

Issues Paper
CSW Interactive Panel Discussion on
"Presentation of the review and appraisal processes at regional level -
achievements, gaps and challenges"
4 March 2005, 3 – 6 p.m.

Introduction

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) urged the United Nations system, regional and financial institutions, other relevant regional and international institutions, other relevant regional and international institutions ... to fully commit themselves and contribute to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (para. 38). The Platform for Action further called on the regional commissions of the United Nations and other subregional/regional structures to promote and assist the pertinent national institutions in monitoring and implementing the global Platform for Action within their mandates. This was to be done in coordination with the implementation of the respective regional platforms or plans of action and in close collaboration with the Commission on the Status of Women, taking into account the need for a coordinated follow-up to United Nations conferences in the economic, social, human rights and related fields (para. 301).

To facilitate the regional implementation, monitoring and evaluation process, the Platform for Action requested the Economic and Social Council to consider reviewing the institutional capacity of the United Nations regional commissions within their mandates, including their women's units/focal points, to deal with gender issues in the light of the Platform for Action, as well as the regional platforms and plans of action (para. 302). Within their existing mandates and activities, the regional commissions were asked to mainstream women's issues and gender perspectives and to also consider the establishment of mechanisms and processes to ensure the implementation and monitoring of both the Platform for Action and the regional platforms and plans of action (para. 303).

The General Assembly¹ encouraged all regional commissions to carry out activities in support of the preparations of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" inter alia, through holding preparatory meetings to ensure a regional perspective on implementation and on further actions and initiatives. The results of the regional meetings (see Annex) were presented to the Commission on the Status of Women as preparatory committee for the twenty-third special session.²

The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) encouraged the Economic and Social Council to request its regional commissions, within their respective mandates and resources, to build up a database to be updated regularly, in which all programmes and projects carried out in their respective regions by agencies or organizations of the United Nations system are listed, and to facilitate their dissemination, as well as the evaluation of their impact on the empowerment of women through the implementation of the Platform for Action. (para. 84(e)). Previous to this, the Council had requested regional commissions to assume a catalytic role in exchanging experiences and best practices as well as promoting cooperation in gender mainstreaming on a regional level.³

Ten-year regional review and appraisal

The General Assembly⁴ invited the United Nations regional commissions in collaboration with other regional and subregional organizations and processes, as appropriate, to contribute, within their

¹ A/Res/54/142

² E/CN.6/2000/PC/6 and Add. 1-5

³ A/52/3, Chapter IV, para. 4, ECOSOC Agreed conclusions 1997/2

⁴ A/RES/57/270B, OP52.

mandates, to the review of progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits. The General Assembly recognized the importance attached to the regional and subregional monitoring of the global and regional platforms for action and of the implementation of the outcome of the twenty-third special session by regional commissions and other regional or subregional structures, within their mandates, in consultation with Governments, and called for the promotion of further cooperation in that respect among Governments and, where appropriate, national machineries of the same region, and welcomed in this regard the contributions of the United Nations regional commissions to the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.⁵

In preparation for the ten-year review and appraisal at the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the regional commissions held regional meetings. (see Annex) Meetings of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were held in all regions in conjunction with these intergovernmental regional meetings, and NGOs participated actively in the intergovernmental regional meetings. Each of the five regional meetings focused on areas of particular importance in achieving the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The regional processes provided an important opportunity to reflect on the potentials and challenges in implementation of the Platform for Action at national and regional level, that need to be addressed in the global review and appraisal at the forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Representatives of Governments, United Nations entities and civil society organizations shared experiences on achievements, gaps and challenges, as well as further actions required to ensure full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at national and regional levels. While many achievements have been made over the past decade, progress made varies across the different regions of the world. In all regions, serious gaps and challenges remain which need to be explicitly identified and addressed.

Issues for consideration

In the follow-up to the world conferences on women, the regional commissions have played and must continue to play a critical role supporting the efforts of Member States and developing effective monitoring processes. The challenge is facilitating the development of new and more effective ways of translating the commitments made by Governments, the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations, and civil society, into action programmes to ensure full implementation at national level.

Participants in the discussion should highlight the main gaps and challenges in implementation of the Platform for Action which exist in their regions, including those areas of concern and emerging issues which present specific difficulties, and outline further actions required in their regions for full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Discussion could also highlight the important role of the regional commissions in supporting national-level implementation of the Platform for Action, including through gender mainstreaming. The support provided by Regional Commissions to national mechanisms for the advancement of women and ways in which this could be enhanced should be discussed.

The institutional mechanisms put in place in the Regional Commissions to support promotion of gender equality, including Gender Focal Points, training, and methodology development, should be discussed as well as the ways in which Regional Commissions have incorporated gender perspectives into their own work and promoted gender balance and gender equality within the Regional Commissions themselves.

⁵ A/RES/59/168, OP16.

Annex

The regional plans of action adopted prior to the Fourth World Conference on Women included: the *Jakarta Declaration and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific* (June 1994); the *Regional Platform for Action: Women in a Changing World Call for Action from an ECE Perspective* (October 1994); the *Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000* (November 1994); the *Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001* (November 1994); and the *African Platform for Action* (November 1994).

The regional commissions held preparatory meetings prior to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. ESCAP convened a high-level meeting from 26 to 29 October 1999 in Bangkok, Thailand; ECA convened the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women from 22 to 27 November 1999 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; ESCWA convened an Arab Conference on Integrated Follow-up to Global Conferences from 29 November to 1 December 1999 in Beirut, Lebanon; ECE held a Regional Preparatory Meeting on the 2000 Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action from 19 to 21 January 2000 in Geneva, Switzerland; and ECLAC held the Eighth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean from 8 to 10 February 2000 in Lima, Peru.

In preparation for the review and appraisal at the forty-ninth session, regional meetings took place. ECLAC held the *Ninth Session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean* from 10 to 12 June 2004 in Mexico City. The Conference focused on reviewing the implementation and fulfilment of international and regional agreements and on the analysis of two central themes of strategic importance to the region: poverty, economic autonomy and gender equality; and empowerment, political participation and institution-building. The Mexico City Consensus, which was adopted at the Conference, reaffirmed the decision of participating countries to apply measures in different areas toward gender equality. The Consensus called on Governments to adopt measures in political, social, economic and cultural spheres, including legislative measures and institutional reforms, to ensure the full development and advancement of women of all ages, with a view to guaranteeing their access to justice and their exercise and enjoyment of all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

From 8 to 10 July 2004, ESCWA hosted the *Arab Regional Conference Ten Years after Beijing: Call for Peace in Beirut*. The Conference reviewed and appraised the accomplishments achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005, identified the obstacles to the implementation process, developed initiatives and new measures to expedite implementation and confronted the challenges that obstruct the achievement of development, equality and peace. The Conference adopted the Beirut Declaration, which outlines actions to be implemented over the following ten years to empower women, improve their conditions and increase their participation in political, economic and social life. Additionally, the Beirut Declaration highlighted: the political participation of women at all levels including the legislative, judiciary and executive levels; the role of the media in raising gender awareness and projecting a positive image of Arab women in the West and East; the central role that ESCWA has been playing in raising gender awareness and empowering women; and called upon the regional commission to provide technical assistance in that respect.

ESCAP hosted the *High level Intergovernmental Meeting to Review Regional Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and its Regional and Global Outcomes* from 7 to 10 September 2004, in Bangkok, Thailand. The report of the meeting contained the Bangkok Communiqué which set out gains made over the past ten years, identified gaps, and recognized challenges that lay ahead for the region. The Communiqué reaffirms commitment to the consensus of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It notes significant progress in the formulation of national policies and action plans to promote gender

equality and the empowerment of women, the establishment and the strengthening of national machineries and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, formulation and revision of domestic laws and regulations to eliminate discrimination against women, and affirmative actions to increase women's participation in politics and decision-making. The Communiqué noted the insufficient catalytic role given to national machineries for the advancement of women and insufficient financial and human resources allocation to promote gender equality, and addressed the need for closer cooperation and partnerships with various stakeholders and collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics.

ECA held its review from 12 to 14 October 2004 during the *Seventh African Regional Conference on Women* held in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. The review detailed progress in addressing the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform for Action and emerging issues, and assessed implementation of the regional 1994 Dakar Platform for Action, the Africa-specific content of which raises issues widely reflected in the global Beijing Platform and other relevant global and regional frameworks. The outcome document of the Conference noted that, to accelerate implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, it would be necessary to institutionalize gender mainstreaming through the provision of adequate resources, technical expertise and sufficient authority to those responsible for implementation. The Conference outcome document called upon Governments to regularly evaluate the extent to which political will was translated into concrete results, so as to identify and remedy existing gaps in the implementation of gender policies.

ECE held its *Regional Preparatory Meeting for the ten-year review of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action* from 14 to 15 December 2004 in Geneva, Switzerland. The meeting recognized the similarity of challenges and progress made in most countries but also great disparities, which exist within the region. While progress was made by most developed market economies, a deterioration of women's position was observed in many countries of eastern and Europe and CIS. Main themes of the meeting reflected three areas of particular concern to the ECE member countries: women in the economy (employability and social protection); institutional mechanisms to promote gender equality; and trafficking of women in the context of migratory movements. The chairperson's conclusions, which were the main outcome of the meeting, reaffirm the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, stress the importance of strong and sustained political commitment for achieving full implementation of commitments and draw the attention to linkages across 12 critical areas of the Platform. The document calls for using good practices to address key challenges, which were identified in each of three areas discussed. It also addresses a number of emerging issues such as: mainstreaming gender into economic policies (public budgets, fiscal policy, trade policies), and welfare reforms, broadening and deepening the scope of gender responsive budgets to take into account diversity and to include interactions with employability, social security, ageing population and transforming masculinity, ensuring a gender perspective in the development of new technologies (especially ICT), empowering women in private sector and fostering corporate social responsibility for promoting gender equality and working with men.