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**Where are the women and
how are they today?
An overview of the SADC region**

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Introduction

When the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) was transformed into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) through the SADC Declaration and Treaty of August 1992, the new organisation's Treaty contained only one reference to gender: art. 6 (2) stipulated that neither the organisation nor its member states shall 'discriminate against any person on grounds of gender, religion, political views, race, ethnic origin, culture or disability.' For the rest, the Treaty made no mention whatsoever of women or gender, and even referred to the various positions of 'chairmen' in chapter 5 dealing with the various institutions of the organisation. The ensuing years saw some fundamental changes in and to this approach, discussed and analysed in this paper.

The first section deals with changes and developments within the organisation in terms of its approach to the issue of gender, thereby providing a background and context to the various chapters that follow. Broader continental developments regarding the issue of gender and women are discussed in section 2, paying specific attention to the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Section 3 contains a discussion of the current status of women in SADC, focusing mainly on the issue of women's representation in decision-making bodies at the national level of member countries, but with some other aspects regarding their status and position also briefly taken into account. The purpose is not to deal in a critical manner with the concept 'gender mainstreaming', but rather to offer a descriptive account of SADC's approach to gender and a brief assessment of the extent to which this approach has brought a change to the position and status of women in the various countries of the southern African region.

1. The SADC approach to gender

Although the 1992 SADC Treaty contained no trace of a consciousness of or sensitivity to the subordinate status and position of women in the region, events and processes internationally were soon to change this state of affairs. The idea that special attention should be paid to women if the region was to achieve its development aims was already on the cards during the last years of the existence of the organisation in its previous incarnation as SADCC and despite the 1992 Treaty's lack of reference to gender, it did provide a sufficient legal basis and framework for ways in which to incorporate gender into the structure and activities of the organisation.

The 1995 Beijing Conference and Convention provided the first big impetus for change within SADC as it placed a responsibility on states that ratified the convention to fulfill certain obligations and provided a checklist for measuring progress. The pre-Beijing preparatory workshops were conducted on a regional or sub-regional basis and SADC provided the initial focus point to bring women together, but later also for women as a lobbying opportunity and an 'overseer' of progress in meeting the Beijing demands and targets¹. Gender mainstreaming was established and accepted as a global strategy for promoting and attaining gender equality at the Beijing Conference and each strategic objective identified at Beijing made specific reference to the importance of mainstreaming as the required approach to realize these aims and objectives.² Subsequently the concept and strategy of gender mainstreaming was adopted within the United Nations (UN) system and reinforced in three

1 The February 1999 *SADC Gender Monitor* provides a thorough account of the pre-Beijing preparations in the SADC region, organised and co-ordinated by a regional task force (consisting of representatives from governments and NGOs) that was later (in 1996) to be transformed into a Regional Advisory Committee.

2 UN Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, 2001, accessed electronically.

key documents, viz. the ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions of 1997, the Secretary General's communication on gender mainstreaming in October 1997 and the Outcome Document from the General Assembly in June 2000.

At the regional level the commitment to the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (PFA) resulted in a significant, if not radical, change in SADC's approach to gender and women when the SADC Heads of State or Government signed the Gender and Development Declaration in September 1997, thereby committing the organisation to adopting a policy framework for mainstreaming gender in all its activities.³ For analytical purposes one should note the close link between changes within SADC with regard to gender and women's issues, and changes internationally, reflected by the UN as a universal international organisation acting as a socializing agent of its member states. In the Beijing PFA 12 global critical areas of concern were identified; four of these were prioritized within the SADC region (and dealt with implicitly or explicitly in this book), based on national priority concerns of the organisation's member states:⁴

- Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women.
- Inequalities between women and men in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels.
- Inequalities in economic structures and policies in all forms of productive activities at all levels.

3 Preamble, F (i).

4 The original member states of SADC were Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, with South Africa, Mauritius, the DRC and Seychelles joining the organisation subsequently.

- Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of human rights of women and the girl-child.

Although these four priority areas do not include such areas highlighted in the PFA as persistent and increasing poverty, violence against women and inadequacies and inequalities in access to health care and education and training, these are to an extent included in the above as issues such as women's rights (as and being human rights) or lack of power-sharing and decision-making would, at least theoretically speaking, also affect problems related to poverty, health care, education etc.

With the Declaration on Women and Development in place, SADC obtained the formal institutional framework that could guide its now outspoken commitment to the mainstreaming of gender in all its activities. One of the first steps taken was to establish a Gender Unit within the Secretariat, though only two staff members were allocated to the Unit. In 1998 another milestone was reached when an addendum to the Declaration of 1997 was adopted, dealing with the 'Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children'. Although not initially considered a priority area, this initiative can be attributed both to the UNIFEM campaign of 1998/9 on the elimination of violence against women and children and to increasing levels of violence against women and children in many SADC countries, not only due to internal wars and unrest, but also to domestic violence and battering. Another direct result of the 1997 Declaration was a commitment by SADC Heads of State or Government to the goal of 'Thirty percent women in power by 2005' and, partly in response to the PFA, but also due to the influence and example of South Africa, the idea of an 'engendered' national budget started to

take hold amongst SADC members, opening up potential opportunities for women's economic empowerment.

Yet, bigger and more encompassing changes were under way in SADC in the late 1990s. What with the transformation of SADCC into SADC, new countries joining the organisation and a rapidly changing global environment, especially on the economic front, it was increasingly felt that the organisation's sectoral based approach was inhibiting endeavours to achieve regional integration. At the 1999 SADC Summit it was decided to conduct a review of the organisation's institutions and operations and the recommendations regarding the restructuring of the organisation were adopted in 2001, resulting in a fairly encompassing change in the structure of the organisation. To prepare the way for the implementation of the recommendation a number of changes to the SADC Treaty were made and the opportunity was taken to also amend the outdated and sexist language contained in the original Treaty. Throughout, references to e.g. 'chairman' were changed to 'chairperson' and a new clause was inserted into art. 5 (that deals with the objectives of the organisation): '... mainstream gender in the process of community building'. A detailed analysis of these developments and changes would most probably point to the fact that the 'SADC change of heart' was largely based on an instrumental view of women: the region's goals and objectives would not be met without paying attention to gender. On the other hand, one could also argue that even if the original view was to simply add women and their concerns in order to promote the development interests of the region, this was still a victory for women, as it did open up opportunities for them to at the very least access potential avenues for addressing areas of vital concern to them.

The restructuring of SADC did, however, contain one major change as far as the issue of women and gender was concerned. The mainstreaming *objective* added to the revised Treaty soon became a *strategy*, at least in as far as the structure and functioning of the organisation was concerned. The sectoral based approach was discontinued and an Integrated Ministerial Committee, together with a newly created Department of Strategic Planning, **Gender** and Development and Policy Harmonisation (emphasis added), devised a Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP). In the place of the numerous (and seemingly ever increasing) sectors, four directorates will in future be responsible for SADC activities and programmes, with the Department of Strategic Planning, Gender and Development and Policy Harmonisation overseeing their work. The groundwork for mainstreaming gender has thus been laid in SADC. The extent to which this strategy is paying off and effecting genuine change and improvement in the lives of the women of the region, is a debatable point, but will be explored in section 3.

2. The SADC-AU/NEPAD connection: anything in it for women?

In 2002 the Organisation of African Union (OAU) was transformed into the African Union (AU) and at its inaugural meeting during the Durban Summit of 2002 the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) was adopted as the official economic policy of the new continental organization. In both the AU and NEPAD the various regional organizations, such as SADC, play a key role as 'building' blocs of the continental organization and programme and each SADC meeting duly reports on progress made by it in terms of 'building' the AU and implementing NEPAD.

The AU's Constitutive Act states in article 4(m) that the 'promotion of gender equality' is one of the principles of the organization and as a result of the networking and lobbying by a range of African women's organizations, particularly in the run-up to the Durban Summit, a number of decisions regarding the advancement of gender mainstreaming were taken at the Summit, amongst which were the following:

- 50% of the AU Commissioners (the Commission drives the agenda of the AU) will be women (these appointments have already been made);
- the AU Assembly approved the creation of a Gender Promotion Directorate in the Office of the Chairperson and
- agreement was reached on the principle that the recruitment of senior staff for the Commission should uphold the principle of gender equality.

But despite these advancements, some serious problems and challenges remain as far as the issue of representivity is concerned. Africa does not have a single female head of state or government⁵ and very few female ministers of foreign affairs.⁶ Women are thus under-represented in a number of forums/organs of the AU. With reference to the Executive Council a possibility might be that under the rule that allows a member state to duly accredit any of its ministers (therefore not necessarily the foreign minister) to serve on the Executive, member states might consider accrediting a female minister when it comes to issues of particular importance to women. However, this would mean assuming that women necessarily attend more carefully to women's

5 Mozambique has a female prime minister, but an executive president and heads of states or governments hold power in the AU.

6 The powerful Executive Council that makes recommendations to the AU Assembly consists of foreign ministers.

issues, or behave in ways different from men when it comes to decision-making and it would seem that little evidence exists for supporting such an assumption.⁷

Another problem relates to the Protocol of the Pan African Parliament (PAP) which states that of the five representatives from each state that will serve in the Parliament, at least one should be a woman. This stipulation undermines the SADC commitment to '30% women in power by 2005' and women's organizations will have to lobby the Union, and also their own governments, to have this provision changed. Another aspect that needs attention is that of sufficient mechanisms to ensure input from ministries of gender and relevant civil society organizations on policy making on gender mainstreaming within the AU.

Given the high incidence of civil war and upheaval in many African countries, and in southern Africa in the DRC and Angola in particular, another concern is that the Protocol of the powerful Peace and Security Council (PSC) (which will be the decision making organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts), although expressing strong concern for the need to assist vulnerable persons (including women and children) in conflicts, is not clear on the ways in which it will engage women in the activities of the Council. When appointing the 'Panel of the Wise' (a group of senior political and other leaders on the continent who enjoy the respect of the majority of Africa's people), it might be wise to ensure that women constitute at least half of the panel's members. But again, it is not guaranteed that the appointment of women would necessarily ensure gender mainstreaming in the sense that the concerns, problems and challenges faced by ordinary women would get specific or special attention. Proper gender

mainstreaming probably depends as much, if not more, on mechanisms that allow for focusing attention on gender issues and on the general mind-set of decision makers, be they male or female.

Whereas the AU has since its inception shown some commitment to gender equality and mainstreaming, the same cannot be said of NEPAD. One of the most persistent criticisms of NEPAD is its 'gender blindness': its central goal is to eradicate poverty in Africa and to promote sustainable growth and development. However, in its overall content, structures and strategies there is little that attests to an awareness of the very real and crucial differences between men and women on the continent and the extent to which these differences need to be taken into account and call for differential treatment between men and women. The fact that the NEPAD African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and its Panel of Experts that have called for the implementation of international agreements on gender are now in place, opens up the potential for gender mainstreaming to take be implemented. The APRM could, for instance, develop specific gender-related indices for its review process and could ensure that it appoints women to assist in conducting the reviews. In this way individual countries that elect to be peer-reviewed may be encouraged to pay attention to gender mainstreaming in their policies.

Overall, NEPAD needs to be engendered. If it does not have a commitment to gender equality and does not provide a framework for gender mainstreaming, there is little hope of it being successful. To the extent that NEPAD does pay attention to gender, it is in the way of urging African leaders to promote the role of women in society through, amongst other things, education and training, access to credit facilities and the inclusion of women in political life (i.e. decision making). Such

actions are of course necessary – each of them points to an area of exclusion and/or discrimination against women – but these are mostly areas that are already part of the various declarations and commitments of an organization such as SADC. What is needed, in addition to such calls for the promotion of women’s interests, is a plan of action that would assist in removing systemic barriers to women’s full inclusion and equality in their various societies. Apart from indices that would assist in measuring and monitoring progress towards gender mainstreaming, NEPAD also needs to unpack clearly what objectives and targets are deemed necessary in order to achieve the goal of gender equality. Such recommendations and targets can only be made once all the links between households and the micro and macro economies of countries and regions have been made, identifying the gender gap/s based on women’s subordinate position and status within their different societies.

What is rather worrying about NEPAD is not so much the way in which it fails to take cognizance of women and gender issues per se, but rather the way in which it mixes various approaches, principles, goals and objectives to present, in effect, a rather haphazard and not always coherent approach to development (used here to include growth and the alleviation or eradication of poverty). On the one hand it presents a liberal economic approach to macro economics very much in line with the prevailing view of international financial institutions such as the IMF. On the other hand, it emphasizes that the main objective of the plan is to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development i.e. it is ‘people sensitive’, but a quick glance at some of the sectoral priorities of the programme points to the fact that gender did not come into the analysis at any stage during its development:

- human resources: there is no link drawn between existing macro economic frameworks, based in many instances on the demands of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), and the deterioration that women in particular experience with respect to access to health and education;
- agriculture: there is no recognition of African women's roles as primary producers and therefore no emphasis placed on the need to provide them with better access to skills and knowledge, and to credit, but also, and very importantly so, to access to and control over land as an economic resource;
- culture: NEPAD calls for a return to 'traditional' African cultures, without taking into account the fact that 'traditional culture' is often the very means employed to subordinate women and that what is needed is a far more critical approach to 'traditional culture' in order to assist women to improve their inferior status and position in society. This 'cultural aspect' of NEPAD is particularly worrying because it can be used to perpetuate not only 'traditional' customs, habits and practices that discriminate against women, but also because it will continue to reproduce the vary attitudes and perceptions underlying these customs, habits and practices, reinforcing patterns of gender inequality.⁸

3. Does 'mainstreaming gender' contribute to the improvement of SADC women's concerns?

'The proof of the pudding is in the eating' is an old saying. The institutionalization of mainstreaming gender in organisations such as SADC and the AU and in the NEPAD programme does not necessarily translate into benefits for women or an improvement in their condition.

The realization of organisational goals and objectives are dependent on a wide range of conditions, not least of which are the political will of member states and general global trends and events. Countries sign and even accede to international conventions in their droves, but genuine fulfillment of the obligations entailed by such conventions is not guaranteed. In this section an attempt is made to assess progress made in the lives of women, especially as far as empowerment is concerned, with regard to women's participation in decision-making structures at the national level of SADC member countries by exploring progress made in terms of the goal of 'thirty percent women in power by 2005'. Some attention is also paid to the economic conditions of women in the region.

SADC as an organisation perceives the goal of '30% by 2005' (often also referred to as 'beyond 30% in 2005') as being one of the most important ways in which gender could be mainstreamed in the region. Placing this goal as one of the two top commitments in the Declaration on Gender and Development attests to the primacy given equality as a means of empowering women, as does the fact that under-representation of women in politics and decision-making was identified as a critical area of concern by the region in the aftermath of the Beijing Conference. Gender equality is perceived to be both part of the solution to the problems and inequities suffered by women and as a strategy for sustainable development in the region and equality is viewed as a fundamental human right.

By mid 1999 the average representation of women in parliaments in the region was 15% with only five member countries above this average. An average of 11% of cabinet ministers in the region were women. In an address to a conference on 'Women in politics and decision making in SADC: Beyond 30% in 2005' organized by the SADC Gender Unit in

March 1999, Botswana's President Mogae explained the new emphasis on enlarging women's representation as follows (summarized):⁹

- equality is a fundamental human right and a pre-requisite for democracy;
- women are mostly concentrated at the middle management level of the civil services of member countries, but at this level they have little impact on the outcomes of decision making;
- women make a qualitative difference in political debates and decision making, strongly focusing on 'quality of life' issues and favouring increased budgetary allocations to the social sector, provided of course that there is more than just a token representation of women.

The assumption is that in order to make this qualitative difference there needs to be a 'critical mass' of women represented in order for them to make a genuine impact and not to be sidelined, silenced or turned into 'honorary men'. It would therefore seem that despite the rather top-down approach inherent in this strategy, it makes sense to focus on issues of representation and to attempt, over time, to broaden such representation to the private sector and professions as well. In short, the promotion of '30% women by 2005' reiterates and confirms the importance of power politics because unless one concentrates on the political power centers, be these at the national or sub-national levels, it would be very difficult to ensure the broadening of female representation and the necessary support for and realization of community-based and/or gender sensitive development policies. However, to what extent have these assumptions been proved correct within SADC member states?

As a starting point one can look at the actual 'success rate' of the '30% women by 2005' goal. By mid 2004 the percentage of women in parliaments in the region had increased somewhat and it currently is as follows:¹⁰

Angola	15% ¹¹
Botswana	8%
DRC	NA ¹²
Lesotho	13%* ¹³
Malawi	8%
Mozambique	28% ¹⁴
Namibia	19%
Seychelles	24%
South Africa	32,8%*
Swaziland	7%
Tanzania	16%
Zambia	10%
Zimbabwe	9%

Although the up-coming elections (in 2004 and early 2005) in a number of countries in the region may change the above percentages, it needs to be pointed out that the average for SADC member countries currently is approximately 19%, up 4% on the figures for 1999 (see above). Progress is therefore slow with no expectation of achieving the 30% goal for the region by 2005. A number of reasons could explain the slow progress.

10 Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa will hold general elections in 2004. Statistics for these countries therefore pertain to their last elections (1999).

11 The last general election held in Angola was in 1992.

12 A general election was held in 1993, but the country is currently ruled by a transitional government. No data and female representation is available.

13 An * indicates a parliament with a female speaker.

14 A female prime minister was recently appointed in Mozambique – the first woman to achieve such a position in the SADC region.

On the one hand, several heads of states or governments actively promote and encourage greater female participation and representation in national assemblies and senior positions such as speakers, cabinet positions and other senior positions. In South Africa, under both the Mandela and Mbeki presidencies women were appointed to senior cabinet positions (moving away from the rather traditional position that women, when in these offices, should be appointed to the so-called 'soft' areas such as social welfare). At present, 41,2% of cabinet positions are filled by women. In Botswana, 25% of cabinet ministers are women (up from 16% before the last election held in 1999) and the governor of the country's central bank is also a woman. Botswana's President Mogae made use of his prerogative to appoint 7 out of the legislature's total of 47 seats to increase the number of women representatives and this is where one gets to some of the underlying reasons for the continued low percentage of women in decision-making positions.

It seems that in several African countries, still steeped in traditional societal values, there is some resistance to voting for women, but also, importantly, women often fail to make themselves available for election. This is well illustrated in the case of Zambia, where its president, Mwanawasa made the following comments recently:¹⁵

Despite the fact that 150 parliamentary seats were open for contesting in 2001, only 19 women applied to stand on the MMD ticket [the ruling party] and 12 of them were elected...chances of reversing the gender imbalance in parliament and other decision making bodies would be higher if more women availed themselves as candidates.

Yet it is not only a case of persisting traditional values that preclude women from 'making themselves available' or people from voting for female candidates. The liberal principle of 'merit' also plays a role in a country such as South Africa for instance. Its main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, argues that 'women's social and economic opportunities need to be developed in order for women to be substantively more equally represented on the basis of merit rather than just as "window dressing"'.¹⁶ Men, it seems, are already represented in droves on account of merit as there is no argument made that male candidates should also pass the 'merit test'. In other words, there is still a strong current of thought that for women to be elected to senior positions, they need to prove themselves in order to be included in decision making structures whereas the same standards are not required of men.

It becomes clear then that traditional views of women, including traditional liberal assumptions, still determine to a large extent the voting habits of citizens and that women themselves, in many instances, still associate themselves with either an inferior position in society or that they believe/fear that even should they avail themselves of opportunities to be elected to public office, they would not be taken seriously. This type of 'societal resistance' to the full inclusion of women into decision making bodies, has so far been dealt with in a top-down fashion. Heads of states and governments use their powers to include women through constitutional prerogatives (as in the case of Botswana) and/or appointing elected women to senior decision making positions (cabinet posts, positions as deputy ministers, speakers of parliaments and other high public offices). This trend is also evident in the AU where 50% of the positions of AU commissioners are women and where

15 *Times of Zambia*, 1 April 2004.

16 Bentley, 2004.

a woman (Gertrude Mongella from Tanzania) was recently elected as speaker of the newly established Pan African Parliament (PAP). To an extent then it would seem that the inclusion of women into public office is very much an elite activity that does not necessarily reflect societies' approaches to or a commitment to the issue of gender and the position and status of women.

But, relying on the will of a president does not necessarily create opportunities for women to access public office. During the August 2002 party congress of SWAPO in Namibia, President Nujoma was forced to withdraw his plans to have 21 women nominated to the party's Central Committee. A furious debate surrounded his attempts at including more women into the 'heart' of party decision making and eventually he was forced to accept a resolution that *in future* the party would 'consider' reserving 21 seats for 'women comrades'. Only 13 women were elected to the 83-strong Central Committee and the president's original plans sent 'a wave of panic through the old guard' who vigorously opposed attempts to have a quota for women.¹⁷

A similar phenomenon can be observed in Zimbabwe currently in the run-up to the 2005 elections. At the ZANU PF Women's League conference President Mugabe indicated that women should be included in the top leadership echelons, an indication that he might be amenable to the idea of a female vice president. According to one report¹⁸ 'the female dimension has caused consternation among aspiring candidates for the country's top jobs'.

In Swaziland, widows have to go through a mourning period of two years during which they may not appear in public, thereby not being able to cast their votes or run for public office. Women are not allowed to own property,

17 *The Namibian*, 27 August 2002.

18 IRIN, 9 September 2004.

obtain bank loans or enter into contracts without the sponsorship of a male relative and despite its membership of and official support for SADC initiatives, including the organisation's Gender and Development Declaration of 1997, the Swazi government has not yet changed any of the state and society's discriminatory practices against women.¹⁹

Following from the above – a somewhat mixed record within the SADC region when it comes to women's representation in decision making forums – a next question becomes important: to the extent that mainstreaming has been adopted as a strategy to promote gender equality and equity, how successful has it been? Has the position of women in the SADC region improved over the past decade since the adoption of the gender mainstreaming 'doctrine' that aims at gender equality (rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on a person's gender)? Again, the answer presents a rather mixed bag.

At the regional level, SADC has, as mentioned in section 1, adopted an organizational restructuring that now allows for mainstreaming to be inherently part of the organisation's activities, brief, responsibilities and decision making processes. The SADC Parliamentary Forum has already attained the goal of 30% women's representation and 'gender mainstreaming' as such has been identified as a budget priority of the organisation for the financial year 2004/5.²⁰ Yet there is little evidence that these changes have so far in and of themselves benefited women at the grass roots level. In Botswana, for instance, there is a constitutional prohibition against gender-based discrimination, yet a plethora of legal exceptions in the areas of marriage, divorce, burial, inheritance etc limit women's opportunities to improve their status and situation. The poorest

19 IRIN, 12 March 2003.

20 SADC Media Briefing, 17 March 2004.

urban female-headed households still have disposable incomes of only 46% of the incomes of the poorest male-headed households.²¹

In Zimbabwe, having taken four years to be completed and adopted, a National Gender Policy was unveiled in early March 2004, containing a call for more women's representation in parliament, yet it was pointed out that although preparations for the parliamentary elections to be held in 2005 were far advanced there was little indication that more female candidates would participate. The chairperson of the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe pointed out that what was needed, were more laws 'that will be in line with government's commitment to address issues of gender imbalances.'²² With an increase in political instability and turmoil in Zimbabwe, international human rights agencies such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International report a 'dramatic' increase in the rate of politically motivated rape²³, a situation also prevalent in war-torn DRC.²⁴

In general, the gender picture in the Southern African region looks bleak and there is not much evidence that women have so far benefited from gender mainstreaming as a strategy to encourage equality. In Malawi a disproportionate number of female headed households are in the lowest quarter of income distribution, women constitute less than 5% of managerial and administrative staff in the formal labour market and 18% of females are subjected to genital mutilation (FGM) with government not taking action against such practices. In the southern African region, as in the rest of sub Sahara Africa, two thirds of those under the age of 24 infected with HIV are women. In Mozambique, six provinces are

21 IRIN, 11 March 2004.

22 IRIN, 11 March 2004.

23 *The Sunday Independent*, 28 March 2004. See also IRIN, 8 April 2003.

24 IRIN, 1 April 2004.

threatened by the combination of drought, poverty and HIV/AIDS with women the majority of household heads, battling for survival amidst famine and disease. 60% of woman headed households live in poverty, compared with 31% of male headed households.²⁵

It is the economic discrepancies between male and female within the region that provide the most glaring differences between the lives of men and women. Even though GDP per capita (PPP adjusted) does not present a complete picture, it provides at least a good indication of where women are and how they are faring, compared with their male counterparts.²⁶

GNP per capita (PPP US\$)

	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>
Angola	568	1 102
Botswana	3 747	8 550
DRC	590	1 060
Lesotho	982	2 291
Malawi	432	616
Mauritius	4 375	12 266
Mozambique	647	921
Namibia	3 513	6 852
South Africa	5 205	11 886
Swaziland	2 267	5 485
Tanzania	400	561
Zambia	540	903
Zimbabwe	1 990	3 359

What is interesting is that some of the poorest countries have relatively smaller income disparities between male and female, for instance, in the case of Malawi and Tanzania, but not in the DRC and Mozambique,

²⁵ *The Sunday Independent*, 28 March 2004.

²⁶ From *UNDP 2000*. What is necessary, though, is a comparative study of changes over time, something that the present study does not attend to (the latest *UNDP 2004* Report does not contain gender-disaggregated data).

which does not mean that one can assume that in very poor countries men are relatively speaking as poor as are women. On the other hand, the three countries with the highest GDP (Mauritius, South Africa and Botswana) have very big income disparities between men and women. These 'anomalies' confirm the principle that economic growth does not necessarily translate into economic development and a broad distribution of economic gains and points to the need for concerted efforts, e.g. through gender mainstreaming, to ensure that all members of a society benefit from growth.

One does of course need to take into account that gender mainstreaming was only adopted as an official strategy for the achievement of gender equality in 1998 in the SADC region, and in 2002 by the AU. It would be unreasonable to expect huge improvements in a time span of between 4 and 6 years and it might be useful for women's organisations and gender units/desks/focal points in the civil services of the SADC member countries to do a thorough audit (as is already prescribed by SADC) on an annual basis in order to measure and monitor success in the implementation of mainstreaming.

Conclusion

When all is said and done one cannot but ask whether gender mainstreaming, and its apparently biggest success (a moderate increase regionally in the number of women represented in parliaments or appointed to cabinet positions) over the past several years, have genuinely made a difference to women's lives in southern Africa, except, perhaps, amongst the elites of the countries of the region. From a class analysis perspective it would seem that women from the working classes and peasantry have not fared well despite 'paper commitments' by their

various governments to gender equality. Various explanations can be offered for this situation, some already hinted at in the previous section.

A commitment to gender mainstreaming does not easily translate into action and positive results. A lack of skills, knowledge and resources regarding the requirements for successful gender mainstreaming and implementing decisions and policies goes part of the way to explain the apparent failure of such a strategy. But the persistence of traditional views on the inferiority of women and the concomitant acceptance of their subordination also play a key role. Little will change unless processes of socialization, and the content of these processes, change. Education needs to be 'engendered' and the challenge is to move from lip service to genuine implementation of gender equality. Yet, such a solution is also trapped in the sense of being a circular argument – in order to improve the status and position of women we need to change values and in order to change values we need better policies and to get better policies we need more women in decision making positions and in order to get more women into these positions we need to change the status and position of women.

The above does not mean that it is impossible to improve the quality of life of women, nor that working towards the goal of gender equality is an impossible dream. Rather, it points to the fact that various strategies and processes need to be put in place in order to achieve equality in the long run. One such a strategy is to get more women into decision making positions. Such a strategy does not necessarily make a difference: South Africa, having attained the 30% women in power goal, went to the polls in 2004 with explicit gender and women's concerns largely absent from

election manifestos and debates.²⁷ There is little evidence, at least within the region, that the relationship between gender inequalities and the position of women is recognized or considered to be important by women voters, nor, it would seem, has a type of ‘womanist’ agenda developed that cuts across broad divisions within society, such as race, class, ethnicity, culture and religion.²⁸ An absence of such recognition and consideration might even be considered to be undermining attempts at gender mainstreaming. Yet such a strategy (more women in decision making positions) is not the sole solution to the problem of continued gender inequality – it is a necessary, but not sufficient approach within gender mainstreaming. Other strategies are as important. Amongst these are the need for capacity building for senior civil servants at all levels of government, as well as for technical and programme staff and managers, and also proper reporting and information gathering capabilities. Without knowledge about the status and position of women and the ways in which these can be addressed by government (also through partnerships with civil society, in particular community-based organizations) and without the necessary resources, both human and material, there is little benefit to be expected from commitments to gender mainstreaming.

It cannot be denied that on paper at least gender and gender mainstreaming have been placed on the agenda of African organizations. Legal frameworks for working towards gender equality have been put in place by both the AU and SADC (though still lacking in NEPAD), but many of the broad principles and commitments of these organizations still need to be fleshed out and operationalised. Women will have to continue to put pressure on these organizations and on their

27 *The Sunday Independent*, *ibid.*

28 For a South African case study, see S. Hassim, 2003, ‘Representation, participation and democratic effectiveness: feminist challenges to representative democracy in South Africa’.

national governments to ensure that the promises contained in the numerous declarations and protocols on gender are realized.

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