



Update on the Campaign on Ratification, Domestication and Popularization of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa
By Equality Now, October to December 2008

This is the quarterly update on campaigns towards popularization, domestication and implementation of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. It reports on work done during October to December 2008 and includes information on the status of ratification and upcoming events that could offer opportunities for further action towards the objectives of the campaign. This quarter, SOAWR would like to welcome one new member, Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) based in Kampala, Uganda.

Country Level Actions

Burkina Faso

Voix de Femmes held a training seminar during 26 to 28 November 2008 on human rights in the context of the family and violence against women for twenty peer educators. The objective of the seminar was to educate them on the rights of women and in particular human rights legislation and the African Women's Rights Protocol in order to allow for healthy debate on issues of concern. The seminar focused on three principle units of action: access to justice and the right to earn a living; marriage and divorce; children's rights, succession and gender based violence.

During 5 -10 December 2008, Voix de femmes engaged in an educational campaign on FGM and the rights of women; and the activities included educational discussions with members of the public. Voix de femmes used the opportunity to explain the provisions of Article 5 of the Protocol which have specific action points for states to end FGM; and as such were able to educate the public that FGM is a violation of women's human rights. Forty people were present at this meeting.

The Gambia

From the 2 to 4 of December, the **African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)** organized a three-day sensitization workshop for grass roots women from the Western region of Gambia on the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in two local languages, Wolof and Mandinka. It was attended by 27 participants, six of whom were men. The objective was to train these women on the Protocol and enable community members to become fully conversant with the provisions of the Protocol and provide them with knowledge and skills necessary to popularise the Protocol in respective communities. The workshop equipped grassroots women with information on the provisions of the Protocol and the rights enshrined therein. Selected articles of the Protocol were illustrated in pictorials for easy comprehension by the participants.

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Kenya

Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya (FIDA-K), attended the 41st Session on the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Geneva Switzerland from 3 to 21 November 2008 where it submitted a shadow report to the Governments report which addressed the violation of women and girls rights to property and inheritance, including their right to adequate standards of living and housing. Secondly, FIDA-K highlighted the effect of economic disempowerment of women and girls; vulnerability to violence and HIV infections. These are all issues that are provided for in the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women. During the session, Hon. Martha Karua the Minister of Justice and Constitutional affairs, who represented the government committed that her Government would ratify the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women.

FIDA-K was also involved in lobbying for, and advancing the Health and Reproductive Bill, which incorporates Article 14 of the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women. Article 14 provides for the rights to sexual and reproductive health and access to abortion. The Bill was drafted as part of a campaign to ensure that reproductive and sexual health care in Kenya is accessible, available, and affordable. The Bill was drafted by FIDA-K together with the **Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW)** and addresses various reproductive health issues, including a push for easier access to abortions. It proposes, for instance, that a statement by a pregnant woman or any other proof that her pregnancy is due to sexual assault, rape, defilement or incest guarantee a legal abortion. The Bill has sparked a lot debate surrounding abortion.

COVAW undertook the simplification of the Protocol into Swahili. The objective was to increase public awareness about the provisions of the Protocol. COVAW is also developing a Legislature Guide to the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women; and its objective is to offer an easy to read guide to parliamentarians. The Guide is complete and awaiting printing, upon its completion it will be distributed to female parliamentarians.

Following a SOAWR Steering Committee where a decision was made to put more efforts in securing Kenya's ratification ASAP; **Equality Now** convened a meeting of SOAWR members that are based in Nairobi to take stock of what the experiences, especially challenged encountered, had been of the Kenyan organizations that had been engaged in the campaign and to strategize on realizing the ratification objective. Equality Now has also been in touch with the office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs for an appointment to receive a delegation of SOAWR.

The Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Network (ESCR-Net) convened its International Strategy Meeting on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Nairobi from December 1-4, 2008. **Equality Now's** Director, Faiza Mohamed, participated and presented in their working group on

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Women and ESCR where she talked about provisions in the African Women's Protocol that addressed economic, social and cultural rights. She stressed that without addressing discrimination and violence against women, which have been the main weapons used in disempowering women and girls and denying them equal rights, there is no way women and girls will enjoy their ESC rights. She spoke about the SOAWR campaign and shared that the Women's Rights Protocol offered an opportunity to work at addressing both the civil, political and ESC rights.

Liberia

WOLPNET undertook continuous engagement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to speed up the process of domestication of the Protocol. The objective was to provide support to the Government through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs to print the Act ratifying the Protocol into Hand Bills. The printing of the Act and dissemination of the Hand Bills to the three branches of government: Executive, Legislature and Judiciary signifies the domestication of the Protocol into domestic law and is applicable in court. On 18 November 2008, 600 copies of hand bills were printed and 300 submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for distribution to various government departments.

WOLPNET participated in a meeting hosted by the Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL) on 25 November 2008. The objective of the meeting was to create awareness about the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women and its current status in Liberia. The meeting attracted about 50 members including the staff of the Ministry of Gender and Development. Ms. Una Thompson, Director of **WOLPNET**, gave a presentation of the Protocol and its relevance to women in Liberia. The presentation generated great interest as some participants expressed the desire to conduct activities centred on the provisions of the Protocol. Fifty copies of the printed hand bills were distributed to the participants and some extra copies left with the secretariat.

With a view to popularizing the African Women's Rights Protocol, **WOLPNET** undertook interview sessions with the Liberian Broadcasting System (LBS) in a televised coverage of the WONGOSOL meeting held on the 25 November 2008. The opportunity was used to create greater public awareness about the rights of women as envisioned in the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women.

Tanzania

The **Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC)** carried out various press conferences from 17 to 28 November 2008 (as part of their 16 days of Activism activities) and a general call was made to government representatives to domesticate all international human rights instrument including the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and repeal prejudicial laws that perpetuate

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gender-based violence. LHRC reported that in response to their call, the government committed itself to repeal all laws that are injurious to women.

Uganda

Akina Mama Wa Afrika (AMwA) together with the Uganda National Taskforce on the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, launched policy briefs addressing Violence against Women; Water and Sanitation; and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights in Kampala on 26 November 2008 and Gulu (Northern Uganda) on 9 December 2008. The launch in Kampala targeted line ministries such as the Justice and Constitutional Ministry, the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development. The launch in Gulu targeted grassroots communities especially those that have been affected by the 20 years civil war in Northern Uganda. The launch created awareness and gathered the support of leaders and the community in advancing the rights of women. During both launches, distinctions were made between the CEDAW and the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women creating awareness among those present. AMwA also got support from other human rights organisations who pledged to publicize the Protocol.

AMwA also held a public dialogue with Muslim women on 29 November 2008. The purpose of the dialogue was to popularize the Protocol amongst the Muslim community. During the dialogue, community members were able to distinguish the Protocol from the Domestic Relations Bill and understand the provisions of the Protocol. On 19 December 2008, **AMwA** held a sensitization workshop with women councillors in Luwero District. The purpose of the meeting was to raise awareness and popularize the Protocol at the grassroots level. The women councillors pledged to popularize the protocol among their constituents as well as put pressure on their Members of Parliament to call on the Government to ratify the Protocol.

Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) held two talk shows on Ugandan Television on 12 and 18 November 2008 respectively. The TV shows discussed violence against women and highlighted the importance of ratifying the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women as a way to curb the violence. The purpose of the TV shows was to create awareness of the Protocol to a wider audience as the TV shows were hosted in local language.

Zambia

Equality Now's Program Officer, Caroline Muthoni Muriithi, went on a mission to Lusaka during 3 to 11 December 2008 to follow-up on advocacy actions related to a landmark judgement delivered on 30 June 2008 by a Zambian high court in the case of rape of a school girl by a teacher that was supported by Equality Now's Adolescent Girls Legal Defence Fund (AGLDF). The actions are directed at the Zambian state through its Ministry of Education and the office of the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) to ensure that the directives of the judgement, including

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the Ministry of Education putting in place mechanisms that will ensure the safety of girls from rape and sexual harassment and the DPP initiating criminal charges against the teacher whom the judge found liable for the rape of the young girl, are implemented. Following the judgement, Equality Now's AGLDF has been supporting a coalition of Zambian organizations that came together to push for reforms that will ensure schools are safe places for girls. The coalition is also advocating for the government to reconsider its plan to appeal against the judgment which found the state negligent in its duty to protect the young girl from the rape by her teacher. During the visit, Muthoni Muriithi held individual and collective meetings with members of the coalition, engaged with the media on their role to publicise sexual abuses against girls, and participated in coalition members' meetings with the Minister of Education and the DPP. As a follow-up on these consultations, Equality Now is in the process of launching a Women's Action campaign to support local efforts at ensuring justice of the young girl and for securing national reforms to make schools safe places for girls.

Regional Level Actions

The **Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting Women and Girls (IAC)** held the 3rd Regional Youth Forum in Accra, Ghana during 18 to 20 September 2008. The event attracted sixty-two young people from twenty-three African countries, as well as two youths from Norway. The objective of the forum was to educate the youth on the provisions of the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women and equip them with the tools to lobby their governments to ratify and domesticate the Protocol. At the end of the forum, participants were better informed on existing international and regional human rights instruments and pledged to advocate for the implementation of the Protocol on return to their countries.

FAHAMU Networks for Social Change created the SOAWR website which was launched on 1st October 2008. The website will create a 'public face' for the campaign; to create a platform for centralized information on the campaign and the related topics and a platform for news and sharing from and across campaign members and the public. SOAWR members are encouraged to send it regular updates to ensure that the website provides users current campaign news.

During 19 to 20 October 2008, the **IAC** held its Regional Training Workshop for Parliamentarians in Khartoum, Sudan. Forty-six participants from over five African countries were present. The objective of this workshop was to establish a network of Parliamentarians to determine concrete mechanisms for the domestication and implementation of the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women. The participants mapped out strategies for domestication and dissemination of the AU Protocol to carry out in their respective countries. Sudanese legislators drafted an action-plan to lobby their government to ratify the Protocol.

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The 7th IAC General Assembly/International Conference was held during 27 to 30 October 2008. It brought together 150 people from across the world consisting of representatives of IAC National Committees from 28 African countries, 15 Group affiliates outside of Africa (Europe, Canada, US, Japan, New Zealand, Australia) and IAC partner's world wide. One key objective of the conference was to promote the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women, especially those provisions which call for the elimination of practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The conference created an increased awareness about the Protocol and called on governments to ratify and implement the provisions of the Protocol.

Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI) launched the East African Declaration on Gender Equality (EADGE) advocacy project which is expected to run from September 2008 to August 2010. The aim of the project is to bring together into one legally binding regional instrument all the commitments on gender equality (The Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action, CEDAW, the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the Millennium Development Goals). The objective of the project is to consolidate and strengthen all the international commitments to gender equality into one regional legal instrument for application in the five countries (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda) of the East African Community (EAC) by 2010 and the formulation and adoption of a regional framework for mainstreaming and advancing gender equality in the EAC.

EASSI will advocate for the adoption and implementation of an East African Gender Equality Declaration and advocate for the establishment of a centre for Gender and Community Development at the EAC. One of the first activities that EASSI aims to undertake is the establishment of a 15 member alliance of like-minded organizations that will spearhead the advocacy for the EADGE. EASSI will be the lead organization in this campaign and will compile a regional situational analysis on the state of gender in all five countries. The national alliance of members will be involved in lobbying and advocating different stakeholders. The concept of the EADGE campaign has already been introduced to the EAC structures, namely the Gender Unit and the Directorate for Political Affairs. Annual meetings will be held to report back to stakeholders and plan for the following year.

From 7 to 9 November 2008, the **ACDHRS** hosted the Forum on the Participation of NGOs in the 44th ordinary session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights in Abuja, Nigeria. The objective of the forum was to foster dialogue through the sharing of ideas and experiences among participants; and to deliberate and adopt resolutions on specific themes and countries, for presentation to the African Commission Session held from the 10 to 24 November, 2008 in Abuja, Nigeria. The NGO forum concluded by adopting a resolution on the situation of Women's Human Rights which was forwarded to the African Commission for consideration during its sitting. The resolution highlighted the fact that the African Protocol on the Rights of

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Women which came into force on the 25th of November 2005, had not yet been ratified by many African states and called for the African Commission for Human and Peoples Rights to ensure the urgent ratification and domestication of the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women. The resolution also urged the Commission to impress on all African states on the need to allocate a budget for the implementation of the Protocol.

Equality Now program officer, Caroline Muthoni Muriithi, organized and coordinated activities on behalf of SOAWR at the AWID International forum on Women's Rights and development which took place during 14 to 17 November in Cape Town, South Africa. SOAWR had a campaign corner which show-cased SOAWR's campaign (efforts and results to-date) to participants. On 16th November, SOAWR also hosted a lunch time caucus that discussed strategies for using the AU Protocol as a framework for the promotion of women's rights in Africa. Solome Nakaweesi Kimbugwe of **Akina Mama Wa Afrika** chaired the caucus while Mrs. Hannah Forster (**ACDHR**S) gave an overview of the SOAWR campaign and its objectives. During the caucus, Mama Koite of **FEMNET** launched the crossroads radio program the cds containing the program were later distributed to all the participants.

During 14 to 15 December 2008, the **IAC** participated in an international conference in Cairo on the "Cairo Declaration on FGM + 5". The conference was organised by the National Council for Childhood & Motherhood (NCCM) Egypt and No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ), an Italian NGO. The aim of this conference was to examine the implementation of the Cairo Declaration on FGM in 2003. The President of the IAC, Mrs. Mariam Lamizana, in her paper called on governments to speed up the implementation of legal instruments including the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa for the elimination of FGM in Africa.

In December 2008, **FAHAMU** translated the crossroads radio program into Kiswahili. The radio programme has been used in English and Swahili speaking communities to popularize the Protocol and mobilize communities to advocate for its ratification. The English version of the radio program has been aired in a number of community-based radio stations in Kenya. The Kiswahili, Portuguese and French versions are expected to be launched in 2009.

FAHAMU is also undertaking the production of a SOAWR advocacy book with **FEMNET**. This process is still ongoing. The objective is to share lessons from SOAWR's advocacy successes and challenges with the broader human rights community as well as the public. The advocacy book has been finalized and is expected to be published in early 2009. FAHAMU also trained community-based radio presenters on the Protocol and the use of the Crossroads radio program in collaboration with Community Media for Development (CMFD) and FEMNET.

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The **African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)** during the last quarter has undertaken the planning for the SOAWR activities during the AU Summit in January 2009. Some of these activities will include; the preparatory meeting, a press conference, the cross movement debate, a book launch, public forum and an exhibition.

Equality Now and **Oxfam GB** have been working, in consultation with the African Union Commission and UNIFEM's AU/ECA Liaison office based in Addis Ababa, on preparations for a domestication meeting whose objective is to provide space for discussing and conceiving action plans for advancing domestication of the Protocol in countries that have ratified it.

Status of Ratification

This quarter Guinea Bissau deposited its instrument of ratification with the African Union on 14 October 2008 moving from the yellow zone to the green zone.

Status of signatures and ratification ¹	At December 2007	At December 2008
Total signatures	43	45
Total Ratifications	23	26

Past Events

Several SOAWR members (AMWA, EASSI, Equality Now and FEMNET) participated in a consultation meeting hosted by UNIFEM's AU/ECA Liaison office in Addis Ababa during 15 to 18 December 2008. The meeting offered an opportunity for women's rights networks and organizations to come together and discuss priorities; and set a common agenda around thematic areas, especially in emerging issue areas such as international trade, agreements, migration and trafficking, climate change, food insecurity. Faiza Mohamed, Equality Now, participated in a panel discussion sharing SOAWR's experiences in engaging the African Union Commission and member states around the Women's Rights Protocol campaign. Other organizations (FAS, WiLDAF West Africa and UNIFEM) also presented on their experiences as well. Report of the meeting will be distributed once received from UNIFEM.

¹ **Red (5):** Botswana, Egypt, Eritrea, Sao Tome & Principe and Tunisia

Yellow (22): Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Niger, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland and Uganda.

Green (26): Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Comoros, Djibouti, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Libya, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Mauritania, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Senegal, Seychelles, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

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