

African Group 1

Committee Background Guide

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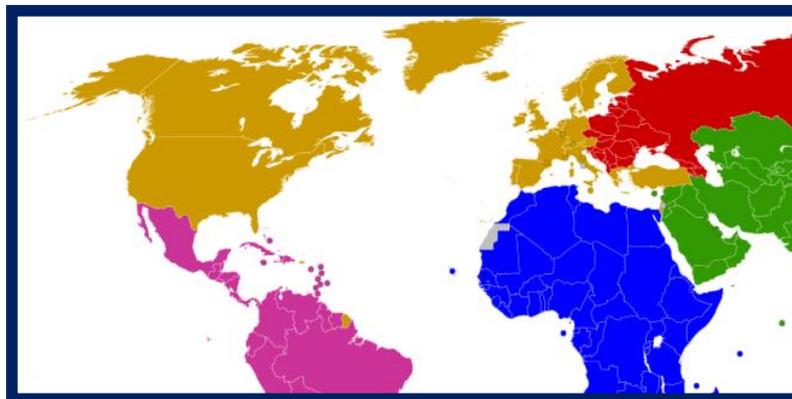
African Group 1

About this Committee

The African Group has 54 members (28% of all UN members), and is thus the largest regional group by number of member states. It is the only regional group that has a territory that coincides with the traditional continent of which its name originates. The African Group has 3 seats on the Security Council, all non-permanent. The Group also has 14 seats on the United Nations Economic and Social Council and 13 seats on the United Nations Human Rights Council.

There are 54 member states

 Algeria	 Ethiopia	 Niger
 Angola	 Gabon	 Nigeria
 Benin	 Gambia	 Rwanda
 Botswana	 Ghana	 São Tomé and Príncipe
 Burkina Faso	 Guinea	 Senegal
 Burundi	 Guinea-Bissau	 Seychelles
 Cameroon	 Kenya	 Sierra Leone
 Cape Verde	 Lesotho	 Somalia
 Central African Republic	 Liberia	 South Africa
 Chad	 Libya	 South Sudan
 Comoros	 Madagascar	 Sudan
 Republic of the Congo	 Malawi	 Swaziland
 Côte d'Ivoire	 Mali	 Togo
 Democratic Republic of the Congo	 Mauritania	 Tunisia
 Djibouti	 Mauritius	 Uganda
 Egypt	 Morocco	 Tanzania
 Equatorial Guinea	 Mozambique	 Zambia
 Eritrea	 Namibia	 Zimbabwe



Regional Information

For many African women, the Beijing platform and the various international instruments their governments have signed have yet to translate into positive changes in their daily lives. They remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy, with poor access to land, credit, health and education. While some of the agreements that African governments have ratified enshrine property and inheritance rights, in most countries women are denied those very rights. Africa is a diverse continent and its problems complex. 'Solutions' should not be made simplistic or be reduced to a single denominator." For example, girls not only need access to primary education, but must also be protected from violence and harmful practices.

Compounding the situation are setbacks such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic that is destroying the health of more women than men in Africa, eroding some of the development gains women had attained. As a result, poverty in Africa continues to wear a woman's face. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of people living in poverty dropped in all developing regions except Africa, where it increased by more than 82 million. Women make up the majority of the poor, as much as 70 per cent in some countries. More often than not, men are more likely to find a job and enterprises run by men have easier access to support from institutions such as banks.

A UN Food and Agricultural Organization study on Benin, Burkina Faso, Congo, Mauritania, Morocco, Namibia, Sudan, Tanzania and Zimbabwe shows that women rarely own land. When they do, their holdings tend to be smaller and less fertile than those of men. Studies also show that if women farmers had the same access to inputs and training as males, overall yields could be raised by between 10 and 20 per cent.

But perhaps the most inhibiting factor is that women in Africa continue to be denied an education, often the only ticket out of poverty. Disparities between girls and boys start in primary school and the differences widen up through the entire educational system. In total enrolment in primary education, Africa registered the highest relative increase among regions during the last decade. But given the low proportion of girls being enrolled, the continent is still far from the goal of attaining intake parity by the end of this year. By 2000, sub-Saharan Africa was the region with the most girls out of school, 23 million, up from 20 million a decade earlier.

The total number of children out of school has declined during the last decade. Between 1990 and 2000, worldwide enrolment in primary education increased from 596 million to 648 million, with the highest increase occurring in sub-Saharan Africa, which recorded a 38 per cent rise.

Policies specifically targeting girls were responsible for considerable improvements in countries such as Benin, Botswana, the Gambia, Guinea, Lesotho, Mauritania and Namibia. In Benin, for instance, the gender gap narrowed from 32 to 22 per cent, thanks to policies such as sensitizing parents through the media and reducing school fees for girls in public primary schools in rural areas.

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reports that girls' enrolments rise relative to boys as the proportion of female teachers increases. Therefore an effective method of ensuring gender parity is to equalize the gender balance among teachers, a strategy Mauritania used to narrow the gender gap in primary schools from 13 to 4 per cent between 1990 and 2000.

Guinea employed a broader approach, making girls' education a national priority during the early 1990s. After assessing the challenges faced by girls in schools, the government embarked on programmes to build latrines, assist pregnant students, distribute free textbooks and increase the number of female teachers. By 2000, the country had more than doubled the number of girls in school and increased boys' attendance by 80 per cent. But in general, Africa has the lowest proportion of female teachers of any region.

Numerous other hurdles continue to hamper the expansion of education in Africa. Austerity programmes constrains educational spending. Governments have little money to maintain existing schools or build new ones

At the family level, households that became poorer often face the stark choice of deciding whom to send to school – and often it was the girl who stayed home. Costs of tuition, the requirement to wear uniforms, long distances between home and school, inadequate water and sanitation, all help to restrict girls' access to education.

Africa, however, has registered improvements in adult literacy rates, which rose 20 per cent between 1990 and 2000. The goal is to raise adult literacy rates by 50 per cent by 2015, from the 1990 level. About half of sub-Saharan African countries have registered moderate increases towards gender parity in this area, UNESCO reports. However, in some countries the female illiteracy rates are much higher than the regional average of about 50 per cent. In Burkina Faso it is 82 per cent, in Sierra Leone 79 per cent and in Benin and Ethiopia 77 per cent.

Many now acknowledge that to enable women to escape poverty, development policies should place more emphasis on their contributions to the economy. Even though women make up a significant proportion of the economically active population, their contribution is not fully recorded because they are mainly engaged in family farming or in the informal sector. In other cases, what they do, such as household work, is not considered an economic activity.

In agriculture, sub-Saharan Africa's most vital economic sector, women contribute 60–80 per cent of labour in food production, both for household consumption and for sale. But while they do most of the work, they lack access to markets and credit. In Uganda, women make up 53 per cent of the labour force, but only sell 11 per cent of the cash crops.

No country allocates more than 1 per cent of its national budget to women and gender issues.” Currently, resources for national programmes for the advancement of women come mainly from external partners.

Africa's progress on the MDGs is gaining momentum. The continent continues to make steady progress on most of the goals. And even though it is unlikely to achieve all the targets by 2015, the rate of progress on several indicators – including primary school enrolment, gender parity in primary school enrolment, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament, HIV/AIDS prevalence rates and the share of women in non-agricultural wage employment – is accelerating.

Almost all countries have a national government body that deals with gender issues. However, in the 10 years since Beijing, these units, departments or ministries “have become weak and unable to be responsive to the challenges presented by the struggle for gender justice,” NGOs declared at an African Social Forum in Lusaka, Zambia. “Poor resource bases, few staff and no power or authority within governments to advance equality and justice for women are just a few of the constraints.”

However, women in some countries in Southern Africa have moved into positions of political influence. In South Africa and Mozambique, for example, women hold 30 per cent of the seats in parliament. In February 2004, Mozambique became the first country in the region to appoint a woman as prime minister, Ms. Luisa Diogo. In Rwanda, women lead the world in representation in national parliaments. There, 49 per cent of parliamentarians are female, far more than the 30 per cent target specified in Beijing. The world average is just 15 per cent.

In 14 of 23 recent elections in African countries, women increased their parliamentary representation. Still, the situation is far from ideal. In the majority of these countries (20), women hold 10 per cent or less of parliamentary seats. In Madagascar, Mauritania and Niger, for example, they occupy less than 5 per cent of seats.

In some countries, the presence of women in parliament has made a difference in the adoption of gender-sensitive policies. Because of pressure from women, some countries now have affirmative action policies, such as quotas, to increase the number of women in decision-making positions. In South Africa, women parliamentarians succeeded in passing various pieces of legislation, such as those legalizing abortion, countering domestic violence and ensuring child support. In Uganda, women parliamentarians helped to adopt legislation making rape a capital offence. In 2003, following a long delay, Mozambique passed a family law considered pivotal for the emancipation of women in that country.

So far, four international conferences on women have been held – Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).

The African Charter on Human and People's Rights has a protocol aimed at promoting gender equality (the Maputo protocol). Once in effect, the Protocol on the Rights of Women would provide a legal framework for women's rights and require states to develop laws that prohibit discrimination. Of the 53 member countries in the African Union, the heads of states of 46 countries signed the protocol, and as of July 2010, 28 of those countries had ratified and deposited the protocol.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maputo_Protocol#Ratified_by

The protocol states that every woman has the right “to the recognition and protection of her human and legal rights.” It includes articles on equality in marriage, access to justice and political participation, protection of women in armed conflict and the provision of education, training and health care. It also upholds women's rights to housing and inheritance. The rights of widows and the special protection of elderly women and those with disabilities are also covered. The protocol contains guidelines on ending traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, which it condemns as harmful to the health of women and girls. Signatories will have to report periodically on progress and to provide financial resources to implement the rights enshrined in the protocol.

Availability of gender statistics

The World's Women 2010 has benefited from an increase in the availability of gender statistics in the last 10 years. The majority of countries are now able to produce sex-disaggregated statistics on population, enrolment, employment and parliamentary representation.

In addition, gender statistics in some newer areas are becoming available. For example, statistics on child labour are now collected by a larger number of countries. Similarly, surveys on time use and on violence against women were conducted in both developed and developing countries although international standards in these two statistical fields have not yet been fully developed.

However, the preparation of *The World's Women 2010* was hampered by the fact that statistics in certain domains are not available for many countries. Furthermore, even the statistics that are available are often not comparable because concepts, definitions and methods vary from country to country. Data are also lacking in detail in many cases.

In other areas, the absence of internationally agreed measurement standards and methods has resulted in a lack of gender statistics relating to disease prevalence, home-based workers, access to credit, the worst forms of child labour, human trafficking, femicide, intrahousehold poverty, individual ownership of land and losses associated with natural disasters.

Challenges:

- The global economic downturn will have significant impacts on women as more of them lose jobs and are forced to manage shrinking household incomes. By arresting capital accumulation by women and drastically reducing African women's individual incomes, women are being crippled in their quest to contribute effectively to the household economy.
- While micro-finance is useful for addressing immediate household needs, it does not lead to women's economic empowerment in a transformative manner.
- Additionally, small-scale women's businesses tend to be focused on traditional jobs such as embroidery, sewing and the sale of food items, with limited opportunities for expansion. Impacts of PRSPs and other development plans which aim at reducing women's poverty call for careful scrutiny, as there is limited evidence to demonstrate that they have resulted in curbing poverty in Africa in any significant manner.
- Compared to the general impressive progress being made at primary level, a mixed picture is presented with respect to attainment of gender equality at secondary and tertiary levels. At these levels, it is observed that both males and females face obstacles in enrolment and retention.
- Although country reports indicate that gender disparities in enrolment and literacy are narrowing in every country, more remains to be done to guarantee equality between the sexes in the sector. In many countries, illiteracy rates among women remain high and disparities between men and women persist.
- Despite commitments to improving women's health and specific targeted action on reproductive health, maternal mortality in Africa remains the highest in the world. In addition, high levels of illiteracy resulting in inability to read and write hinder access to information and services related to sexual and reproductive health including HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.
- In most countries, domestic violence is still regarded by society and enforcement agencies as a private matter. Attitudes of both men and women towards the criminality of domestic violence also tend to impede successful and timely prosecution of such acts. In addition, implementing institutions lack the financial and human resources to be able to carry out their functions and programmes effectively.
- Some issues of violence such as sexual harassment suffer from limited visibility, reporting and prosecution, accentuated by a paucity of related research and data. VAW remains one of the most pernicious consequences of armed conflict.
- Despite progress, obstacles to strengthening women's participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peace-building remain.
- The threat of post-conflict violence remains one of the most persistent obstacles to women's full and equal participation in post-conflict peace-building and reconciliation.

Questions for Research:

1. What are the key issues for your country and region?
2. What action has your country taken to promote the equality and empowerment of women on a national and international level?
3. How is your country promoting the economic empowerment of women?
4. How is your country promoting participation of women?
5. How has your country implemented legislation that promotes equality and empowerment?
6. What legal safeguards are in place for women in terms of key issues such as trafficking, 'honour' crimes, VAW and other issues?
7. Do national polices take account of gender ('Gender Mainstreaming')
8. Does your country keep and submit data on gender equality and the empowerment of women?
9. Does your country promote the sharing of family roles and responsibilities?

Read the relevant guides to the '12 Areas of Action' from the Beijing Platform on the delegate preparation website and the 'useful websites' as a starting point for research

Gender mainstreaming

UNECOSOC formally defined concept:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality

Useful Websites:

Information specific to Africa

http://www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/HLMonAIDS_KeyDataStatsOnGenderEqualityWomenAndHIVaids_20110606.pdf
<http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/databases/ecwpubs/pub.asp>
<http://web.undp.org/africa/mdg/report.pdf> v
<http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/databases/ecwpubs/pub.asp>

African Charter on Human Rights

http://www.who.int/hhr/Human_and_Peoples_rights.pdf

Summary information on NAPS and strategies for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and global gender data:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/westsum.htm>
<http://web.undp.org/latinamerica/>
http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2011.pdf

Gender equality, women's empowerment and the MDGs

Gender equality and women's empowerment is central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Yet, while there are some positive trends in gender equality, there are still many areas of concern. Girls account for the majority of children not attending school; almost two-thirds of women in the developing world work in the informal sector or as unpaid workers in the home. Despite greater parliamentary participation, women are still out numbered four-to-one in legislatures around the world.

Gender equality is a condition for inclusive, democratic, violence-free and sustainable development.



Keywords

Empowerment: increasing the spiritual, political, social, or economic strength of individuals and communities.

Development: planning and building to help improve communities and lives.

Discrimination: unfair treatment of a group based on a certain characteristic.