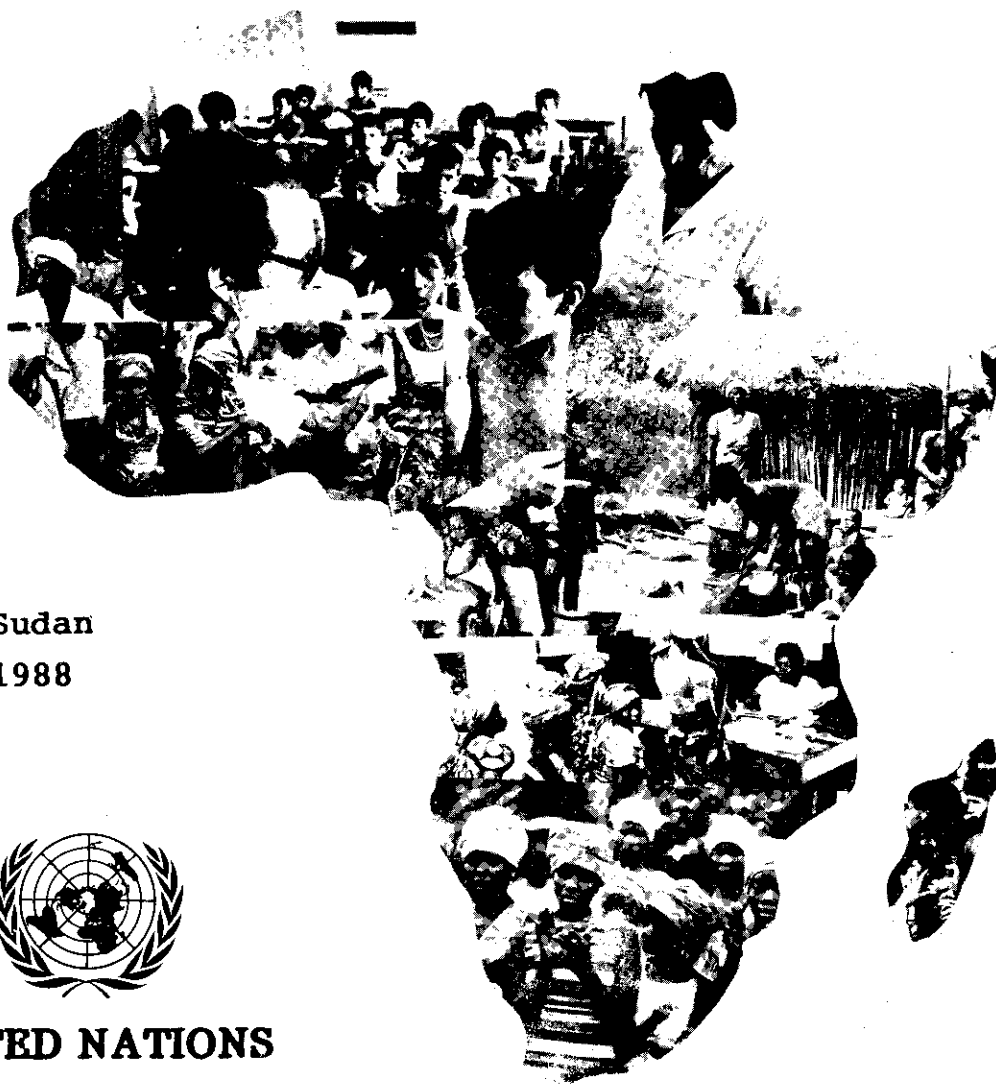


INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF AFRICA'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT

THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS ON THE VULNERABLE GROUPS
IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES: WOMEN

by

AFRICAN TRAINING AND RESEARCH CENTRE FOR WOMEN (ATRCW)



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UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The economic crisis confronting most African countries today is the consequence of many interrelated factors. These factors among others include: (i) systematic decline in food production culminating in severe food shortages and insecurity in many areas; (ii) rapid population growth (which is disproportionate to economic growth and productivity) resulting in high dependency ratios and the subsequent unbearable pressure on the already scarce resources; (iii) increasing unemployment and underemployment especially among women and youth; (iv) disparities in incomes between rural and urban areas have been a major factor in accounting for rural urban migration with serious consequences both for the sending and the receiving areas. The former (i.e. the rural areas) in terms of food production since migration is selective in favour of the young, the more educated and usually male, the latter (urban areas) because of increased urban problems.

2. Lack of adequate knowledge about ecology and ecosystems and inappropriate technologies have coalesced to further exacerbate the above problems by reaching, for instance, to serious problems of desertification and intensification in some areas. Considerable fluctuations from year to year in agricultural production, mainly due to droughts, have also aggravated the situation.

3. The Africa's debt crisis which may be a combination of the above factors and many others have definitely added to many of the problems confronting African countries.

4. The above mentioned problems and others have led to the current economic crisis in Africa and which in turn has led to the deterioration of the wellbeing of the African people. Economic growth has slowed down and has now become the socio-economic crisis in Africa.

5. Faced with this persistent economic crisis in Africa, coupled with the inadequate economic strategies and policies, African governments have initiated actions aimed at long term structural transformation of their economies. These measures to overcome the current economic crisis and to which African countries have fully committed themselves to their implementation are elaborated in the OAU's African Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER) 1986-1990 which African Heads of State and Government adopted in July 1985.

6. Within the framework of activities related to the implementation of APPER and the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development, human resources development has been singled out as one of the four priority areas of development at the national, subregional and regional levels during the period 1986-1990. Both documents have also stressed the need for improvements in the management of the African economies and the role that human resources play therein.

7. Women are part of the human resources and their role in national development cannot be ignored. In this respect, there is need to ensure that women are included and integrated in all aspects of national development and that the current economic crisis in Africa does not continue to perpetuate the poor economic conditions of women. Within the objectives of this conference, and in order to analyse the impact of the Economic Crisis on Women, this paper will: (a) first look into the elements of crisis (drought, food crisis, African economic recession, debt crisis and structural adjustment) in relation to the situation of women; (b) look into the impact these elements of crisis have had on women in various sectors and social services (employment, education and training, health and nutrition, water and housing and the participation of women in politics and decision making); (c) look into some of the measures that have and are being initiated towards the implementation of the various strategies such as the Arusha and Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies as they relate to changing socio-economic conditions of women; and (d) draw conclusions and recommendations.

II. ELEMENTS OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

A. Drought and Desertification

8. Drought and desertification have been Africa's greatest environmental problems affecting more than two-thirds of the continent for more than two decades and severely damaging not only the physical environment but also social and economic conditions. ¹ The severest spell of drought was in the period 1982-1985, when as many as 24 African countries, ranging from the sub-humid Sudan-Guinean Zone in West Africa were so badly affected that they required emergency food aid at one time or another.

9. In the Sahelian belt for example, cereal production in 1987 declined about 12 per cent in relation to 1986 in the nine Sahelian countries which belong to the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) - Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. ² Drought has therefore become one of the most important causes of the economic crisis and has led to slow economic growth.

10. In respect to women, the situation has and continue to affect women as food producers, fuelwood collectors and water fetchers. This has increased women's workload as they have to walk miles and miles in fetch of water and spend time collecting firewood needed for cooking. These activities are done at the expense of other productive activities in order to meet basic needs (water, food etc.) of the family.

11. Measures to control drought and desertification in Africa at the national, subregional and regional levels have been included in APPER and subsequently endorsed in UNPAAERD. The involvement of women and the incorporation of their concerns into these measures should be seriously considered in order to improve women's situation in productive sectors such as agriculture and ease their workload.

B. Food Crisis

12. Agricultural development efforts directed towards cash and export crops have diverted fertile land and family workers from food production, putting additional strain on the already overburdened women. This diversion along with drought, human policies and activities have greatly contributed to food shortage and crisis in Africa.

13. Over the past 20 years food production according to FAO figures show that there has been a steady decline in the amount of food grown per person regardless of rainfall.

14. Women remain the provider of 60 to 80 per cent of the household food in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Women are the key actors in ensuring the survival and well-being of children, the youth and the aged. However, agricultural development programmes generally have failed to recognize that women traditionally have been responsible for growing most of all of the family food. These programmes have often neglected or even undermined women's role in all aspects of agriculture, including growing food and cash crops.

15. The introduction of commercial crops and the commercialization of food staples has drawn women into labour-intensive, low-producing work. The net effect has been an increase in women's work. Food crisis caused by drought, human policies and other factors have had greater impact on women not only as food producers and caretakers of the wellbeing of children, but also has increased their workload as head of households and their participation in other income-generating activities to meet the family's basic needs.

16. Other aspects of food crisis that have had an impact on women include the rise in food prices and that the standards of living are falling down. These aspects have affected women in their roles as wives, mothers and household managers. The situation has necessitated women to work more in order to maintain the well-being of the family.

C. African Economic Recession

17. The African economic recession has been a subject of great and central concern to African governments and international organizations. It has been the theme for innumerable national and international conferences, all ending with strategies and recommendations. The period of recession began in 1980 when the GDP of Africa (excluding South Africa) is estimated to have increased at an annual rate of 5.2% per annum from 1970-1980, with per capita GDP rising by 2.4% per annum, in the 1980-1986 period, GDP increased only by about 1% per annum and GDP per capita declined by about 2% per annum during the period.

18. These trends in global GDP in Africa, however, show considerable variations in GDP performance among African countries either on a regional or income basis. Table 1 (see annex 1) shows these variations in performance among African countries. In spite of variation in performance amongst African

countries, all the groups suffered substantial declines in their GDP and GDP per capita during the recessionary period of the 1980s, compared to the decade of the 1970s.

19. What does this decline in GDP and GDP per capita mean to the situation of women in Africa? What impact the decline in per-capita income have had on women? In the first place, the substantial declines in total output as measured by the GDP in African countries during the recessionary period of the 1980's has been reflected in major sectors, agriculture, industry and social services. In agricultural sector for instance, women play a significant role as food producers, processors as well as marketing. In Ghana for example, women feature prominently in food production, food processing and small-scale manufacturing.⁴ Their participation in the productive sector such as agriculture is hampered by the limited access to means and services of production. To that effect women's productivity has remained low and has hence contributed to the decline in GDP.

20. Another particular feature of the recession has been that of unemployment, underemployment and poverty. This situation has had an impact on women. By and large, women chances of participating in the formal labour force and in remunerative activities are still very limited. Gains in employment status on the part of women would only result from a rapid rate of structural differentiation in the economy.

21. Furthermore, one of the features of the African economy is its dependency on external trade especially with the industrialized countries of Western Europe, the United States, and Japan, in short, members of the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development). Accordingly, a decline in the economies of the industrialized countries on which African countries depend for their exports, imports and capital flows has resulted in reduced exports, imports and net capital inflows with consequent reduction in government revenues, expenditures and others. Export of cash crops such as coffee, tea, oil (in Nigeria) copper in Zambia as Africa's primary commodities have fallen down.

22. Albeit data is not available to assess the impact this have had on women, it is however perceived that women have been affected as part of the labour force in the tea and coffee plantations, in mining industries and as import and export traders.

D. Debt Crisis

23. Besides the decline in per capita income, Africa is faced with the debt situation whose servicing charges are creating tremendous strains on economic recovery programmes. Governments are under pressure to improve their balance of payment situation and to reduce their budget deficit within very short periods of time. The external debt service burdens have put serious limits on the resources that can be internally mobilized to promote domestic reconstruction and rehabilitation.

24. This financial constraints created by the external debt had led to drastic import reduction and strangulation leading to overall declines in economic growth and development. On the part of women, negative impact resulting

from external debt could be pointed out: (i) inequitable access to women opportunities, access to credit and services support and hence their ineffective participation in the development process and in the productive sector such as agriculture; (ii) low priority accorded to women concerns in economic development has led to low allocation of resources for women's programmes.

E. Structural Adjustment

25. Debt situation has led to the structural adjustment programmes in order to reduce the demand and to stimulate export earning so that more money could be earned to pay for debt. Both Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery 1986-1990 (APPER) and the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development 1986-1990 (UN-PAAERD) adopted in 1985 and 1986 respectively underscore the importance of structural policy reforms in Africa. To date 25 African countries have adopted structural adjustment programmes with the support of the International Monetary Fund and or the World Bank. ⁵

26. The main features of these structural adjustment according to an ILO paper ⁶ include: currency devaluation, elimination of subsidies, cuts in public expenditures, liberalisation foreign trade, increase in domestic interest rates, restraint in monetary expansion deregulation in internal markets and privatisation of public enterprises and increase in producer prices for farmers. The introduction of these structural adjustment measures and their implementation have had ramifying consequences on women. A few examples of such consequences on women can be pointed out as follows:

- (i) Cuts in government expenditure have affected social services more adversely than other elements as far as women needs are concerned. Social aspects particularly as regards employment and social services such as education and health tend to be affected by the budgetary cuts that are often required and as regards special population groups particularly women and children.
- (ii) A second aspect whose effects on women need to be pointed out is budget retrenchment. Budget retrenchment has generally meant a freeze in the salaries of public employees, a freeze on public employment and a reduction in public expenditures for social services. ⁷ These measures have had greater effect on women than on men. For instance, when it comes to reducing the number of employees women would generally be the first to go.
- (iii) A third aspect that has affected women is deregulation in internal markets. This means absence of price control by allowing prices to find their natural level. As a result prices go up and this leads to inflation. With limited resources on the part of women, this has limited their purchasing power and has made it difficult for women to meet the ever demanding basic needs of the family.

27. To sum up this part of the paper, drought, food crisis, economic recession, debt crisis and structural adjustment all have had an impact on the women in terms of income, productivity, health, employment and the general well-being of the women and their families. Albeit it is well known that the economic crisis in the region has had significant implications for social classes and social categories in terms of income, women especially among the poor have and are suffering from dwindling or lowering real incomes and rising prices. Women have and are therefore greatly suffering from the economic crisis as members of the society.

28. It is obvious from the foregoing analysis that economic crisis in Africa has had an impact on women. However, even though the concern is on women, the relevant questions here are whether women are suffering more than men, and why. If that is the case, what can be done to alleviate women's plight? In what capacity are women being involved in the development process? How could they be involved to increase productivity? As part of human resources, to what extent is women potential being developed, identified and appropriately utilized?

29. In an attempt to respond to some of the questions raised above, this part of the paper examines further the social consequences of Africa's economic crisis and their impact on women under the following heads: (a) Employment; (b) Education and Training; (c) Health and Nutrition; (d) Water, Sanitation and Housing; and (e) Participation of women in politics and decision-making.

III. AFRICA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN

A Employment

30. A major aspect of the current socio-economic crisis in Africa which has serious implications for women, is the critical unemployment and underemployment problem facing many African countries (ILO/JASPA 1985).⁸ As already discussed in part II of this paper, generally, retrenchment and general decline in economic recession as well as privatization have led to an increase in unemployment and underemployment.

31. In reference to women, in spite of the fact that in recent decades, interest in policies to promote women's participation in economic development has increased, by and large, their chances of participating in the formal labour force and in remunerative activities are still very limited. This is shown to be the case by a number of ILO-sponsored studies and publications.⁹

32. Available information regarding women's employment in most African countries indicates that there is no policy discrimination between men and women in wage employment, and that labour laws provide for equal pay for equal work and for equal treatment between men and women.¹⁰ However, in most countries men still dominate wage employment. Specific efforts aimed at improving women's access to their status in wage employment have been slow. Overall, women are still concentrated in the low status and low paying services sectors such as teaching, nursing, social work and secretarial jobs.

33. Given this situation on women in wage employment, budget retrenchment has added to the unemployment and to less employment opportunities on women. Governments cannot employ more women and hence new women employees have no chance. Similarly, reduction in male wage employment has also led to increased dependence on women's earnings in poor rural households.

34. Reduction of employees in the formal sector has increased women's participation in the informal sector. At the time when employment situation in the formal sector has more or less stagnated, employment in the informal sector has grown considerably. Recognition of the importance of the women's role in the informal sector assumes a greater significance at this time of economic crisis. In the urban areas, faced with the combined pressures of rising prices, falling wages and high male unemployment rates, more women are entering into informal sector.

35. Women in the informal sector work under the most trying conditions without basic services such as potable water and sanitation nor health facilities, most have no skill and training and have no secure access to production resources.

36. Several resolutions and reports have called inter-alia for action to improve upon the conditions of work of the women in the informal sector, not only with respect to increasing their access to improved technologies, storage facilities, credit and other productive resources but also making their work environment and welfare more human. The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies have stressed among other strategies, that governments should assist the increasing number of working women in the informal and economy (see also the Arusha Strategies). Furthermore, the inter-Parliamentary Union Conference in Dakar in October 1985 adopted several recommendations on the African employment situation including women's work in the informal sector. It observed that the women had poor work environments and lacked governmental investment and support and therefore, proposed both national and international action to ameliorate their working conditions in the informal sector. Despite these resolutions and recommendations, environmental conditions in the informal sector remain poor.

37. The informal sector plays a significant economic role in the urban as well as rural areas of African countries by producing goods and services in conformity with the needs of the population. Since women play a significant role in this sector, it should be perceived that enhancing the productive capacity of this sector as well as improving its working conditions, could simultaneously improve the living standards of the women in the sector and also the larger number of urban workers and poor who consume the goods and services generated by the sector.

38. Several problems within the informal sector hampering productivity need to be pointed out. On the part of the government, the attitude of most African governments to the informal sector can best be described as ambivalent. Development plans put strong emphasis on employment creation and basic needs satisfaction, however, the day-to-day reality is harassment of the informal sector. In most cases, despite the pronouncements in the development plans, governments have been reluctant to implement laws to favour the informal

sector or even put it at par with the modern sector.¹¹ Accordingly, it is not just government's hostile attitudes but the practical difficulties of helping the sector that explains government action or lack of it. Secondly, the absence of legal status of most informal sector participants and the absence of records make it difficult to plan for the improvement of facilities. Thirdly because of the nature of the informal sector, it cannot be integrated in development plans.

39. If we perceive that women play a significant role in the informal sector, then it is fair to say that something ought to be done to improve women's productivity in the sector. The following are suggested to help improve the situation of women in the informal sector:

- (i) more use of appropriate technology to improve quality and increasing market opportunities for the sector;
- (ii) training programmes designed for women could help although in keeping with the technology practised in the informal sector, special programmes are needed for the informal sector to take account of its special needs;
- (iii) improvement programmes for women in the informal sector are needed emphasizing reconstruction of physical facilities which could inevitably lead to some improvement in the work environment and welfare of the women traders.

40. In general, training would help women in the introduction of more appropriate technology into the informal sector. Similarly, in the long run, it would increase the capital intensity of the sector. Some form of technical or financial assistance is also needed by the sector especially to meet the needs of women and to maintain its dynamic nature and make major improvements in its production, sales, training and other aspects.

41. In the area of agriculture as part of the rural sector employment, statistics on women's labour force participation in agriculture (based on national sources and or estimates of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Sub-Saharan Africa show an intensive participation of women in agriculture. In six countries (the Gambia, Mali, Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Malawi and Zaire), about half of the agricultural labour force are women with well over half in Botswana, the United Republic of Tanzania, Cameroun and Sierra Leone. In another four countries (Ghana, Senegal, Togo and Burkina Faso) women comprise between 42 to 46 per cent of the agricultural labour force, and in the remaining countries, from 31 to 39 per cent. The only exceptions of this high participation pattern are countries with predominantly muslim, population (e.g. Mauritania and Niger).¹²

42. Structural adjustment programmes in many countries of Africa have focused on agricultural development including agricultural research, extension services strategies, marketing and others. In respect to women's participation in agricultural development as in the statistics referred above, and despite the acknowledged predominance of women in agriculture in many parts of the world and in Africa in particular, women continue to be left out of

agricultural strategies. Aside the above, women still experience a number of problems. Notably as identified in a recent study in Ghana, ¹³ problems include inadequate resources for production mainly land; limited access to credit; appropriate technologies to reduce drudgery associated with household work; land ownership is still in many countries of Africa vested in the male members of the family; the level of development of productive forces and farming methods are still mostly traditional and backward.

43. In Africa, 85 per cent of rural women are involved in Agriculture, where they produce and process as much as 80 per cent of family food consumption. Where successful structural adjustment requires improving the balance of payments with regard to agricultural exports and food imports, then women must be part of that strategy. There are clear linkages between structural adjustment objectives to increase food supply, the economic and technical roles of rural women, and the welfare of children.

44. In terms of credit, women have no access since the title of the land for collateral is in the man's name. Perchonock,¹⁴ for example considers the question of women and land matters and concludes that while both men and women suffer from the same type of oppression (i.e. in class relations) in depriving them of land, peasant women suffer quantitatively more than peasant men. Stressing this situation further (Philomena Steady 1983 P.19), ¹⁵ states that in view of the pattern in some societies of allocating land to males even when land rights are determined by rules of usufruct, women as a group are likely to be more deprived of access to land under new land tenure conditions.

45. Mechanization has also affected women since women are not selected for training in agricultural extension work for example.

46. Due to the above factors, the productivity of women is severely undermined, and they are becoming more and more marginalized (Makamure and Chimedza, 1985:51). ¹⁶

47. In order to alleviate the above mentioned problems and others and to improve women participation in agriculture the following ought to be considered and where possible provided for:

- (i) appropriate labour and time saving devices to cater for all agricultural activities such as ploughing, weeding, harvesting, transporting, preserving and processing of agricultural products;
- (ii) appropriate food processing technologies that are relevant to be made widely available to rural women, along with storage and marketing facilities to reduce post harvest losses;
- (iii) provision of farms implements, fertilizers, high quality seeds and agricultural extension services in order to improve the input/output ratio.
- (iv) access to land and training in agricultural extension work.

48. The key issues with regard to technology are whether the changes brought about by the technology are beneficial to women in the long run; whether women can afford to purchase the new technology and whether they have access to the technical skills required for maintaining it. Technological improvements such as tractors allow more land to be plowed on the family farm, but on the other hand, this usually means additional burdens for women because they have more weeding to do by hand unless devices for weeding are also made available.

49. In short, women have very limited access to land, capital, skills and technology which are major factors to increase income and productivity.

50. At this juncture, there is need to point out some of the progress that have been made in the formal employment sector. A recent global statistical survey (1950-2000) on women in Economic Activity undertaken by International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW),¹⁷ showed that within the services sector, in almost all African countries, more and more women were employed in the services sector in countries for which data was available. The proportion of women has more than tripled in some countries and doubled in others. For example, the percentage of working women in this sector rose from 3 to 8.3 per cent in Senegal, 7 to 13.6 per cent in the Ivory Coast, 19.8 to 30.5 per cent in Nigeria and 31.6 to 51.9 per cent in Mauritius. However, despite this increase, the proportion of women in the total labour force of the services sector is still very low compared to men.

51. Similarly, as the figures in Chart E (see annex) clearly indicate, the highest percentages of the female labour force is occupied in agriculture, and the lowest in administrative and managerial functions. In the category of professional and related workers women in Africa register a relatively lower rate reflecting the first stages of industrialization and inadequate facilities for specialization and training.

B. Education and Training

52. Education and training are among the major factors that promote National Development and thus bring about positive change in the lives of the population. Over the past two and a half decades, there have been many substantial improvement in levels and standards of education and training in Africa. However, as a consequence of policies associated with the debt crisis in Africa, there have been major setbacks in almost all countries in terms of declining quality of education and training being provided.¹⁸

53. As mentioned earlier in part II of this report, cuts in government expenditure have affected social services. Education as part of social services is the largest single expenditure. Cutting expenditure in education has led to reduced enrollment, facilities (e.g. text books) and others. This decline in enrollment rates is due partly to the inability of governments to provide the facilities to cope with rising population and in other cases due to the introduction of increased fees which has led to withdrawals from the education and training systems by those unable to pay.

54. What does this mean to the education of girls? To what extent can this have an impact on girls/women? In the first place, women have always been at the disadvantage and that whenever there is crisis, women are bound to

suffer even more. Traditionally in the African society priority to education have always been given to boys. In the situation where the family is unable to pay the increased school fees, chances are given to the boys first. To further illustrate this point, a meeting of Kenyan educators who met in March 1987 to discuss issues of women in education, noted that the culture has not yet fully accepted the premise of equal education and opportunity for girls, especially in rural areas. ¹⁹

55. Educational problems, to a greater or lesser degree, confront many African countries. Inevitably, the problems of inadequate educational facilities and manpower are much greater in the rural areas, since development planners and policy makers have not in the past addressed the problems of structural inequalities and rural-urban differentials in the educational development. ²⁰ The problems of structural inequalities and rural-urban differentials in the educational development have added to women inequalities in the education process.

56. Albeit girls enrollment at all levels of education (primary, secondary and university) is declining in many countries in Africa, in a few has increased. According to the various country reports presented at the Fifth meeting of the Sub-regional Committee on the Integration of Women in Development (Lusaka MULPOC, February 1987), in the area of formal education, Zimbabwe reported to have achieved equal enrollment of boys and girls at primary school and an increase in the proportion of girls at secondary school level. ²¹ In Tanzania, there has been an increase in the number of girls at secondary school level which is at present recorded at 37 per cent at ordinary level and 29 per cent at advance level. ²² At the university level, women enrollment rose from 9.7 per cent in 1977 to 25 per cent by 1984. Teacher Training Institutions have also observed higher rates of women.

57. In Kenya, there has been a rise in the total enrollment of females. In 1984, for example, out of 4.38 million children attending primary schools, 2.1 million were girls. At the university, the increase in female enrollment has been more modest than at the other levels, rising from 15 per cent in 1973 to about 23 per cent in 1984. ²³

58. In respect to non-formal education several countries, including Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania have all embarked upon strong programmes of adult education to redress illiteracy. Literacy classes have observed a higher number of women in many countries of Africa. Since most of the rural women are either illiterate or semiilliterate, non-formal education has played a significant role to widen their skills and ability to use new knowledge and technique so vital to the development process. Non-formal education should enable women to assume new roles and expose them to greater contact with the social economic and political life of their respective countries which in turn may lead to the development of new ideas, values and attitudes to development. Hence, non-formal education programmes for rural and urban women must not be planned in isolation, but must be linked to the overall national development plans and efforts.

59. As part of human resources development, what then can be done to increase the participation of girls/women in education and training within the structural adjustment programmes? As many analysts have pointed out, education

has the potential for being a major force for greater equality but too often this potential is obstructed by perverse effects of structure and fees (Richard Jolly 1987).²⁴ Several measures to develop the human resources (women) needed in the development process are suggested as follows:

- (i) there is need for action and or build in programmes within the curriculum/school syllabus to encourage female participation on a more equitable basis in the school system in terms of enrollment, motivation to learn and aspirations;
- (ii) develop preventive services such as systematic guidance and counselling services to minimize female drop outs and early pregnancies;
- (iii) to make the curriculum more relevant for female and develop programmes such as career guidance education to strengthen linkages between the education system with the world of work;
- (iv) in the field of science and technology where women enrollment is very low, strategies aimed at increasing women and girls for entry into scientific and technical fields should be developed. In the urban areas where high technologies are being introduced, awareness should be created and appropriate training planned for women.

C. Health and Nutrition

60. In the period since 1980s, several African countries have experienced increasing infant mortality and crude death rates, while the level of malnutrition has increased and per capita food supplies have dropped. The International Safe Mother hood Conference on Preventing the Tragedy of Maternal²⁵ noted that half a million maternal deaths take place every year, 99 per cent of these deaths occur in developing world. The question of women's health is a question that is intricately linked to women's role and status in the community and to the level of sociocultural and economic development of the society.

61. In Africa as in most developing countries, women's health has been given cursory attention and with emphasis on women's reproductive roles and with insufficient attention to women's other health needs.

62. The various structural transformations that are taking place as measures to overcome the Africa's economic crisis have to some extent not considered the impact these measures could have on women and other vulnerable groups.

63. Within the structural adjustment programmes, budgetary cuts in public expenditure have had some negative impact on social services such as health. Health services are a necessity and often badly needed and required as regards special population groups particularly women and children.

64. A severe chronic undersupply of essential drugs to health services exists in a number of developing countries especially in rural areas. This undersupply results partly from the shortage of foreign exchange, which causes

delays in making settlement for supplies from commercial sources, so that suppliers charge an additional fee to cover the credit risk and delays in payment. ²⁶ The delay and undersupply of essential drugs along with the high price on drugs have affected women especially pregnant and lactating women and where women cannot afford to pay for drugs because of the high prices. Cutbacks in essential imports necessitated by servicing external debt have hurt social sectors such as health; education and water supply. Health institutions have experienced chronic shortages of essential drugs and medical equipment. In Zimbabwe for instance budgetary allocation for all social sector ministries were reduced by 19.5 per cent in 1984/85. External debt and domestic budgetary constraints have forced for instance Niger to drastically scale down development plans and reduce national investment from an average of US\$60 million a year prior to 1980 to US\$2 million in recent years. ²⁷

65. In mozambique, the drugs and equipment needed to maintain and extend the primary health care (PHC) infrastructure cannot be imported because of the shortage of foreign exchange. ²⁸

66. In general, economic crisis has led to food crisis and hence an increase in malnutrition. Since women are the vulnerable groups, they have been hit very hard.

67. Closely associated with the health status of countries is their level of nutrition. As a result of the debt crisis and Structural adjustment programmes adopted to resolve the crisis, a large number of African countries have had to eliminate or reduce subsidies on food products. This has led to increased food prices and falling living standards. In this respect, it is generally observed that the general level of nutrition has declined in a number of African countries during the 1980s. With increased food prices coupled with limited resources, women as mothers and caretakers of the family have found it very difficult to afford to buy the required food to keep up to the nutritional standard of food intake.

68. The health needs of female adolescents and pregnant and lactating women require special attention for various reasons. For instance, and according to UNICEF report, pregnant women's nutritional condition has caused approximately 15 per cent of babies to be born with low birth weight. Similarly, women's nutritional status also requires consideration because it is affected by work load, seasonal peaks in labour demand and pregnancy. It is often overlooked that women suffer a particular labour constraint seasonal work stress which can present various health problems as well as weaken any incentive to limit family size or send children to school.

69. Since healthy people constitute (in economic terms) the productive labour force and women play a dominant role in the labour force and yet are the most and worst affected group in terms of health (maternal, mortality and fertility rates etc.), it is necessary that special attention be given to women's health.

70. Albeit African governments have made significant strides in implementing and strengthening programmes in areas such as Immunization, Primary Health Care (PHC), Maternal Child Health (MCH) and Family Planning Programmes, all of which are of particular relevance to the health of women, these programmes have yet to reach the majority of women in the rural areas in particular.

D. Housing, Water and Sanitation

71. Shelter and water have been defined by the various United Nations agencies as basic needs. And yet, housing in most African countries, especially in the urban centres has reached a crisis proportion. Today, a large proportion of urban dwellers live in unbearable crowded slums and shanty towns, while others have no shelter at all. The slums and shanty towns are without proper sanitation while the structures in which they live themselves constitute serious health and fire hazards.

72. With respect to water, about one quarter of the people in Africa have access to adequate supplies of water for drinking and washing and the number is even smaller in rural areas. The situation varies widely from country to country.

73. Housing, water and sanitation as part of social services as well as problems of health care have been exacerbated in most countries by budget limitations and the need to divert funds to emergency relief assistance. As a result women and children who are most affected continue to walk miles and miles to fetch water. The women and children of Africa will be the chief beneficiaries of any improvement in water supply and sanitation. Access to water supplies will save time and reduce drudgery for women. It will also enhance standard of health and sanitation, paving the way for better child and maternal health.

74. Efforts to formulate plans of action for community water supply and sanitation as part of the implementation of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD) have been made by African governments. Some of these activities include rural water supply systems using hand-pumps as well as piped gravity systems. These are being operated and maintained by communities in countries such as Burkina Faso, Benin, Burundi, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Rwanda, Sudan and Uganda. ²⁹ Furthermore, some countries have made progress by increasing their budget allocation for the sector. Despite these positive signs, much remains to be done.

75. Funding limitations, operation and maintenance, lack of trained personnel at the professional and sub-professional levels and inadequate cost recovery policies seem to be among the major serious constraints hampering the implementation of the Decade plans. Consequently, women and children continue to suffer.

76. It is recognized that women are involved and participating in the community water projects. Participation alone is not enough. There is need to: (i) train women not only as para-professionals but at the professional level; (ii) integrate water supply projects within other health activities such as PHC; (iii) provide guidance and counseling services in relation to proper use of water for health benefits; and (iv) undertake need assessments to identify problems and specific needs of women as related to health and their effect to women's productivity so that such identified needs could be incorporated into other women's health activities. At the government level, governments need to make every effort to generate resources needed to reach their targets for the Decade. Accordingly, since governments have

and continue to be committed to the activities and attainment of the IDWSSD goals, it is here proposed that more attention for water and sanitation activities be placed more to the underserved and rural population in the countries using low cost appropriate technologies and locally available resources.

77. In short, lack of recognition of women's productive roles and their contribution to the economic development have influenced policies governing health delivery systems. This is evidenced by the lack of attention given to women's health issues in agricultural and household work such as fetching water, collecting fuelwood etc.; and as mentioned earlier, by the emphasis made only on maternal child health (MCH), primary health care (PHC) and family planning (FP) programmes.

E. Women at decision-making level and political participation

78. Political participation is a key issue for women because it is an indicator of their status as well as a tool to improve their condition in society. In many African countries, women have the right to vote and they do vote. However, the mere act of voting cannot be regarded as a measure of political consciousness or participation. In many instances, poor rural and urban women are mobilized by political parties to vote. In such situation, women vote in high numbers but they do not participate in any other political activities. Though a few women in some countries of Africa are now actively involved in politics, the situation of women in political participation is still unsatisfactory.

79. Factors affecting women's participation in politics include: resources, time, skill, experience, patronage, contacts and information. Women are at a disadvantage with regard to all these factors that promote success in politics. Besides and above all, cultural attitudes towards women is a major factor hampering women's participation in politics.

80. In high public offices, women are under represented though it is recognized that in some countries in Africa, a few women have been appointed to responsible positions such as ministers and mostly assigned to social services sectors such as education, culture, social welfare, women and youth affairs. In the judiciary, the majority of women are at the lower levels of the judiciary, while very few women (in fact the proportion is very negligible) head various parastatals organizations and government ministerial departments, advisors, top government civil servants and institutions. In short, as in many other areas, women here are grossly under represented.

81. To this end, we may ask ourselves, how relevant is the issue of women's participation in politics and at the decision-making level to the Africa's economic crisis? To what extent could women's participation in politics and at decision-making level have a significant impact on Africa's economic crisis? Are women potential human resources in the recovery programmes? The discussion follows highlights some of the important roles women could play as participants in politics and at decision-making level.

82. First as already mentioned in the preceeding paragraphs, the participation of women in politics and in decision-making is an indicator of their status as well as an instrument to improve and strengthen their socio-economic conditions in society. This involvement would inevitably bring women to the centre of power, thereby enabling them to participate in national plans and policies that have to do with structural transformation taking place in their respective countries. After all, it is the politicians who make decisions, policies and priorities for national development.

83. Consequently, development planners have overlooked women's special needs and concerns in the planning process. Women's participation in politics and at the decision-making level can not only put them at the centre of power, but also enable them to act as pressure groups for ensuring that national policies, plans and programmes address women's concerns as well as promote implementation of national, regional and international strategies.

84. In the context of the Africa's economic crisis, economic recovery programmes such as structural adjustment programmes have not included women in the design, and planning of programmes even though the Lagos Plan of Action, APPER, and UN-PAAERD recognize the role of women in national development. For instance, in respect to women's participation in agricultural development (World Bank Report 1987), ³⁰ despite the acknowledged predominance of women in agriculture in many parts of the world and in Africa in particular, women continue to be left out of agricultural strategies.

85. Though there have been serious attempts to introduce affirmative action, variously defined as "equality policies" or "positive action" ³¹ (ILO/INSTRAW) to enhance the status and promote the full integration of women into political and economic systems, the situation is far from changing. Governments should take into account that women are equal partners with men, that their participation in politics and at decisionmaking level is crucial in development and that women are an economic asset whose contribution should be sufficiently acknowledged and utilized. If we take the position that women are potential human resources, then that potential must be developed and appropriately utilized in line with the structural transformation, national plans and recovery programmes taking place in the respective countries in Africa.

86. In short, since women are still not sufficiently involved in decisionmaking at all levels, the interests of women in African countries are still not sufficiently taken into consideration when planning and implementing development activities. Integrating women in development activities does not necessarily lead to a situation where men and women play an equal part in the development process, women also want to be involved in discussions and decisions on the direction in which society is to develop.

IV. MEASURES TAKEN TO OVERCOME AFRICA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS IN RELATION TO WOMEN

87. At the end of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) all governments approved the Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (FLS), thus expressing their political will to continue and improve their policies and activities for the advancement of women.

89. During the last ten years there has been some progress in such areas as legislation, education and employment, health and family planning and to some extent, the participation of women in politics. In general however, the status of poor women in particular cannot be said to have greatly improved. Most women still bear a double workload and have little if any access to land, credit and training of technological improvements. Women are still a long way behind in education, employment, health and representation on decision-making bodies. That having being said, the discussion in the following paragraphs notes some of the progress that have been made in implementing the strategies and which have a bearing on the socio-economic conditions of women.

90. In the context of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 40/108 of 13 December 1985, specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations system were requested to establish where they did not already exist, focal points on women's issues in all sectors of the work of the Organizations of the United Nations System.³²

91. Since then, the World Bank, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Labour Organizations (ILO), and other United Nations Programmes and Funds have taken measures to establish Women in Development Divisions and or to strengthen their existing respective focal points for the advancement of women. Though it is not the objective of this paper to discuss what has been achieved by each one of these United Nations bodies and agencies, however, it should be pointed out that the establishment of such focal points can be seen as initial and essential steps in translating the strategies into action, as they provide the implementation structure for the strategies.

92. Accordingly, non-governmental organizations have played a great role in publicizing and helping to implement the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies. Their activities have included among others, conferences and meetings held at local, national and international, levels to bring women's issues to the public attention; identification of priority problems and seeking solutions; assisting in the collection of data, in research and the production of community guidebooks for action and training manuals.

93. Most African governments have drawn plan of actions to implement the FLS in all sectors of national development giving more attention to sectors such as agriculture, health, education, water and sanitation. For instance, extension services have been extended to cover women in agriculture in countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Niger and others. To improve the input/output ratio, efforts are made and which are geared towards the provision of farms implements, fertilizers, high quality seeds and agricultural extension offers are being made available to demonstrate and educate women farmers on modern methods in order to ensure higher agricultural productivity.³³ Similar measures are observed in Guinea and Niger.³⁴

94. In the areas of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, African governments, with the financial support of International agencies, have made efforts to strengthen the MCH, PHC, FP programmes and immunization programmes.

Within the Commission (ECA), the sub-regional Committees on Integration of Women in Development within the framework of the existing Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) based at Lusaka, Yaounde, Niamey, Gisenyi and Tangiers as well as the African Training and Research Centre for Women (ECA) have spearheaded and promoted the activities of the subregions according to priority areas set forth by each subregion and in line with the Arusha and Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies. These activities have included and focussed on: the role of women in the distribution of foodstuffs; training and research activities in agriculture; food and appropriate food technologies, marketing and processing; health issues such as water and sanitation; development and management of small-scale enterprises; legal status of women; strengthening national machineries for women in development; as well as training in project planning, implementation and evaluation.

96. Though we cannot claim that the above mentioned measures and activities being undertaken have positive impact on the economic conditions of women, it is worth noting that something is happening and that if these measures continue to be vigourously pursued, some changes may occur in the long run.

97. In the context of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD) 1986-1990, the Secretary General's initial report (October 1987) ³⁵ on the progress made in the implementation of UN-PAAERD noted that African countries have paid particular attention focussing on assistance programmes for small farmers on the need to strengthen the self-help efforts of rural population through participatory organizations and co-operatives.

98. With respect to women in this connection, almost four fifths of the African countries responding to the ECA survey indicated that they had taken measures in line with the Programme of Action on the enhancement of the role of women in agricultural production and other development processes.

99. In the area of human resources development, planning and utilization, the role of women is accorded special emphasis in the Programme of Action. In support of the efforts of African countries and the international community, the United Nations system has devised a co-ordinated approach aimed at ensuring the full participation of women organizations and agencies.

100. The activities of the United Nations bodies with regard to the promotion of women in development were, inter-alia, reviewed by the Joint Consultative Group on Policy, whose members include UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP, IFAD and the United Nations Development Fund for Women. The Group recently conducted a senior management training seminar at the field level for participants from Eastern and Southern African countries. The seminar focussed on the most effective strategies for integrating women into development programmes and projects and for increasing their agricultural productivity, taking into account women's health status and existing workloads.

101. It should be recognized that no significant development can be achieved without the role and participation of women. In this view and though the Programme of Action does not single out the role of women in each sector, it is perceived that the far-reaching policies and actions undertaken by African countries in areas such as; better management of water resources;

improvement of drainage in irrigated areas; encouragement of afforestation; the control of deforestation; rehabilitation and maintenance of existing modes of transport and communication; protection of the environment and reorientation of the education system to meet development needs have taken into consideration women's concerns and that women's special needs have been incorporated into these initiatives.

102. In the area of population, a growing number of countries are taking measures to implement the policy recommendations of the Programme of Action and the Kilimanjaro Programme of Action for African Population and Self-Reliant Development by formulating comprehensive population policies and programmes, establishing national machineries to facilitate the integration of population issues into development planning process.

103. Though some progress have been made by most African governments in the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UNPAAERD) 1986-1990, the period is too short to allow for a full evaluation of the impact this progress may have had on the economic conditions of women. Secondly, development plans (at the national level and as elaborated in UNPAAERD) which are major instruments of change in African countries, are mostly silent on the question of women and their contribution to development process and strategies. In most of these plans, women and families are conceptualized as welfare "problems" rather than economic assets (Karanja, W. 1986). 36

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

104. The improvement of the status of women, their full participation in economic, political, educational and cultural life and their effective access to responsibilities related to development and the advantages resulting therefrom should constitute one of the governments, organizations and international agencies major areas of concern.

105. In the employment sector, and given the current Africa's economic crisis, lack of knowledge with respect to women's actual, as well as potential participation in the labour force will always have a detrimental effect, not only on women themselves, but on national development processes in general. Awareness of the real extent to which women's economic activity has reached, the importance of women's income, and the contribution of women to national development is essential to the formulation of adequate policy measures and the adjustment of strategies in such a way as to benefit both women and men in the area of employment and, in turn, to enhance the development process as a whole.

106. Though there have been some notable examples of women making inroads into what have traditionally been considered men's domains, the situation is far from being satisfactory. In fact while more women are seeking jobs, more and more still face unemployment in most countries in Africa. The economic crisis has contributed to an even sharper visibility of the need to redefine "economic contribution" including "economic activities" of women (ILO/INSTRAW 1985). 37

107. Concern with women's participation in economic activities should not be limited only to the recognition of their contribution to gross national product, recognition in itself is meaningless unless it is translated into definite forms of action that would have a favourable impact on their status. These forms may include such activities as artisan production, self-employment in domestic distribution and employment for wages in government and industry, income generating activities, and the like. All these assume considerable importance in terms of their implications for the women's real economic status.

108. In the agricultural sector, Africa's Priority Programme as stated in Africa's submission to the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly (1986) ³⁸ lays considerable emphasis on the food and agriculture sector. It is a fact that women remain the providers of 60 to 80 per cent of the household food needs in Africa and most cases about half of the agricultural labour force are women. Since agriculture, particularly traditional agriculture, is the major sector of employment, the exclusive attribution of economic activity to males by reason of ownership of agricultural land status tends to lead to an underestimation of the women role in productive activity.

109. To improve women's participation in employment both formal and informal as well as in the agricultural sector in relation to the current social and economic realities in most African countries, the following are proposed:

- (i) Technical assistance in terms of training and material support through better access to credit, land, support services and training opportunities should be extended to women to enhance productivity.
- (ii) The intensification of agricultural extension work aimed at rationalizing the organization of production, training women in modern methods of production, marketing and introduction of technologies in food processing, preservation and storage.
- (iii) To improve access to and control over production factors (land, credit, capital, labour), services and infrastructural facilities (water, energy, health care, education, information etc.).
- (iv) To reduce the workload of women, e.g. by introducing labour saving technologies.

110. The proposals suggested above are not likely to contribute significantly and immediately to the reduction of the problems of unemployment on women, but are likely to create in the long run the resource base for further development and for the enhancement of productivity.

111. In respect to health, it has become increasingly apparent that women are the primary health workers in both rural and in the urban areas since they have the greatest influence on the health of their families. Women themselves do not enjoy good health, owing to frequent pregnancies, abortions, substandard nutrition and cultural factors (workload, diet, female circumcision etc.). Every year, half a million women die as a direct result of pregnancy.

It is necessary, therefore, for women to play a more active part in planning and carrying out health work projects and for those values and customs that have an adverse effect on the health of girls and women to be changed by means of health education.

112. In regard to population policy, it has been demonstrated that a falling birth rate is primarily related to better education and better incomes, women's knowledge of family planning methods and services, while their availability also affect the size of family preferred by women. The absence of such facilities until now has led many women to use less reliable methods. Birth control education programmes should be aimed more at men in order to make them aware of their responsibilities. Guidance and counseling services on use of birth control devices as well as cultural attitudes and perceptions on abortions, early pregnancies and surgical contraceptions should be designed and provided to women, teenage girls and men.

113. Basically, what all this amounts to, is that the various strategies adopted should be seriously considered and implemented giving particular attention to women's concern as reflected in the paper e.g. in employment, agriculture, education, health and the like.

114. The Arusha and Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for instance present concrete measures to overcome the obstacles to the Decade's goals and objectives for the advancement of women. These measures include all sectors in development. If attention is given to the implementation of these strategies, the socio-economic conditions of women could be improved for the better.

115. Measures for accelerating the recovery process as recommended in the Abuja Statement (1987) called on African countries to continue to pursue structural policy reform measures, taking into account the need to minimize the adverse social impact of such measures and to take into account the human dimension of adjustment; ensure that budgetary cuts do not affect development of social infrastructure, particularly health and education services.³⁹ In respect to women, as discussed in this paper, all structural policy reform measures should give special attention to issues that relate to the improvement of women's socio-economic and political status.

116. Measures to alleviate Africa's external debt crisis for Africa's economic recovery and development as stated in the African Common Position on Africa's External Debt (OAU - 1987)⁴⁰ Crisis include among others increased use of domestic resources and formulation and implementation of programmes on the development and effective utilization of human resources with a view to increasing labour productivity and to promoting scientific and technological development. Policies and measures to ensure dependency on domestic resources for economic recovery and growth should take into consideration women's role in domestic resources mobilization programmes.

117. The Kilimanjaro Programme of Action for African Population and Self-Reliant Development (Arusha-Tanzania 1984)⁴¹ made several recommendations concerning the changing role of women in the development process. These recommendations among others include: (i) governments should introduce

programmes designed to reduce the heavy burden of the rural women, that such programmes should include the introduction of labour-saving technology in agriculture, industry and domestic work; (ii) government should recognize the importance and changing role of women as mothers and workers in all sectors of the economy; and (iii) government should ensure that rural populations have easy access to modern agricultural technology and equal opportunities to use credit and other resources generating facilities. Governments should therefore give serious attention to the implementation of these and other recommendations.

118. In conclusion, it must be realized that women in Africa play a significant role in the economic activities of their respective countries. To ensure their participation as part of the human resources in the economic recovery programmes, the role of women in development process must be taken seriously into account in development planning and policy and in the disbursement of resources, both as contributors to and beneficiaries of development efforts as recommended in the Arusha and Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies, the Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery and the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (1986-1990).

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Table 1

**ANNUAL GROWTH RATES FOR GDP AND GDP PER CAPITA
BY REGIONS DURING 1981-1985 (1980 CONSTANT FACTOR PRICES)**

REGIONS	GDP (total)					GDP per capita				
	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
1. North Africa	-5.9	8.4	4.6	0.7	3.1	-8.4	5.4	1.7	-2.0	0.3
2. West Africa	-8.4	-0.5	-6.8	-3.1	-2.8	-11.4	-3.0	-9.2	-5.6	0.8
3. Central Africa	6.6	2.5	3.4	4.1	3.0	3.9	0.5	-0.5	1.3	0.3
4. East and Southern Africa	3.3	2.0	0.4	2.4	3.3	0.4	-1.2	-2.4	-0.8	0.4
TOTAL	-5.0	3.5	-0.4	-0.2	3.0	-7.9	0.0	-2.6	-3.0	0.3

Source: Compiled from the Economic Commission for Africa
Survey of Economic and Social Conditions in Africa, 1985-1986

AFRICA (CHART E)

**ACTIVE FEMALE POPULATION BY OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS
(percentages)**

Prof., techn. and related workers	Admn. and manag. workers	Clerical, sales and service workers	Agri. animal husby. and forestry workers	Production and related workers	Others
11.4	1.5	24.4	42.5	14.4	8.2

Note: The percentages are arithmetic averages of sample countries

Source: ILO Year Book of Labour Statistics, 1981-83, table 2B