



PRESS STATEMENT 20th JULY 2016

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY GENDER EQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT BILL

The East African Sub Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), now **20 years old** is a sub regional civil society Organisation established in 1996 to systematically follow up implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action emanating from the Fourth World conference on women held in Beijing in 1995. EASSI is registered in Uganda as a Non-Governmental Organisation and currently works in eight countries in Eastern Africa namely Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Uganda.

Since 2008, EASSI in partnership with women rights' alliances in the 5 Partners states, has been campaigning for an East African Gender Equality Protocol. This later changed into a bill which was tabled at East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) as a Private Members Bill and due for public hearings in all the 5 EAC Partner states.

The overall purpose of the EAC Gender and Development Bill is to advance Gender Equality across the 5 EAC Partner states in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres, for the benefit of women and men by consolidating into one legally binding document, the various human rights instruments to which the EAC partner states are party or signatory at the continental and International levels. *(The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, CEDAW, the protocol to the African charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of women in Africa and the Recent Sustainable Development Goals especially Goal 1 and 5)*

This campaign was inspired by a similar campaign in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) waged by the women's movement in Southern Africa for a SADC Gender Declaration which later on became the current SADC Gender Protocol.

Why the EAC Gender and Development Bill?

The EAC Partner States have signed and ratified various regional and international instruments relating to gender equality and women's rights and have national legislations and policies on gender equality. However, these are either not extended to fully protect women's rights or efforts to implement them are insufficient.

This has left women vulnerable to human rights abuses and has exacerbated inequalities in governance and trade at the regional, national and community level.

For example, Women in countries like Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda still face FGM despite having laws outlawing the practice. According to a UNICEF report about FGM in 2013, 27% of girls in Kenya undergo FGM 88% in Sudan and 1% in Uganda.

When it comes to health, sexual and reproductive health indicators are low for all countries. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live

births) in EAC Partner States is as follows: Burundi 740, Kenya 400, Uganda 360, Tanzania 410 and Rwanda 320. These are very high maternal mortality rates yet the countries do not allocate the required 15 percent of their budgets to health, as agreed in the Abuja declaration that mandated African countries to allocate this percentage.

These are, but a few examples of gender inequalities in the EAC Partner states. The EAC Partner States therefore, need to implement the instruments, legislation and policies, allocate sufficient funds and take affirmative action to be able to address gender inequalities and women's rights and mitigate the barriers to the advancement of women.

We hope that the Bill once enacted into an Act will harmonize national laws of the EAC Member States with regional and international standards of protection and promotion of gender and human rights, promote non-discrimination and gender equality in the processes of governance and trade for strengthened regional integration and sustainable development of the Community.

It will also promote the equal participation of women and men in regional trade by entrenching enabling policies and macro-economic frameworks that are gender sensitive and responsive.

Members of the Media,

This time round, we are not just pushing for a mere law to be passed on paper but we have all intentions of measuring governments' progress and performance in implementing their commitments towards gender equality and development.

For the first time in East Africa, we are going to produce an EAC Gender Equality Barometer, similar to the SADC Gender Barometer. The EAC Gender Barometer report which will include a Citizens Perceptions Index will be out in October this year and will be updated annually for the subsequent years.

Currently, there is no legal framework that provides authoritative information or data that can be used to hold EAC partner States accountable on their gender commitments. Whereas sporadic data is collected on different themes at different times, the evidence in those studies sometimes lack scientific rigour or an articulation of clear cut consequences associated with the absence of mutual accountability across partner states.

The EAC Gender Barometer will therefore be a key advocacy tool which will provide a synthesized measure of women's rights and gender equality that is both easy to understand and to communicate.

The Gender Barometer is also expected to give visibility to gender equality issues by making it possible to measure progress over time. The Barometer report will also be an important tool for

decision-makers in assessing how well their states have done in implementing gender equality commitments.

Having a Gender Barometer therefore is a critical tool for not only enhancing citizen's participation in governance processes through critical information but also a tool for holding governments accountable to their gender commitments.

The EAC Gender and Development Act has been long overdue! We therefore call upon EALA to fast track the public hearings and passing of the bill.

We call upon EAC partner states to support the EAC Gender Equality and Development Bill for a United East Africa!

For the detailed draft EAC Gender and Development bill, please visit <http://www.eassi.org>

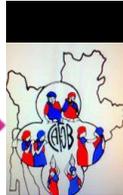
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