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Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
Twenty-first session of the Commission/
Twelfth meeting of the Conference
of Ministers
Yaounde, Republic of Cameroon
17 to 21 April 1986
Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE
UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN IN AFRICA

* E/ECA/TPCW.7/1.
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Background to the World Conference

1. When the international community declared the period 1976-1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, it represented the culmination of a series of events which were instrumental in creating a climate of opinion that called for urgent action to redress the inequalities, injustices and discrimination against women. Thus declaration of the Decade was built on the principles of equality proclaimed as early as 1945 in the Charter of the United Nations the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and other international instruments addressed to these issues. The purpose of the Decade was to spur action and to promote effective and sustained efforts to implement the World Plan of Action adopted by the World Conference held in Mexico in 1975.

2. General Assembly resolution 3520 (XXX) of 15 December 1975 which contained the above mentioned declaration had twenty operative paragraphs detailing action to be taken during the Decade. On the one hand governments were urged to examine all the provisions of the World Plan and formulate short, medium and long-term targets for their implementations within the context of their national plan and strategies. On the other, international organizations, in particular the United Nations through the Secretary General were requested to make appropriate proposals for the realization of the World Plan of Action and to render "in accordance with the request of governments" sustained assistance in the formulation design, implementation and evaluation of projects and programmes which would enable women, to be integrated in national and international development. The 1980 Copenhagen World Conference further elaborated on the existing obstacles and on the existing international consensus on measures to be taken on the advancement of women. A programme of action to the end of the Decade was elaborated by the Conference which was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in the same year in its resolution 35/136 of "December 1980. This same resolution decided "to convene in 1985, at the conclusion of the Decade, a world conference to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women".

Regional Preparatory Activities to the World Conference in Nairobi

3. The Africa Regional Coordinating Committee for the Integration of Women in Development (ARCC) engaged itself fully in the regional preparatory activities to the World conference. Following its recommendations, the ECA Conference of Ministers in its resolution 447(XVII) dated 30 April 1982 decided that the ECA Third Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in Development, which should cover preparations for the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women should be held in 1984, and directed this Conference to discuss progress in the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action with special reference to the role of women in alleviating the food crisis, refugee and displaced women problems; women's participation in the programme of the Industrial Development Decade in Africa, the legal status of women, women in the rural areas, out of school girls and vocational training, the setting up of national machineries and utilization of research. 1/

4. In accordance with the General Assembly resolution 38/108 of 6 December 1983 on preparation to the World Conference and, resolution CM/Res.876 (XXXVI II) of the 37th Session of the OAU Council of Ministers and the 18th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of African Heads of State and Government (1981) the Regional Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace/Third Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in Development was held in Arusha United Republic of Tanzania 8-12 October 1984. The Conference had a dual purpose: it had to review and appraise the progress achieved and obstacles encountered in Africa in attaining the goals of the Decade with special reference to the sub-themes of employment, health and education, and secondly it had to adopt the forward looking strategies for the advancement of women in Africa to the year 2000 and to arrive at a common Africa position for the World Conference to be held in Nairobi, Kenya 15-26 July 1985.

5. The Conference took place amidst grave concerns for the economic and social conditions of the Africa continent. The steady decline in the price of raw materials, the inequities inherent in the world economic order had left the African continent with acute balance of payment deficits. The general stagnant nature of domestic economies had inevitably depressed industrial and agricultural investment population growth. Misguided national policies had resulted in poor performance of the agricultural sector particularly in inadequate levels of food production. Repeated droughts and encroaching desertification had eroded the self sufficiency of food of the majority of the countries. Women as food producers, the small farmer in general had been largely ignored and suffered most.

The Arusha Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women in Africa

6. The regional Conference adopted the Arusha Strategies for the Advancement of Women in Africa. The strategies follow the uneven progress made in Africa in realizing the Decade goals of equality, development and peace for women, recognizing that the impediments to recognition of women were varied and complex with roots in the cultural historical and colonial past of the African continent. These obstacles obviously could not be overcome in a period of ten years. The strategies recognize, however, that some gains have been made during the decade notably in increased visibility of women's needs, in greater access to education at all levels and by the expansion of health facilities in rural areas. The establishment of national, subregional and regional machineries have helped to create focal points for the formulation of strategies for the advancement of women.

7. Based on the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), the strategies focused on certain key sectors wherein women's concern should be taken into account both in the analysis of the sectors and in measures to be taken for their improvement. These were agriculture and food production, health, education and human resources development, industry and environmental concerns. The strategies propose wide range action, related to the problems of refugees and displaced women in Africa and the problem of peace and apartheid in South Africa and Namibia. Attitudinal obstacles still persisted giving little value to women's productive work in rural areas in the home and farms; and perceived reproductive roles as women's burden and not as a shared societal responsibility have been major constraints to equality. It requested African governments to take appropriate steps to harmonize their national development plans with the objectives and integrated approach of the Arusha strategies for African women.

The World Conference in Nairobi

8. The World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace was held in Nairobi from 15 to 26 July 1985. The rules of procedures of the Conference which had been debated at length during the Preparatory meetings of the World Conference were adopted at the 2nd Plenary meeting of the Conference on 15 July 1985. Immediately after the adoption of the Conference the statement of the President (Kenya) was crucial and carefully worded: "Without prejudice to the rules of Procedures of the Conference which have been adopted, in particular rule 34 and without setting a precedence a general understanding has emerged as a result of consultations whereby all documents of the conference in particular the forward looking strategies document under item 8 of the Conference agenda, should be adopted by consensus".

9. In reviewing achievements of the Decade the representative of countries with centrally planned economies reported that they had achieved full legal and de facto equality and that they intensified their efforts to enhance the participation of women policy and decision making bodies in society and in science and technology. On the other hand, countries with developed market economies reported that equality of the sexes in legislation has been substantially achieved, intensified effort was also made for the participation of women in accordance with their own needs and priorities. Many of the representatives of developing countries noted some of the progress made in legislation, literacy education and employment; they reported the growing importance of grassroot organization of women. Many of the delegates specially those from the Africa region stressed that environmental disasters in particular drought, and the consequent famine hindered the achievement of the Decade goals and objectives. 1/ The Secretary General of the World Conference reflected the major thoughts expressed by most member States. She stated that during the decade significant lessons had been learnt about the actual and potential role of women. Although in many ways performance has fallen short of promise an irreversible process far reaching in its implication has been set in motion by the Decade. The organized women's movement, she said, initiated in the nineteenth century had become a global force. However, the "feminization of poverty" was now a reality, the change from this situation to the exercise of power was a long and painful one, but the march of women globally, hand in hand, had already begun.

Africa follow-up to the World Conference the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women

10. The most important document which came out of the World Conference was the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. As stated in the Arusha strategies the Nairobi recommendations concludes that improvement in the situation of women cannot be viewed outside the context of overall development in general. The Nairobi strategies created scenarios that will have profound effect on the advancement of women: (a) Unless major structural changes or technological breakthroughs occur recent trends should be used to predict the situation of women to the year 2000. The prospects of developing countries specially those of low income and LDC countries will be "sombre". It concludes that the overall growth in the developing countries as currently projected will be lower in the period 1980-2000 than that experienced in the period 1960-1980. (b) According to projections of the ILO women constitute 35% of the world labour force, this is likely to increase steadily to the year 2000. However, unless appropriate steps are taken as of now, the type of work as well as the rewards for the majority of women will be low. Women will continue to have sole responsibility for the economic support of children (presently for almost one third of children in some countries). Therefore support to these women

include the ever-expanding communications network including computers and development in media technology which can be utilized to change attitudes towards women. Provided global regional and national efforts are intensified by the year 2000 illiteracy will be eliminated, life expectancy of all women increased to 65 years (presently 47 in Africa) and improvement in the quality of life achieved.

11. It is recognized that social and economic policies conducive to a favourable climate for the future are those prescribed in the international development strategies and the principle of the New International Economic Order. It may be recalled that reference in the strategies to Zionism, Apartheid and the failure to establish a new situation of Palestinian women and children, were the issues that occasioned the most controversy, and threatened to prevent consensus adoption of the strategies. Though role call votes were taken in those disputed issues, the final text of the forward looking strategies was adopted by consensus. It was generally felt that the proposal of Kenya to delete mention of Zionism and to replace it with the phrase "all forms of racism" constituted a turning point of the Conference. Though some delegations had reservation even on this last formulation it did not prevent them from endorsing the forward looking strategies document as a whole. Thus, Nairobi was able to achieve a consensus that had eluded Mexico (Declaration) and Copenhagen (Programme of Action).

Equality, Development and Peace

12. These three themes were taken up by the Nairobi strategies in terms of obstacles, basic strategies, and measures to implement these strategies at the national level. The fundamental message seems to be that the objectives of the Decade, Equality, Development and Peace should be viewed as an entity and inseparably, they are still essential to the full integration of women in the economic, social, political, cultural development of societies. They remain in effect in these strategies to the year 2000, and continue to have validity in all regions of the world.

Equality

13. While the overall goal remains that of ensuring the elimination of the de jure and de facto discrimination against women, the strategies point out that in both developed and underdeveloped countries, de facto discrimination on the ground of sex is still a major problem. While a major strategy should be the acquisition of political commitment for promoting a comprehensive legal base for the equality of women and men, in addition to legislation, education of the judiciary and the population at large, through formal and informal channels including the media, non-governmental organization; political party platforms and executive section is required. At the national level governments are urged first and foremost to sign the Convention of all forms of Discrimination against women with appropriate monitoring bodies to check its compliance. Most of the provisions of the world plan of action of Mexico are reiterated in this sector. It is recommended that by the year 2000 all governments should have comprehensive and national women's policies to abolish all obstacles to the full and equal participation of women in all spheres of society.

Development

14. The longest part of the strategies is devoted to development; the major reason is that "insufficient awareness and understanding of the complex and multifaceted relationships between development and the advancement of women have continued to make policy, programme and project formulation difficult". During the decade there was a belief that economic growth would automatically benefit women but experience has shown that this is an oversimplification. It is necessary, the strategies state,

that the "actual and potential impact on women of macro-economic processes operating at the international and national as well as financial, special and physical development policies should be assessed and appropriate modifications made to ensure that women are not adversely affected". Women's contribution have not been adequately assessed, specially the unremunerated contributions of women should be measured and reflected in national accounts and economic strategies.

15. In employment food, water and agriculture questions were discussed. The strategies though globally oriented devoted many paragraphs to Africa's plight in food production and agriculture. Most of the ideas of the Arusha strategies wer reflected here. An appeal is made to the international community, particularly donor countries to assist African women enhancing their role as food producers with emphasis on providing food technologies. Emergency assistance it says should be increased and accelerated to alleviate the suffering of women and children dying and starving under famine condition in Africa. As long term strategies it was recommen- ded that women development strategies and programmes as well as projects in food and agriculture need to be designed in a manner that fully integrate women at all levels of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in all stages of the development process. Women should also receive full benefits commensurate to their contributions in this field. (In this sector 12 major resolutions were table for adoption).

Peace

16. There were basically two important provisions to this subject. The first is the fact that measures at the national level should ensure according to the strategies, that women are included in all negotiations concerning peace and all communities should introduce education for peace in their educational programme. Regarding apartheid and Palestinian women and children, the inter- national community is called upon to give assistance "to the most oppressed groups under apartheid - women and children. With the help from their government women are urged to strengthen their commitments to the eradication of apartheid and support their struggling sisters". United Nations projects should be initiated, it said, to assist Palestinian women in the fields of health, education and vocational training. Monitoring roles of regional commissions were also given great prominence as in the Arusha strategies.

The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and Africa

17. The Nairobi World Conference was a forum for the women of the world to manifest their desire to consolidate the gains made during the past decade and determination to build a better future for their societies. In this and many other areas there is a common approach between the Arusha and Nairobi strategies. Both have given a time-span of 15 years to the year 2000 for a marked improvement in the situation of women and both advocate that a periodic meeting (say every five years) should be held to look into progress made. In the African region, greater efforts will have to be made however in view of the alarming state of the economies of African countries aggravated by adverse climatic conditions.
18. Nairobi considered but did not adopt (due to lack of time) 105 resolutions. Most of these dealt with economic and social issues. The concern for women in development is also shared by the Arusha strategies. Both recommendations stressed the fact that global, regional, national economic success or stagnation affect women more adversely while at the same time women could be the very instrument to bring about change. The Arusha strategies, however approach the problem with greater selectivity and puts emphasis on sectors such as agriculture and food, industrialization, human resources development, health and environment. While these areas are reflected in the Nairobi strategies many additional sectors and categories of problems affecting women are discussed in the world strategies.
19. Basically the Arusha strategies are conceived in terms of rural and urban women. The World strategies reflect on the other hand the diversity of the situation of women and recommend measures appropriate for each emerging new problems under "areas of special concern". The heterogeneity of women is recognized in terms of socio-economic status, life styles, and the changing life cycles of women. A special appeal is made to women and men who now "enjoy certain improvements in their material circumstances and have achieved position where they may influence policy-making", to do their utmost to reverse the current inferior conditions of the majority of women and contribute to the goal of equality for all. Above all the Nairobi strategies address themselves primarily to governments, since they alone can generate and sustain the process of change and create conditions conducive for women. However, the strategies recognize that countries find themselves at different stages of development and therefore should have the option to set their own priorities based on their national policies and resources capabilities.
20. The measures recommended in Nairobi include those directly affecting women others are designed to make societies adopt more positive attitudes towards women. Both strategies stress the need for an increase in the number of women in decision making levels. Thus the desire to see more women in policy making positions at international, regional and national level organization is strongly presented.

21. The World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace was held in Nairobi from 15 to 26 July 1985. It had a huge participation; a total of 157 states were represented at the Conference. Non-governmental organizations, 17 inter-governmental organizations, the UN Council of Namibia and the Special Committee against apartheid participated. The liberation movements of ANC, PAC, SWAPO and the FLO attended the Conference as observers. Numerous United Nations offices, bodies and programmes, specialized agencies and related organizations, four regional commissions including the ECA participated as observers. The estimated number of total participation was 6000 in the UN meeting (15,000 in Forum 85).

22. The Rules of Procedures of the Conference which had been debated at length during the preparatory meetings of the World Conference were adopted at the 2nd Plenary Meeting of the Conference on 15 July 1985. Immediately after the adoption of the Conference the statement of the Presidenc (Kenya) was crucial and carefully worded: "Without prejudice to the rules of Procedures of the Conference which have been adopted, in particular rule 34* and without setting a precedence, a general understanding has emerged as a result of consultations whereby all documents of the conference in particular the Forward Looking Strategies document under item 8 of the Conference agenda, should be adopted by consensus".

Elections of officers of the Conference

23. At its opening meeting on 15 July 1985 the Conference elected by acclamation Ms. Margaret Kenyatta, the Head of the delegation from Kenya, as the President of the Conference. The Conference proceeded to elect 29 states as Vice-Presidents, out of which seven were from the Africa region: Burundi, Chad, Liberia, Mali, Tunisia, Tanzania and Zambia. There was, however, one Vice President for coordination elected, this was Norway.

24. The Rapporteur-General was Bulgaria. Since there were two major committees the Presiding officer of the first committee was Colombia, with Netherlands, Rumania and Pakistan as Deputy Presiding Officer and Niger as the Rapporteur.

25. The second committee Presiding Officer was Philippines with Barbados, Ethiopia, Hungary as Deputy Presiding Officers, the Rapporteur was Austria. Lastly the Credential Committee consisted of nine member States two of which were from the Africa Region: Ivory Coast and Guinea Bissau.

26. Thus the Africa region had the Presidency of the Conference, 7 Vice Presidents, Rapporteur of Committee, Vice Deputy Presiding Officers post in Committee two and two members of the Credential Committee. Informal meetings of regional groups greatly facilitated the deliberation of the Conference. The Africa group met continuously before and during the Conference and fully participated in the meeting of the group of 77 and in global negotiations.

*Rule 34 dealt with majority required in decision making.

General debate

27. It is very difficult in a report to capture the range of topics touched upon by the various speakers, because they not only dealt with item 7 of the agenda, which dealt with the review of the Decade but also item 8 which was concerned with the Forward Looking Strategies and which was really the task assigned to the two committees of the Conference. The speech of the Secretary-General of the Conference reflected the major thoughts expressed by most member States. She stated that during the decade significant lessons have been learnt about the actual and potential role of women. Although in many ways performance has fallen short of promise an irreversible process far reaching in its implication has been set in motion by the Decade. The organized women's movement, she said, initiated in the nineteenth century has become a global force. However, the "feminization of poverty" was now a reality, the change from this situation to the exercise of power was a long and painful one but the march of women globally, hand in hand, had already begun.

Action taken by the Conference on the reports of the first committee and second committee

28. The Conference had allocated to the two committees different chapters and sections of the document entitled the "Forward Looking Strategies of implementation for the Advancement of women and concrete measures, to overcome obstacles to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women for the period 1986 to the year 2000, equality, development and peace: Note by the Secretariat". In addition each Committee considered relevant resolutions pertaining to its work. Thus the Conference considered all the paragraphs recommended by the two committees and those paragraph which could not be agreed upon at committee level.

29. References in the strategies to Zionism, Apartheid and the failure to establish a new International Economic Order as obstacles to the advancement of women, as well as the situation of Palestinian women and Children, were the issues that occasioned the most controversy, and threatened to prevent consensus adoption of the strategies. Though roll call votes were taken in these disputed issues the final text of the Forward Looking Strategies was adopted by consensus. It was generally felt that the proposal of Kenya to delete mention of Zionism and to replace it with the phrase "all forms of racism" constituted a turning point of the Conference. Though some delegations had reservation even on this last formulation it did not prevent them from endorsing the Forward Looking Strategies document as a whole. Thus Nairobi was able to achieve a consensus that had eluded Mexico (The declaration) and Copenhagen (Programme of Action).

The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women

30. The Nairobi Strategies is a comprehensive document which, based on a realistic assessment of the last ten years, on future policies to accelerate the advancement of women. The document reflects the views of over 120 governments whose appraisal was obtained through a comprehensive questionnaire administered by the United Nations. The document has five major chapters in addition to a historical introductory section, these are the chapters on Equality, Development, Peace, areas of special concerns and international and regional cooperation.

31. To understand the spirit of the Strategies, however the basic approach to them and the philosophy behind the recommendations have to be understood. The fundamental ideas therein seem to be:

(a) The objectives of the decade, equality, development and peace are viewed as an entity and considered to be still essential to the full integration of women in the economic social political, cultural development of societies. They remain in effect in the strategies to the year 2000, and continue to have validity in all regions of the world.

(b) Though the Forward Looking Strategies are guidelines for global action on a long term basis, within the context of the broader goals and objectives of the New International Economic Order, countries find themselves at different stages of development and therefore should have the option to set their own priorities based on their national policies and resources capabilities.

(c) The measures recommended include those directly affecting women, others are designed to make societies adopt more positive attitudes towards women and are formulated to eliminate sex-stereotypes. Emerging new problems are also dealt and underprivileged and vulnerable women who are victims of socio-economic changes are discussed.

(d) The heterogeneity of women is recognized in terms of socio-economic status, life styles, and the changing life cycles of women. A special appeal is made to women and men who now "enjoy certain improvements in their material circumstances and have achieved position where they may influence policy-making" to do their utmost to reverse the current inferior and exploited conditions of the majority of women and contribute to the goal of equality for all.

(e) Above all the strategies address themselves primarily to governments, since they alone can generate and sustain the engine of change and create conditions conducive for women. A role is given, however, to international and regional organizations to play their part in promoting action favourable to improvement of women's situation.

32. Women's contribution have not been adequately assessed, specially the unremunerated contributions of women should be measured and reflected in national accounts and economic statistics. With regard to employment policies it is advocated that women should be able to obtain jobs involving more skills and responsibility including those at the managerial level in all sectors of the economy. Women's occupational mobility should be promoted. The demand for absolute equality in employment is unequivocal and is stated as follows "recognition should be given to the fact that women and men have equal right to work and on the same footing to acquire a personal income on equal terms and conditions, regardless of the economic situation, in many cases women are the sole supporters of their families, they should be given equal opportunities, in particular in the labour market in the context of measures to stimulate economic development and to promote employment growth. (It must be pointed out that this paragraph of the strategies evoked a great deal of debate during the conference).

Trends and perspectives to the year 2000

33. As stated in the Arusha strategies the Nairobi Conference analysis concluded that improvement on the situation of women cannot be viewed outside the context of overall development in general. The Nairobi strategies discuss the future scenario that will have profound effect to the advancement of women. It concludes that:

(a) Unless major structural changes or technological breakthrough occur recent trends should be used to predict the situation of women to the year 2000. The prospects of developing countries specially those of low income and LDC countries will be "sombre". It concludes that the overall growth in the developing countries as currently projected will be lower in the period 1980-2000 than that experienced in the period 1960-1980.

(b) According to projections of the ILO women constitute 35 percent of the world labour force, this is likely to increase steadily to the year 2000. However, unless appropriate steps are taken as of now, the type of work as well as the rewards for the majority of women will be low. Women will continue to have sole responsibility for the economic support of children (presently for almost one third of children in some countries). Therefore support to these women must be part of the strategies for the future.

(c) Positive features for the future include the ever-expanding communications network including computers and development in media technology which can be utilized to change attitudes towards women. Provided global regional and national efforts are intensified by the year 2000 illiteracy will be eliminated, life expectancy of all women increased to 65 years (presently 47 in Africa) and improvement in the quality of life achieved.

(d) If global regional and national efforts are intensified the strategies predict that by the year 2000 illiteracy will be eliminated, life expectancy of all women increased to 65 years (presently 47 in Africa) and improvement in the quality of life achieved.

(e) It is recognized that social and economic policies conducive to a favourable climate for the future are those prescribed in the international development strategies and the principle of the New International Economic Order.

Monitoring roles of regional commissions are given great prominence as in the Arusha strategies. In order to analyse the situation of women in their geographical areas. Research and policy analysis with greater attention on the economic role of women in society including access to economic resources such as land and capital are advocated. Lastly, interagency co-operation is encouraged, and it is said that this should be complemented by networking particularly in the field of information and research training and programme development. The international and regional organizations are also called upon to advance the position of their women staff and to extend hiring practices to include women.