



# WILDAF WEST AFRICA

## Newsletter

Women in Law and Development in Africa

Issue 42 January 2010

### EDITORIAL

Welcome to readers of WILDAF–West Africa Newsletter. This issue is mainly devoted to the new project: "using law for rural women’s empowerment in West Africa", announced in the Issue 39. To that effect, we suggest you read the report of the work done by rural women paralegals in the field, one year after the implementation of the project and the expected results.

This edition will also inform on the participation of WILDAF at the 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women held from February 27 to March 12 in New York on the global evaluation of the Beijing Platform for Action, fifteen years after its adoption.

As usual, we brought you news of our national networks, information on the situation of women's rights in Africa and the world as well as some publications on various topics.

Enjoy your reading and thank you for your faithfulness!

**Michelle LOCOH**  
Assistant Communication officer

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### Women farmers, a strength for agriculture development in Africa



Eliminating social barriers that prevent women from accessing knowledge and the creation of income generating activities is fundamental to the fight against poverty.

Yukiko Omura, Vice-present of IFAD. March 2010

### Also available on our website:

[www.wildaf-ao.org/eng](http://www.wildaf-ao.org/eng)

You are member of WILDAF/FeDDAF West African Network and wish to publicize your activities? Your initiative? Your association?

WILDAF-West Africa newsletter is a quarterly publication of the WILDAF sub regional office. Send us your text (long or short, what counts is the content!) by e-mail to WILDAF West Africa. The deadline for the reception of the texts is:

June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010

Who are the Newsletter readers? The WILDAF West Africa Newsletter is distributed to WILDAF West Africa members in nine countries of the sub-region BUT ALSO to our partners in Africa, Europe, Scandinavian countries and America.

[info@wildaf-ao.org](mailto:info@wildaf-ao.org)

## IMPACT OF THE PARALEGALS' GRASSROOT WORK: the stakeholders witness

Our project "Using law for rural women's empowerment in West Africa" started a year ago, which we abundantly dealt with in the Issue 39 of our Newsletter, is in the middle of its implementation. Being part of the n° 3 priorities of the Millennium for development, the objective of our project is to enable rural women to know their rights, to claim and enjoy them and exercise them in the same way as men in their family, community and professional lives. The 250 trained volunteer rural women, as well as the members of the committee for gender violence set up in the five beneficiary countries, have, in turn, the duty to disseminate law in their respective communities and to help the other women as well as their communities to individually use law for settling the difficulties they daily face at all levels.

Some among these brave volunteers we call paralegals give us their evidence on the actions they carry out in the milieu as beneficiaries of the project. These actions are admittedly petty ones but are apparently having an impact on the behaviours of the populations.

These actions cover assertiveness and family conflict settlement regarding inheritance and the problem of conjugal violence.

### Togo: from training to assertiveness

Ms. AKPOTO Atsoupi, farmer and mother of five children is a volunteer paralegal in the Yoto prefecture.

*"I've really have a breakthrough, a few months ago, I would never have accepted a position of responsibility within my organization. Although I have the capacity to do so, lack of confidence in me was still an obstacle. Shortly after the training including the rights to equal participation of women in decision-making structures, the opportunity has arisen for me to prove my ability through the election as President of our Union. I have taken appropriate action and filed my candidacy for the presidency of the Union of Producers of food grains in Yoto Prefecture. I made an effective campaign and I was elected by 57 members against 8 for my competitor. This is an unprecedented score. I have a term of 3 years before me and I will work hard to show that we women, we are able to do as much or better than men".*

Talking about her actions in the field, Ms. Akpoto said that through the paralegal's training, she can deal with problems facing her or her community.

Thus in her community, she has helped to reduce the dropout rate. *"There are some students who were left schools because they said that they were beaten at school.*

*Being aware of the situation and as a paralegal, I initially approached the parents to explain the importance of school and the exercise of parental authority. I then went to talk with teachers on the issue. Since then, everything comes back in order".*

### From Benin: Alternative approaches in settling domestic violence

Right after been in touch with women's human rights in the country, women's farmers paralegals gained confidence and became precious assistance and help in their communities. The paralegal living in Sakete reported us the case:

*"Lady Avlessi in Sakété in Benin went to the farm with her co-wife and their common husband for harvesting maize. In the farm, an argument occurred between the two co-spouses. Supporting his younger wife, the husband slapped Lady Avlessi who bites him to defend herself. He then in turn bites his wife and violently blew her repeatedly in the abdomen which caused Lady Avlessi important traumas revealed by the medical certificate issued to her. Her health condition required a nearly three week hospitalisation. Dissatisfied with the facts, the victim's relatives brought her back to their home after she recovered."*

*"As a paralegal trained by WiLDAF for the area, I was informed. I met the victim who told me the complete facts and gave me some proofs. After listening to her, I appeased her and showed her different available means of redress of the situation. But Lady Avlessi did not intend to go to the police fearing to be rejected by both the community and her own family. Insistently, I explained to Lady Avlessi that gender violence is an offence punished by the law and no matter the perpetrator is one's husband. I understood her fear but continuing settlement of cases as usual in family would no longer help ending violence against women. With insistence, I proposed and it was accepted that the settlement been leading to a commitment signed if needed at the police office by the husband.*

*Continued on page 3*

## IMPACT OF THE PARALEGALS' GRASSROOT WORK: the stakeholders witness

The commitment stipulated that the husband would never again hit his wife and that any recidivism might be denounced with a complaint at the judiciary police. I met the husband whom I sensitised on the blameworthy character of his violence against his wife; he recognised his bad behaviour, accepted to sign the commitment and agreed never more to exercise whatever violence against his wife and particularly to treat her better".

### Côte d'Ivoire:

A case of physical, moral and economic violence by a man on his wife whom he accuses of negligence in house keeping and in this particular case, of killing for dinner an injured hen from his poultry.

*"Last September, Mrs Ouattara Mariam, aged 31 and mother of two children one of whom was a girl child, was beaten and held in custody for three days by her husband. She succeeded in running away from her husband's house with her girl child and asked for my assistance enabling her to go back to her mother in a neighbouring village.*

*After listening to her and quieting her and with her agreement, I met her husband, Mr. Abdoulaye. In the beginning of our conversation, Mr. Abdoulaye did not seem to regret anything and was ready to repeat his reaction (and this toward any other woman) if she came back to his house because, for him, it is normal that the man, as head of the household, has the right to punish his wife in such a way.*

*I took the decision to meet the village IMAM (the couple being Muslim) and the head of the community. I did it with the social worker's assistance. The two local authorities helped us to make Mr. Abdoulaye, the lady's husband, understand the legal punishment he deserved by exercising violence on his wife. The imam was satisfied of our action in the settlement of this conflict and called on us for a sensitisation meeting in the Muslim community (which was very difficult before we helped to settle this case)."*

*"Our greatest satisfaction was that, during the sensitisation, Mr Abdoulaye had officially promised no more to use violence against his wife and he even volunteered to be our spokesman near men who usually were violent against their wives but were absent at the meeting".*

### Preventing domestic violence: a case dealt with by the Kpélé-Konda Committee (Togo)

*My name is KLEVOR GERARD and I'm married to only one wife. My spouse took the habit of going out and coming back late without informing me, even during weekends when I stay at home.*

*"She alleged going out to visit her friends in the area for discussion. This situation was creating conflicts in our relationship.*

*On hearing about the existence of the committee that fights violence against women in Kpélé-Konda, a village 4 km from Kpélé-Tsiko where we lived, I did not hesitate travelling for seeking the committee's intervention. The committee summoned my wife who did not deny my allegations. The committee said it did recognise her right, as a woman, to visit her friends and relatives in my presence or absence, but she must beforehand inform me and come back on time to carry out her duty as mother of the family. They made her understand that this was a case of violence practised by a woman on her husband who expected finding his wife at home after a long working day and that this attitude might make me suspect her of infidelity. The situation also applies to me. The couple's happiness and harmony are at stake. They gave her advice which she well accepted."*

*"In this particular case, the husband and witnesses found that we had been objective in settling the case and that we did not try, at all cost, to favour women. This gave certain credibility to our committee" declared one of the members of the committee.*

### From Ghana: contributing to putting an end to violence regarding rape

I am Eric Aryee, a member of Ga West community reconciliation committee.

*"Prior to the launching of the CRC's Ga West Municipality, rape and defilement of student and girls in the community were seen to be a normal thing in the community. However after the launch of the CRC's, community members became conscious of it including students in the community. On November, 2010, a primary school teacher was caught raping a student at the school toilet by some students. The students immediately reported the issues to me as a community reconciliation committee member.*

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*Continued from page 3*

*The case was immediately reported to the police and the student immediately referred to the hospital for the necessary attention. The student was admitted and discharged after going through medical examination and treatment. The teacher after sensing danger took to his heels and has since then never been seen in the community.*

*The police are however on the lookout for him to be persecuted."*

This is an effective warning for authors and potential authors of rape in the community.

**Togo: In Yotocopé, a widow recovered a farmland confiscated by her family in law.**

Lady Akouvi Avoke, mother of two children lost her husband three years ago. After her husband's death, her family in law did whatever possible to snatch her own farm and her husband's from her. She was then repudiated and deprived from the farms and all the goods they acquired together. She attended a sensitisation by the Yotocopé paralegals, she reported her problem to them and they took an appointment. The paralegals explained the different possible alternatives and redress procedures and she begged for their assistance. The village chief was immediately informed. On the paralegals' proposal, successive meetings took place with the family in law. The paralegals and the village chief had had time to explain to the wrongdoers the impacts of their acts on the woman, on their late brother's children and on the family as a whole. After a little reluctance, the family finally accepted to give the widow her farm back and to share among the two children their late father's farm. Thus, thanks to the two Yotocopé paralegals, Mrs. Avoke recovered her rights after a three year period of difficulties; everybody was satisfied.

Through this evidence illustrating these women and men's commitment to working for their community's welfare, we could efficiently make mentalities evolve and behaviours change from the grassroots if we were supported by these available local resources.

As many witnessed when we were collecting evidence, all kinds of obstacles occur and make the work on the field difficult.

For as much as possible finding solutions to these difficulties, WILDAF will, very soon, start a series of workshops for consolidating the trained paralegal's knowledge.

### **47<sup>th</sup> Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights**

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights will hold its **47<sup>th</sup> ordinary session in Banjul**, the Gambia from **12<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> May 2010**. The following states will have to submit their periodic reports: Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Cameroon and Rwanda.

For more information, please visit the website at:

[http://www.achpr.org/english/info/news\\_en.htm](http://www.achpr.org/english/info/news_en.htm)  
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### **Consultative Assembly of Parliamentarians for the ICC and the rule of law**

The sixth session of the Consultative Assembly will be held in Kampala, Uganda on 27 and May 28, 2010. The Consultative Assembly of Parliamentarians for the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the rule of law is the only global meeting, which brings together legislators focusing solely on the issue of the International Criminal Court.

This Assembly, which is part of the campaign for the ICC conducted by Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), represents a unique opportunity for the few hundred legislators from all continents of the world to discuss and identify strategies to make advance the strategic objectives for the ICC.

The sixth session of the Consultative Assembly will be held in Kampala in preparation for the First Review Conference of the Rome Statute, which will start on May 31, 2010, also in Kampala.

<http://www.pgaction.org/CAPVI.html>

## Declaration of African Women's Caucus at the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

As the women from other continents present at the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women devoted to the evaluation of the Beijing Platform of Action (Beijing + 15), the African women representatives met in caucus to debate the specific concerns of their region. At the end of their fourth session, they adopted a declaration intended to African governments as well as to development partners. WILDAF-West Africa is one of the organisations that took an active part in these sessions. The declaration deals with what follows:

We, representing various African civil society organisations at the World Forum for the Beijing + 15 Review, 15 years afterwards and representing the voices of millions of African women and girls,

After consultations with various actors before and during the NGO World Forum on the progress registered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action in Africa,

After examining the African women and girls' situation contained in the Regional Shadow Report that gives the regional and sub regional organisations and networks' contributions,

Recognising that the evaluation review process of Beijing + 15 is going on at a moment of great opportunities and challenges for women in the realisation of their civil, political, economic and cultural rights;

Considering that, though the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action in the 15 last years had consumed considerable resources, we remark, with a great concern, that progress has remained minor, slow and fragmentary and has not reached fundamental changes in the lives of the majority of women in Africa.

This is why, we pressingly call for African leaders and development partners to prioritise the following actions:

1. To see to the ratification without reserve, the domestication, the integral application of all human right key instruments that secure women and girls' rights, in particular the CEDAW and its optional protocol, the African Union Protocol of Maputo on women's rights, the African Charter on the Child's Rights, the African Charter on Democracy and the resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889 of the UN Security Council.
2. To see to the implementation of policies and programmes aiming at promoting the realisation of men-women parity in leadership and decision-making and that women have the sufficient capacity to influence decision-making systems, structures and institutions.
3. Ensure that structures set for conducting gender equality and women's empowerment increase in number and have significant resources that indicate the political commitment to women's advancement;
4. Increase the support to African women's economic empowerment as a strategy to eradicate poverty;
5. Take measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls with particular attention to negative cultural and religious practices, violence during conflicts and the post-conflict situation and human trafficking.

We call to African leaders to seize the opportunity of the African Women's Decade 2010-2020 for taking the initiative of significantly reducing discrepancies in the enforcement of the Platform of Action particularly in the three last years of the decade.

# NETWORK NEWS

## West Africa Sub regional office

### Strategic Planning Meeting of WILDAF West Africa

WILDAF West Africa national networks' representatives coming from Benin, Burkina, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo meet this week in Lomé for a five-year strategic planning meeting (2010-2014).



*The facilitator presenting her communication*

During this meeting the network will have to redefine new strategies that may enable it to increase its impact in women's rights development and promotion in a changing environment. Thus the participants considered the report of the evaluation of the former strategic plan that came to its end. The strategic plan 2004-2008 helped to strengthen the capacity of the network members in order to help them better understand the concept of networking and improve their capacity in fund raising.

The Chairwoman of WILDAF Board, Ms. Dorcas Coker-Appiah appreciated this initiative and emphasized on the need to have a strategic plan for the sub-regional West-Africa office.

The meeting ended by the setting of new priorities in the new strategic plan (2010-2014) which included institutional strengthening, capacity building of members and WILDAF's engagement in development activities.

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Participation of WILDAF-WA in the 15<sup>th</sup> African Women's AU Pre-summit consultation on gender mainstreaming in the African Union

From 21 to 22 January 2010, WILDAF-West Africa participated in the 15<sup>th</sup> African Women's AU Pre-summit consultation on gender mainstreaming in the African Union, organized by Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) and the campaign "Gender is My Agenda" (GIMAC) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The meeting aimed to discuss the changing environment at the regional and international level and elaborate a new paradigm in the work of CSOs, to advocate effective gender parity policies and practice. The outputs of the meeting are as follows:

- Adoption of a Declaration including recommendations, which will be presented at the next AU meeting;
- Revision of the GIMAC Strategic Plan adopted in Sharm-El-Sheikh, June 2008
- Elaboration of a Plan of Action of the ECOSOCC Women and Gender Commission and set up the bureau
- Publication of a report analyzing the Heads of States' respective reports in the implementation of the Solemn Declaration Gender Equality.

The meeting brought together other civil society organizations among which ACDHRS, SAHARA ANCEFA FEMNET and EBWAY. We could also note the presence of the former Finnish President Mrs. Mary Robinson, the Special Rapporteur on women's rights for the AU, Soyata MAIGA and the Executive Director of Gender and Development Commission of the African Union, Ms. Litha MYSYIMI-Ogan.

This 15<sup>th</sup> session of the consultative meeting on gender mainstreaming began by the presentation of the reports of the focal points, members of the campaign "Gender is my Agenda" and a review of the campaign's activities. WILDAF-West Africa also presented a report on human rights. Other activities such as panels and discussions on various topics including "Panel on Resolution UNSCR 1325 " and the Beijing +15 Review and the African Women Decade were part of the event.

The meeting ended with the presentation and launch of the alternative report on the implementation of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. A statement has been developed to this end and will be presented at the next African Union Heads of State summit scheduled for January 25 to February 02 2010.

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# NETWORK NEWS

## WILDAF-WA at the 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

The participation of WILDAF-West Africa at the 54th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women held from 1st to 12th March 2010 in New York was marked by two parallel events. In conjunction with the official session devoted to the evaluation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the first event was a panel that had been conducted on 5th March at Nigeria House. It aimed to present through the various speeches, the actions that WILDAF West Africa has undertaken since several years in order to contribute to the implementation of the objectives of the Platform. To this end, the floor was given to the beneficiaries of WILDAF's projects so that they can give their testimonies and share their experiences with others.



Photo of the panel

According to **Mrs. Antoinette Dadjo** of Benin, the project "*Women and Good Governance*" enabled Beninese women at all levels to recognize the importance of women's participation in politics – "*politics is decisive in all aspects of human life, we understood that it is too serious to be left solely in the hands of men,*" she declared. As for **Mrs. Lydia Sasu**, farm operator, who spoke on behalf of the beneficiaries of the project "using law for rural women's empowerment in West-Africa", the fact that WILDAF has been able to mobilize resources for their participation in this important meeting so that they can talk about themselves and about their daily activities, is a great step.

An exhibition of photos and tools (posters, training manuals, advocacy tools, reports, etc.) produced in the

framework of various projects has enabled the panel participants to better appreciate the work of WILDAF-West Africa. Some of these tools have been distributed.



Photo of the tools exhibition

The second activity was devoted to the reflection on the African Women Decade (2010-2020) decreed by the African Union. The objective of WILDAF through this event was to capture on one hand the presence of a large number of women's organizations representatives so that they can be at the same level of information and on the other hand to start discussions on how to effectively organize in order to get involved in the implementation of the objectives of the African Union governments. Ideas have been selected and the responsibility has been entrusted to WILDAF to propose these ideas from a program that will be adopted by the participants.

Apart from its own activities, WILDAF-WA was also involved in the caucus of African women who released a statement towards the African governments and partners.

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## Capacity building of elected women councillors by WILDAF Mali

The WILDAF-Mali held in March 10, 2010 in Bamako, a training workshop for capacity building of elected women councillors of Bamako district on planning and gender budgeting. This three-day workshop brought together the elected municipal women leaders and coordinators of district heads of the District of Bamako.

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## NETWORK NEWS

The objective of this training was to strengthen the capacity of the elected women and women leaders on the process of community management and consideration of their needs in policies and programs at local and national levels. The training helped them on one hand to have a better understanding of the concept planning and gender budgeting and on the other hand to develop a draft action plan for their community and also to develop indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

Various themes including gender and equality, gender and development, poverty, sustainable human development etc. have been developed during the training.

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### Celebration of International Day in Togo

WILDAF-Togo celebrated in delay the International Women's Day on March 15 in the Avé prefecture. This celebration was marked mainly by the presentation of sketch on maternal health.

The organisers focused on the advantages of prenatal consultation and delivering in a health facility and urged women to report cases of women suffering from Obstetric fistula so that they can get free care.

They also called for women's support to WILDAF-Togo in its advocacy for a free caesarean section in Togo.

## AFRICA NEWS

### African Union to create an African women's fund

The heads of state and government who participated in the 14th African Union (AU) summit in Addis Ababa held on 31st January to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2010 in Ethiopia, have announced the creation of a fund meant for African women.

## AFRICA NEWS

The African leaders, in an ad-hoc resolution, said such the fund was created assist women involved in the gender issue strategy of the continental organisation.

They tasked the AU Commission to prepare a detailed strategy through which the fund will be mobilized. The fund, in its first stage, will be secured through contributions from member countries. "I hail the decision to create the fund. This shows not only our will to promote and guarantee women's rights on the African continent but also our will to recognise the privileged place for women in the African society," Malawi's President a nd new chairperson of the African Union, Bingu Wa Mutharika, said.

"We must go beyond the following steps and use the fund appropriately. We have above all, to ratify a certain number of legal instruments which guarantee women's rights," he added at the closing ceremony of the summit.

After three days of talks, heads of state and government adopted many important decisions, including the strengthening of relations between the African Union and regional organizations on the one hand and regional organizations between themselves on the other hand.

They equally decided to drum up support for African officials bidding for important offices in international bodies.

<http://www.afriquejet.com/news/africa-news/african-union-creates-fund-for-african-women-2010020343440.html>

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### Swaziland: Property Rights at Last for Women

A recent court ruling has finally given Swazi women the right to own and administer property in their own names.

Many Swazi women married in community of property have been left in the cold by their husbands, who chase them out of their matrimonial homes or sell property without their knowledge.

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# AFRICA NEWS

In some cases, the wives will have paid for the property but leave with nothing because it is registered in their husband's name.

Due to the brave efforts of women's rights activist Doo Aphane, who challenged the Deeds Registry Act on the basis of the equality clause of the Constitution, other Swazi women will no longer have to experience what Ndlovu has gone through.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201003050891.html>

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## GUINEA: Union Leader, Rabiadou Serah Diallo, to Head Transition Council

Rabiadou Serah Diallo, secretary general of Guinea's National Workers Confederation, has been named president of the National Transition Council," the decree signed by interim leader General Sekouba Konate declared. Rabiadou is the first and only woman to head a syndicate in Africa.

Thanks to her long struggle against the dictatorship of Lansana Conte, she has managed to win in a predominantly male environment to become a leader of Democrats in Guinea. Becoming the president of the NCL since February 2010, she is one of the few female to be at the head a Union in Africa.

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## PSC urges appointment of envoy on violence against women and children

African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) said it is urgent to ensure the appointment of women Gender Focal Points in each AU peacekeeping mission as well as special envoys on violence against women and children.

AU Commission Gender and Development Directorate presented its report at the AUPSC 122nd meeting under the theme « *Mitigating Vulnerabilities of Women and Children in Armed Conflicts* ».

The Directorate said it is working towards mobilizing financial support for various programs and projects for women to fight poverty and close the gender gap and thereby halt Africa women's marginalization.

According to the report thousands more children are subjects to a range of violations including forced prostitutions, gang rape, mutilation and economic exploitation. The report said only 27 AU members states had ratified the protocol to the African Charter on Human and People Rights on the Rights of women in Africa.

It further said other 21 member states have signed the protocol but have yet to ratify, but five countries have yet to sign. The protocol provides an explicit framework outlining the rights of women on the continent and specially calls for women's protection against all forms of violence including international crimes that occur during conflicts, it said. Concerning to the rights of children, the report recalled that the then OAU adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in 1990. The Charter prohibits the recruitment of children by armed actors and specifically identifies the need to respect international humanitarian law regarding children during armed conflict. It also explicitly prohibit the sexual exploitation of children as for the protection of internally displaced and refugee children.

The report urged member state to endorse the charter and to domesticate and implement it with commitment. The report said the year 2010 heralds the African Women's decade (2010-20) which is intended to advance gender equality by accelerating implementation of various decisions, through dual top down and bottom up approach which inclusive of grassroots participation.

The report said the AU and its member states have already demonstrated a firm commitment to address issues related to women and children in armed conflict through well-defined human rights mechanisms. Nonetheless, it said despite the considerable measures put in place to protect the rights of women and children during armed conflicts implementation remains fragment.

The report recommended high level visits to members state who have not ratified the protocol and the charter in order to encourage heads of states to ratify and domesticate, ensure the appointment of women Gender Focal Points in each AU peacekeeping mission and as special envoys and special Representative of AU. The report called for accountability and end impunity by prosecuting perpetrators of violence against women and children at the national and regional level.

<http://www.ethiopian-news.com/au-calls-to-protect-the-riahs-of-women-and-children/>

# WORLD NEWS

## New FAO database eyes gender gap in land rights

A new database launched by FAO puts the spotlight on one of the major stumbling blocks to rural development - widespread inequalities between men and women in their access to land. The Gender and Land Rights Database, produced in consultation with national statistics authorities, universities, civil society organizations and other sources worldwide, offers up-to-date information on how men and women in 78 countries differ in their legal rights and access to land.

In most of the world, women lag well behind men in ownership of agricultural land and access to income from land, even though women are major producers of food crops and play crucial roles in providing and caring for their households.

"Disparity in land access is one of the major causes for social and economic inequalities between males and females in rural areas. It jeopardizes food security at the household and community levels, and has an impact on national food security and development. It is vital information for policy makers. But until now, finding information on this phenomenon in one place has been difficult to come by," Marcela Villarreal, Director, FAO Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division said as the new database was placed online.

The new information tool, available to anyone with access to the Internet, provides policymakers and other users with a better picture of the major social, economic, political and cultural factors which affect access to land and enforcement of women's land rights.

The database covers both national and customary laws governing land use; property rights and inheritance; international treaties and conventions; land tenure and related institutions; civil society organizations that work on land issues, and other related statistics. By searching country profiles, users can find out the answers to specific questions on topics like the total number of land holders, the total number of women land holders and the number of rural households headed by women. They can also call up comparisons on a given topic between two or more countries.

<http://www.fao.org/gender/landrights>

## Women reservation bill: India sets quota for female lawmakers

The women reservation bill passed 12<sup>th</sup> March 2010 in India's upper house of parliament, setting the stage for women to hold one-third of all legislative seats. The women reservation bill passed today in India's upper house of parliament, as politicians overwhelmingly voted to amend the Constitution to reserve one-third of all seats in national and state legislatures for women.

Female lawmakers and activists shouted "we have made it" outside parliament soon after it passed Tuesday night in New Delhi.

While proponents say the bill will increase women's participation in politics and contribute to one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, critics say it favors wealthy women and encourages powerful men to substitute daughters and wives as political proxies.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said the 186 to 1 vote was a "historic step forward toward emancipation of Indian womanhood."

The vote came a day after [International Women's Day](#), which saw more than 70 demonstrations globally to protest for women's empowerment in jobs and government.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-News/2010/0309/Women-reservation-bill-India-sets-quota-for-female-lawmakers>

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**Laura Chinchilla becomes Costa Rica's first female leader**

Costa Rica is set to have its first female president, after election results gave governing party candidate Laura Chinchilla an unassailable lead.

With most votes counted from Sunday's poll, Ms Chinchilla had 47% of the vote, 22 points ahead of the main opposition contender, Otton Solis.

Ms Chinchilla, a former vice-president, has pledged to continue the free-market policies of outgoing head, Oscar Arias. She has also promised to tackle violent crime, a growing issue in Costa Rica.

"The biggest challenge we face is criminality, violence and drug-trafficking," Ms Chinchilla, told her supporters.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8503425.stm>

# WORLD NEWS

## Launch of the Global Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls

UNIFEM has launched a [Global Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls](#). The one-stop centre will support practitioners around the world in effective design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes. The web-based site brings together lessons learned to date and recommended practices gleaned from initiatives on ending violence against women and girls, whether originating from the women's movement, civil society organizations, governments, the United Nations system or other actors.

The *Global Virtual Knowledge Centre* was presented on 4 March at an event held on the occasion of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) and co-hosted by UNIFEM and the Government of Spain.

Efforts by the international community to end violence against women and girls have gained an unprecedented momentum. Decades of tireless work by the women's movement and human rights activists have placed the issue high on global, regional and national agendas. At the international level, the UN Secretary-General's campaign, [UNiTE to End Violence against Women](#), calls on governments, civil society, the private sector and the entire UN system to join forces in addressing this global pandemic.

The major challenge worldwide is to translate policy commitments into practice, but few policy-makers and practitioners have ready access to the global evidence base of effective measures to end violence against women and girls.

In response, UNIFEM has developed the *Global Virtual Knowledge Centre* that brings together existing and cumulative experience, know-how and resources from around the world. Access to this knowledge base can improve the quality of interventions, optimize results and enhance the cost-effectiveness of investments.

Currently, the knowledge centre features three modules, developed by recognized experts in the respective areas of specialization and vetted by networks of practitioners. Several additional modules are in development. The centralized database is fully searchable and available in English, French and Spanish.

[http://www.unifem.org/news\\_events/story\\_detail.php?StoryID=1044](http://www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail.php?StoryID=1044)

## FRANCE MAY MAKE MENTAL VIOLENCE A CRIME

France's National Assembly approved on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010 night a proposal to add "psychological violence" to a law intended to help victims of physical violence and abuse, despite doubts that the law is specific enough to have much impact.

The proposed law says that to "act or repeatedly say things that could damage the victim's life conditions, affect his/her rights and his/her dignity or damage his/her physical or mental health" is punishable by a jail term of up to three years and a fine of up to 75,000 euros, or about \$103,000. Carefully covering both genders, the law applies to behavior toward a wife, husband, partner or concubine.

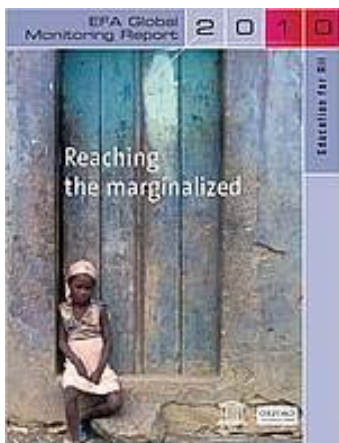
Danielle Bousquet, a Socialist, and Guy Geoffroy, a member of the ruling center-right Union for a Popular Movement, wrote the [draft law](#), supported by 30 other legislators. It received backing last November from the government and Prime Minister [Francois Fillon](#), who called it "very significant progress."

The new law, Mr. Fillon said, "will allow people to take into account the most insidious situations, which don't leave a mark to the naked eye but can mutilate the victim's inner self." He called the issue "a great national cause," and the government has started a [series of commercials](#) on television to sensitize viewers to conjugal violence, especially against women.

<http://www.awid.org/eng/Women-s-Rights-in-the-News/Women-s-Rights-in-the-News/France-May-Make-Mental-Violence-a-Crime>



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## Global Monitoring Report 2010: Reaching the marginalized

Education systems in many of the world's poorest countries are now experiencing the aftershock of the global economic downturn.

The 2010 Education for All Global Monitoring Report, released on 19 January, argues that the crisis could create a lost generation of children whose life chances will have been irreparably damaged by a failure to protect their right to education.

The Report examines who these children are and why they are being left behind, and shows that the cost of providing Education for All is much higher than previously estimated.

The report looks at concrete solutions for making sure that no children are excluded from schooling.

<http://www.unesco.org/en/efareport/>

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## The second issue of the African Women Rights Observatory newsletter, now available

The African Women Rights Observatory (AWRO) has published the second issue of its quarterly newsletter dedicated to women's rights issues.

This newsletter is available on the website of AWRO at: <http://awro.uneca.org/ownPublications.aspx>

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## A "DOSSIER OF CLAIMS" TO SUPPORT THE CAUSE OF WOMEN

In order to commemorate its first anniversary, the campaign « Ratify and Respect » launched by FIDH

(Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme) in collaboration with five regional NGOs namely African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS), Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), Women's Aid Collective (WACOL), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) et Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) has launched a "dossier of claims" to support the cause of women.

This document is the outcome of investigations conducted by national human rights and women's rights organizations in their respective countries and reflects the situation of women's rights in over thirty African countries. It contains key demands to eliminate discrimination and violence against women. These "claims" are directed towards national governments, since strengthening respect of women's rights is primarily a question of political will. The Dossier is composed of a series of notes, detailing the main violations of women's rights in each country. Each note underlines where they exist - any positive measures that have been taken over recent years, and identifies the main obstacles to respect of women's rights in law and practice.

## WILDAF WEST AFRICA Newsletter

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