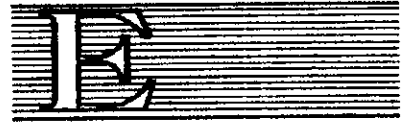


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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

**Eighteenth meeting of the Africa
Regional Coordinating Committee
for the Integration of Women in
Development (ARCC)**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
24-26 April 1997**

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STRUCTURE,
ROLE AND FUNCTION OF ARCC
AND
HOW IT MAY BE STRENGTHENED**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Economic Commission for Africa has four technical subsidiary bodies as part of its Intergovernmental machinery, namely: United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa, which is convened every three years; the African Regional Conference for Science and Technology which is expected to be convened at least once every two years; the Joint Conference of African Planners, Statisticians, Demographers and Information Scientists which is convened every two years and the Africa Regional Co-ordinating Committee for the Integration of Women in Development, which is convened every year.

The Africa Regional Co-ordinating Committee for the Integration of Women in Development was established by the ECA Conference of Ministers' Resolution 365 (XIV) in March, 1979. Its establishment was initiated by representatives of governmental organizations who felt that a mechanism was needed to promote exchange of experiences, strengthen solidarity among African women and plan a common strategy. Some of the achievements of ARCC include:

- (i) the articulation of aspirations and needs of African women as expressed in documents such as the "Arusha Strategies for the Advancement of Women in Africa beyond the end of the UN Decade for Women";
- (ii) the promotion of Africa women in the decision-making process at the national, subregional and regional levels;
- (iii) mobilizing resources from donors, as well as from African States through pledges to the UN Trust Fund for Africa's Development (UNTFAD); and
- (iv) mobilizing and preparing African Governments for effective participation in World Conferences on Women.

Since its establishment, there has not been an evaluation of ARCC regarding its functions and its significant role in promoting the advancement of women in Africa. It is now an opportune time to reassess ARCC in light of recent events such as the Fourth World Conference on Women, and an urgent need to give impetus to the implementation of the African and Global Platforms for Action; a new strategic focus within ECA and the United Nations Special Initiative for Africa -- all of which will impact the ways in which ARCC carries out its functions.

II. BACKGROUND

1. Structure of ARCC

ARCC is an inter-governmental policy-making body and is a subsidiary organ of the Commission focusing on the advancement of women and whose recommendations are directly submitted to the annual meetings of the ECA Conference of Ministers. It is therefore the political arm of ECA's gender programme. Until 1996, membership in ARCC was comprised of 3 representatives from each of the five sub-regions. At the sub-regional level, Committees of ARCC should focus on implementation of plans of Action for the Integration of Women in Development and Advancement of Women through ECA's Sub-Regional Development Centres (formerly Multinational Programming and Operating Centres). UN Specialized Agencies, donors and the Pan African Women's Organization are invited as Observers without voting rights. Its Bureau is composed of a President, two Vice-Presidents and two Rapporteurs, elected by the ARCC members. The African Centre for Women (ACW) serves as its Secretariat.

Resolution 365 (XIV) adopted by the ECA Conference of Ministers in March, 1979, established the structure and terms of reference of ARCC. The primary functions assigned to ARCC were:

- (i) to harmonize and co-ordinate the sub-regional programmes on women in development approved within the subregions;
- (ii) to review and evaluate the activities carried out in the region in the framework of programmes for the advancement of women;
- (iii) to report to the deliberating organs of the ECA on the activities and programmes on women in development covered at subregional and regional levels;
- (iv) to mobilize resources for the implementation of programmes agreed on at the regional and subregional levels; and
- (v) to organize every three years, an African Regional Conference on Women and Development.

At the Nineteenth meeting of the Conference of Ministers held in Libreville, Gabon 19 to 22 April 1993, the constitution and terms of reference for ARCC were amended as follows:

"1. To harmonize and coordinate the subregional programmes approved within the Multinational Programming and Operating Centres¹;

¹ The name of these Centres is being changed to Sub-regional Development Centres (SRDC) effective 1997.

2. To evaluate and implement work programmes, bearing in mind the availability of resources and to oversee the implementation of work programmes;
3. To organize the exchange of information and experiences;
4. To participate in the activities and meetings of the United Nations and other relevant organizations;
5. To mobilize resources for the implementation of programmes agreed at the regional and subregional levels;
6. To review and evaluate activities carried out in the region in the framework of programmes for the advancement of women;
7. To convene every three years, the African Regional Conference on Women and Development;
8. To report to the deliberative organs of the Economic Commission for Africa on the activities and programmes carried out in the subregion (Committee of Officials and Councils of Ministers of the Multinational Programming and Operational Centres)."

At the Twenty-second meeting of the Conference of Ministers, held in May 1996, a decision was made to increase the number of ARCC members from 15 to 19 and thereby increasing the number of members from regions which have the largest number of countries. By its Decision 3 (XXXI), the Conference of Ministers decided *inter alia* that the Commission carry out periodic evaluation exercises of the performance of the Africa Regional Coordinating Committee at the subregional levels.

III. THE ROLE OF ARCC IN MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLATFORMS FOR ACTION

It may be useful to begin by reflecting on major obstacles to the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies which have been identified.² They include: failure to assign responsibility for the various sectors and levels of implementation, the absence of appropriate structures and failure to identify the sources of resources necessary for effective implementation strategies and activities. Strong political will and commitment are essential elements in the process. The ARCC could play a major advocacy role in seeing that the Platform is accorded the proper level of importance within national governments. Input from the donor community and appropriate NGOs could also be invited and general recommendations could be channelled through ARCC to governments.

² Guidelines for the Implementation of the African Platform for Action, African Centre for Women, ECA, 1995

**A. The Role of ECA and ARCC described in the
Global and Regional Platforms for Action**

In the African Platform for Action, the role of ECA, the African Centre for Women (ACW) and ARCC at the regional level are described:

"At the regional level, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the African Platform for Action should be entrusted to ARCC in close collaboration and consultation with existing intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) such as PTA, SADCC, ECOWAS, etc., as well as the Joint OAU/ADB/ECA Secretariat, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), UPA and relevant United Nations agencies, especially UNIFEM, as stipulated in the existing institutional frameworks. The body should meet annually and should present a progress report to the ECA Conference of Ministers, the OAU Council of Ministers and the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government every two years. There should also be a review of the effectiveness of the delivery of donor programmes related to gender and development."

The African Platform for Action, under the heading "Institutional arrangements for the implementation of the African Platform for Action" describes the importance of core structures viz:

"... The core structure for the implementation of the African Platform for Action should have the mandate for advocacy and for ensuring the mainstreaming of gender concerns in all sectors, programmes and at all levels, monitoring, evaluation and the accountability required at all levels."

**C. Recommendations from the Experts and Bureau meetings
held in March 1996**

It may be helpful to revisit recommendations made at the Expert Meeting held in March, 1996, which include the following:

- The development of indicators and ways of measuring success and failure of actions taken in the context of the Platforms for Action
- Since only a small number of people know about the Platforms, sensitization and dissemination of information about them is needed. The national machineries were suggested as appropriate for coordinating this work.
- The implementation strategy must be specific and action-oriented
- The compilation of information on national experiences by ECA and its dissemination so that others may learn from it. It may be noted however, that ACW has received very little information on national experiences which has hindered work in this area.
- The Bureau of the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women, in close consultation and collaboration with the OAU and ECA should play a primary role in all regional and international advocacy activities. In this respect, members of the Bureau should form part of their national delegations to all OAU Summits so they can appropriately lobby OAU policy organs.

Other specific recommendations were made at that meeting regarding national plans of action.

**D. Monitoring and Evaluation of the implementation
of the Platforms for Action**

Each implementing body must monitor and evaluate its own projects and policies. This includes government offices at all levels, NGOs, IGOs, and donors' project managers. The ACW publication, "Guidelines for the Implementation of the African Platform for Action" provides suggestions for specific steps which can be taken to implement various components of the Platforms, and its use in designing activities could be recommended to planners.

IV. ASSESSMENT OF ARCC

When the Bureau of the Fifth Regional Conference on Women met in March 1996, one of the recommendations it made was that "there should be an evaluation of ARCC with a view to determine its effectiveness and the impact of its functions", and further, that "ECA should carry out this evaluation and report to its legislative organ." In light of the above, a critical examination

of the past activities of ARCC, including its role in the 1989 Abuja meeting and the 1994 Dakar preparatory meeting, and ideas for its future work could be considered by ARCC members with a view to suggesting how the Committee could be strengthened to fulfil its mandate more effectively.

In this context, issues which ARCC may wish to discuss include:

A. Strategies, targets and procedures for the coordination, monitoring and evaluation role to which ARCC has been assigned in the context of implementing the Platforms for Action.

Specific areas, amongst others, which need addressing are as follows:

1. **Coordination:** meetings could be held at the sub-regional level with assistance from Sub-regional Development Centres (SRDC), formerly MULPOCS, which have been strengthened through increased staffing, including gender focal-points, and which could be assigned the role of being a secretariat for sub-regional organs of ARCC.

Member States of ECA could be requested to provide ARCC with information on what is being planned and what actions have been taken as well as ways they are ensuring accountability.

A mechanism for coordinating work and exchanging information on what work is being done on gender issues in institutions, NGOs, universities etc. could be established at the sub-regional level.

2. **Monitoring:** ARCC could consider how often it should review progress made in implementing national plans, for example, whether it could be done annually, prior to an ARCC sub-regional meeting; and whether it could agree on guidelines or indicators which could be used by all members. (See for example, the ACW publication, "Guidelines for the Implementation of the African Platform for Action")

3. **Evaluation:** Beijing-follow-up activities carried out could be evaluated every five years, or coinciding with the African Regional Conference on Women which is held every 3 years. Reports could be requested by the ARCC subregional bureaux.

It should be noted that the coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanism envisaged in the African Platform for Action and quoted in section III, B above is very clearly described, yet no steps have been taken to operationalize it. Concrete suggestions on how to move forward in this regard would be welcome by the Women's Centre.

B. Constraints of ARCC:

1. The limited number of members considering the number of countries the Committee has to serve.
2. ARCC does not have its own financial resources and lacks an effective mechanism for mobilizing resources.
3. Lack of continuity in terms of who attends. As a consequence, the role, capabilities and functions of ARCC may not be understood by all participants.
4. Representation is limited to governments: ARCC might wish to consider whether ARCC members should be appointed in their personal capacity; involving people who are in a position to draw on diverse constituencies and disciplines, including government as well as civil society; and whether members should be expected to function at a mainly technical or political level.
5. Meetings are held only once every year. ARCC may wish to create more networks and exchanges at the subregional level. Members of ARCC may wish to consider having ARCC sub-regional Committee meetings once each year and the entire ARCC membership every other year. A Report of each annual sub-regional meeting could be submitted to ACW for compilation and distribution to all other sub-regions or an even wider audience. This way, the process of electing new ARCC members be more efficiently carried out. Elections are normally held every other year at the sub-regional level with the assistance of the SRDC (MULPOC) serving the respective sub-region.

The meeting may wish to consider ways in which ARCC and ACW, as its Secretariat, can function better according to its terms of reference which are given on page 2. The African Centre for Women as the Secretariat certainly would be expected to carry out almost all of these functions on behalf of ARCC since the Committee is without its own human and financial resources.

It might be useful for ARCC to make suggestions about a division of labour in general and specific activities to be carried out by ACW as the ARCC Secretariat and those which ARCC members themselves may be in a position to carry out. The meeting may wish to revisit suggestions made at its meeting in 1996 and decide further on specific structures to be established or steps to be taken. It was suggested in the last ARCC meeting that sub-committees could be established to carry out specific activities such as resource mobilization and sensitization. The meeting also suggested having a thematic orientation to future meetings so as to make them more focused.

It should be noted that the recommendation made in 1996 of having a gender focal point assigned to each of the sub-regional centres of ECA (formerly MULPOCS), is being implemented. Niamey, Giseyni, Lusaka and Yaounde now have a gender focal point. Also, a directory of structures which deal with gender issues is in the process of completion.

V. CONCLUSION

All of ARCC's activities will ultimately become an important input to the annual Conferences of Ministers, which in turn is expected to ultimately impact on Member States' policies on gender issues and the advancement of women. The comparative advantage which ARCC has is being in a position to carry out advocacy work at the sub-regional and regional levels and keep attention focused on commitments made and obligations accepted in Beijing and Dakar. Through assessing its past work and future opportunities, ARCC can sharpen its focus, thus enabling it to make a stronger impact in targeted areas.