

**Regional Preparatory Meeting for Africa on Women and Health**  
**Moderator report**

**Session 3: Empowering women to improve their health**  
Promoting health through knowledge and participation

Ms. Souad Abdennebi-Abderrahim Regional Adviser for the Promotion of women's Human and legal rights (UNECA) moderated Session III on empowering women to improve their health.

The aim of the session was to highlight strategies that can be used to: accelerate women's political economic, political, social and legal empowerment as a means to improve their health; overcome women's lack of access to income, assets and credit; develop legal frameworks that guarantee decent work, labour rights, property rights, and asset ownership for women; and improve women's health literacy and expand coverage of health awareness programmes to empower women to make informed decisions about their health.

The major recommendations for improving women's empowerment to enhance their health that were suggested include the following:

**Economic empowerment:**

- Provision of micro-credit specifically targeted to women and youth;
- Entrepreneurship training;
- Provision of agricultural inputs and other services to boost agricultural productivity;
- Improved access to land and secure tenure for women;
- Improve labour-force participation of women through appropriate policies;
- Strengthen social protection mechanisms to support women's incomes and ability to access health services;

**Social empowerment**

- Reinforce girl child education as it is the foundation for women's empowerment;
- Intensify literacy classes for women to help them fight poverty;
- Train and deploy population and family health advisors into communities who can provide support to women's health through home visits. These advisors can provide training on hygiene rules, feeding, antenatal and post natal care; efforts that can help change behaviour;
- Extend free health insurance coverage to the entire population.

**Political empowerment**

- Increase the participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels: household, local/community, national and regional. This is essential in empowering women to protect themselves;
- Engage in social dialogue to promote gender equality;

- Mainstream gender and health issues in national, sectoral and local development policies;
- Adopt a human rights based approach to development

### **Empower women through supportive legislation**

- Develop legislation that domesticates global conventions that are supportive of women's health;
- Adopt and enforce legislation that empower women to access productive resources, property and investment; and on violence against women.

### **Empowering women with information**

- Health literacy - provide free information on women's health including information on violence against women;
- Disseminate appropriate health information as widely as possible regardless of geographical space;
- Translate into local language and disseminate OIT global instruments ( No 100,111,156,183)
- Share information and experiences as widely as possible within countries, and between countries. Make extensive use of the ICTs (cell phones, internet, radio etc);
- Ensure a secure ICTs environment that is safe from harassment, pornography and sexual exploitation of women and children;
- Invest in awareness raising programmes especially on Sexual and Reproductive health and HIV/AIDS.