

# AFRICAN WOMEN STATEMENT FORMULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUES

## Preamble

The WSSD marks 10 years after the Historical Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, a conference which was attended by over 2,000 women, including grassroots women among them a significant number of African women. Just as women were active in the women's tent in Rio, we envision that the summit in Johannesburg will provide more space for all women, and particularly the African women in whose continent this Summit will take place. During this conference, the women movement will re-launch the Women Action Agenda 2002 and African women are part of that process. Since its birth in Rio, the Women Caucus has continued to be the flag bearer of gender issues in the wave of UN conferences held in the last decade of the 20th century. The Women's Caucus provided space for women in the Vienna Human Rights World conference held in 1993, the International Conference on Population and Development held in 1994 in Cairo, the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in March 1995 closely followed by the Beijing 's Fourth World Conference on Women's in September 1995, the Second United Nations conference of Human Settlement held in Istanbul in 1996 and Finally in the Food Summit held in Rome in November 1996. In the plus five review process, it continued to champion gender issues and is active and kicking in this African Regional Conference. The African women who produce over 70% of the food, manage the continent's natural resources, nurture, care and act as the back bone of our fragile economies in addition to shouldering the heavy burden of conflict, debt and disease among others, wish to take full advantage of this preparatory process while at the same time they can share to the wider circle of stakeholders their concerns on a few critical and emerging issues that have characterized the 10 years since the Rio conference, some of which had very serious negative impact on the Eco-systems and livelihoods and made it impossible to achieve goals of sustainable development in the continent.

## **Critical and Emerging Issues**

- 1) African Women have noted with great concern that although they were present in the Rio deliberations, they have been minimally present in the technical meetings and deliberations which have taken place since Rio, such as the KYOTO protocol, the FCCC and FCCD and also from the *COP* processes. Even though insignificant effort has been made to make accessible to women, documents that have emanated from these processes, more effort needs to be made to disseminate various instruments in appropriate languages.
- 2) The post Rio period has witnessed serious natural and man-made disasters sometimes, catastrophe's in this continent. While the list is endless, we would like to point just a few such as.
  - HIV/AIDS pandemic
  - Increasing Poverty levels now standing at an average of 50% in most countries Civil Strive, conflict over natural resources, and War leading to increasing number of refugees and internally displaced persons

- Bad governance, mismanagement of limited resources coupled with corruption
  - Further marginalisation of persons living in fragile Eco-systems such as women pastorists
  - Growth of informal and unplanned settlement
  - Unfavourable trade agreements such as the WTO coupled with institutionalised piracy on women intellectual knowledge through patenting
  - Debt burden due to the adoption of unfavourable macro-economic policies
  - Lack of resources
  - Women's lack of access to equal opportunities for knowledge, skill development and resources
  - Reciprocal support from governments for drudgery, diminishing living standards resulting from multiple roles of women as major contributors to National Social Capital.
  - Gender Inequality including in environmental governance
  - Growing religious and cultural fundamentalism which reinforces harmful traditional practices
  - Globalisation which is killing national production capacity, local industries and job opportunities, increased job insecurity, child labour, gender based violence and wide spread retrenchment of nationals, particularly women who occupy lower cadre jobs
- 3) Women in this continent have witnessed a rare situation in which a state loses its status as one and therefore ceases to be recognized by the members of the international community such as Somalia and yet it is common fact that the people continue to exist in this statelessness, through embracing alternative governance with inbuilt social network anchored in the African tradition. The international community should respect the alternative governance structures that are in place and identifying with the legitimate civil society working in Somalia
- 4) The near complete absence of women representation in decision making in all fields and particularly in environmental governance has manifested itself in the present unsustainable livelihoods which we confront. Twenty years after Rio no much success will be recorded unless women are brought into the fore of the decision-making structures. This can only be achieved if governments inbuilt targets in this area and make clear and time bound commitments to implement them

## **Recommendations**

- African Governments should mainstream HIV/AIDS issues in all areas of development.
- Governments should put in place relevant policies and legislation to achieve set targets, at least of 30% by 2003 and move towards gender equality, and reform policies that adversely affect family livelihoods
- African coastline as a whole should be protected from dumping of toxic waste and exploitation
- Patenting of traditional knowledge should only be done by indigenous communities and custodians of that knowledge
- Alternative types of governance should be embraced and recognized as safety nets for fragile western governance system and the civil society groups should be given a chance to demonstrate this as the case of Somalia
- Governments should allocate more space and resources should be devoted to African women's participation particularly grassroots women, in the Rio + 10 process through sharing their success stories, best practices, and participating in local, national, regional and international level activities in preparation for the Summit
- The voices of grassroots women and their contribution to sustainable development should be visible and their every day knowledge heard, recognized and rewarded by their governments
- Capacity building of women involved in environmental management, including information technology, should be given priority while at same time putting more effort into the enhancement of the knowledge base of women decision-makers in advocacy and lobbying
- African governments should provide resources to empower women at the national level to avoid reliance on donor sources which sometimes further a northern agenda

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion the African women are encouraged to learn that the WSSD is a bottom-up summit and secondly is willing to face the challenges on sustainable development with a view to committing themselves. In spite of sub-regional variations women in this continent face common challenges. This statement strongly identifies with African governments that are willing to work with women as the head change agents in management of natural resources in a participatory manner. This will not only uplift their status but also truly empower them We call upon Ministers present in this African regional conference to work hard in reducing existing gender inequalities that hamper women from playing their respective role in achieving sustainable development.