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**TOWARDS DEVELOPING A DATA BANK
ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT:
THE CASE OF THE SUDAN**

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ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION :

Women constitute more than fifty percent of the world's population, perform two-thirds of the labour, receive one tenth of the income, produce about half of the world's food, but own less than one percent of the land, constitute one third of formal manpower but receive less than two thirds of the wages which men receive for similar work (1).

The 1973 census of Sudan indicates that 53% of women were economically active. The present female economic participation is estimated to have increased to 80% principally because of heavy outmigration of males due to impoverished conditions in recent years (2).

Women, like men, are important agents of development. Women perform a key role in human reproduction and growth. Their contribution as educators, household managers, income earners and main food crop producers cannot be overlooked.

2. UNITS PRODUCING AND DISSEMINATING DATA AND INFORMATION

REGARDING WOMEN IN SUDAN :

The National Documentation Centre, of the National Council for Research, collects, processes and disseminates information relating to pure and social sciences, economics and technology. The Centre issues the following publications for which data bases were created:

- a. Sudan Science Abstracts which identifies, abstracts and indexes reports and studies of relevance to Sudan as well as research results currently published, read in conferences, or accepted for higher degrees. Six issues have come out including some references to publications on women.
- b. The National Register of Current Research which gives information on research currently being carried out in, or about the Sudan. Volumes published give information for research carried out during 1983 to 1988, including research relating to women.

Using micro-computers and micro-graphics, an integrated information system was designed whereby the different data bases created would be searched separately or simultaneously.

The Ahfad University for women works in four areas relating to women activities :

- a. The rural extension and development programmes.
- b. Mustafa Abu Ella Chair for Women Studies.
- c. Women's studies course given to all third year students.
- d. Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women Studies.
Among the activities of this association is issuing the journal Women (three issues have come out).

The Development Studies and Research Centre of Khartoum University carries out a project entitled Women in Development which aims at including women in development by training them to the level of fair competition on the basis of equal competence with men. The documentation unit collects and processes documents on women. A bibliography (3) on the same subject was prepared by F. Hamour. A trial volume on Who is Who in Women Studies was also attempted.

The Economic and Social Research Council of the National Council for Research, the Populations Studies Centre of Gezira University, the Social Affairs Ministry, the Cooperative Training Centre, and the Agricultural Bank are among the main institutions concerned with women studies in the Sudan.

3. BARRIERS TO READY ACCESS AND EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF DATA AND INFORMATION :

- 3.1. Restricted awareness of, and accessibility to primary and secondary literature and to external data bases.
- 3.2. Difficulty of acquiring non-conventional literature from internal and external sources.
- 3.3. Absence of an institution ensuring accessibility to a comprehensive collection and performing in-depth analysis and evaluation of information.
- 3.4. Lack of coordination among institutions concerned with women studies.
- 3.5. Absence of policies or formal agreements for the exchange and flow of data and information.
- 3.6. Lack of communication among researchers.
- 3.7. Lack of resource sharing tools such as union catalogs of journals to facilitate utilization of existing resources.

4. GAPS AND DEFICIENCIES IN CURRENTLY AVAILABLE DATA AND INFORMATION :

Library collections are fragmented and outdated due to inadequate budgets, scarcity of hard currency and lack of arrangements for cooperative development of library collections.

With regard to available statistical data, researchers have expressed the need for counting women in published figures and including gender differential in statistical data related to health development issues. "It is shockingly sad how the well established statistical and demographic references up to 1988 still lack any basic information on the status of women in most developing countries, particularly with regard health (4).

It was also pointed out that registered labour force usually disregard calculating women. Data on child care, care of elderly relatives helping in labour etc. are not available in official statistics. Hence the need for inter-ministerial seminars for up-dating methodology of collecting statistical data and analyzing it within the context of women's position and their participation in changing demographic trends (5).

5. DATA AND INFORMATION NEEDS OF VARIOUS USER GROUPS :

Specifying users' needs for data and information is basic requirement for designing information systems and networks. In the absence of studies to define users' needs, the activities in which women engage could give indication of subject areas of information likely to be sought.

Women at all levels need information to effect development in the sense of improving the quality of life. The illiteracy rate among women is still very high : 82% of all adult urban women and 87.8% of all rural women are still illiterate in Sudan. Information and data relating to this area is likely to be sought.

At the grass roots women are likely to need information on nutrition. The Ministry of health has estimated that fifty percent of children between birth and four years of age suffer from some degree of malnutrition in Sudan Nutrition education teaches mothers to get the best out of what they can have, and to produce on a family scale what their families

need, to reach an adequate diet (6).

Female economic participation in traditional agriculture was estimated (7) to be 87%. Wiese pointed out that while rural women are, on one hand, overburdened with work; part of their efforts goes to waste, on the other hand, because of lack of appropriate rural training and modern agricultural inputs (8). Thus the necessary improvement of rural extension services for women will increase and improve the activities of the rural women related to food production, food processing and nutrition. Information on improved technologies and know-how need to be made available to women.

Students and teachers of women studies curricula in universities need information related to these curricula. Researchers need information related to their research activities. Studies are needed to define the specific needs of these users' groups. It is expected, in view of the fact that literature on women's issues is multi-dimensional in nature, that information on women should be multi-disciplinary.

6. NEED FOR ESTABLISHING WOMEN'S INFORMATION NETWORK IN AFRICA
INCLUDING A DATA BANK ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT :

Documentation and information centers cannot be self-sufficient, neither can they work in isolation. Furthermore, the development of appropriate conceptual and methodological frameworks for research cannot be carried out by isolated researchers. The need for some type of network among the many agencies and individuals who are involved in this work becomes increasingly evident. A continued exchange of information, ideas, results and experiences can guarantee a permanent constructive diffusion and evaluation of research efforts, and the development of the appropriate methodologies and theories (9).

A network consists of different components and of a formal agreement, whereby materials, information and services provided by a variety of organizations are made available to all potential users. The objectives of an information network are :

1. Sharing and utilizing existing information resources.
2. Promoting communication and developing collaborative and comparative research programmes.
3. Integrating and complementing efforts by various institutions.

4. Coordinating activities of already existing research and documentation units interested in women studies and activities.
5. Mobilizing the strength of each unit for the benefit of all units in the network.

The proposed regional network is envisaged to have a centralized data bank having several data bases. These are :

- a. Statistical data base including data on all aspects of women development.
- b. Bibliographic data base giving descriptions of library holdings.
- c. Current research activities data base giving information on researchers, areas of research, research organizations and funding organizations.
- d. Specialists data base giving profiles of specialists in the area of women activities, their qualifications, experiences and areas of expertise.
- e. Organizations data base giving information on areas of their specialization their publications and activities.

7. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE INFORMATION NETWORK :

The organizational structure is one of the critical components essential for the development of a network. It provides for :

- 7.1. Commitment for the planning and development of the network.
- 7.2. Fiscal and legal responsibility for the realization of the network.
- 7.3. Establishment and formalization of cooperation and linkages between the different components of the network; the national information system; and regional information systems.
- 7.4. Identification of priorities and levels of services to be offered.
- 7.5. Assignment of responsibilities for the proper functioning of the network.
- 7.6. Collaborative development of resources. (10)

8. COMPONENTS OF THE NETWORK :

8.1. Libraries and information units identified on the basis of capability to provide specialized services as well as geographic coverage.

8.2. A coordinating centre identified on the basis of :

8.2.1 Existing infra-structure having the necessary staff, equipment and financial support, in addition to an expanding capability to allow it to develop network operations.

8.2.2 Potential for leadership and capability to prepare and implement (in cooperation with partners in the network) a work plan for the development of the network

8.2.3 Ability to secure additional resources.

8.3. A coordinating committee composed of representatives of participating centers undertaking responsibilities for network organization, implementation and evaluation.

9. MECHANISMS TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL MACHINERIES FOR WOMEN :

Aspects requiring strengthening include better access to the latest publications and extension material as well as to external data bases; specialized training facilities for information personnel, including training in methods of collecting and analyzing data; greater dissemination of information, particularly document delivery; and greater coordination of information functions and institutions.

It is also necessary to provide facilities and incentives for greater utilization of technical information by user groups, including the repackaging of such information in suitable form and language in which it can be effectively utilized. Assistance to strengthen the existing infrastructure of libraries and information units such as provision of adequate budgets for acquisitions, provision of photocopying facilities, availability of funds for promoting cooperation and coordination of information activities is very much needed.

A network arrangement, on the national and regional level, with a coordinating unit for providing guidance and assistance, is the mechanism

proposed to strengthen national machineries for women. To make the network operational, on a mutually acceptable basis, participating organizations agree to : (a) share with one another information that is readily obtainable (b) receive personnel from other participating organizations for observation, training and sharing of experiences, (c) making available their technical personnel for short term assignments to other participating organizations.

At the hub of the network, a central data bank on women and development may be created both at the national and regional level. Compatibility of software and hardware and adherence to standards are basic requirements needed for the transfer and exchange of information within the network.

10. SUMMARY :

Development depends on women and cannot take place without them because women constitute half of the world's available talent and a substantial economic resource. For this reason, women issues have become the subject of many studies. In the framework of establishing a data bank for women in development, this paper presents units producing and disseminating information on women in Sudan; barriers to ready access and effective utilization of such information; the gaps and deficiencies in currently available data; and the needs of users groups. The paper proposes mechanisms to strengthen national machineries for women. The need for establishing women's information network in Africa, including a data bank on women and development is highlighted, giving the organizational structure and components of the network.

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