



# AKIDWA

## PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

“We are working together in solidarity, building an integrated society, one in which all people are valued, treated with respect and dignity, and enjoy equal opportunities and protections”

Salome Mbugua, September 2008

### AKIDWA BACKGROUND

Akina Dada wa Africa (AkiDwa) is the authoritative minority ethnic-led national network of migrant women living in Ireland, unique domestically and one of only a few such networks in Europe. Seven African women founded AkiDwa in 2001 to address issues of discrimination, racism and domestic violence they were experiencing in Ireland. The non-governmental organisation is a representative body for migrant women, irrespective of their national/ethnic background, tradition, religious beliefs, socio-economic or legal status. AkiDwa's advocacy approach is based on strengthening migrant women's voice, applying a gender perspective to policies and practices and the promotion of equality of migrant women in Irish society, free of gender and racial stereotyping. Current membership of AkiDwa is diverse, with over 2,250 individual members from 35 countries of origin and 34 migrant organisation affiliates.



## WOMEN AND MIGRATION

While women may migrate for the same reasons as men, they may also do so for reasons directly linked to gender. One in three women worldwide will experience gender-based violence in her lifetime; in some countries it affects 90% of the female population. Domestic violence, rape, forced or child marriage, "honour" killings, dowry-related murder, human trafficking, and female genital mutilation occur on a daily basis globally. The United Nations estimates more than 100 to 140 million girls and young women worldwide have been subjected to genital mutilation.

Women and children may be victims of forced prostitution and can be trafficked to many parts of the developed world for sex and labour and post conflict can be left vulnerable, stigmatised and shunned by family and community. The current international refugee model, including criteria to be met, is based largely on the male experience of migration.

### KEY ACTIVITIES OF AKIDWA INCLUDE:

- Information provision
- Migrant women support
- Provision of education and training
- Research and related activities
- Policy work
- Outreach to members and vulnerable migrant women
- Stakeholder engagement on priority issues
- Development of a community resource centre

### A SELECTION OF AKIDWA WORK TO DATE INCLUDES:

#### PUBLICATIONS:

- 2008 – *Understanding Gender Based Violence - An African Perspective* research and booklet for service providers
- 2007 – *Black African Women in the Irish Labour Market*
- 2006 – *'herstory'*- migration experiences of African women
- 2003 – Needs analysis/key issues identified of African women resident in Ireland.

## AKIDWA MISSION STATEMENT

AkiDwA's mission is to promote equality and justice for migrant women living in Ireland.

#### PROJECTS:

- **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Health Project** 2008 – 2009 – funded by the Office of the Minister for Integration. Currently conducting action research on the health needs of African and migrant women, in relation to FGM, to improve and inform service delivery and to influence mainstream policy.
- **Domestic violence training and research** 2007 – 2008 – funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Raising awareness on domestic violence issues with migrant women and local service providers. To date training sessions have taken place in five regional areas and over 150 women have participated.
- **Gender guidelines** 2007 – 2009 – A suggested amendment for gender guidelines in asylum policies and procedures was submitted March 2008 to the Dail Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights for the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill 2008. Policy work is ongoing for the inclusion of a gender perspective in Irish and European immigration processes.
- **Employment for Parents of Irish Born Children programme (EPIC)** 2006 – 2007  
AkiDwA helped in the design of the programme, was on the Steering Committee for this Business in the Community project and the AkiDwA EPIC employee contacted over 1,420 individuals, resulting in 130 referrals.

- **Linking Local Irish Indigenous Woman to Global Issues 2007** - funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs. There were 173 participants from five counties and a further 95 individuals attended the project-end conference.
- **Capacity building/training programmes** from 2002 – 2008 programmes have been delivered to migrant women in over five counties, reaching more than two hundred and twenty-five women across Ireland.

## STRATEGIC PLAN 2008 – 2011

In 2007, AkiDwA engaged in the development of its current Strategic Plan for 2008 – 2011. Consultations were held with members, the AkiDwA Board of Management, the AkiDwA Advisory Committee and relevant stakeholders to review issues and future work. Integrating Ireland assisted AkiDwA through this strategic planning exercise. The strategic plan has been developed with a view towards increased achievement of positive outcomes for migrant women through the expansion of its programmes, based on a combination of identified need and opportunities within the sector. Migrant women AkiDwA is working with have expressed a desire for a stronger voice within decision making processes affecting their lives and the opportunity for increased activism to meet challenges within Irish society.

Irish immigration systems and processes can at times isolate migrant women and the responsibilities stemming from the multi-identity nature of their lives can often create barriers to their success, if gender considerations are not taken into account. Immigration policies favour an economic model based on a male migrant experience and are generally developed without a gender perspective, which can result in a larger negative impact on female immigrant's lives. Economic attainment can affect many immigration processes, including meeting the criteria to secure a work permit, long term residency, citizenship and family reunification. Mothers, especially those parenting alone, are more likely to need non-traditional working hours so they can care for their children, may have breaks in the continuity of their employment for the same reasons and can traditionally receive lower pay due to gender and thus not meet minimum income requirements for some immigration application processes. Because of family reunification issues, migrant mothers might be parenting alone and without extended family support.

## AKIDWA VISION

AkiDwA's **vision** is a just society where there is equal opportunity and equal access to resources in all aspects of society: social, cultural, economic, civic and political.

## AKIDWA OBJECTIVES 2008 – 2011

AkiDwA's policy, campaigning and capacity building work aims to advance gender considerations in legislation, policy and practice affecting migrant women and to strengthen migrant women's voice to represent their concerns for better access to rights and services. AkiDwA works to improve access to culturally sensitive State services, including those related to health, focusing on issues of gender-based violence, employment, rights and secure immigration status. The organisation employs three strategies to achieve its objectives: networking, policy work and capacity building/organisational development. Migrant women's capacity for participation and representation in their communities and in decision-making structures is developed through training, consultation, focus groups, information provision and research. With a sustainable and effective organisation and network, AkiDwA will continue to deliver positive outcomes for migrant women living in Ireland.

## AKIDWA WORKS TOWARD PROGRESSING OBJECTIVES IN THE FOLLOWING THREE KEY AREAS:

**Gender-Based Violence:** The organisation is a respected authority in gender-based violence (GBV) work for migrant women in Ireland. GBV work covers a broad area and AkiDwA focuses on FGM and domestic violence. AkiDwA works to improve delivery of support services for GBV related issues and provides guidance and training to migrant women experiencing domestic violence.

**Employment:** To achieve positive outcomes for themselves, their families and their communities, migrant women need better access to the labour market, which includes recognition of skills, education and work experience from their country of origin. Ireland's current economic climate means a balance will need to be struck between the retention of immigrant staff and upskilling of indigenous marginalised communities in Ireland, in support of an integrated workforce. The attainment of economic independence is crucial for women, especially for migrant women experiencing domestic violence so that they can make decisions based on safety and not poverty.that they can make decisions based on safety and not poverty.

**Gender-Based Discrimination:** Equality of treatment and engagement is promoted in the organisation's work and activities. The organisation advocates for a level playing field for migrant women living in Ireland in their private and public lives and encourages Government to approach access to rights, services and economic opportunities from a gender perspective. Safety and protection issues, in particular within State systems, are paramount.

### **AKIDWA LONG TERM LEGACY OUTCOME**

AkiDwA's long term legacy outcome is that the rights of migrant women living in Ireland will be respected and protected. Migrant women will have fair and consistent access to services and a safe, empowered and active role in their communities in Ireland. Learnings from new and indigenous Irish communities will be exchanged, enriching the social, political and civic landscape of Ireland.

### **LOOKING AHEAD: AKIDWA'S FUTURE WORK**

AkiDwA plans to expand the work it is doing in the field of gender-based violence. Work in the area of FGM will be progressed, as discussions with medical professionals and migrant women have highlighted needs and gaps in current services. The domestic violence programme will look at the engagement of community and religious leaders, male activists and perpetrators to provide a wider range of options for women experiencing domestic violence.

The organisation will continue to work on employment issues of concern for migrant women. This will include work not only in accessing the labour market but also on matters of sustainability and longevity in the workplace in a changing economic climate.

In the future, AkiDwA hopes to reach a larger population of migrant women with its work and to further support migrant women who are isolated and at risk. Increased protections for migrant women and children will be advocated for and an understanding of the female immigrant experience will be promoted.