaboration with NGOs, women's groups, the private sector, and international agencies should design and implement programmes and projects for—
 - sensitization, training and inspections
 - HIV screening and contact tracing to protect public health, particularly of the high-risk groups, to be determined at the national level
 - conducting family life and sex education on the dangers of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, targeting the youth
 - building community associations through age groups and professional, religious, or other clubs to facilitate information interchange and networking and to promote community feeling and concern for one another. Through these, transmission will be reduced and the care of those already infected will be intensified and made more effective
 - setting up homes and centres (for example, as in Zimbabwe) to rescue orphans, particularly girls, from defilement, violence, neglect, or abandonment, and build or reassign hospitals, health centres, and clinics, under professional and skilled personnel, to provide health services, including counselling, to the communities
6. Enable countries to investigate and negotiate for a supply of available testing kits and medicines at a reasonable cost.

7. Safeguard all nationals against unethical practices, such as drug testing studies conducted without informed consent. Women need to be educated, trained, and empowered socially and economically while their human rights are protected from being violated by anyone in any way.
8. Enable the national HIV/AIDS committee, national women's groups and organizations, and the civil society to ensure political will and commitment, such as through lobbying.
9. Support applied research by compatriots in Africa using indigenous or modern methods.

Actors

Actors include individuals, both infected and uninfected; the community; governments; NGOs; collaborating national, subregional, regional, and international institutions.

Indicators

Some of the indicators are the number of communities organized and functioning in the control of HIV/AIDS; the number of information, education and communication groups and clubs; the number of health centres, clinics, homes, and hospitals responding to community health-care and social needs; the number of people seeking assistance at these centres; the rate of new HIV/AIDS infections; the rate of sexually transmitted disease infections; death rates, birth rates, fertility rates and population growth rates; the rate of condom use; and the number of HIV/AIDS rape cases and subsequent convictions. PFA implementation to eradicate HIV/AIDS will be monitored and evaluated regularly by the national multisectoral teams, which will involve experts in this field.

Resources

Governments have the moral obligation to allocate sufficient resources to control the epidemic as a matter of priority. Resources for the community-based approach should be mobilized internally as well. However, access to available tests and medicines should be negotiated externally without the conditionalities that distract nations from their priorities or encourage external dependence.

Mechanisms and structures

National governments will set up national HIV/AIDS committees or their equivalents comprising representatives from sectoral ministries, particularly health, social services, education, finance, and planning. The committees will include representation from NGOs, women's groups, the private sector, and the civil society. The national committees will form subregional and regional committees in which they will involve related subregional and regional organizations to facilitate exchange of information and monitoring of the cross-border interactions that may influence the control of the spread of the epidemic. Experts under the guidance of the national multisectoral monitoring and evaluation team will carry out monitoring and evaluation, and report to the national coordinating and consultative committees with mandate, status and power for effective coordination.

VIII. Access to basic services by the poor and the helpless in African society

Justification

The progress of a nation is judged by the well-being of its peoples with respect to health, nutrition, housing, clothing, transport, and education, and by the care that is accorded those who are marginalized and disadvantaged. Worldwide, the poverty level is highest in Africa— with up to 70 per cent of the population, mainly women, living below the poverty line in several countries. Poor women and children (orphans) head many households. The family is ordinarily the primary source of economic and social protection for those who cannot support themselves because of disability, illness, old age, inflation, low wages, unemployment, or displacement. Unfortunately, urbanization and its

accompanying lifestyle coupled with the poverty that has resulted from the poor performance of most African economies have left the traditional African social welfare system weakened and ineffective. The burden therefore falls disproportionately on women, who have to assume greater responsibility for the care of the poor and the helpless in addition to other productive and reproductive roles. It is important therefore that Governments provide assistance through an alternative social welfare and protection scheme, targeted particularly at the needy who are also helpless. The scheme should run parallel to poverty alleviation programmes to lighten the heavy responsibilities that women carry to maintain those unable to care for themselves.

Some countries have made a start in this direction. Zambia is aiming to reduce poverty from 70 per cent to 50 per cent by 2004 and Mozambique by 20 per cent in 10 years. The social protection programme in Algeria initiated in 1996 aims to preserve the purchasing power of the marginalized groups. It provides financial assistance to poor families, including elderly women and the disabled. Female heads of households are encouraged to seek financial assistance in return for public work organized by local communities. The disabled receive financial assistance, they have free access to education, training, medical services, and they can be integrated into the working world. Poor students receive financial assistance to buy textbooks and other school materials.

South Africa has formulated a social partnership with business and labour to address poverty and unemployment. It provides free medical services for pregnant women and children. Free meals for schoolchildren are provided in South Africa and at one time were provided to schoolchildren in Kenya. Largely a colonial legacy, family allowances are provided to needy families in different forms in countries such as Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Madagascar, and Togo. Allowances are also paid to the elderly and invalids in countries such as Guinea and Sao Tome.

Unfortunately, social security and welfare systems that are operational in some African countries are heavily linked to employment or income-generating activities. For those who are unable to fend for themselves, however, due to disability, illness, early or advanced age, it is the moral duty of the State to ensure that their basic needs with regard to food, clothing, shelter, health, and education are accessible to them. According to the United Nations International Bill of Human Rights, articles 25 and 26 are explicit about these basic entitlements for every human being. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women all reiterate these basic human rights. But the international instruments also underline the responsibility of the State in ensuring access to these rights for those unable to fend for themselves—the disabled, the elderly, the orphans, and the sick.

To this end, a national mechanism is needed for administering a test of individual means, as is done in Seychelles and South Africa, to identify those most needy and therefore eligible to receive services through special social welfare schemes.

Vision

The vision of the Five-Year Plan for Action is, by 2015, to eradicate the absolute poverty that prohibits access to such essentials of life as health, food, shelter, clothing, and education. The Plan of Action will set up and implement the social welfare system in all countries in the region.

Strategic objectives

1. Set up and start operating the social welfare system within the next five years.
2. Set aside a budget to finance the social welfare system.

Strategic actions

To set up the social welfare system governments should—

1. Formulate explicit social policies that respect basic human rights and facilitate those entitled to have access to social welfare services.
2. Develop a social welfare system that ensures access to food, shelter, clothing, education, and health services by the needy elderly, disabled, orphans, and chronically ill.
3. Design programmes to implement the social welfare system for those entitled to its benefits and ensure that the delivery mechanisms protect the dignity of the beneficiaries through a user-friendly approach.
4. Recruit personnel skilled in means testing or train staff in the skill, to identify and register eligible cases as beneficiaries of social welfare benefits.
5. Build safe homes for the homeless.
6. Devise an appropriate mechanism through which wealthy individuals and the private sector can make regular contributions into the social welfare budget, thus promoting a sense of national solidarity and collective responsibility.
7. Place the responsibility for establishing and coordinating the social welfare system under the ministry responsible for social services and national solidarity. This ministry should also be responsible for determining eligibility through the means test.

In collaboration with the Government, NGOs, and the civil society, women's groups should—

1. Organize public canteens to provide free or subsidized food for those eligible.
2. Coordinate with various philanthropic organizations to collect clothing and other assistance for the needy.

Actors

The actors are the Government, the ministry responsible for social services and national solidarity, the civil society, the private sector, individuals, and collaborating institutions.

Indicators

Indicators include the number of social welfare beneficiaries by gender; the amount of money disbursed; the number of needy people, by gender, who use health services and education facilities; the number of women in decision-making roles regarding the social welfare system; the number and categories of institutions catering for the welfare of those who are unable to take care of themselves and are without guardians.

Resources

Resources will need to be allocated from the national budget. Governments should develop partnerships with the private sector, the wealthy citizens, and other national, regional, and international institutions to mobilize the necessary resources for social welfare. The ministry in charge of social services and national solidarity should devise ways to encourage all segments of society to contribute in one way or the other to the survival and care of the poor and helpless, thus promoting national solidarity.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ADB	African Development Bank
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa (United Nations)
HIV/AIDS	human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome
NGO	non-governmental organization
IGO	inter-governmental organization
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PFA	Platform for Action
SAP	structural adjustment programme
STD	sexually transmitted disease
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme