

**SID-DAWN Africa-UNFPA
Africa Regional Dialogue**

**'Building Alliances for Women's Empowerment:
Globalization, Empowerment, Reproductive
Health and Rights'**

14-15 December, 2001. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania



SID

Society for International Development



Globalisation enemy of African women's liberation

Women from media, reproductive rights and economic research and rights activist networks in Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Sengal met for a highly visible press event in Dar es Salaam. The 40 participants, including 12 media representatives, discussed the links between violence against women's bodies, and violations of the environment, the impositions of globalization and women's empowerment strategies. The meeting was headline news in national papers



SID/DAWN Africa Dialogue Participants

of the meeting in an attempt to bring closer the vision provided by the meeting for future alliance building towards African women's empowerment on all levels.

'Correcting gender disparities in socialization and in policies is key to redress imbalances in opportunities for women and men, the challenge for activists is how to apply a human rights framework to counter cultural and religious influences.'

Frontcover: Heidi Lange

The Links: Globalization, Reproductive Health and Rights in Africa

The dialogue placed the issue of reproductive and sexual rights within the context of globalization and neoliberal macro-economic policies. The reality of trying to carry out the promises made at the UN

meetings of the 1990s such as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) given the insecurities, social chaos, breakdown of human values, strains in health standards and

dehumanizing levels of poverty was strongly questioned. The impact of globalization and the heavy burden of debt repayments and structural adjustment programmes do not allow African governments to provide basic rights for their citizens, including economic and social rights that include women's sexual and reproductive rights. The lack of resources to implement the ICPD means that most African governments are adopting an ambivalent position with regards to women's reproductive and sexual health. The gap left by the resources of the current economic and geopolitical climate lead to a grave shortfall in the provision of health and social services that is often filled by religious organizations, hampering further women's rights and empowerment.

As Africa constantly reconstructs itself under the pressure of exogenous factors and internal reactions to these forces the issue of identity is crucial. Oftentimes this has meant subjecting women to cultural and religious controls in order to prove allegiance to their faith or ethnicity. In this complex situation women are seen to be defenders of the family and tradition.

Women activists are increasingly challenging such perceptions. In order to change social and cultural gender inequalities both economic and political changes as well as social changes are needed. This is the complex picture that participants spoke about dealing with on a daily basis in their fight to end sexual violence, ignorance about reproductive rights and health and in the struggle to ensure poor women and their families' sustainable livelihoods and basic securities.



Participants and journalists in plenary session



Bene Madunangu (DAWN) and Mulhoni Wanyeki (FEMNET) listen to Fatou Sow (DAWN Francophone Africa)

Major Concerns for African Women's Empowerment

Political

- There is still a gap in terms of commitments made by governments to a number of international instruments.
- With the exception of South Africa, Uganda and Tanzania



Miranda Greenstreet, SID Governing Council member chats with the Deputy Minister Hon. Shamim P. Khan.

- women are under represented in decision making structures particularly in the highest political structures.
- Democratic systems of governance are missing in most movements/groups such that there are no links between the international, the local and the regional in advocacy initiatives.
- The state organ fails to protect women especially in military situations but also through the preservation of discriminatory cultures.
- Shrinking resources thwart advocacy initiatives at the international, regional and grassroots levels.

Economic

- It is not enough that an individual understands a right but must be able to assert that right. The state's ability to provide basic rights is compromised by international financing and trade agreements.

- Economic policy initiatives have not been

African women need to be innovative in mobilizing their strength, talents and expertise. A lot can be learnt from African women's experience in building alliances in response to the harsh policies that govern their lives.

concurrent with the ICPD and other instruments that aim to put in place a pro-people health policy.

- The GDP is yet to show women's contribution to the economy in actual terms nor does it identify how many men and women are currently marginalized from the economy.
- Most women do not have access to credit and to financial and advisory support services. This requires a legal, political and economic mechanism to protect women nationally and also those who trade in border areas.
- There is need to understand deeper who benefits from economic global governance by re-examining economic policies e.g. high lending rates and push

The African Quarterly, December, 13, 2001

NATIONAL NEWS Gender activists attack PRSB

- for redistributive policies that would enable the poor access markets and wealth.
- There is need for a gendered approach to budgeting and to demystify 'big' language and terminology in economics.



Fatma Albo, founder of TAMWA addresses the gathering

Health Services

- Valuable reproductive health knowledge is not reaching the appropriate people at the right time. Most women spend much time caring for others and not themselves. They rarely have access to correct information about how to protect their reproductive and sexual rights. There is increasing vulnerability of consumers and especially women in the dispensation of health services. Little is being done to research the effect some of the birth control methods on the health of women or to provide adequate technical support in the proper administration of the methods.
- The increasing reliance on religious bodies in service provision has implications for reproductive health initiatives.
- Socio-cultural and economic factors influence the use of medical facilities. For example, decision-making structures in the family often determine a woman's ability to exercise her personal autonomy and cost sharing and high medical cost keeps many poor women from seeking health services.

Cultural

- In Africa, language has been used to divide the continent and it is difficult to translate concepts and hidden messages particularly around cultural change, sexual choice into local languages. The issue of language barrier must be addressed to facilitate an African initiative on women's reproductive health and rights.
- There is a tendency to romanticize the past. African women must articulate an ideology of equality from their own standpoint, drawing from present realities and reject imposed gender bias from outside and within a culture.
- Both men and women have internalized the system of patriarchy and therefore have to work together to challenge the gender stereotypes in order to carry out a reproductive rights agenda.

'Women in Africa do not enjoy the right to reproductive safety. For most it remains a matter of life and death. The magnitude of maternal morbidity, prevalence of STDs and HIV/AIDS and the burden of infertility from conditions that are preventable does not indicate that the women are unaware of their rights. Often they have to access these services by subterfuge.'

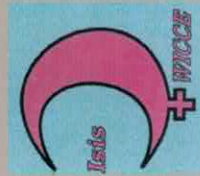
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Doha meeting 'genital mutilation of African economies'

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In Uganda a decentralized system of governance enables women's empowerment by facilitating access to reproductive health services and increasing their participation in decision making at all levels. In Uganda devolution is entrenched in the Constitution and concerns not only executive power but also financial resources of local councils. Various sectors have taken advantage of this system of governance pioneered by the health sector. A notable result of this approach is the reduction of HIV infection rates.



ISIS-WICCE (Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange)

www.isis.or.ug

ISIS-WICCE is an information and communication service, based in Uganda, dedicated to the promotion of social and economic gender equality. The organization boasts a large and comprehensive data base with information on women's issues of all kinds, and programmes confined to specific areas such as violence against women, and women and health. Their publishing and communication programme encourages the intensive use of publications and especially of new information technologies to transmit and exchange information between the organization and universities, research centres, women's rights movements, government agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations and other networks.



AMANITARE (African Partnership for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Women and Girls)

www.amanitare.org

AMANITARE was launched in Uganda in 2000, and is co-ordinated by RAINBO. AMANITARE's goal is to build an influential social movement to institutionalize the recognition of African women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health rights as fundamental to their civil and human rights. AMANITARE is organized into three action groups, each co-ordinated by an African NGO:

- advocating for Freedom from Gender-Based Violence;
- integrating Sexual and Reproductive Rights into Health Services;
- reaching-Out to New Generations.



WOUNGNET (Women of Uganda Network)

www.woungnet.org

This is a relatively new network (founded in May 2000) based in Uganda. It utilizes information and communication technologies, including TV, radio and print media but mainly deploying e-mail and the web, to link women's groups and individuals working in women's issues. In the web site information is detailed on current projects and activities in the following areas: Women and Agriculture, Women and Business, Women and Education, Women and the Environment, Women and Health, Women and Human Rights, and Women Studies. The web site also includes profiles of women's organizations in Uganda, documents on women's issues, data on women in Parliament, and links and resources.



ZaWoN (Zanzibar Women on the Net)

www.zitec.org/zawon

ZaWoN is an organization dedicated to facilitating and encouraging the use of new communication and information technology among women's grassroots groups concerned with development in Zanzibar. The organization provides a space for sharing and disseminating information on economic, social and political issues. ZAWON's aim is to empower women through the use of IT, and to create strong links among them in order to achieve a more effective contribution to issues of development in Zanzibar that affect them.

The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)



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www.africaonline.co.ke/femnet

The African Women's Development and Communication Network is a network that connects African NGOs involved in women's rights activism. The communication and information dissemination among these reinforces their role and influence, as well as aiding capacity building and strengthening mutual support. The organization also aims to foster and maintain close working relationships with governments, UN agencies, the OAU and other institutions and groups with objectives similar to those of FEMNET. The networks' activities, goals and achievements are publicized through events, the mass media and publications.

Alliance Building as Strategic Responses.

There is no formula for effective alliance building. Embedded in women's experiences in the continent is their diversity-cultural, political, ideological, linguistic, historical and ethnic. It is this diversity that is the source of their strength. A good approach in building alliance is to be flexible and have clear aims and to focus on what works by capitalizing on opportunities especially where they overlap with the aims of other partners. To understand the process through which women can exercise their rights dialogue highlighted models that have worked elsewhere that can be shared and that could inform strategies African women can adopt to build alliances across sectors in promoting women's reproductive health and rights.



SID and DAWN in partnership: Falou Sow, Miranda Greenstreet and Wendy Harcourt

NGOs mobilized to raise awareness about sexual violence as a human rights violation. TAMWA lobbied the state to afford greater legal protection to victims. In response, a law 'Sexual Offences (Special Provision) Act' which imposes stiff penalties to culprits of rape and sexual harassment and bans Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) was passed in 1998. There is also greater media coverage of cases and in police records and now a National Plan of Action to Combat Violence Against Women, a joint initiative between the government and NGOs is under way.

"The uphill task for African women cannot be achieved on our own, we have to work across boundaries, with our allies, fully aware of our cultural diversity, and so that our networking will make the difference" Miranda Greenstreet SID

Ghana and Governing Council Member

In South Africa Women's Net has used IT as tool for empowerment

for national NGOs and for rural/local organizations. For example, it has effectively used the Internet to end gender violence, to share information and promote networking, working with community radio and rural telecentres.

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Ukombozi wa mwanamke upo mikononi mwake



- To defeat notions of masculinity FEMNET has undertaken initiatives with religious leaders, in its Men to Men Campaign.
- SANGONET has a training facility that educates women's groups on how to use the Internet strategically to advance organizational objectives such as violence against women and women's reproductive health and rights.
- ISIS-WICCE has run cross-cultural exchange programmes to support women in trauma in war and conflict situations.



Participants in workshop session



The Importance of African Women's Knowledge Networking

Women's groups have to understand the complex role of culture, economics and politics in determining women's health and sexuality. Women's networks thus need to amass data to understand the link between population, development and reproductive health. Since women in all spheres of life constitute the human agency for change, activists need to engage in research to collect data on the changes of women's lives in communities. The importance of gathering such collective knowledge was continually emphasized. There is in particular a need to record and maintain collective memory of activities undertaken by organizations as well as of the history of the feminist movement in Africa and create formal space for reflection on concept and improvements on practice.

In such knowledge building African tradition must be scrutinized not only for its oppressive content but also for evidence of resistance or even evasion to sexist norms and values by documenting what was good and positive and doing away with negative practices. The preoccupation should hinge on emphasizing women as historical achievers: social, economic and political participants in the process of development.



From Swahili Coast, edited by Fatma Albo

The dialogue underlined the need to conduct cultural exchange programmes and learning forums for activist organizations and for partners who are critical in furthering specific aspects of their work together.

- AMINATARE, AAWORD and women's resource centers and institutions can coordinate important knowledge sharing across alliances on African women's realities.
- Networks can together track and document achievements, direct and indirect, in advocacy initiatives. For example, Proof in Print, a journal tracking domestic violence in Uganda published by ISIS-WICCE, was adopted by TAMWA in their domestic violence campaign.

'We need to replace the sexist patriarchal images of African women over the millennia. We need to write the her-story rather than the his-story of African Women'
Bene Madunagu DAWN Africa

The Politics of Reproductive Health and Rights: Recommendations for Collective Action

- Empower women politically so that they not only turn out to vote but also know enough about the candidate for whom they vote, address negative attitudes about affirmative action, lobby for women who are committed to gender justice and equality, empowering them with skills and information so that they can engage more effectively.
- Campaign to make governments accountable for existing disparities between law and practice. Promote political change towards decentralized systems of governance as a way to ensure women's voices are heard. Ensure women's participation in local decision making structures, adopt affirmative action measures where required and encourage civic engagement at national and international levels. Ensure that the Ministry of Women/Gender in each country should monitor compliance and undertake capacity development in gender.
- Lobby to abolish discriminatory laws and enhance a rights

Women meeting to discuss effects of globalisation
By Simon Kivamwo
The UN International Meeting to discuss the diverse effects of globalisation, 10-12 November

- national and international levels. Ensure that the Ministry of Women/Gender in each country should monitor compliance and undertake capacity development in gender.
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socialization approach for gender justice where reproductive rights and health are central by researching and disseminating information about the evolution of religions and economic dogmas. Promote opportunities for women to become good leaders in law and in religious institutions to help African women

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'Devise new plans to end poverty'

claim not only secular rights but also cultural and religious rights. Undertake political analysis of unequal gender relations in the home, community and public places and analyse how gender bias against women in economic, social and political spheres are played out in reproductive rights and health policy.

- Provide indicators of success for reproductive health and rights. Such indicators should: consider participation and representation in decision-making structures; transparency and access to information; accountability in the utilization of resources and in the allocation of budget; the extent of civic engagement at the national and international levels; and equity of access especially to health services in terms of proximity, availability and costs.
- Educate girls and boys in gender aware politics through positive socialization to break the current political culture founded on discrimination against women and to create a supportive environment at the political and social level that promotes the enjoyment of women's health and reproductive rights.



DAWN

DAWN is a network of women scholars and activists from the global South with a strong feminist agenda. The organization mainstreams research and activism on the global environment, in particular on issues of economic and gender justice, and democracy. Their 'global advocacy' initiative involves co-operation with like-minded feminist groups and networks, and engagement with global civil society and social movements. DAWN also carries out regional work, which entails developing and disseminating information on regional issues related to DAWN's research themes, networking with regional women's and development NGOs, advocacy, capacity building —with a special focus on civil society responses to globalization. DAWN publishes a newsletter, DAWN Informs.



Society for International Development

Society for International Development

Created in 1957, the Society for International Development (SID) is a unique global network of individuals and institutions concerned with development which is participatory, pluralistic and sustainable. SID has over 3,000 individual members in 125 countries, 55 institutional members and 65 local chapters. It works with more than 100 associations, networks and

institutions involving academia, parliamentarians, students, political leaders and development experts, both at local and international levels. This makes SID one of the very few organizations that has a holistic, multidisciplinary and multi-sectorial approach to development and social change.

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Supported by UNFPA



For more information:

This leaflet is based on a much longer report by Salma Maoulidi, Executive Director of Shiba Sisters Foundation, her full report, the list of contact addresses and original papers are available at TAMWA (tamwa@raha.com) and SID (wendyh@sidint.org)