

Issues Paper
CSW Interactive Panel Discussion on
“The Role of regional and intergovernmental organizations in promoting gender equality”
10 March 2005, 3 – 6 p.m.

Background

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) calls upon relevant regional institutions, with full respect for their autonomy, to fully commit themselves and contribute to its implementation (Para 38). The Platform for Action further invites regional development institutions to apply gender-sensitive social impact assessment of structural adjustment programmes to overcome negative effects of these policies and to ensure that women do not bear a disproportionate burden of transition costs (Para 59 (f)). Intergovernmental organizations are requested to develop and apply conceptual and practical methodologies for incorporating gender perspectives into all aspects of economic policy-making (Para 67 (a)). The Platform for Action calls for the regional development banks to develop flexible funding arrangements to finance intermediary institutions that target women’s economic activities, and promote self-sufficiency and increased capacity in and profitability of women’s economic enterprises (Para 169 (b)).

The Platform for Action addresses the role of regional and intergovernmental organizations in promoting gender equality in many critical areas of concern. For example, in the critical area of concern “Education and training of women” regional bodies are requested to narrow disparities between developed and developing countries (Para 81, (d)). Intergovernmental organizations are further requested to urge Governments to implement measures aimed at eliminating differences between women and men and boys and girls with regard to opportunities in education and training and the levels achieved in all fields, particularly in primary and literacy programmes (Para 87 (a)). They are further requested to provide technical assistance to developing countries to strengthen the capacity to monitor progress in closing the gap in educational achievements between women and men in all fields, particularly basic education and the elimination of illiteracy; to conduct an international campaign promoting the rights of women and girls to education and to allocate a substantive percentage of their resources to basic education for women and girls (Paras 87 (b, c and d)).

In the area of combating violence against women, regional organizations are called upon to step up cooperation and concerted action by all relevant law enforcement authorities and institutions with a view to dismantling national, regional and international networks in trafficking (Para 130 (c)). In the area of women and armed conflict, the regional institutions are invited to take action to promote equal participation of women and equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making levels (Para 142, (a)). Subregional and regional bodies are called upon to develop mechanisms and training to encourage women to participate in the electoral process, political activities and other leadership areas (Para 19 (e)). Regional bodies are requested to aim at and support gender balance in the composition of delegations to the United Nations and other international forums (Para 192 (i)).

The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) calls upon regional intergovernmental bodies to support government efforts and, where appropriate, develop complementary programmes of their own to achieve full and effective implementation of the Platform for Action (Para 49). Intergovernmental organizations are encouraged to continue strengthening partnerships with non-governmental organizations, particularly women’s organizations, in contributing to the effective implementation of and follow-up to the Platform for

Action (Para 50). Regional organizations are called upon to allocate sufficient resources to regional and national programmes to implement the Platform for Action in its twelve critical areas of concern (Para 84 (c)).

The outcome document calls upon regional organizations to take measures to promote international cooperation to support regional efforts in the development and use of gender-related analysis and statistics (Par. 92 (a)); to continue to support and strengthen regional adult literacy programmes with international cooperation to achieve a 50 per cent improvement in the levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women (Para 95 (f)); to ensure equal opportunities for women and girls in cultural, recreational and sports activities, as well as in participation in athletics and physical activities at the national, regional and international levels, such as access, training, competition, remuneration and prizes (Para 95 (h)). Regional organizations are called upon, as appropriate, to pursue and support national, regional and international strategies to reduce the risk to women and girls, including those who are refugees and displaced persons, as well as women migrant workers, of becoming victims of trafficking (Para 97 (c)). The outcome document requests regional organizations to encourage the establishment and strengthening of multi-stakeholder partnerships/cooperation at all levels among international and intergovernmental organizations, with relevant actors of civil society, including non-governmental organizations, the private sector and trade unions, and women's organizations and other non-governmental organizations, communications and media systems in support of the goals of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Para 102 (b)).

Issues for consideration

Regional and intergovernmental organizations play an important role in implementing international commitments and in promoting gender equality both within the organizations themselves and within member states. The panel should focus on the experiences of regional and intergovernmental organizations in implementing the Platform for Action and the outcome of the special session - achievements, gaps and challenges and required future actions for full implementation. Good practice examples and lessons learned should be shared.

The achievements, gaps and challenges in efforts of regional and intergovernmental organizations to promote and support gender equality in member states through a variety of means should be addressed. These include their support to gender mainstreaming efforts of member states in different policy areas, including for example macroeconomic policies and poverty reduction strategies, as well as encouraging member states to ratify and implement the CEDAW Convention and other relevant regional legal mechanisms to protect women's rights. The efforts of regional organizations to provide direct support to women's empowerment through, for example, support to female entrepreneurship and education and training should also be discussed.

Efforts and achievements made in increasing the representation of women in delegations to the regional and intergovernmental bodies and their active participation in these processes should be addressed, as well as the future actions required in this area.

The discussions should focus on the extent to which the policy frameworks, decision-making mechanisms and programmes and activities in regional organizations and intergovernmental bodies have adequately incorporated gender perspectives. Constraints and challenges, and ways of overcoming them, should be addressed. Progress made in promoting gender equality within the organizations themselves, through, for example, by increasing gender balance in appointments, especially to decision-making positions, and enforcing family-friendly policies and addressing sexual harassment, is another important issue for discussion.