



Celebrating Courage
Overcoming Harmful Traditional Practices

**PAN-AFRICAN CONFERENCE
ON CELEBRATING COURAGE AND OVERCOMING HARMFUL
TRADITIONAL PRACTICES IN AFRICA**

**5-7 OCTOBER 2011, AU CONFERENCE CENTRE,
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

REPORT

**Department of Social Affairs
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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Traditional cultural practices reflect values and beliefs held by members of a community, spanning generations. All social groups over the world have specific practices and beliefs which often have strong cultural underpinnings. These can be positive but they can also be negative. Almost all societies have positive cultural practices that are beneficial to all members, such as those which sustain society, provide cohesion and solidarity, and promote development in its broad sense. On the other hand, there are also practices which may be harmful to specific groups, for example, to women. Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) have persisted because individuals and communities may hesitate to sacrifice what is perceived as important, although they may recognize them as harmful. Hence, in fighting HTP, change should be advocated for without posing threats or by making people feel they should abandon what is important in their cultures.
2. Children and young women are often victims of various forms of physical or psychological violence that infringe on their bodily or physical integrity and mental well-being. This is due to their perceived and actual inferior status in society and the persistence of patriarchal attitudes.
3. Many governments and communities in Africa have become aware of the need to achieve gender equality and a more equitable society. Many have initiated efforts to overcome HTP, including enactment of laws criminalizing HTP and development of national policies to sensitize communities and their leadership against HTP. Irrespective of these efforts, which must be acknowledged, there still remains a gap between aspirations and values embodied in the relevant instruments and the reality that HTP still persist in African societies.
4. It is in this context that the AU Commission (AUC), with support from GIZ, organized the ***Pan-African Conference on Celebrating Courage and Overcoming Harmful Traditional Practices*** in the Conference Centre of the African Union Commission, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 05 – 07 October 2011. The Conference was held to acknowledge the efforts, to share the experiences gained and to celebrate the courage of many women, men and organizations who have been inspirational in the process of eliminating Harmful Traditional Practices. The Conference also examined the legal and human rights of women and girls, as well as the socio-cultural factors which give rise to HTP and at the same time hinder challenging age-old traditions in the process of introducing required change. The Conference served as a platform for synergizing energies and developing a framework for action to contribute to the promotion and protection of the rights of women, girls and children in our efforts to combat HTP.

II. ATTENDANCE

5. The Conference was attended by 80 participants from 24 African countries. The participants consisted of policy makers from the AU Member States, activists, human rights lawyers, cultural practitioners, religious leaders, researchers, African and international inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, associations and networks, regional and international organizations and development partners of the AU.

6. The List of Participants is attached as Annex 3.

III. ORGANISATION OF THE CONFERENCE AND MAIN OBJECTIVES

7. The Conference was divided into the following sessions:
 - Opening ceremony
 - Plenary sessions
 - Closing session
8. The participants discussed a range of issues under the general theme, “Celebrating courage and overcoming Harmful Traditional Practices” with the main objective to contribute to continental efforts to promote and protect the rights of women and girls, to celebrate achievements and courage in combating HTP develop actions through the promotion of positive cultural values.

IV. ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

9. This Report contains the highlights of the discussions during the Conference and is organized as follows:
 - Introduction
 - Organization of the Conference
 - Organization of the Report
 - Opening Ceremony
 - Plenary Sessions
 - 1) Human Rights and Legal Protection of Women and Girls with regard to HTP
 - 2) Positive and Negative Cultural Practices and Traditions
 - 3) Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
 - 4) Case Studies A on Best Practices
 - 5) Case Studies B on Best Practices
 - 6) Adoption of the Conference Report

Annexes

- Work Programme
- Concept Note
- List of Participants

V. OPENING CEREMONY

10. Dr Olawale Maiyegun, Director of Social Affairs, AU Commission, welcomed the participants to the Conference and acknowledged the presence of H.E. Dr Jean Ping, Chairperson of the AU Commission, as well as the presence of H.E. Adv. Bience Gawanas, Commissioner for Social Affairs, and H.E. Mrs Lieselore Cyrus, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany. He emphasized that in fighting HTP we should aim for change without making people feel they should abandon their positive traditions, some of which have been practiced over many years and are deeply entrenched in societies in

Africa. The Director mentioned that HTP such as FGM, early marriages, taboos that prevent women from controlling their fertility, early pregnancy, and others result in death, illness and psychological harm for millions.

11. H.E. Mrs. Lieselore Cyrus, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the AU and Ethiopia, welcomed the participants and emphasized the uniqueness of the conference as it focuses on solutions rather than problems. She also noted that it is a forum to exchange experiences and to create a network for people from different countries and societies to support one another. The Ambassador stressed that human rights approaches must relate to efforts in combating HTP and the adoption of best practices. Germany interprets it as an issue of protection of the rights of women and girls and therefore supports the AU and the African Court of Human Rights in order for the AU to deal effectively with human rights violations and HTP. This is done to help Africa seek African solutions for African problems. The Ambassador concluded that she is confident that all participants will partake successfully in the conference and that the outcome will assist them in their daily fight against HTP.
12. Dr Cheikh Ould Zein, Religious Leader from Mauritania, stressed the importance of the Conference because of the importance of the subject matter. He also highlighted the exceptionality of the venue, Addis Ababa, which is symbolic of dialogue between religions. The Cheikh noted that people are of the opinion that Islam is not compatible with human rights. He mentioned that FGM in particular is contrary to the central teaching of Islam.
13. H.E. Adv. Bience Gawanas, Commissioner for Social Affairs, AU Commission, thanked H.E. the Chairperson of the AU Commission for his presence and commenced her statement by mentioning that Ethiopia is the cradle of humankind, and therefore an appropriate venue for the Conference. She pointed out that the African Union does not only manage conflicts in Africa, but that the AU puts people at the centre of its vision and its actions. The Commissioner emphasized that Africa must find its own solutions to these challenges. On the other hand, Africa is not an island, but it is part of the global world, and it was through solidarity that Africa had made remarkable achievements. In keeping African tradition and cultural heritage rich and vibrant, they must be adjusted to the current dynamics of the world and must further discard what has ceased to be useful or relevant. The purpose of the Conference is to provide a platform for interaction between stakeholders and to decide on actions and strategies that will transform negative African cultures to respect the dignity of all people. The Commissioner ended her statement by asking if girls and women would be asked to speak at this Conference, what would they say? “We are powerless and voiceless victims – please help us?”, “We are powerful and have the will to overcome – make our voice loud and our vulnerabilities visible”, Or, “We have overcome – celebrate with us and help us to sustain our victories?”
14. The Commissioner subsequently presented the theme and highlighted the expectations of the Conference as follows:

Human Rights and Legal Protection of Women and Girls:

- Even with the existence of global, continental and national legal instruments, gender inequality persists at national level in African countries. Constitutions of African

countries contain provisions on equality and rights of women but in reality, these provisions are not implemented. Hence, formal equality has been provided for, but in practice, gender equality usually does not exist.

- Various role players, including the judiciary and parliaments, have an important part to play in addressing gender equality. Gender roles are linked to tradition and socialization. Recognizing the status of women would also mean combating HTP and using tradition creatively.
- Changes, whether as a result of laws and policies, in tradition and customs affect people and therefore we need to promote community awareness of the legal instruments that protect the rights of women and children.

Cultural practices:

- Culture is dynamic and evolving. Africa has embraced the African Renaissance to promote our African identity and heritage, and therefore the Conference should also consider positive African traditional values with a view to maintain and promote them. At the AU Commission, shared values have been identified as a separate pillar of its strategic plan. The African Cultural Renaissance addresses our intellectual, spiritual and material heritage, and in particular it reclaims, restores, rediscovers, and reconnects with our identity and Pan-Africanism. In this regard, we should reflect on our values and beliefs held by members of a community which have been passed on through generations.
- The African Charter on Human and People's Rights preserve and strengthen positive African values and contribute to the promotion of the moral well-being of society. The positive values include respect for elders, caring for the vulnerable, sharing and solidarity, tolerance, dialogue, consultation, Ubuntu ("I am because you are") and mediation. The Conference will consider positive African traditional values with a view to maintain and promote them. However, negative cultural practices that discriminate and violate the human rights and dignity of women and girls which lead to physical and emotional harm, should be discarded. These include practices such as forced feeding of women, FGM, early marriages, practices and taboos preventing women from controlling their fertility, female infanticide, succession and inheritance, wife inheritance and son preference.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR):

- SRHR is a critical development concern, focusing strongly on the agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The Maputo Plan of Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health provides for universal access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services (SRHS), and links HIV to SRHS.
- The linkage between SRHR and HTP are very clear because they are also causes of high maternal mortality. Some women do not have control over their fertility as a result of various taboos and cultural practices, which can prevent them from accessing services or having too many pregnancies which can lead to birth related complications.

- AUC launched the Campaign for Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA), an AU campaign launched in May 2009 during the 4th Session of the AU Conference of Ministers of Health under the slogan, “Africa Cares: No Woman should Die While Giving Life!” to raise awareness on maternal mortality and to promote actions including combating HTP that can help to reduce mortality.

Case Studies on Best Practices in combating Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP):

- Positive actions to overcome HTP will be highlighted in the two sessions under this thematic area. Tools and models used will be presented, and through sharing and learning, participants should leave the Conference on a note of celebrating achievements in overcoming HTP.
15. The Commissioner expressed the expectation that through frank deliberations on the above four (4) thematic areas, the Conference should produce clear and implementable recommendations that can be translated into concrete actions for the way forward.

VI. PLENARY SESSIONS

16. Each plenary had a moderator, rapporteur and presenter(s). Within the framework of the overall theme, papers were presented in plenary sessions on the following topics:

SESSION 1: Human Rights and Legal Protection of Women and Girls with regard to HTP

Presentation and discussions

17. Speaker 1: Mrs. Sheila Minkah-Premo emphasized the following:
- Traditional practices can be positive but also negative. HTP is a human rights issue which affects the rights of victims because it discriminates women and causes harm.
 - A number of human rights instruments already exist at global, continental and at local level. Enactment of laws alone cannot address the issue of HTP. The challenge is to enforce the legislation. However, laws serve as tools and set standards, which are important to produce social change.
 - In Ghana, the Constitution contains a number of provisions that can be used to combat HTP. Additional laws have also been promulgated to combat HTP, however, these practices still continue. A research project is currently conducted by the National House of Chiefs, and the Law Reform Commission (with financial support by GIZ) which aims at establishing a collection of customary legal norms. This study uncovered a number of existing HTP in communities in Ghana.
 - Examples for HTP in Ghana include: (1) Accusation of witchcraft of older females with consequent beating, loss of land and properties and expulsion from the community to witches camps. (2) Trokosi (ritual servitude) and exploitation of labour of girl children at farms and by priests. A law against it has been passed, but the police do not execute it because of fear of the priests. (3) Inheritance rights: patrilineal systems where girls cannot

inherit, or when the girl marries the property is taken away from her. In matrilineal communities female spouses do not inherit from their husbands unless the female spouse agrees to marry the successor and children can stay in their father's house subject to good behavior. In 1985 a law for equitable inheritance rights was enacted, but in the rural areas it is not complied with. (4) Marriage forms and discrimination in control of resources: forced marriages in the form of abduction, and forms that do not require the woman's consent. The process of abduction has led to fights between whole communities as a revenge on the family who abducted a girl.

- Several traditional Ghanaian sayings demonstrate the attitude towards women's rights ("A woman does not kill a snake and cut of the head", "If a woman owns a gun, it leans in her husband's room".)
- The most important continental instrument is the Protocol to the African Charter on Woman's Rights. Governments should be encouraged to undertake and promote research to identify HTP, the harms they cause and how to combat them, and ratify relevant international and continental legal instruments. NGO's should furthermore continue their important advocacy work. There are other important human rights instruments such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, among others.

18. The participants further noted that:

- The African continent has a history of struggle for liberation and freedom. Women were part of these struggles, because they knew that before they can have their rights as women recognized, they need to be recognized as a human being first.
- The focus must not only be on political and civil rights but also on economic, social and cultural rights. Africa's main challenges are poverty and ill health. Therefore, economic, social and cultural rights are equally important even though it is argued that they are not enforceable.
- Many countries have a dual legal system where customary law operates alongside case law/civil law and women have to constantly negotiate between these legal systems. However in some countries (e.g. South Africa and Namibia) customary laws are recognized to the extent that they do not conflict with human rights.
- Access to justice is not always provided in formal courts, but in customary, religious courts or informal systems. It is important to emphasize the role of alternative mechanisms such as the ombudsperson and traditional mechanisms through which women can fight for their rights and get redress. The role of the state can be viewed as (1) serving as a vehicle for delivery of a public good, such as access to health and legal services, and (2) setting norms and standards for shared values of equality and dignity. In this regard, it has a duty to ensure that women are provided with such services and that our practices also espouse values of equality and dignity.
- We should celebrate the good work done by women lawyers in their campaign for legal reforms and judges who have interpreted provisions in order to support women. Judicial activism is a very important part of the process of change. Most women, even if they know their rights, do not have access to legal advice. There is need for community legal assistance and community help lines.

19. The main points raised in the discussion were the following:

- Concerns were expressed about the continued prevalence of FGM, unofficial marriages viz-a-viz the three levels of marriage – traditional, religious and civil - widow inheritance and bride price.
- The primary duty bearers to combat HTP are not NGOs, but Governments. The AU can encourage Governments to pass laws against HTP and to enforce them, and even institute measures to monitor implementation, e.g. by means of peer review. It was emphasized that civil society and NGOs indeed fulfill an important role in awareness-raising on HTP.
- The question of universalism of human rights was raised and confirmed. Basic human rights and women's human rights must always be respected independent of culture and religion.
- HTP are sometimes viewed as a religious issue, in that some are officially promoted by religious leaders, some leaders never speak out against it, and others have banned these practices, but they are still practiced by people in the name of religion. It was reiterated that religious leaders need to be included in the dialogue on HTP at all times, and it was proposed that a Conference should be held with religious leaders under the auspices of the AU on HTP.
- It was pointed out that some AU Member States have enacted legislation because they are pressured by peer review. There remains much to be done with regard to implementation of laws against HTP.
- It is important that people in rural areas know their rights and that they can also understand them. Language is an important obstacle in this regard. Laws and research documents should be translated into local languages so that the affected women understand them.

20. The moderator summarized the key discussion points as follows:

- Any legal strategy to combat HTP should be accompanied by advocacy, education, medical assistance, information gathered through research to create evidence based advocacy and law reform, sensitization of older people on existing norms and laws, involvement of religious leaders as key change leaders, traditional leaders and civil society.
- Economic, social and cultural rights viz-a-viz political and civil rights pose challenges. National constitutions should include all as enforceable rights and not just as principles of state policy. Issues of legal pluralism are a problem – an effective way to deal with this is to work towards uniform laws such as on succession. State responsibility is important because governments play a critically important role in addressing HTP through developing legislation and enforcing it. How do we hold governments accountable?
- Women's right groups should organize themselves in networks to address HTP to avoid proliferation of efforts and resources.
- The work of woman lawyers and activists should be celebrated.
- The cultural relativism arguments that arise with regard to HTP should be addressed by pointing out the universalism and indivisibility of human rights.
- Despite laws, how do we create awareness in the rural areas where the majority of people speak only African languages? Women must be empowered in word and deed. Language is the medium of communication. Not only should relevant laws be communicated to women in their own languages, but research results should also be translated, and they should ascertain whether these results reflect the truth of their own words.

SESSION 2: Positive and negative cultural practices and traditions

Presentations and discussions

21. Speaker 1: Mrs Berhane Ras-Work stressed the following:

- HTP have their roots in the patriarchal system which controls the world. Mechanisms were created to subjugate women to the will of men.
- For the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices (IAC) the main focus is on FGM, which also attracts worldwide attention because of its brutality and effects.
- The combating of FGM needs to be introduced sensitively to traditional, religious and community leaders. The entry point for dialogue is always on positive traditional practices that exist in the community. Then gradually the problem of HTP is introduced. The communities are then asked to propose solutions.
- In cities such as Addis Ababa where you find a mixture of cultures, the target groups to be addressed are youths, health workers, the media and institutions such as mosques, churches and schools.
- In Kenya, the tool of community mobilization is employed, accompanied by festivities, dancing and music and at the same time introducing dialogue on issues such as FGM.
- In Sudan, midwives, health workers and doctors are approached and mobilized to combat FGM. Home visits and education are also conducted, as well as sensitization of politicians and religious leaders.
- In Ethiopia's Bosana Worana area, communities have been reached through education. Whoever practices FGM are excluded from the "idir" self-help organization and will thus be an outsider.
- In Uganda, a culture day is organized annually where positive traditional practices are celebrated, while at the same time, a campaign against FGM was launched. Everybody is mobilized, including politicians, civil society, the media, youth and health workers. The President included the fight against FGM in his election campaign.
- In Benin, traditional leaders are mobilized for awareness raising campaigns.
- The multi-pronged holistic approach combines FGM education with holistic development and general human rights debates, health, education, economics and development.
- The AU has included HTP in Art. 5 of the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women, which is a big step forward.
- Challenges are to coordinate all the efforts of many actors. Another problem is to finance projects and reach whole populations in many African countries. Political will of governments poses another challenge. Sufficient mechanisms and resolutions exist and they just have to be embraced by the people through information and education.
- Excisors could be target groups that can be used as change agents.

22. Speaker 2: Dr. Cheikh Ould Zein, religious leader emphasized that:

- In Mauritania, FGM is a religious issue which is practiced by women, and men are not widely aware about it. There are many Islamic writings on the matter, some of which make it compulsory, some say it is recommended (this being the common belief in Mauritania), and some say it is against Islam.

- The greatest problem is the perception of what is required by Islamic rules, because there are many different writings on FGM.
- There was a workshop in Mauritania in which representatives from many African Islamic countries discussed the FGM in Islam, which was a big step forward. The idea is to have a common African ruling (“Fatwa”) on FGM in Islam.
- This is not a change of Islam, but it is simply a change of perception.

23. The main points raised in the discussion were the following:

- FGM was the main point of the discussion, though it was made clear that many other HTP exist. There is a need to conduct baseline studies to determine which practices exist and who the participants and victims are.
- Many participants presented practices and developments from their countries. Examples include joint activities of different actors on the national day against FGM, the organization of large funerals when a girl dies from FGM in order to raise awareness that FGM can kill, or media campaigns.
- It is necessary to monitor whether the incidence of HTP decreased resulting from evaluating the effects of projects. Without monitoring mechanisms it is hard to identify best practices because it is not known if they actually achieve their goals.
- It is also important to synergize efforts. There are a large number of organizations campaigning against HTP, but they would be much more effective if they worked together. There should be a holistic approach including all stakeholders.
- It was proposed to use local radio stations to inform women in rural areas about their rights in their local languages.
- Concern was raised that few efforts have been made to identify positive traditions and promote these although there is much talk about them, there is no action. Hence, there should be a baseline study on positive traditions so that they can be shared.
- HTP are also practiced by educated people because there is too much pressure from family members.
- Women and girls in conflict and post-conflict areas are vulnerable to HTP.
- The religious ruling from Mauritania should be distributed widely to religious leaders in African countries where FGM are practiced.
- In Cameroon and Rwanda, members of teenage mother groups reported the massaging of their breasts by elders with heated objects, or with needles to induce retarded growth. This is another HTP to be combated.
- The use of native languages to address HTP is very important. How can we address the problem of many languages spoken in one country? We must see many languages as an asset, not a liability to bring anti-HTP messages over clearly. “If you talk to a man in a foreign language, the message goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, the message goes to his heart” (Nelson Mandela).
- In KwaZulu Natal Province, South Africa, the King reintroduced male circumcision because of the benefit of this positive traditional practice regarding prevention of HIV infection with 60% success. Medical circumcision is now conducted by the Department of Health, which is preceded by HIV testing. Traditional surgeons are also trained. The negative effect (death, penis amputations, severe infections due to unhygienic operations) of this positive traditional practice has thus been counteracted.
- It was reiterated that tools developed for FGM should be used to combat other harmful traditional practices.

24. It was further noted that:

- For the last 25 years there was a large emphasis on HIV, which even led to a fragmented medical system with doctors and nurses only focusing on HIV. The same should not happen for HTP. When talking about HTP, there should not be a sole focus on FGM, but on all kinds of HTP in an integrated way. It is important to know the whole extend of HTP practiced in our countries in order to combat them.
- The Commissioner posed the question: How can positive values be used to overcome negative traditions?

25. The moderator summarized the key discussion points as follows:

- Baseline studies needs to be conducted to identify HTP, and who is involved.
- Synergies need to be created between activities at national, regional and continental levels to combat HTP.
- Cross-generational dialogues need to be conducted with the youth to be the torchbearers of campaigns against HTP.
- Male youths in particular should be mobilized to strongly voice their disapproval of HTP and their impact on their female peers.
- Special programmes should be launched in conflict, and post-conflict settings to combat HTP.
- There should be special programmes for people with disabilities especially children.
- A holistic approach is needed where modern and traditional approaches are combined.
- The positive results achieved with regard to FGM should be applied to other HTP.
- A multi-pronged holistic approach is needed where positive cultural values can be used to fight Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) and where education on HTP is linked to development and human rights, health education, and economics.

SESSION 3: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

26. **Speaker 1:** Dr Jotham Musinguzi emphasized the following in the session that focused on the linkage between Harmful Traditional Practices and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights:

- Reproductive health is defined as a state of physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system at all stages of life and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (ICPD PoA, 1994). Implicit in this definition are the rights of men and women to have information and access to safe, effective, affordable, and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, and the right to appropriate health-care services that enable women to safely go through pregnancy and childbirth.
- Although Africa has made progress in achieving the goals of global and continental instruments related to sexual and reproductive health and rights such as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Beijing Platform, Maputo Plan of Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Campaign for Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA), and others, maternal mortality ratios in Africa remain very high with most countries reporting 1000 or more deaths for every 100,000 live births.

- The major causes of maternal mortality are: Hemorrhage, infection, eclampsia, obstructed labour, abortion and others. Malnutrition was highlighted as a central underlying death cause of both, mothers and their newborns. It was further emphasized that most of the births were attended by unskilled birth attendants increasing the risk of maternal and newborn mortality.
- Harmful Traditional Practices indeed contribute to the high maternal and infant mortality rates in Africa. These practices were said to either indirectly or directly impinge on the progress of achievement of the MDGs especially as they affect sexual and reproductive health and rights of women. Examples of such practices mentioned during the session included nutrition taboos, early marriages, FGM, bride price, wife inheritance, etc. It was concluded that SRHR could act as an important entry point for stakeholders in the fight against HTP.
- Specific rights relevant to sexual and reproductive health, include: rights to the highest attainable standard of health, life and survival, liberty and security of person, free from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of one's children and to have the information and means to do so, women to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, right to privacy, participation, freedom from discrimination (on the basis of sex, gender, marital status, age, race and ethnicity, health status/disability), right of access to information, right to education, right to freedom from violence against women.
- A relatively good policy environment for SRHR in Africa exists, given the various instruments such as Maputo PoA, African Women's Decade, CARMMA, the Abuja Call for Accelerated Action towards Universal Access to HIV/AIDS, TB & Malaria Services and the Africa Health Strategy that have been adopted.
- The ultimate goal of the Maputo Plan of Action calls upon African governments, civil society, the private sector and all development partners to join forces and redouble efforts to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health services in all countries in Africa by 2015.
- The Campaign for Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA) was launched in 34 African countries by October 2011 and most of these countries have developed road maps for the implementation the Maputo Plan of Action on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.
- The Debate on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) during the AU Summit in Kampala in July 2010, has facilitated the review of the Maputo Plan of Action, its extension to 2015, and alignment of its indicators with the Millennium Development Goals, as well as broadening the focus of the CARMMA campaign to also cover the newborn and African child.
- The AU has also engaged Ministers of Finance in dialogue with Ministers of Health on issues of health financing including on SRHR.
- Progress has also been recorded as regards Health systems strengthening at Primary Health Care level, development of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems and integration of HIV.
- Reproductive health and family planning services are being implemented by all Member States. However, only 17% of Member States have provided for sustainable funding for Mother, Newborn and Child Health and SRHR.

27. The following challenges were highlighted by the presenter:

- Weak political commitment and support of policy makers.
- Inadequate health financing, including for SRHR, at various levels - country, regional and international.
- Weak health systems including inadequate Human Resources for Health, Health Information Systems and M&E.
- Poor implementation of effective interventions including policies and programmes. National strategies/roadmaps for Maputo PoA which are not financed or remain on the shelf or in draft form.
- Poor coordination, limited integration.
- Unfavorable or outdated legislation, limited application.
- Harmful traditional practices still prevail.
- Limited IEC and community involvement, especially for men, youth in/out of school.

28. Recommendations ensuing from the discussions were the following:

- Member States should be held accountable on their commitments regarding SRHR.
- Advocacy is required at various levels including AU, governments, parliaments, the private sector, CSOs/NGOs and the media.
- Engagement at various levels is needed - community, district, national, regional and international – for improvement of SRHR services.
- Harmful Traditional Practices should be combated through all possible means including family dialogues, IEC materials, etc.
- Advocacy efforts should be increased towards African leaders on the implementation of SRHR and other related policies.
- The advocacy efforts, policy dialogue and networking of policymakers and women SRH champions should be supported.
- Capacities should be built and networking of Women Champions facilitated.
- South-south initiatives and partnerships should be encouraged.
- Government stewardship and coordination of partnerships need to be promoted.
- A multi-sectoral approach, rather than a narrow focus on clinical solutions to SRHR and HTP, should be implemented.
- Gender-based violence, including harmful traditional practices, should be combated rigorously.
- Human resources should be developed, including training of traditional birth attendants.
- Integrated health systems need to be developed that will incorporate access to SRHR services and commodity security.
- Health financing need to be improved at both local and international levels.
- Legislation that address harmful traditional practices need to be updated and enforced;
- Community education and male involvement needs to be expanded to address SRHR and HTP.
- Different approaches should be used, including family dialogue as a mechanism for behavior change.

29. Speaker 2: Ms Imelda Hyera presented the following:

- The organization 'TANGA', established in 2000 as a branch of the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices in Tanzania, fights against HTP which affects the basic human rights of women and children, while maintaining good traditions.
- The presenter recommended that women should have access to both formal and informal education, and to health care, for them to make their own informed decisions regarding HTP. Every person in the community should be involved in this fight.

30. Speaker 3: Ms Edwige Sangli presented the following:

- The presenter briefly described the work of her organization and finally recommended the Family Dialogue as an approach that has been successful to educate rural women on their rights.
- The moderator shared a story about two different communities living on the two sides of a river. The women from one community wondered why the women on the other side, after they delivered, were able to come back to the river after only two or three days, why they themselves needed two or three weeks to recover. After communicating with the other women, they found out that it was because they themselves were circumcised and the women on the other side of the river not. From this experience, the women themselves decided that from now on they would not circumcise their daughters any longer.

SESSION 4: Case Studies A on Best Practices

31. Speaker 1: Mr. Amare Dejene from Ethiopia made a presentation based on a qualitative study on 'Best Practices in Africa' focusing on 5 selected countries - Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Senegal and Tanzania. The study presented some best practices of interventions from political to the grassroots level to protect the rights of people against Harmful Traditional Practices, particularly those affecting women and girls. The best practices highlighted in the report were the following:

- Strong political commitment by the Government of Burkina Faso in addressing HTP in the country in the form of implementing national legal instruments against gender based violence, particularly FGM.
- Education at school level - projects have been initiated to include issues of HTP into school curricula and training of teachers to be sensitized towards the harmful effects of FGM.
- Psychological counseling and medical assistance to victims of FGM in Burkina Faso.
- Involvement of a number of stakeholders – people practicing FGM and other harmful traditions, religious and traditional leaders (Mauritania), associations and NGOs, human rights organizations.
- Community-led development in Senegal, promoting human rights education at grassroots level, providing communities with a forum to express their views and become knowledgeable of the damage caused by HTP practices, using local languages to educate and reach out to communities.
- Development of a network of Government Ministries and Departments (Women, Children and Youth Affairs), the Private Sector, NGOs, Human Rights Organizations, Religious and Traditional Leader Network, Civil Society and grass roots communities to strengthen and implement laws against HTP in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Tanzania.

32. Speaker 2: Ms. Bogaletch Gebre presented insights from her organization, KMG-Ethiopia's experience, how culture and human rights can be harmonized for gender justice and on creating grass roots social movements against gender based violence, including FG, bride abduction, widow inheritance, domestic violence, etc. The speaker highlighted the following:

- When debates on human rights, particularly that of women and the girl child arise, the cultural aspect is always emphasized which leads to the question whether culture is fundamentally at odds with women's rights? Or is culture being used as a scapegoat to deny, to segregate, discriminate and devalue women's agency as a human being?
- Culture is basic to human constructs of reality and is constructed through human action rather than super organic forces, thus culture is ever changing. Culture is incorporated within structures of power for the construction of hegemony.
- Everyone is entitled to their cultural rights, and the principle of respect for Human Rights is not a matter of choice to any culture, but a universal value that must be upheld. We must, therefore, identify ways and means to harmonize the views and values in those cultures that violate human rights, particularly that of women and female children in facilitating the change process.
- Understanding that there is no parent in the world that would hurt her/his child deliberately, we must also believe that communities have capacities to affect change and to sustain it. However, there are information/knowledge gaps and at times misconception followed by acts conducted in bad faith (with the knowledge that they are harmful).
- The approach must start with what communities already know and build upon it, such as Community Conversation (CC), which is an age old African tradition where elders meet to resolve community problems through discussions. CC is a multi-thrust approach where young, old, women and men, religious leaders, community elders, the educated, the illiterate, and judicial and law enforcement agents are included.
- A multi-faceted systemic approach is required, linking practical needs with strategic interventions regarding issues that affect women which are multi-faceted and re-enforcing each other. FGM cannot be tackled without addressing women's and girls' broader rights issues.
- There should be coordination and linkages created with all essential stakeholders; Generational linkages should be created to mentor and develop leadership, and for the succession of young women to leadership.
- Consistent Community Conversation (CC) engagement provides opportunities for active interaction, dialogue, reflection and sharing without fear of discrimination, respect, trust and relationship building.
- Training is critical, particularly women on Gender, culture and Human Rights for awakening of young women and creating a critical mass of them to become involved in their own struggle, and making them the foot soldiers, leaders and owners of the movement against HTP.
- Providing training for law enforcement agents, the courts, religious leaders, community elders CBOs, young men and women on their roles against gender-based violence, is essential in order to bring change in cultural assumptions which discriminate and exploit women, violate their human dignity and maintain them in inferior positions.
- Culture is not the root cause for the violation of women's human rights; what must be addressed, is sanctioned and institutionalized violence against women.

SESSION 5: Case Studies B on Best Practices

33. Speaker 1: Dr Isatou Touray from The Gambia highlighted the social mobilization process and how a systems approach to overcoming Harmful Traditional Practices can be developed. She emphasized the following:

- In the Clusters approach, the core group of traditional leaders and elders which make decisions in each community, need to be reached first before trying to change HTP.
- The Clusters approach endeavour to identify the power dynamics of the leadership and decision makers in communities, and it is recognized that it is necessary to break into the traditional structures to implement effective interventions against HTP.
- Empowering grassroots through advocacy and information campaigns is essential.
- Using local languages is crucial because a woman has to be able to fully understand her rights in order to claim them.
- In many societies, cultural practices are not questioned, but simply lived because they are part of the culture. It needs to be understood why those cultures exist and what are the dynamics behind them.
- Public action has to be taken to shape culture and this requires culturally appropriate approaches.
- FGM cannot be seen in isolation; it is multi-dimensional and affects sexual and reproductive health and human rights.

34. Dr Gabriele Gahn from GIZ in Germany made a presentation on how to use the instrument of the inter-generational dialogue to bring about behavioral change with regard to harmful traditional practices. She made the following key points in her presentation:

- Participants of inter-generational dialogues pro-actively shape their own development.
- IEC materials, followed by a multi-level approach are very important to work towards knowledge building and behavioral change, and empowerment and capacity building of women, men and youth is essential.
- Inter-generational dialogue is participatory, which is different from information and education campaigns. Effective campaigns must go further than just explaining the effects of HTP but people have to find solutions on how to stop the negative practices. The community has to understand the problem, and facilitate decision making for women, men and the youth to become change agents.
- The dialogue is guided by specially trained local facilitators and is supposed to present a forum for discussion between men and women, youth and elders. In this way, change itself becomes less threatening. People should see change as an opportunity and not as a threat. The bottom-up approach creates ownership and makes change sustainable.
- The inter-generational dialogue has been used for FGM, child marriage and HIV/AIDS in different countries. It facilitates not only a change in attitude, but in behavior and is a result-oriented approach.

35. Speaker 3: Mr. Mory Camara from Senegal presented details on educational programmes and community-led development as an approach to overcome harmful traditional practices. The speaker highlighted the following in the presentation:

- Tostan is an NGO in Senegal which has developed a non-formal basic education program.
- The mission of Tostan is to build capacity of African communities for development and social change and it follows a holistic approach to enable communities to talk about their traditions. It presents women and youth with opportunities to express their vision.
- Participants of Tostan's programmes first discuss with each other in the classroom setting, then they share their experiences with the rest of the community in educational discussions organized by the participants and later in inter-community meetings.
- Communities that benefit from the program then invite other communities to the inter-community meetings.
- Tostan has a cross-border approach, because social issues go beyond borders.
- Learning of human rights is key to social transformation.

36. Recommendations from the ensuing discussions were the following:

- Interventions are needed at all levels to combat HTP: men, women, children, youth - all need to have a stake in deciding how to exercise their rights.
- School teachers, learners and their families, including men and boys, need to be made aware of the adverse effects of HTP.
- Persons practicing HTP, in particular FGM should be informed about the effects of HTP to facilitate change in their attitudes and they need to be presented with opportunities for alternative income-generating activities.
- Economic empowerment of women is important and their voices need to be heard in making choices that affect their lives.
- Refugees and IDPs need special consideration when interventions are planned and executed to combat HTP.
- Harmful practices against disabled children need to be addressed, as these children are often hidden and treated like they were a shame, while they should be treated according to the child rights approach.
- Positive African values and practices should be preserved and promoted and used to bring harmful traditions to light. Positive values should be employed to combat HTP.
- African culture and traditions must be celebrated and harmful traditions need to be reconstructed through positive cultural values and practices in African societies.
- It is important to break the silence when it comes to HTP, because many victims and societies do not talk about it.
- Communities must feel they own programmes to eliminate HTP themselves in order to facilitate change, as change should be experienced in local contexts.
- Religious leaders are instrumental in the fight against HTP.
- Advocacy groups (women's and lawyers associations) should lobby governments for law reform. An audit of law reform to determine their compliance in line with international laws should be conducted in each country. Good practices in law reform should be identified and the successes shared with regard to elimination of HTP.
- Social mobilization must be pragmatic, adaptable and conducted in a sensitive way to solicit support from the local community. Communicating in local languages is the key to fully involve the local community and its leadership structures to usher in lasting change.
- Different networks and committees should be formed to improve the efficiency and scope of the actions to combat HTP.

- Documenting of HTP across Africa is important in order to determine what interventions would be necessary for which practices.
- The role of traditions and culture is essential in the promotion of peace in societies. The family, as the building block of the community and carrier of values, culture and traditions, should socialize their children such that the children's considerations and behavior will preserve and promote positive traditional practices which will further promote peace in societies.
- The African Union should urge Governments to domesticate key policy instruments for combating HTP that they have ratified.