



Make **Every** Woman Count

Promoting the Empowerment of African Women & Girls

Volume I, Issue I

Make Every Woman Count Newsletter

July 2011

Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of Make Every Woman Count (MEWC) E-Newsletter. Now, not only do we offer our frequently updated website, but for individuals who don't have the resources to visit the website daily to kept abreast of current issues, we offer the MEWC E-news. We hope this comprehensive monthly news publication will give you the best overview of some of the most important topics affecting African women and girls.

Make Every Woman Count is a young women-led organisation committed to actively promoting and advocating for the empowerment and rights of African women and girls and to raise awareness of the African women's Decade.

Our mission is to provide accessible, timely and accurate information, resources and tools to strengthen the work of African women's rights advocates, grassroots, and activists to effectively promote the economic, political and social rights of African women and girls; and to inspire and support young women to be the future generation of African leaders.

By launching the African Women's Decade, the African Union officially puts women at the centre of every initiative or work that will be undertaken in Africa by the African Union, and its members states, the UN, the EU, International or local NGOs as well as all institutions, public and private companies. The Decade is an opportunity for African Governments to back up their commitments with actions.

We need to work to ensure that women have a real voice in all governance institutions, from the judiciary to the civil service, as well as in the private sector and civil society, so they can participate equally with men in public dialogue and decision-making and influence the decisions that will determine the future of their families and countries. We can't develop a continent if half of the population is left behind.

MEWC strives to strengthen the roles of African women's rights advocates, grassroots, and activists in their work promoting the empowerment of African women and girls by providing up-to-date informational resources. As we believe that access to education, training, information, and resources are key to the **empowerment** of African women and girls.

At MEWC we believe that as long as women are seen and dealt as victims, they will not be allowed to participate in decision-making, peace-processes, and decisions that will determine the future of their countries. Women need to be considered as agents of change so that they can participate in the economic, social and political development of the continent.

We hope that our website, in the context of African Women's Decade, will provide women with the tools they need to become agents of change. In 10 years, we need to look back at the African Women Decade and be proud of what we have achieved together.

Rainatou Sow - Founder & Director of MEWC

Top Women, Peace & Security News

[SUDAN: COMMITTEE ON UN RESOLUTION FOR WOMEN LAUNCHED IN ZALINGEI](#)

Source: UNAMID

Unanimously adopted on 31 October 2000, Resolution 1325 is a landmark legal and political framework, which specifically addresses the impact of war on women, and it stresses the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in all efforts to maintain and promote sustainable peace and security. The resolution underscores the responsibility to protect women and girls from human rights abuses, including gender-based violence, and emphasizes the vital importance of mainstreaming gender perspectives in all aspects of conflict.

[NIGERIA: KADUNA – WOMEN INVESTING IN PEACE](#)

Source: Congolese Women's Group

Participants trickled into the venue, most of them delayed by the rain while the organisers were busy putting finishing touches to the hall decoration. The women had organised interfaith activities in the past, including an interfaith dialogue and a book launch. The sensitisation seminar for key stakeholders which was held on July 5 2011 at the Women's Multipurpose Centre in Kaduna.

Top Violence Against Women News

[SOUTH SUDAN: BORN INTO CRISIS – VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTINUES](#)

Source: IPS

Violence against women is rampant, devastating and tolerated in South Sudan and the new country needs to address these gross human rights violations and train people, especially soldiers, to respect women's rights.

[SOMALIA: SOMALI RAPE SURVIVOR REBUILDS LIFE](#)

Source: UNHCR

Somalia has been plagued by decades of woes – persistent conflict, waves of natural disasters and drought. While these crises make headlines, the country's embattled people – a quarter of whom have been uprooted – also face personal tragedies that are no less devastating.

Top Political Participation News

[KENYA: MUMIAS ELECT FIRST EVER WOMAN MAYOR](#)

Source: *the State*

Councilor Lilian Osundwa was yesterday elected the first woman mayoress of Mumias Municipal Council. She succeeds nominated councillor Rashid Omwendo who has held the seat from July 2009.

[GHANA: TIME TO ELECT A FEMALE GHANAIAN LEADER](#)

Source: *Peace FM Online*

Experts on Gender Equality and Democracy have unreservedly supported Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, the founder of the 31st December Women's Movement and now the increasingly popular presidential female candidate for the next 2012 elections, to raise Ghana further on the global stage for promoting democracy and women's status.

Top Economic Empowerment News

[KENYA: TODAY WOMEN ARE INVESTING IN REAL ESTATE, NOT SUFURIAS](#)

Source: *the Star*

Millions of people in Africa, especially women, have no access to adequate housing, no security of tenure and are at risk of being forcefully evicted. Mass evictions characterised by police brutality and sexual violence against women have been witnessed, leading to loss of lives and property — pushing them deeper into poverty.

[RWANDA: FISHING IS ALSO WOMEN'S BUSINESS \(SYFIA GRANDS LACS\)](#)

Source: *Farm Radio Weekly*

A woman paddling a canoe no longer arouses curiosity in eastern Rwanda. While still not a common sight, you can readily spot women wearing orange life jackets and sitting alongside men, paddling canoes and fishing on Lake Rwakibare.

Top HIV/Aids & Reproductive Health News

[ANGOLA: SYPHILIS TEST ON PREGNANT WOMEN CAN SAVE BABIES](#)

Source: *Angola Press*

The life of thousands of babies can be saved annually if pregnant women do the syphilis test, since early treatment can prevent contamination of the foetus.

[KENYA: MORE CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING FOR HIV-POSITIVE WOMEN URGED](#)

Source: *Plus News*

The Kenyan government is taking steps to incorporate screening for cervical cancer - one of the biggest killers of women of child-bearing age - into HIV care, but health workers say low awareness means the uptake of this vital service is low.

Human Rights of Woman

[RWANDA: LET US UNITE IN SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS](#)

Source: The New Times

The latest UN Women report released on Wednesday, in New York, once again positions Rwanda as the country with the highest representation of women in politics and participation in the development of their country.

[SUDAN: UNIQUE CHANCE FOR SOUTH SUDAN TO HERALD WOMEN'S RIGHTS](#)

Source: Huffington Post

On July 9th, South Sudan will declare its independence, becoming Africa's newest nation. The challenges it faces are many. 50 years of war and conflict have seriously undermined the capacity of institutions at all levels to provide justice. Scores of cases of human rights violations and abuses, including sexual violence have remained uninvestigated, unprosecuted or unpunished.

Featured Resources

[TALKING GENDER TO AFRICA](#)

Source: Africa Research Institute

International donors have sought to improve the social, political and economic position of women in Africa through an approach known as “gender”. This donor-driven strategy is failing. The jargon of gender programmes is ambiguous and easily misunderstood. It fosters inaction and lip service on the part of patriarchal African governments and civil servants. Gender has become the preserve of the educated elite. The voices of African women have been lost.

[FROM CONFLICT AND CRISIS TO RENEWAL](#)

Source: UNFPA

The release of the 2010 edition of the State of World Population report coincides with the 10th anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325, which recognizes and seeks to address the vulnerability of women and girls to violence during and after armed conflict, and the absence or low level of women's representation in efforts to prevent war, build peace and restore devastated societies.

Upcoming Events

“MOVING THE AGENDA FORWARD”

Source: Sexual Violence Research Institute

Date: 10 October 2011

Location: Cape Town, South Africa

In 2009, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative held our first international conference on evidence based approaches for sexual violence, with emphasis on developing countries. People from around the world came together to debate, discuss and share new ideas and innovations for research on sexual violence. An important output of the SVRI Forum 2009 was the identification of some key research priorities. Building on the research priorities identified at this event, the SVRI would like to invite researchers, policy makers, funders, survivors, gender activists, service providers and others to network, share ideas and exciting strategies, and to feed into important international campaigns currently underway to prevent and respond to sexual violence globally.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PROMOTING PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Source: Somalia International Rehabilitation Centre

Date: 23 September 2011

Location: Lund, Sweden

The Horn of African conferences have since its inception focused on issues related to peace, security and development. So far, none of the conferences has yet had an explicit focus on the linkages between gender, peace and development. This time the focus of the conference is set on these linkages. We know that the violence has had disproportionate effects on the lives of women. Often as targets of extreme forms of violence, women in the Horn of Africa experience the full impact of violent conflict in the region as civilians and combatants, but are generally excluded from the decision-making processes that ignite wars or put an end to hostilities.

Interview of the Month

AFRICA: OUR INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH WITH FAIZA JAMA MOHAMED

Faiza Jama Mohamed holds a Masters in Business Administration from the California State University at Fresno. She also acquired a human rights diploma in 1998 from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) at The Hague, The Netherlands, and has over 20 years of experience working with international organizations. She has been Equality Now's Nairobi Office Director since 2000. Prior to that she was an active member of the women's movement in Somalia for many years and was instrumental in the coalition building of women's organizations with a focus on promoting peace, gender equality and advocacy for women's rights. In 1998, she received the Hundred Heroines award for recognition of her activism in support of the human rights of women in Somalia. In 2008, she was awarded the Africa prize of the Hunger Project (http://www.thp.org/learn_more/speeches_reports/speeches/faiza_jama_mohamed_africa_prize_2008). She currently serves as a member of the African Union Women's Committee, which advises the Chairperson of the Commission on women's rights issues and is a member of the African Women's Rights Observatory (ARWO) panel, which was launched in April 2007 by the Africa Center for Gender and Social Development of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). She also serves in the Oxfam International Pan Africa Advisory Group since January 2010 and is a Board member of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network which she joined in 2010.

1. In October 2010, The AU launched the African Women's Decade 2010-2020, what are your thoughts about this landmark Decade?

The African Women's Decade is a testimony to the African Union's (AU) commitment to African women's rights realization and advancement. Those who have been following the AU's work would know that in 2003 the Heads of State and Government adopted an important Protocol on the Rights of Women and a Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa in 2004 in which they committed to implementation of the Protocol's provisions amongst other critical areas to ensure that women are enjoying the various rights provided for therein. Unfortunately most countries have been slow in honoring their commitments and the African Women's Decade is therefore a great opportunity to keep them focused on the work that needs to be done in terms of enabling gender equality and most of all so that women enjoy exercising their rights. It also gives us, i.e. human rights activists, the opportunity to step up our advocacy and holding governments accountable to delivering on their commitments to women.

2. What are the challenges of the decade and what African women and girls can expect from this decade?

Well, the expectation is that African governments will demonstrate concrete actions that bring about positive changes in the lives of many women and girls in Africa during 2010-2020. The Decade focuses on one theme each year and countries are expected to heighten their efforts under the theme of the year with a view to addressing obstacles and investing resources in removing such identified obstacles paving the way for workable projects that empower women to enjoy their rights. The question is whether governments will show political action to deliver on their commitments. Several countries have nationally launched the Decade thereby taking the initial step towards the objectives of the decade. Also, the decade has kicked off in an era of world economic crisis; and political crisis in several countries that led to

conflict and civil war as is the case in Libya, which is one of the AU's major contributors, etc. Hence all these represent a challenge as stability and resources availability are critical factors in implementing national programs geared at realizing the AWD's objectives.

3. What are the most pressing issues for women in Africa? and what are the primary actions to take in response to those issues?

Removal of discrimination, both in law and in practice, as this greatly hinders women's economic, social and political rights. Inheriting land and properties from their husbands which many are often denied by in-laws; maternal health problems and death is a critical issue for many countries though improvements have been observed in some countries; overall working women have lower earnings; sexual violence against girls in schools and early marriages is a major setback to many girls whose aspirations for personal development are cut short; and trafficking and prostituting vulnerable women is also another violation that is most neglected. The Protocol on the Rights of Women has provided a legal framework to address all these issues. Countries that have ratified it need to initiate review of national laws to bring them into compliance with the Protocol and under Article 26(2) of the Protocol they have committed to providing "...budgetary and other resources for the full and effective implementation of the rights..." recognized therein. The gender machineries are least resources in all countries and yet there is high expectation by governments of them to address the various challenges facing women. In efforts to support member states realize their commitments under the Protocol, SOAWR partnered with the AUC and UN Women to introduce to them a multi-sectoral framework that could serve as an effective tool in implementing their obligations under the Protocol. It is our hope that many of them will choose to pilot it which will then allow us all to learn from their experiences.

4. What are your thoughts on the fact that after 8 years after the adoption of the Maputo Protocol only 31 countries have ratified it? What can be done to influence governments to take actions and ratify the Protocol?

Yes, 31 countries have ratified the Protocol, the latest country being Equatorial Guinea, and securing this number was a huge effort made by civil society organizations chief among them being the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) coalition which Equality Now serves as the Secretariat. Experience shows that women's rights do not unfortunately usually get priority without pressure and accountability questions and advocacy directed at member states. Hence, the concerted and persistent efforts by civil society organizations are gradually paying off in favor of African women and girls' rights. In our experience, we have tried different strategies to influence governments. We have done score cards rating red those that have not signed the Protocol, yellow to those that have signed but not ratified it and green to honor those that ratified it; and this strategy paid off leading to speedy ratification of the first 15 countries. This was a critical number to enable the Protocol enter into force in a record time. Hence it is now binding 31 countries to honor the rights provided for. We also used important moments such as AU summits, launching of the African Women's decade in Kenya, the AU treaties week, the Beijing +15 reviews, etc. to intensify pressure on member states to ratify and we continued to get more countries. We now have 22 countries (and probably 23 countries after South Sudan becomes independent and joins the AU) to bring on board. SOAWR members meet annually to reflect on successes and challenges and we will be considering other innovative ways to apply pressure on these remaining countries.

5. Having worked over 20 years promoting women's rights in Africa, what do you think has been achieved in relations to women's rights on the continent?

The overall picture remains gloomy for most women especially in rural areas and urban slums. Notable areas of improvement include women's participation in decision-making where most countries seem to have made progress at various degrees though many are far from reaching the Beijing Platform for Action targets (set in 1995). Also, we have more countries that outlawed harmful practices like female genital mutilation though much more work needs to be done in ending the practice. Nevertheless, national demographic health surveys show that the practice is on a downward trend thanks to much effort by the civil society organizations. Several countries have introduced laws to curb domestic violence and others are in the process of doing so. The fact remains that small steps will only lead to small gains and countries need to step up their investments in ensuring that the overall situation improves for women in real terms and in a big way.

6. What ways do you think are the most effective ways to ensure the human rights of women and women's empowerment socially, economically, politically, and with regard to health?

Political commitment is key to ensuring women enjoy their rights. Governments need to back up their commitments with actions. For example; outlawing female genital mutilation is not enough. They need to take additional steps as obliged under article 5 of the African Women's Rights Protocol. This means investing in public education; taking legal action against perpetrators, supporting victims and so on. Likewise, they need to take serious action against traffickers and pimps who profit from selling women's bodies. They also need to take action to eliminate de facto and de jure discrimination which impedes women's advancement and ability to enjoy their human rights. Hence, good policies and laws that protect the human rights of women backed with governmental action programs and resources would be critical. Civil society organizations are doing a lot of good work but I always believe that governments need to take charge and show leadership in promoting the rights of women. This is the big challenge that is present in most countries.

7. Many young women find it difficult to make their voice heard in the women's rights movement, what is their place in this movement and what can be done to make sure young women are better empowered to be the leaders of tomorrow?

This is a very important question. Young women need to be actively recruited into the movement or else it will vanish and this would be a big setback. This reality is not lost to many women and efforts have been made in different countries and at regional level to engage young women in various projects and programs. Young women leadership institutes and training are ongoing in several countries and notably run by organizations like Girl Power Initiative (Nigeria) and Akina Mama wa Africa (Uganda), and others are led by young women themselves such as the Kenyan Young Women Leadership Institute and mixed organizations such as the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS). We need to encourage more of such noble initiatives and to bring the voice of the youth to the fore. As you know the recent AU summit that held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, focused on 'Youth empowerment for sustainable development' and the SOAWR coalition which campaigns for the popularization and implementation of the African Protocol on the Rights of Women organized an essay competition for youth to express their views on what values the Protocol holds for them. Interestingly both young women and men responded to the call and made their views known to thousands of readers of through the award winning online newsletter "Pambazuka"¹ So, it is important to build their capacities but also to give them the space to share their views on important issues being discussed at continental level and then give their voices greater visibility.

<http://www.pambazuka.org/>

Video of the Month

Source: AfricaLives

DRC: CONGO- A Common Cause - from London to Bukavu

A no budget film by British Congolese Women about their journey in Congo to attend the World March ,to highlight the issues faced by women in the East of Congo and their fight to end the war in the East of DR Congo."The film follow our international and local activism and shows the resilience of Congolese women as active actors for change and not as victims as portrayed by many stories. Congolese women are not just victims but actors who have a voice that needs to be heard". A film by Shana Mongwanga. A preview of this documentary "CONGO- A Common Cause - from London to Bukavu - was presented at the Cannes Film Festival, Short film Corner 2011. To watch the video, please click [here](#)

Highlight of the Month

NIGERIA: WOMEN GIVING EACH OTHER A HAND UP

SOURCE:IPS

In an open space near her home in Makoko, a crowded suburb of the sprawling city of Lagos, Latifat Agboola sits in the midst of bags of charcoal, attending to her customers. some of them call her "the charcoal woman with the dirty job, but she sees herself as a businesswoman on the rise. to read the full, please click [here](#)

Make Every Woman Count Launch

We officially launched MEWC on Tuesday 19th July with the support of the United Nations Association London & South East Region and the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, and hosted by SOAS (School of Oriental & African Studies)



For the full photo reel, visit MEWC on [Facebook](#)
