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A General Paper

on

OUT-OF-SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Prepared by the

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## I. Introduction

1. Education and training are among the major factors that promote national development. This is not disputed. What, however, needs to be clearly established and recognized is the fact that development is brought about not only by educating and training men, but also women. African women form an indispensable part of human resources for development. Without their contribution, the economies of African countries cannot be expected even to be maintained at their present low levels, much less advanced to meet the targets and levels which are constantly being set by African Governments.

2. African women, whether educated or uneducated, whether rural- or urban-based, whether engaged in gainful employment or not, contribute to development, directly or indirectly, in a variety of forms. They constitute a sizable number of the active population in agriculture, small industries and trade, even though this fact has never been acknowledged in the modern sector of economy. As home managers, they are responsible for improving the general conditions of their families, by introducing the necessary changes in food habits. They usually have to walk miles to obtain the much-needed water and firewood for the household; and it is they who usually market the farm produce. Besides, they are responsible for attending to the early education of the nations's children.

3. In spite of these multiple responsibilities, the chances of African women for education and training are very limited compared to those of men. This paper is intended to highlight some trends in out-of-school education and training for women in African countries. It throws some light on the situation of vocational education and training for women, from the perspective of providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary for active participation in the development of their countries. The paper finally suggests some actions and strategies that Governments and other interested development agencies could take, in order to improve the educational and training opportunities for women in Africa.

## II. The present situation and trends

4. Training opportunities for women in Africa are indeed developing, but very slowly compared to those for men. Such out-of-school education and vocational training as exist for them have "tended to concentrate somewhat conservatively on the careers traditionally regarded as 'women's work', such as teaching, nursing and dressmaking (and) fail to distinguish clearly between home economics training for the home and family and vocational training for gainful economic

activity." <sup>1/</sup> Moreover, where minimum skills are required in the growing number of new fields now available, women are usually unable to make proper use of any training offered, because they lack the general background education which is basic to the development of those skills.

5. Such a situation is tending seriously to hamper and delay women's greater (and more meaningful) participation in such fields as agriculture and industry, which are so vital to the economic and social development of their countries.

6. Obstacles that hinder the access of African women to education and training have been cited by many conferences. The 1971 Regional Conference, which took place in Rabat, Morocco, <sup>2/</sup> identified such factors as cultural and religious traditions which often dictate that girls should stay at home and help their mothers rather than go to school. In the economic field, the Conference observed that "limited economic resources, combined with social factors, influence parents and governments to give preference to boys and men when education, vocational training and employment are in short supply."<sup>3/</sup> This trend, in giving preference to boys to the detriment of girls, has special implications for development. It is through education and training that women's horizons are widened, their skills improved, and their ability to make plans and decisions for themselves, their families and the nation as a whole is ensured. "It is not a question of women obtaining equal rights in any respect as a kind of personal or group gain. The point really is that any society which wants to proceed energetically towards economic, social and political progress must liberate and realize women's creative energies, as part of the development and utilization of its human resources." <sup>4/</sup> The effects of less educational and training opportunities for girls and women are reflected in the lower rate of growth, less progress and less development in African countries.

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<sup>1/</sup> ILO background document, "The Employment and Vocational Preparation of Girls and Women in Africa", in Report on the International Conference on Predominant Areas of Women's Activities in the Economic and Social Development of African Countries; Relationship between Training and Labour Market Requirements, Volume II, Berlin, 1970, page 82.

<sup>2/</sup> Report of the Regional Conference on Education, Vocation Training and Work Opportunities for Girls and Women in African Countries, Rabat, Morocco, 20-29 May 1971, page 20.

<sup>3/</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4/</sup> "Education and Training of Women: Special Reference to Africa", Statement provided by the United Nations Social Development Division to the Regional Meeting on the Role of Women in National Development Addis Ababa, 17-26 March 1969, Annex III, page 10.

7. Some efforts have been made by some African countries to expand vocational training for girls and women. The following examples point to some promising trends:

- The Mancell's Girls Vocational Institute, 1/ Kumasi, Ghana:  
This institute provides the skills required for self-employment and for wage employment in laundry, sewing, dress-making, designing, and catering. Apart from providing the skilled workers needed in public enterprises, the institute also raises the skill level of those who are self-employed, and generally has remained in tune with the demands for vocational skills.

- National Women's Vocational Training Centre, 2/ Accra, Ghana:  
This centre offers courses to women as follows:

- (a) a six months introductory courses for newly appointed community/development and rehabilitation assistants;
- (b) refresher courses for field officers;
- (c) refresher and in-service training courses for tutors at regional women's training institutes;
- (d) a two-year course in basic home economics for women between the ages of 15 and 30 years, in dressmaking, tailoring, cookery, home management, food processing, child care and family planning. This two-year course does not only prepare women for the home, but it opens the way in other fields such as small-scale industries, factory work, as well as to self-employment.

- St. Brigad's Social Centre, Ibadan, Nigeria: 3/ The centre conducts training in the following fields:

- (a) typing, shorthand, office management for school-leavers to help them find jobs in offices;
- (b) cooking, child welfare, dressmaking, crafts, laundry and literacy, to help women meet their home and family responsibilities;
- (c) literacy classes for adults, and illiterate women traders, who show sufficient aptitude in arithmetic, are also taught how to keep simple accounts.

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1/ James R. Sheffield and Victor P. Diejomach, Non-Formal Education in African Development, African-American Institute, New York, 1972, pages 7-8.

2/ Ibid, pages 165-166.

3/ Ibid, Op.cit., page 180

- In Botswana, the Youth Training Brigades offer on-the-job training for girls in silk-screen printing, tie-dyeing, weaving, and dress-making. A textile workshop at Serowe gives girls a two-year course in spinning, weaving, dressmaking, and another one at Shashi River, in printing and dyeing. The Brigades aim at training girls for both self and wage employment. 1/

8. Training courses run by the YWCA in various African countries are also worth mentioning, as they demonstrate what can be done for girls and women with little or no formal education in order to up grade their skills and productive capacity and to enable them to participate better in the development process of their countries.

9. In Zambia, the YWCA has established the Buseko Home Industries as a means for enabling women who have finished primary schools to earn a living. A six-month course is offered to 20-25 women in each class, in sewing and the finished goods are sold not only to individuals but also to shop-keepers on wholesale basis. 2/

10. In Kenya, the vocational training school at Limuru offers a two-year programme for primary-school leavers in general domestic science, including nutrition, poultry keeping, dress-making. Another vocational training school at Mombasa offers a one-year course to girls with school certificate, in shorthand, typing, office management, and bookkeeping. The training at this institute is specifically geared to available employment opportunities. "Even with the most general training, these girls are able to find jobs beyond the housewifery that these training courses generally lead to in other countries." 3/

11. In Tanzania the YWCA trains school-leaver girls between the ages of 14 and 16, in embroidery, after which they are employed by the YWCA workshop. The aim of this course is to make these girls self-sufficient. A related course is run for mature women who are trained as seamstresses, and then employed by the centre which pays them a basic salary plus commission on goods sold. The YWCA also offers a course in basket weaving to about 10 women. 4/

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1/ Sheffield and Diejomaoh, op.cit., page 68; and Botswana Country Report, UNECA, page 9.

2/ Ibid, op.cit., pages 4-5.

3/ Ibid. page 3.

4/ Ibid, page 4.

12. From the above examples, it could be demonstrated that vocational training for women is vital as it serves several needs. It is an alternative for those who lack the opportunity to attend or continue formal education. It is an extension of formal schooling for those who need additional training to get them into productive wage or self-employment. It is a means of up grading the skills of those already employed, even though the percentage of women in this category, as compared to that of men is small. 1/

III. Some fields in which women and girls should receive training:

(a) Training in Literacy

13. A survey of literacy in African countries reveals a very high percentage of illiteracy among the population in most countries. With rare exceptions, the rate of illiteracy is usually higher among women than among men, as the following figures indicate:

| <u>Country</u>  | <u>Year</u> | <u>Illiteracy rates in percentages</u> |              |
|-----------------|-------------|--|--------------|
|                 |             | <u>Men</u>                             | <u>Women</u> |
| Algeria 2/      | 1966        | 70.1                                   | 92.0         |
| Libya 3/        | 1964        | 62.5                                   | 95.8         |
| Malawi 4/       | 1966        | 66.0                                   | 87.7         |
| Mali 5/         | 1960/61     | 96.0                                   | 99.5         |
| Sierra Leone 6/ | 1963        | 90.4                                   | 96.1         |
| Somalia 7/      | 1964        | 85.0                                   | 95.0         |
| Sudan 8/        | 1970/71     | 72.4                                   | 82.0         |
| Swaziland 9/    | 1966        | 68.7                                   | 72.5         |
| Tunisia 10/     | 1966        | 53.6                                   | 82.4         |

1/ Sheffield and Diejomaoh, op. cit., Introduction XI.

2/ UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1970, page 31.

3/ Ibid.

4/ Ibid.

5/ Ibid, page 32.

6/ Ibid.

7/ Somalia Country Report, UNECA, page 1.

8/ Sudan Country Report, UNECA, page 2.

9/ Swaziland Country Report, UNECA, page 2.

10/ UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1970, page 32.

14. The above figures indicate that while many African countries are fighting illiteracy and the ignorance and low levels of living that usually accompany it, women are afflicted by these evils to a higher degree than men. "Thus while the percentage of illiteracy among the whole population is the principal index of the level of education in a country, the relationship between the figures for each sex becomes an index of the inequality of opportunities offered to men and women." <sup>1/</sup>

15. Literacy can change the whole outlook of women as regards their ability to use new techniques of innovation so vital in the process of development. <sup>as</sup> Illiterate women, kept away from the main stream of change might well act as a deterrent of change in society. "This would be more so because of the impact that women as mothers and wives have on their families and their children. <sup>2/</sup> Moreover, literate parents, particularly a literate mother, can play a vital role in the pre-school education of their children and they are thus more likely to encourage the education of their children. It is a matter of priority then for African countries to make special effort to get all women in their countries to achieve general literacy."

16. In countries where literacy campaigns have been started, there are strong indications that women are just as eager to learn as men, and they may in some cases form the majority in the literacy classes, (partly explained by the fact that more women than men are illiterate). For example, in 1965-1966 out of 11,904 pupils in literacy classes in Cameroon, 8,285 were women. The women in the urban literacy centres often gave as their motives for attending, the usefulness of such instructions in the trade of handicrafts. <sup>3/</sup> In Somalia, there are 20 women's centres in various parts of the country, ~~which~~ run literacy and home economics classes for women with little or no education. "It is not unusual to see women walking long distances each day to attend these courses." <sup>4/</sup>

17. The promotion of literacy, especially functional literacy must be accompanied by meaningful programmes in adult education and vocational training. "If they are not to lapse into illiteracy, the new literates must be encouraged, through appropriate programmes, to continue their education and obtain cultural enrichment, understand

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<sup>1/</sup> Study on the Equality of Access of Girls and Women to Education in the Context of Rural Development, report prepared by UNESCO for the twenty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, page 24.

<sup>2/</sup> "Education and Training of Women," op. cit., Annex III, page 3.

<sup>3/</sup> Cameroon Country Report, UNECA, page 16.

<sup>4/</sup> Somalia Country Report, UNECA, page 4.

civic and political responsibility, acquire greater skills in household management and child care, and train for various vocations and professions." 1/ The Rabat Conference stressed this point by recommending "that adult education programmes should be geared towards increasing the awareness and full participation of women in the modern world of science and technology, and that new strategy emphasizing functional literacy should be established wherever this has not yet been done, since effective adult education programmes are a contributory factor to improving and raising the general living standards of the people." 2/

(b) Training in agriculture

18. In the rural areas where the majority of the population lives, women deal with most of the farming activities. They do <sup>the</sup> tilling and hoeing of the soil, the planting, weeding, harvesting and <sup>the</sup> marketing of the produce. The system of training (including extension services) in agriculture however, has failed to take into account the important role that women play in agriculture in African countries.

"There is a profound contradiction between the women's condition as a chief agricultural producer and the rudimentary nature, sometimes the non-existence of technical and co-operative means designated more specifically for them. The agricultural extension service is almost totally directed to export crops and thus to men. Rural activities programmes for women are oriented more towards their functions as mothers and wives than as agricultural producers. In these conditions it is perfectly obvious why there are growing frustrations on the part of women about their status and participation." 3/

19. Because of this bias in the training system in agriculture, men are given the chance to apply modern methods of farming to cash crops while their wives continue to cultivate food crops by traditional methods. Thus man's labour is better rewarded by a higher produce and income, while the women's productivity remains more or less static and, in some instances, decreases.

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1/ United Nations Assistance for the Advancement of Women, Report of the Secretary General to the Nineteenth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, February 1966, page 28.

2/ Report of the Regional Conference on Education, Vocational Training and Work Opportunities for Girls and Women in African Countries, Rabat, Morocco, 20-29 May 1971, page 13.

3/ Rural Co-operative and Planned Change in Africa, UNRISD, Geneva, 1970, as quoted in "Women and National Development: Some Profound Contradictions", UNECA, page 34.



20. Given the role that women play in agriculture and in the economic life of their communities, it is essential that they be given the appropriate training in farming methods. Rural development demands knowledge of agricultural technology, which must be understood not only by men but by women also. Failure to teach women modern methods in farming, prevents agricultural development, and rural income to rise to a level commensurate with the needs of rural families.

21. Greater attention must be given to the training of women as extension workers in larger numbers in all skills of agriculture, so that they could reach the majority of women in the rural areas. Women represent such a large reservoir of untapped talent capable of transforming life in the rural areas that to exclude them from the appropriate training does injustice not only to the women, but to the societies in which they live.

22. The extent to which girls participate in agricultural training in most African countries is alarmingly low, only few African countries have made a step forward in increasing the enrollment of girls in agricultural institutions. The Arab Republic of Egypt, for example, succeeded in increasing its enrollment of girls in agricultural colleges by 400 per cent in a decade; and, by 1970, one of every six students was female. 1/ In Tunisia, one of every four students in lower secondary agricultural education was a girl in 1968. 2/ Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Sierra Leone now offer agriculture extension training on the certificate level for women. In 1972, 400 Kenya women received co-operative training, through a special series of seminars. 3/

23. There may be other examples which have not been mentioned here; but the contradiction still holds true in the majority of African countries. As one woman complained "it is the women who do all the work while the men lounge under trees, gossiping. But when the experts are called in, it is the men to whom the training is given." 4/ At a Symposium on the Changing Needs in the Education of Women in the Second Development Decade, 5/ the woman delegate from

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1/ "Women and National Development in African Countries: Some Profound Contradictions", a position paper prepared by the Human Resources Development Division, UNEDCA, for the Ford Foundation Task Force on Women, 1973, page 34.

2/ Ibid.

3/ Ibid.

4/ Symposium on the Changing Needs in the Education of Women in the Second Development Decade, 2-9 April, 1971, Haifa, Israel, page 66.

5/ Ibid, page 14.

Liberia had this to say: "During the first Development Decade, men farmers were given extensive assistance in programmes conducted by the Department of Agriculture and also by the University College of Agriculture. Very little attention was paid to women, as farmers, although, many of them have extensive farms in our country."

(c) Training in trade, commerce and small-scale industries

24. The well known fact that in so many African countries women dominate market trade, seems to relate to the female's traditional role in farming activities. Women represented 60 per cent of the sellers in urban markets in Dakar in 1959, 66 per cent in Brazzaville in 1966, 83 per cent in Lagos in 1960 and 85 per cent in Accra in 1959. 1/

25. In Somalia large numbers of women are engaged in various commercial activities in most towns of the Republic. They sell fruits, vegetables and food grains in local markets. Many are employed in coffee shops, restaurants and hotels. In the rural areas the nomadic women produce handicrafts for their homes, including utensils. 2/

26. In spite of these telling figures, the same situation as in agriculture persists, as far as their having access to training is concerned. Women traders lack the necessary training and most of them are illiterate. Those who engage in crafts and small industries, seem to confine their work within their homes and communities, without any specific training to improve their skills for better economic returns. At the Rabat Conference the women voiced their concern for women traders by recommending "that governments should safeguard the position of women traders and market-women in the commercial sector, provide for their training and apply appropriate commercial policies which would prevent their being squeezed out by big commercial undertakings." 3/

27. As economic progress benefits men as wage earners the position of women in the small traditional enterprises correspondingly deteriorates, as they are not able to compete with the big and modern commercial undertakings. And if women are hired at all in these

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1/ Participation of Women in Industry and Commerce in African Towns South of the Sahara, E/CB.14/URB.14, page 17, as quoted in "The Impact of Modern Life and Technology on Women's Economic Role: Implications for Planning", UNECA, page 6.

2/ Somalia Country Report, UNECA, page 2.

3/ Rabat Report, op. cit., page 14.

modern sectors, because they lack the necessary skills and training they more than often occupy positions for the unskilled, while the men hold the skilled jobs. "In one West African country where over 80 per cent of own-account traders are women, the proportion of women among employees in trade is only 24 per cent." 1/

28. Since women have already shown a remarkable initiative and aptitude in these fields, they need training in management, marketing, savings, and credits, to improve their skills and knowledge which would lead to better productivity and income. Training in the establishment and management of co-operatives is also essential; and in general, emphasis should be placed on on-the-job training and continuing training which could enable women to compete progressively in larger markets.

(d) Training for participation in community activities

29. A great number of women participate in self-help schemes and community development activities in their countries. They build roads, schools, dispensaries, nursery centres and wells. Besides, they are members of women's clubs and community centres. In order to enable them to contribute better to the development of the community, they also need some education and training in community responsibilities. Women's voluntary organizations in various African countries have played a particularly important role in providing leadership training for women as well as many specific skills necessary for active participation in community life.

30. Special effort is made by the animation rurale programme in Senegal, Cameroon, and other French-speaking countries in Africa toward the education of women as active members of the community. Out of the 43 rural training centres in Senegal, 22 are for training women. "More than two thousand women have been trained. These are primarily rural women volunteers who are active in their villages promoting rural improvement programmes; related to health, education, agriculture and social welfare." 2/

IV. Some necessary actions and strategies

(1) Evaluation of existing vocational education and training programmes for women

In order to get a better picture of the existing situation in so far as vocational training opportunities for women are concerned, a thorough survey or study is needed to determine the

1/ Symposium on the Changing Needs in the Education of Women in Second Development Decade, page 27.

2/ Education and Training of Women, op. cit., Annex I, page 2.

type and quality of vocational training in African countries. A follow-up of trainees is necessary in order to determine the extent to which they are absorbed in the labour sector. This study will lead to proposals for better programmes for girls and women, and especially those that are job-oriented.

(2) Review of literacy programmes

In order to determine the extent to which literacy, especially functional literacy, influences women's life and brings about change and innovations in their activities, a review of literacy programmes including training and follow-up materials, is needed.

(3) Study of the school-leaver girls

With the flight of school-leaver girls from the country side to the towns gaining momentum, it is necessary to examine the content and quality of education and training in relation to opportunities for local employment. Assessment of the situation of the school-leaver girl should include such aspects as drop-out rates, migrating patterns, means of support, access to continuing education, and the relevance of her achieved education to life in the rural and urban areas.

(4) Review of Legislations on the education and training of girls and women

The Convention against Discrimination in Education was adopted in 1960 under the auspices of UNESCO. International conventions however stay on paper unless they are ratified and their stipulations followed in practice by member States. Many African countries may have ratified this convention and others that have bearing on the status of women. They may even have passed legislations of their own with regard to the access of girls to education and training on equal basis with men. However, the slow progress in the education and training of girls, point to the necessity for a review of these legislations.

V. Conclusion

31. In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the chief concern of the Women's Programme in the Economic Commission for Africa, is the participation of women as human resources in the process of development. The Commission's concern for the advancement of women is not something new.

32. As early as 1963 the Commission sponsored a Regional Workshop on the Role of Women in Urban Development, which was held in Lagos, Nigeria. Under the auspices of the ECA and the German Foundation for Developing Countries, a regional seminar was held in Addis Ababa, in 1969, on The Role of Women in National Development. And in May 1971, the examination of what concrete actions and measures should be taken at the national, regional and international levels, in order to accelerate the promotion of education, vocational training and work opportunities for girls and women in African countries, constituted the main objective for a third Regional Conference in Rabat, Morocco.

33. The recommendations of these and other women's conferences form the basis on which the Commission has developed a programme which is intended to support national efforts in the promotion of women's participation in development. The ECA Five-Year Programme on Pre-vocational and Vocational Training of Girls and Women Toward Their Full Participation in Development (1972-1976) is intended to transform words of these recommendations into actions, with the support and assistance of both governmental and non-governmental organizations.