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Expert Group Meeting on the Establishment
of a Data Bank on Women and Development
in Africa

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**AFRICAN TRAINING RESEARCH CENTRE FOR WOMEN (ATRCW)
INFORMATION NETWORK ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT
IN AFRICA**

I. Introduction

1. The activities of the Economic Commission for Africa directed towards African Women began as early as 1972, culminating in the establishment of the African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW) in 1975 in pursuance of resolution 269(XII) adopted by the ECA Conference of Ministers. As an integral part of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Centre is located within the cabinet office of the Executive Secretary of ECA.

2. The mandates of the African Training and Research Centre for Women derive from the statutory organs of the Commission. Global recommendations given in the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the objectives of the International Women's Year and the Programme of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women (Copenhagen 1980), the Arusha and Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies (1984 and 1985 respectively), for the Advancement of Women as well as the System Wide Medium Term Plan on Women and Development (1990-1995) constitute additional policy directives for ATRCW.

3. ATRCW is the regional women in development structure in the United Nations system in Africa and therefore has a key role to play in reaching out to African women. It services the various subregional and regional structures set up to promote programmes for women. These structures are: Africa Regional Conference for the Integration of Women in Development; the Africa Regional Co-ordinating Committee for the Integration of Women in Development (ARCC); and the Subregional Committees for the Integration of Women in Development.

4. The Africa Regional Conference for the Integration of Women in Development is organized by ECA/ATRCW in collaboration with the ARCC every three years in order to review progress and make proposals in respect of the activities of ATRCW in particular and of the integration of women in Africa in general. The first, second and third conferences were held in Nouakchott, Mauritania in 1977, Lusaka, Zambia (1979) and in Arusha, Tanzania (1984) respectively. The Fourth Regional Conference for the Integration of Women in Development is under planning and will be held this year from 18 to 22 September 1989.

5. ARCC is made up of representatives of fifteen member States, three from each of the five subregional committees for women in development which operate at the Multinational Programming and Operational Centres (MULPOCs) level. These ECA/MULPOCs are based at Gisenyi, Lusaka, Niamey, Tangier and Yaounde. The functions of ARCC are to harmonize and co-ordinate the subregional programmes at MULPOC level, to review and evaluate activities carried out in the region in the framework of programmes for the advancement of women; and to report to the deliberative organs of the Economic Commission for Africa on the activities and programmes carried out in the region.

6. The Subregional Committees for the Integration of Women in Development review programmes and proposals submitted by national commissions on women and development or other similar bodies in the subregion with a view to mobilizing resources for programmes implementation. They also monitor the activities of the women's programme undertaken by the MULPOCs in their respective subregion and report to the deliberative organs of the ECA/MULPOCs.

II. Objectives and the Role of the ATRCW

7. The ECA as a regional commission facilitates concerted action for the economic development of Africa, including its social aspects, with a view to raising the level of economic activity and levels of living in Africa.

8. It is well known that development occurs as a result of the right mix between labour, capital and natural resources. Labour, however, is the most decisive element in development because it is the active factor of production. Both capital and natural resources are passive and require labour to develop and exploit them. Labour, or human resources, therefore, are the crucial elements in a development strategy. Africa does not lack natural resources, what it lacks are skilled men and women in all areas to effectively exploit the other resources. African women constitute a significant portion of the labour force in the region and as such the quality and quantity of this labour force has a significant impact on socio-economic development.

9. In view of the above, and in the framework of the system-wide medium term plan for women and development, and the Arusha Strategies for the Advancement of Women beyond the UN Decade for Women : the objective of the programme is to assist member States improve the condition of African women and enhance their contribution to development. The centre's aim is to ensure that gender issues are taken into account in national and regional strategies so that women fully participate in the development process of the African region. Specific activities directed to women, however, will need to be continued to enhance the productive capacity of women at all levels.

10. Within the above objective, ATRCW has a crucial role to play in policy formulation, implementing, reviewing and monitoring women in development (WID) issues in the countries of the member states of the ECA. The centre is intended therefore to serve as a clearing house on WID in the region.

11. To effectively play this role, ATRCW as officially articulated provides technical and advisory services to member States in the formulation of policies and programmes designed to mobilize, develop and utilize the capabilities of women for achieving national and regional development objectives. This role can be divided into three :

- (i) a catalytic role of providing ideas, strategies and encouraging innovative approaches to the solution of problems;
- (ii) a co-ordinating role bringing together institutions, agencies and structures concerned with the advancement of women; and
- (iii) a disseminating role serving as a resource centre, distributing data and information and promoting the exchange of experiences in the field.

12. Since its establishment, ATRCW has provided over the years and continues to provide services to member States as follows :

- (i) undertake and promote research as a basis for its own regional programmes and in areas that are likely to have impact at national level, and disseminate its findings;
- (ii) hold training workshops and study tours at subregional and regional levels and produces training materials designed to enhance the skills and capabilities of women to adequately meet the demands of their multiple roles;
- (iii) promote and strengthen the capabilities of national machineries to effectively contribute to the advancement of women;
- (iv) promote technical co-operation among the member States of the region through the African women's development task force;
- (v) periodically review and appraise progress made in the implementation of regional strategies for the advancement of women in Africa;
- (vi) service statutory meetings of ECA concerned with the integration of women in development at subregional and regional levels.

III. ATRCW core programme

13. There is need to strengthen the data base on the situation of women against a background of emerging economic and social trends in the region. Generally speaking the questions of what research ATRCW should undertake is not a tabula rasa on which ground a new design can now be elaborated. There cannot be a blue print for research on African women as priorities must be defined nationally. However, several general mandates have been given for these activities in the resolutions of the ECA Conference of Ministers and the Nairobi and Arusha Strategies. The principal activities will thus be :

- (i) Monitoring changes in the situation of African women in the context of the Arusha and the Nairobi Strategies for the Advancement of Women as well as International instruments agreed upon by member States;

- (ii) Ensure women's distinct contribution and needs are taken into account in major regional strategies policies promulgated from time to time;
- (iii) Overall and sectoral analysis of emerging socio-economic trends and their impact on African women. In particular the effect of persistent famine and drought on women as food producers. The effect of structural adjustment programme (SDAs) on vulnerable groups such as rural and poor urban women. (The particular programme has been strongly recommended by the UNDP/ARCC/ECA Evaluation Mission on the Women's Programme in the MULPOCs).
- (iv) Role of women in the informal sector and access of women to scientific and technical fields.
- (v) Promotion of women in small-scale enterprises with particular emphasis on improving the managerial capabilities of women;
- (vi) Enhance the capacity of national machineries to incorporate gender issues in national strategies and promote the establishment of national trust funds for women.

14. On account of its novelty and significance the ECA programme on women in development has been tackled from different angles and through manifold activities and systematic studies designed to increase and improve the scant information available. Thus, national, subregional, and regional projects have been carried out, training activities have been conducted, advisory services and assistance has been provided to governments in the formulation, development and implementation of projects, meetings and other events have been held in order to exchange information and initiate processes for the acquisition of new knowledge. In addition many publications of a technical and informational nature have been produced. For example, to mention a few, ATRCW publications include : Guide for the preparation and implementation of project proposals on women and development; Information Kit for women in Africa, Appropriate Technology for African Women, Marketing in Ghana and so forth. In short, the centre has a reference collection of more than 5,000 items.

IV. Information Network on Women and Development in Africa

15. As part of its work programme, ATRCW has established a modest reference unit which function as a clearing house on women's activities in Africa and as a reference unit for ECA's and the Centre's professional staff and research workers on women and development in Africa.

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16. In the course of implementing its programme, ATRCW has generated over the years and continues to generate a vast amount of information through research studies, training activities, meetings and conferences on women in Africa whose reports and publications are located in the reference unit. The centre publishes semiannual a newsletter entitled ATRCW Update. The main purpose of ATRCW Update is to report on the activities of the centre and in doing so, to record research trends, training opportunities, provide information on recent publications (on WID), national subregional, regional and global networking on women and development topics. ATRCW tries to provide in each issue a special focus, for example, ATRCW Update N° 10 of June 1988 gave attention to Women and Health. ATRCW Update is sent free of charge to interested individuals and organizations according to ATRCW established mailing list.

17. In strengthening women's machineries at national, subregional and regional levels and in order to provide basic information, ATRCW has published an Information Kit for Machineries on the Integration of Women in Development in Africa. The manual serves as a reference document which aims to provide basic information. The manual includes : a listing of most of the resolutions adopted in relation to machineries for the integration of women in development; background information on the development of the various machineries; different types of national machineries, their nature and mode of operation; directory of national, subregional and regional machineries; and a list of training institutions in the African region which may be of interest to women.

18. ATRCW publications beside the Update and the Information Kit for machineries on the Integration of Women in Development in Africa include: official documents, major studies, background papers, general reports, proceedings of conferences, reports of expert group meetings, training seminars and workshops. ATRCW publications may be classified according to their content and their mode of production. Listed according to their content, the following publications have been issued :

- (i) Official documents : these are mainly documents submitted to the meetings of the Africa Regional Co-ordinating Committee (ARCC) and to ECA conference of ministers in the form of reports.
- (ii) Research studies : these are produced by ECA/ATRCW substantive staff and or consultants commissioned by ECA. All studies undertaken in accordance with ATRCW research studies have a target audience such as of women's national machineries, policy makers, governmental and nongovernmental institutions dealing with development, and women's organizations.
- (iii) Reports and proceedings : they are regularly published after meetings organized by ATRCW. Some are also published on completion of a particular ATRCW programme or project activity keeping in view the ATRCW's target audience of experts on women in development issues as well as generating information on women in development.

- (iv) Background papers: these are based on research and or papers prepared and mostly presented by ATRCW staff at expert meetings, seminars, national, regional and international conferences for limited circulation within and outside the ECA.
- (v) Manuals : Research and training results of major ATRCW programme, research and or project activities are published in the form of training manuals and or technical publications targeted to wider audiences including universities, training and research institutes.
- (vi) Bibliographic references : ATRCW has printed bibliographies on several subjects such as women and Development in several countries. Other publication information materials include brochures posters etc.
- (vii) Other forms of Information systems : besides the printed materials, other forms of information systems available in the reference unit include : microfiche (ATRCW publications); video tape on WID; radio tapes (UN Radio on Women series); and films on WID.

19. The materials are not computerized in ATRCW but some of the publications are computerized by ECA/PADIS under the subject "Women in Africa". With the current proposal on the establishment of a Data Bank on Women and Development in Africa, it is envisaged that ATRCW materials plus other information on WID will be computerized for systematic storage, retrieval and dissemination of information.

20. Printed publications are sent to individuals, organizations, universities and the like upon request and free of charge. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa is aware of the fact that the target readership, particularly in the African region have low purchasing power to obtain publications. This is even more true of women's organizations and NGOs operating on generally low budgets devoted to women's issues. For this reason and to encourage and make available information on women in developemnt to the targeted groups, ATRCW publications are sent free of charge.

21. In keeping with its networking cooperation, ATRCW regualrly contributes to other United Nations bodies such as the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) News, Decade Watch and others.

22. ATRCW deals with various categories of organizations in terms of information network and dissemination. These categories of organizations include; UN-bodies-UNDP, UNESCO, ECA/MULPOCs, Regional Commissions; governments; governmental and non-governmental organizatins; national machineries; students, editors in Africa and individuals; research and training institutes; university libraries; voluntary women's organizations; news media; donor agencies; etc.

23. With the above established mailing list and networking co-operation, ATRCW has continued and continues to play its role as a resource centre for dissemination of data and information as well as promoting the exchange of experiences in the field through its programme element on information network on women and developemnt in Africa.