

*report on the*

**C***onsolidated proceedings of  
the Fifth African Regional  
Conference on Women*

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**African Centre for Women  
Economic Commission for Africa  
June 1996**

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	<b><u>PAGE</u></b>
<b>PREFACE .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>I. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II. BACKGROUND.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>III. THE GENDER GAP.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>IV. SOME RECENT GLOBAL INITIATIVES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>V. A. REVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF AFRICAN WOMEN.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>B. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NFLS.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>VI. THE AFRICAN INITITIVE TO ACCELERATE THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN: THE AFRICAN PLATFORM FOR ACTION (APA).....</b>	<b>31</b>

A.	POLICY ISSUES COVERED IN THE HIGH LEVEL MINISTERIAL MEETING AT THE DAKAR CONFERENCE.....	36
B.	AN AGENDA FOR AFRICAN WOMEN'S ACCELERATED ADVANCEMENT.....	42
C.	FOCUS OF THE THE AFRICAN PLATFORM FOR ACTION.....	45
<b>VII.</b>	<b>THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN.....</b>	<b>50</b>
A.	WOMEN'S POVERTY, INSUFFICIENT FOOD SECURITY AND LACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT.....	52
B.	INADEQUATE ACCESS TO EDUCATION, TRAINING, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.....	60
C.	WOMEN'S VITAL ROLE IN CULTURE, THE FAMILY AND SOCIALIZATION.....	66
D.	IMPROVEMENT OF WOMEN'S HEALTH, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INCLUDING FAMILY PLANNING AND POPULATION RELATED PROGRAMMES.....	68
E.	WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIP AND LINKAGES TO ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT.....	72
F.	INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN THE PEACE PROCESS.....	74
G.	THE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN.....	78

H.	WOMEN'S LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS.....	79
I.	MAINSTREAMING OF GENDER DISAGGREGATED DATA.....	82
J.	WOMEN, COMMUNICATION INFORMATION AND THE ARTS.....	82
K.	THE GIRL-CHILD.....	83
VIII	CONCLUSION .....	84

# PREFACE

The women of Africa, who comprise 51% of the continent's 644 million people, are at an important turning point in their history not only in terms of their own becoming, but in terms also of what Africa is going to become in the next millennium. Although African women are beset by numerous obstacles - at social, political, economic and cultural levels, generated both internally and externally, they are nevertheless on the march, with an indomitable resolve and optimism. In contrast to the reality of several decades ago, African women are now operating in a climate full of hope and promise for a better day.

Internationally, the 1970's ushered in an era in which issues relating to the integration of women into overall development and the need for them to benefit equally from the benefits accruing from this development, dominated the agenda and discourse on the requirements for a just, stable and equitable development. For the last twenty years, the triad themes of Equality, Development and Peace have served as the launching pad of international and regional conferences, out of which have been formulated key policies, programmes and plans of action, to provide frameworks for realizing the strategies and objectives for women's accelerated advancement.

In Africa, the most recent of these is the African Platform for Action: African Common Position for the Advancement of Women (APA) which was adopted by African member States in November 1994 during the fifth African Regional Conference on Women that was held in Dakar, Senegal. The APA was further reinforced by the OAU's Assembly of Heads of State and Government at its thirty-first ordinary session in Addis Ababa in June 1995, when they adopted the "Addis Ababa Declaration on the Dakar African Platform for Action on Women". The APA constituted Africa's input into the Global Platform for Action (GPA) that was adopted in Beijing, China in September 1995 during the Fourth World Conference on Women.

The agreements reached at the various international and regional fora during the last twenty years have consistently singled out for special mention, the impediments in the path of African women's advancement. This concern and solidarity with the women of Africa is a continuing source of inspiration and strength which needs to be channelled into concrete and positive action. The speedy implementation of the APA will be testimony of joint collaboration and commitment between Africa and her development partners and will constitute a critical and lasting contribution towards the enhancement of African women's advancement, and the consequent improvement of the lives of their families and communities.

Within Africa itself, despite recurrent crises associated with inter-alia globalization of the world economy, regional economic decline, fall in commodity prices, liberalization of international trade, armed conflicts, and civil and ethnic strifes, there has been an inexorable upward trend in mass mobilization of women especially at national and local community levels. But of even greater import has been the increasing awareness of the role and contributions of African women in development, not only by the African Governments but by the women themselves. Much more recently, however, another <sup>or</sup> more fundamental <sup>the</sup> dimension of this recognition has developed namely, the acknowledgement and acceptance of the fact that the problems of gender balance and equity are not merely issues of social justice, even while admitting that social justice is a cornerstone of true democracy. But gender equity also has to do much more with the economic empowerment of women. African women must be able to fend for themselves and for their families in terms of their material and financial productivity and outputs. Frameworks and measures for addressing gender equity must therefore incorporate the economic empowerment of women as a key factor to catalyze overall social and economic advancement.

Other critical areas and necessary inputs have been identified in the APA and we can highlight but a few of them: The role of African Women in food self-sufficiency and security is widely documented and women must be strengthened in terms of their potential for the management of food resources. This would greatly improve food security at household and national levels respectively. Similarly, protection and enhancement of the environment and natural resource base is a primary responsibility of African women. It is this resource base that constitutes for many African countries, the capital for economic and social development.

The linkages between women's education and overall development is another critical area which has gained wider recognition and is now the focus of concerted and orchestrated investment by African governments and the international community. Women's education is a centre-piece for social and economic development and human welfare. Education has been proved to be the major source of regional and national differences in growth. Studies on rates return from education in Africa reveal that social rates of return are, 24% for primary education, 18% for secondary education and 11% for higher education.

Despite the critical importance of education, about 50% of adults in Africa, the majority of them being women, cannot read or write. The average man has less than three years of schooling while the average woman has less than one year. Thus a large proportion of the labour force is ill-prepared to contribute to development or to benefit from it. The globalization of the world economy, and the recent lowering of barriers to international trade have made education more crucial to Africa. The region must be capable of competing in tradeable goods and services in order for it not to be marginalized, and for this it needs a well educated and skilled labour force. Women are linked to labour and productive processes in many intricate ways and their education is an important cog in the whole machinery.

At the political arena, the argument for the inclusion of women in popular participation and in the total political process is equally unassailable. Pluralism and democracy are unattainable without the full participation of women. Women's advancement and their achievement of equality are a matter of human rights and a prerequisite for social justice and the reduction of poverty. In Africa as a whole, a new democratic era is dawning with a strong momentum towards political liberalization, and the emergence of an increasingly strong civil society, in which both men and women have greater freedom of expression.

# I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission on the Status of Women in 1970 recommended to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) a programme of concerted <sup>in</sup>ternational action for the advancement of women. The programme set forth general objectives <sup>and</sup> minimum targets to be achieved during the Second UN Development Decade (1970s). At the same session, the GA adopted the strategy for the Decade which included among its objectives the encouragement of "the full integration of women in the total development effort".

2. Eight general objectives were spelt out <sup>to</sup> be achieved during the Decade in the concerted action programme. In addition, minimum targets to be achieved during the decade were set forth by the GA in education, training and employment, health and maternity protection and public life.

3. The year 1975 was the mid-point of the Second United Nations Development Decade and a review was undertaken to appraise and evaluate results achieved and to examine the extent to which women had been "integrated in the total development". Out of that appraisal and evaluation, a decision was taken to declare 1975 as International Women's Year, and the UN urged that the year be devoted to the intensification of action to promote equality between men and women, to ensure the full integration of women in the total development effort, and to recognize "the importance of women's increasing contribution to the development of friendly relations and cooperation among States and to the strengthening of world peace."

4. All member States were urged to take steps to ensure "the full realization of the rights of women and <sup>the</sup>ir advancement on the basis of the "Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women". The year was a call to action to women and men everywhere to rise to the challenge and to seek to overcome traditional prejudices and to do all they can to remove the barriers that still prevent the advancement of women and the full exercise of their rights.

5. A new era for women can therefore be said to have begun actively and globally in 1975, when the first world conference on women was held in Mexico City. Almost ten years before, in November 1967, the UN had unanimously adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination on women, after four years of debate and detailed drafting work in the Commission on the Status of Women and in the GA. In Mexico, 1976 to 1985 was declared as the Decade for Women. The UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women was adopted in 1979; the Second World Conference on Women was held in Copenhagen Denmark in 1980, and the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (NFLS) were adopted in 1985.



6. Some important elements of the preamble to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women are worth highlighting here, namely:

- ◆ Discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and with the welfare of the family and of society; it prevents their participation, on equal terms with the men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of ~~their~~<sup>our</sup> countries and is an obstacle to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity.
- ◆ Women have made and continue to make great contribution to social, political, economic and cultural life and they play ~~fr~~<sup>cr</sup>ucial roles in the family particularly in the rearing of children.
- ◆ The full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the inclusion and active participation of women.

7. Now, human experience shows that meaningful and lasting change cannot occur overnight and comparatively, two decades is an incredibly short period of time, in terms of the scale and level of changes needed to significantly alter the condition of women in a positive way. Yet between 1975 and 1995, changes affecting the status of women globally have been phenomenal and have altered henceforth, in ever so many ways, the reality of women's lives.

8. In a rapidly changing world, increasingly more women in many countries have manifested a strong reluctance to accept the subordinate, passive or restricted role played by women throughout history in most societies. Women world-wide are demanding an end to all discriminatory laws and practices which render them and their contemporaries victims. They are seeking opportunities to play an equal part with the men, to have equal access to resources, and to participate actively in the development of ~~their~~<sup>ex</sup> societies and countries, as they attempt to create a better world for all.

9. Through all these changes, it is important to maintain the correct perspective regarding the significance of the passage of time and its effect on women. In the momentum and euphoria created by the world-wide movement for the advancement of women, we are apt to forget that the "Women's movement", under whose impetus the women's issues and problems of today are at the forefront of many governments' concerns and priorities, is a relatively "new" phenomenon. It has been observed elsewhere that,

"What is perhaps the most radical alteration of social relationships in the last century is already so taken for granted that its newness is generally overlooked. Yet less than one hundred years ago women had no rights. The first organized demand occurred as late as 1848 and asked for such essentials as the right to have personal freedom, to own property, to make contracts, to bring suit, to testify in court, to obtain a divorce for just cause, to possess her children and to claim a fair share of the accumulations during marriage."<sup>22</sup>

10. In the United States for example, which many consider as the "cradle" of women's liberation, it was only on May 21, 1919 that an amendment giving women the full rights of citizenship was added to the United States Constitution. Much can be achieved in the space of a century. Yet much more remains to be done for furthering the advancement of women in all fields and in all sectors.

11. At this juncture, it is important to point out that the raison d'être of the women's movement in Africa was fundamentally and subtly different from the more individualistic, feminist and more rights' oriented movement of northern or western women. In Africa, women's activism was much more closely aligned to nationalist struggles for independence. Women fought alongside the men with the conviction that they would be partners in building their newly independent nation states. Thus in the early 1960s, African women formed a regional (African) organization and adopted strategies for their participation in the new nations, side by side with men. Indeed it has been observed that African women....

"acted well before western women renewed their own women's movement towards the end of that same decade".<sup>4</sup>

As further pointed out in the above-quoted work,

"The African Women who witnessed the independence of their countries possessed rich traditions as leaders, as participants in women's movements, and along with men, in liberation struggles. They had tangible records of economic activity, largely in peasant societies but also in monetized 'modern' cultures". (P.20)

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The introduction should indicate what this consolidated report is all about, give a brief summary on the content of the paper, what is covered under each chapter etc. This gives the reader an idea of the ~~the~~ what the paper is all about etc.

## II. BACKGROUND

### BOX I

" As we reflect on the past and look forward to the future, it may be fitting to remind ourselves and our respective Governments and decision-makers that Women in Development is a development strategy not a social issue or movement for women's emancipation.

..... Recognition should be given to the functional role of women in development and it is crucial that women participate in the process in a manner that is consistent with their importance in the production process."

**AJARATOU LADY CHILEI, JAWARA**

First Lady of the Republic of Gambia  
Statement at the Fourth African Regional  
Conference on Women  
Abuja, Nigeria, November 1989

11. Structureal imbalances in society and inequalities between women and men lead to the subordination and marginalization of women. Constitutional and legal rights and international instruments for gender parity are meaningless, unless they are accompanied by the active participation of women, watched by a strong political will on the part of governments, in key decision-making levels in the efforts to bring about a world order free of gross inequities. Closing the gender gap through access to the means and benefits of production requires the evolution and development of a truly democratic culture and this process poses a major global challenge.

12. Sound development is one of the objectives of the 1985 Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies and it is defined as the satisfaction of needs and the attainment of sustained and overall well-being of all peoples. Lopsided distribution of the means and benefits of growth fosters resentments and conflicts. To a large extent, the conflicts and civil strife being witnessed today are the result of inequities and real or perceived marginalization of large segments of the population in their pursuit of the means and benefits of development. Conventional indicators for gauging the level of advancement of a country, such as GDP and GNP, are now the <sup>subject</sup> of a just criticism in current discourse on development. Inequalities breed conflict and disrupt development in as much as a peaceful and stable environment

promotes development and equitable distribution of the benefits of growth and guarantees peace and sustainable development.

13. Equality, development and peace are therefore inextricably intertwined and mutually reinforcing. The 1993 Kampala Action Plan for Peace and the 1993 Vienna Conference on Human Rights provide guiding principles and framework in the promotion of peace by both women and men, as a prerequisite for sustained development.

14. The Nairobi strategies are expressions of high hopes for redressing the inequality and marginalization that pervades most aspects of the lives of African Women. In taking stock of progress and obstacles in the path of African women's advancement, a decade after the adoption of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies, the negative impact of the interplay of both endogenous and exogenous forces on Africa in general and on women in particular, stands out in stark relief. All indicators point to a disheartening scenario. The road towards equality in education, employment, decision making, security and control over reproductive functions, and the attainment of peace still remains tortuous. The continuing gender gap has undermined what little progress had been realized since the 1970's and early 1980s, with increasing incidence of the feminization of poverty. Attainment of the noble objectives of equality, development and peace has remained elusive to African women. Their marginalization and inequality manifest themselves in all walks of life: in the realm of politics, where major policies affecting citizens are formulated; in the area of the public sector where policies are implemented, laws interpreted and legal rights safeguarded; and in the economic sphere where access to resources is determined. In all these crucial sectors, women rarely influence events, policy decisions and directions.

15. Despite these setbacks however, there have been a few positive and encouraging trends since 1985. An increased awareness of the role of women in development, by both men and women has emerged since the Nairobi Conference. The number of governmental and non-governmental organizations and programmes focusing on women have increased, while the move towards subregional and regional affiliations of women has picked momentum. Important milestones are being attained as women's organizations continue to act as pressure groups demanding that the programmes of governments, of political parties and of NGOs address issues of concern to women. International solidarity among women is being forged and strengthened through global and regional networking with a view to addressing global disparities, gender inequalities, valuation of women's unpaid family work and other labour, feminization of poverty, environment, productive employment, external debts and SAPs. Within Africa itself, women's groups are forming alliances with their global sisters and are forcing the inclusion of their concerns in human rights issues, peace, population, environment, world economic order, the workplace as well as overall social development. African women are slowly discovering their comparative numerical advantage and strength and are developing their potential as an organized force participating at the "negotiating table". They are estimated to comprise 51% of the continent's total population of 644 million and their

actions - or inactions - in the development process are critical determinants in shaping a sustainable future. They are now determined to correct their conspicuous absence in decisions that continue to affect and shape the direction of their lives. X / a

16. Despite some dramatic achievements in the realm of women's emancipation and advancement, the question still persists of the rational basis for rigidly delineating so-called women's traditional roles, based on the outdated notion that women are the "weaker sex" and that their place is "in the home". A re-thinking of stereotyped sex roles, concepts and patterns of family living has become necessary, notwithstanding the fact that there can be no fixed model for equality since cultural and socio-economic realities vary from country to country and with the speed of development. realities

17. The tragedy, bemoaned by women in numerous fora is that institutionalized differences in stereotyped sex roles begin at the moment of birth, and in some, when the child is first identified as a male or female. From that moment, indoctrination begins and the child is taught and expected to behave in accordance with the roles customarily assigned to his or her sex. By the time the girl reaches adolescence and adulthood, she discovers that her claim of equal rights has been classified in a number of national traditions, institutions or statutes. The task and the challenge then becomes one of creating awareness and sensitizing the society, both men and women, on the need to understand and acknowledge how continuing negative customs, attitudes and practices still discriminate against women, and how they have to be changed or modified. Thus across cultures, development programmes are affected by the structure of gender roles and relationships and many methods have to be developed to raise awareness about the importance of addressing gender concerns in these programmes. This is highlighted in the section that follows on the gender gap. Women are disadvantaged not only by social structures, but also by many current development initiatives. But all over the world and across Africa, women are working together to overcome barriers and oppressive structures, and to achieve genuine development for themselves and their communities. X / a

18. Women leaders everywhere should sound the clarion call for a wider and more radical vision of the future where women are enabled to play their full role, in a world where gender discrimination no longer exists. There must be put in place alternative management strategies, planning and evaluation techniques that are sensitive to gender issues and are open-ended emphasizing problem solving and practical solutions. Historically, women's demands associated with the private sphere have been excluded from political discourse. The new and revolutionary aspect of women's participation is that it brings issues of personal well-being into the sphere of politics and power relations.

19. But this global awakening, this primeval scream against injustices meted out of women solely on the grounds of one's gender, has not occurred or been heard uniformly. Even as many more women are crying out in anger and frustration against injustice and glaring

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inequality, millions of others have no voice or may not be heard. They are forced into a life of misery, overburdened by constant child-bearing, poverty, ill health and overwork. Tragically, these women may not even be aware of the rights to which they are entitled, and do not therefore seek or demand the enforcement of their rights within the family, within marriage, and in the community or nation. Women are not numerically a minority group. They constitute half the total population of the world; in Africa they make up 51% of the total population. Thus, by limiting women's participation in development, societies deprive themselves of the full talent of half their members. Discrimination against women through laws, practices and attitudes denies them the exercise of their rights in political activities, education, employment, health, marriage and the family. Discriminatory penal and civil laws, customs, policies, social norms and attitudes prevent women from being equal partners in human endeavours.

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**BOX "2"**

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" I have faith and confidence in the people of Africa, in the intelligence of mankind and above all, in the wisdom and integrity of African women. I genuinely believe that the problems of our continent be they social, economic or political, can be solved by Africans alone. Africa is blessed by its human resources, its natural resources and by the economic and social potential yet untapped. Let us, therefore, combine our efforts and stand united in spite of the problems confronting us."

**SUZANNE MUBARAK**

First Lady of the Arab Republic of Egypt  
Statement at the Fourth African  
Regional Conference on Women  
Abuja, Nigeria,  
November 1989

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### **III. THE GENDER GAP**

20. The first World Conference on Women laid the initial global milestone in large-scale mobilization of the World Community for actions towards the advancement of women, within the framework of the World Plan of Action. Subsequent global and regional conferences have periodically reviewed and appraised the condition and situation of women, and their prospects for attaining equality, development and peace. ECOSOC resolution 1994/51 of 3 November 1994 emphasized that the advancement of women should be an integral part of the economic and social development process within the main global issues, such as women's participation in the peace process, in national and international governance, sustainable development and gender equality.

21. A retrospective bird's-eye-view of the nature, evolution and development of women's issues and programmes reveals three important shifts in the conceptual and operational framework. Between the 1940s and 1950s, early programmes on women focused on women's rights. In the late 1960s, a shift occurred and emphasis was on women's roles in development and there was a proliferation of women in development (WID) activities and writings, culminating for instance, in such "classical" works as Ester Boserup's book on "Women's Role in Economic Development" (1970). In the 1980's and 1990's a further, and probably more marked shift has occurred: In an attempt to look at women not as separate entities, thereby isolating them from the mainstream of society, the current approach is to look at women through 'gender lens' and to focus on the socially constructed roles and relations between men and women and the subsequent systematic subordination of women by men in diverse social-cultural, traditional, political and religious contexts and settings. The gender approach is predicated on the tacit acknowledgement that development, and many other issues related to spiritual, social and political well-being, would be handled and proceed better if women were part and parcel of the endeavours. But above all, the core of the gender approach is to examine the status of women in relation to men. The analysis views both the practical and survival needs of women and men in terms of the socially constructed and assigned roles they play in society-reproductive roles for women and productive roles for men - and the strategic gender needs which emerge as a result of women's subordination to men.

22. The conceptual shift from the Women in Development (WID) to the gender and development (GAD) focus is somewhat complex as noted elsewhere. However, the extent to which women have been consumers, or rather victims of bad decisions affecting their lives can be clearly demonstrated. Half of the world's intelligence and experience is held by women. But because of gender differentiation and discrimination in the past, and in many places still on-going, women's experience and knowledge are regarded as being

inferior or at best, functionally different from that of men. In a world of finite resources, we cannot afford to squander, cast aside or suppress half the world's human resources.

23. The gender perspective is an important denominator in any analysis of the linkages between women, men and sustainable development. A gender perspective looks at how and why women and men interact differently with the different socio-cultural, political, economic and physical environments, and how their experiences of this interaction also differ. A gender perspective might therefore change the way the concept of development is understood and articulated. Inequality between women and men is part of a continuum of inequalities between countries, social classes and ethnic groups. But just as in these other categories, there is great diversity among women and a problem emerges in attempts to group women as a homogeneous class or category. It is also problematic to see women as having similar attributes, potentials and constraints given the numerous and differing dimensions of structural constraints on women's economic and social roles, and their social and institutional contexts.

24. It has therefore become increasingly acceptable to formulate women's issues, problems and concerns in terms of gender. This approach shifts the emphasis from women as a homogeneous or problematic group that requires new targeting with each cohort, to an emphasis on relations between the sexes. Gender relations are the social, economic and political expressions between men and women that determine gender identity and roles. They are therefore social constructs in any given society. These relations determine women's access to resources and their work opportunities. They set the limits of what a woman may or may not undertake at the work place, in the family and household, or in public life. Similarly, they delineate male behaviour, responsibilities and entitlements thereby affecting social, economic and political functioning at all levels. Relationships between spouses, children and parents, managers and employees and among community members are all influenced by the dominant model of gender relations. In turn, gender relations are influenced by class, ethnicity, power and economic relations between countries, religious, political and other factors. Gender relations therefore function like a "silent code" that regulates how men and women should behave towards each other and in their respective societies, households and communities. The relations are not static, but evolve in response to economic opportunities and obstacles, or become fashioned in their traditional form to fit a chosen strategy. The complexity of gender relations must be taken account of when analysing trends and policies for socio-economic and political development. The gender analysis seeks to define a rational, organized distinction between men and women in their productive and reproductive roles. This approach is applicable to women and men, irrespective of their age group - to young and old alike.



25. A standard measure of achievements made in the advancement of women world wide is extremely difficult to apply. Women are not a homogeneous social category, existing as they do in highly varied and diverse societies and nation states. Nevertheless on a global scale some dramatic and lasting gains have been made and as the UNDP 1995 Human Development Report observes:-

- Female life expectancy has increased 20% faster than that of males.
- Females have advanced nearly twice as fast in adult literacy and combined enrolment in the developing countries.
- More than half the women in the developing countries now use modern contraceptives and their fertility rate has fallen from 5.4 in 1970 - 75, to 3.6 in 1990 - 95.
- The proportion of women administrators and managers in the industrialized countries has nearly tripled from 15% in 1970 to 40% in 1990.
- In several countries particularly in North-Western Europe, women and men have attained near parity in their access to economic and political opportunities. Indeed it has been observed that the entry of women into the public sphere, from the community up to the national and international level, is one of the great revolutions of the twentieth century, and this trend could finally be attaining a "critical mass" of recognition and support. What is now needed are decisive and operational actions for and by women at all levels.

26. But these progressive milestones must not mask the inequities that still characterize women's lives world-wide. Much more still remains to be done and as the UNDP 1995 Report again notes:

- No Society treats its women as well as its men: the difference is only in the degree of gender disparity, not in the existence of such disparity.
- Women constitute about 2/3 of the world's illiterate people and about 40% of women in the developing countries are illiterate.
- Women still have only 36% of total jobs, 1/3 of the share of national income, 1/10 of parliamentary seats and 5.5% of total cabinet positions.

- Out of 1.3 billion people living in absolute poverty, over 70% are women.
- Nearly one half of married women experience domestic violence.
- Existing laws in many countries treat women and men unequally.

27. In Africa in particular, gender gaps are prevalent in most sections of society. They stem from the subordinate position of African women, despite their crucial roles in reproduction and family care, food production, environmental and natural resource management and overall household support and maintenance. Achieving sustainable economic growth and development in Africa depends heavily on promoting the welfare and productivity of women.

#### IV. SOME RECENT GLOBAL INITIATIVES FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

28. The International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, adopted by the General Assembly in 1990, identifies important directions in the current views on how to bring about equity in global development initiatives, chief among them being:

- equality between women and men as both a goal and a means of development;
- significant improvement in the human condition in the developing countries and a reduction in the gap between poor and rich countries;
- enhancement of the participation of all men, women and youth in economic and political life, protection of cultural identities and assuring to all the necessary means of survival.

29. A major goal of the strategy is "a development<sup>h</sup> process that is responsive to social needs, seeks a significant reduction in extreme poverty, promotes the development<sup>h</sup> and utilization of human resources and skill, and is environmentally sound and sustainable". The Strategy implicitly embodies the idea that while accelerating economic growth is a major objective, economic growth by itself does not ensure that its benefits will be equitably distributed or that the physical environment will be protected and improved. Consequently, the alleviation of poverty, the development of the human resource and the

protection and management of the environment should be priority aspects of development in all countries developed, developing and newly industrialised. ~~countries~~. X

28. Much greater emphasis has also been placed on women's central roles and importance by most of the recently held global conferences, for example:

- (a) The 1990 World Summit for Children, in its Plan of Action recognizes the critical role that women play in the well-being of children, and it urges action for the enhancement of women's status and their access to economic and social services, beginning with the girl-child. The plan of action emphasizes that maternal health, nutrition and education are key determinants of women's survival as well as the well-being of their children.
- (b) The 1992 Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women focused on the need to raise the consciousness of decision makers with regard to the condition of rural women, especially poor rural women, and the importance of establishing objectives and strategies to enhance their welfare and that of rural families world-wide.
- (c) The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) that was held in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, achieved a critical consensus on the issue of women, environment and development. The Rio Earth Summit concluded that women are central to the improvement and management of ecosystems and natural resources, which are indispensable in the pursuit of sustainability. Participants called for the engagement of women in environmental management. Principle 20 of the **Rio Declaration on Environment and Development** adopted at the Rio Conference stipulates that "Women have a vital role to play in environmental management and development and... their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development". Similarly, Agenda 21, the blue print document that was negotiated and adopted at UNCED to guide the achievement of sustainable development, strongly emphasized women's participation in national and international ecosystem management and control of environmental degradation. Agenda 21 underscores the need for creative and effective partnerships between different groups and stakeholders on environment and development. Chapters 24 and 38 of the agenda call for an increase in the proportion of women decision makers, planners, technical advisers, managers and extension workers in environment and development fields. These chapters recommend that mechanisms be established at national, regional and international levels to assess the implementation and impact of environment and development policies and programmes on women to ensure their contribution and benefits.

- (d) The World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 affirmed that the human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights.
- (e) The Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo contained a chapter emphasizing the importance of the empowerment and status of women, eliminating all forms of discrimination against the girl-child, and the key role of men in bringing about gender equality in view of their preponderant power in nearly every sphere of life.
- (f) The World Social Summit held in Copenhagen in 1995 had as one of its main elements that nations should promote gender equality by removing restrictions on women's rights and giving men and women equal access to income and education.
- (g) The United Nations has therefore convened an extensive series of international conferences to address major economic and social issues and to discuss and develop strategies and actions. But the most consistently repeated of these conferences have been on the advancement of women; 1975 in Mexico City; 1980 in Copenhagen, 1985 in Nairobi; and 1995 in Beijing. The UN system has played a crucial leading and catalytic role in helping the female half of the World's population realize its potentials and to contribute fully to the well being of the global society.

29. During the last two decades in particular, people's consciousness about women's issues, problem and inequalities has been slowly but inexorably raised. Emphasis has been on the vast contribution that women can make, the contributions they have made to society and development, and the necessity of ensuring that women also benefit from the development process. The hybridization of agreed international, regional and national actions to uplift the basic social and economic conditions of African Women is an imperative from Alma Ata to Jomtien, Rio to Cairo, to Copenhagen and to Beijing. All these fora and their associated regional and national plans of action have come up with compelling evidence, underscoring and ratifying how critical the advancement of African Women is. It is the centre-piece of overall social and economic development, as well as sustained livelihoods in the continent.

**BOX 3**

" ....The problems faced by women every where lie at the heart of the global agenda. Untill the rights and full potential of women are achieved, enduring solutions to the world's most serious social, economic and political problems cannot be achieved. In many cases, efforts to improve the lives of women offer the most immediate means of changing entire societies for the better."

**BOUTROS-BOUTROS GHALI**

United Nations Secretary General

**World Social Summit**

Copenhagen

March 1995

V. A. <sup>E</sup>REVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF AFRICAN WOMEN  
A

**BOX 4**

"Today gender disparities are prevalent almost everywhere in Africa.... If long-term change in the conditons of African women is to be achieved, the actions and attitudes of men must change, and it is important that men be brought along in the process of change. We are talking about equalizing men's responsibility, and women's access to resources."

**K. Y. AMOAKO**

Executive Secretary

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA:

in : "Gender in Africa: The issues, the Facts"

ECA/WORLD BANK, 1995

30. African women in their multiple <sup>o</sup>roles as home managers, economic producers, caretakers and community mobilisers <sup>h</sup>are and should be beneficiaries, agents and promoters of socio-economic development. However, attainment of their full potential is impeded by the prevailing socio-economic and political environment within the continent

as well as by some cultural factors. Despite phenomenal social and economic progress by African Governments between the 1960s and 1970s, the 1980s were characterized by economic and political decline and crises, aggravated by civil and ethnic strifes, and these severely restricted national capacities to sustain the erst while forward momentum of social and economic change. It is now an acknowledged fact, that women and girls who constitute 51% of the African population, and who are a crucial multifaceted resource, have borne the brunt of these setbacks and their repercussions. They are only marginally integrated in the development process and are often constrained by socio-cultural practices. ✕

31. In sub-saharan Africa for instance, women ensure 90% of household food sufficiency and security and account for 80% of stock-raising. Yet they receive ever-diminishing returns on income, health, nutrition, education, etc. culminating in a low political and social status. In addition, they are the most vulnerable to the impacts of armed conflict and other forms of social instability.

32. The myth of "women's work" is another critical aspect of the socio-economic status of African women. Development planners and policy makers in Africa frequently neglect or undervalue the importance of women's work (domestic, food production, environmental management responsibilities and roles), particularly in the rural subsistence sector. This has marginalised women by negating their productivity and control over resources and by shutting them out of development processes while at the same time increasing their workload. In Africa the traditional division of agricultural labour disproportionately assigns women specific and laborious tasks yet all this labour is statistically invisible to policy makers and planners, and is only marginally reflected in labour and income statistics since these discount work performed outside the 'market system'. Thus, for instance, the ILO defines economic activity as that which produces commodities or services for exchange in the market. This exclusion of subsistence food production renders invisible the bulk of women's work. ✕

33. Another key factor has been the replacement of subsistence farming with cash crops changing in the traditional systems of labour and social organization. This "modernisation" process has also partly disrupted the complementarity roles of the two sexes and the sharing of responsibilities. Women have taken over tasks traditionally outside their domain while men have not done likewise or have been unwilling to do "Women's work".

34. Implementation and introduction of certain activities and policy measures could remove some of the major obstacles that impede the advancement of women, among them access to education, fair labour remuneration, social protection and a fair share of the national cake. By their labour, women keep their families from misery, contribute to GDP formation and are therefore entitled to recognition for their economic and income

generating activities. We have therefore to examine with the use of telescopic "gender lens", the role played by African women in development and to juxtapose it to the role played by men, within the context of development theory, policy and practice. The 1994 UN World Survey of the Role of Women in Development reports that when examining poverty, women are not victims of their circumstances, and more often than not it is women who cope with poverty. Moreover, if women are given access to resources, they increasingly provide the way out of poverty for their families. This observation probably holds even more true for the African women.

## **B. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NAIROBI FORWARD LOOKING STRATEGIES (NFLS)**

35. At the fifteenth meeting of the UNECA's African Regional Coordinating Committee on Women in Development (ARCC), in April 1993 an assessment of both the NFLS and the 1990 Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development was made. This assessment indicated an increasing trend in women's initiatives on several fronts towards mainstreaming their concerns in the development of their countries. Despite this trend, however, the overall situation of women had not improved significantly, due to socio-economic and political factors.

36. Among the obstacles to a speedy and effective implementation of the NFLS were:

- lack of political commitment and support at all levels;
- limited human, financial and technical resources made available to national machineries on women and NGOs in the field;
- unclear policies and programming;
- poor coordination and communication nationally and regionally;
- strong resistance to change among both men and women, as a result of the biases against women's participation in certain fields, arising from widespread negative traditional attitudes, practices and stereotypes all over Africa.

37. Since the adoption of the NFLS ten years ago in 1985, both positive and negative trends had occurred and they were currently manifested by several factors. On the positive side, several developments had taken place evidenced, for example, by emergence of national coordinating machineries and ministries for the integration of women in development and for the mainstreaming of gender concerns and priorities into

Refer to  
the 5th  
Reg. Conf.  
and not  
the 15th  
meeting of  
ARCC

development policies, plans, programmes and projects; proliferation of women NGOs, cooperatives, associations, grassroots movements and other organizations, with the active encouragement of governments as well as with some assistance from external resources. In addition, more women in several African countries were participating in parliament, local government bodies and in decision-making positions and capacities in various development sectors than previously. There was also a growing awareness of women's human and legal rights and of their productive and reproductive roles, as well as increasing commitment to, and manifestation of, women's networking and solidarity. For professional and salaried women in the formal sector, a significant upward mobility was evident, while within the informal sector, there were many more women operatives whose activities continue to grow under the stress and impact of socio-economic crises and structural adjustment programmes. Overall, therefore, African women were better organized and were more vocal than was the case a decade ago.

38. However, in other areas, African women had become victims, culprits and recipients of several negative developments and trends in the continent. They had become poorer from being the main victims of recurring economic crises, and political, civil and ethnic strifes affecting Africa during the last decade. They had also achieved relatively few gains in political representation. For instance, a study undertaken by ECA of 26 African countries showed that since 1985, political representation had increased from 7.65% to 7.77% only. This was despite the widespread process of democratization and women's great contribution to the African economy, the family and the whole society. An increase in the political representation of women was also mainly due to presidential nominations, rather than through elections. Similarly, the 45 national reports submitted to ECA as well as broad consultations between ECA and numerous institutions and constituencies at regional, subregional, national and grassroots levels also revealed that some gains had been made in some few areas of the NFLS and many Governments are working to further the cause of the advancement of women, inter-alia through:

- the setting up of national machineries to promote and monitor the implementation of the NFLS;
- a broad sensitization of society on the need to take corrective measures to bring women into the mainstream as equal partners in all aspects of life;
- the establishment and proliferation of dynamic and highly energetic NGOs and women's organizations and groups in all sectors.

39. A subtle bridge had therefore been crossed since 1985, when the tendency was to think in terms of "women's" issues and concerns, a somewhat narrow and tunnel-visioned perspective. Increasingly, there was now wide recognition and acceptance that issues

X this should be explained as to the nature and scope of the national



concerning women also concerned men and further, that innovative solutions that could change the lives of women positively would also change life positively for men, children and the entire society. The emphasis was more on the "gender perspective" rather than exclusively on women's issues and concerns. However, national structures to promote and monitor implementation of the NFLS lacked adequate resources and the necessary authority to carry out their tasks on a consistent basis, and women still lagged behind and were marginalized in several critical areas. Eleven of these areas were identified as the priority issues of focus in formulating the African Platform for Action.

40. The sharing and exchange of experiences by African member States attending the fifth Regional Conference on Women in Dakar, Senegal, 1994 further revealed a fundamental fact namely, that while the implementation of the NFLS differed in specific profile and detail from country to country, all the countries had experienced the same general positive trends during the last decade such as:

- ⇒ improvements in the level of women representation in decision-making organs;
- ⇒ increased emergence of women's groups and NGOs;
- ⇒ improved awareness of women's concerns in the African society;
- ⇒ continued establishment of government machineries to cater for specific women's concerns.
- ⇒ relative improvement in access to education, health and employment opportunities;
- ⇒ increased participation of women in economic activities, in both the formal and informal sectors.

#### **BOX 4**

No one can deny the fact that African women have played a great role in our history as actors in economic, social, political and ideological processes. Women have exercised real power in government, have been great queens or otherwise great women. African women in precolonial Africa played a role in public life which was unknown and undreamed of by their western counterparts.

Throughout our history, our women have always enjoyed economic and political rights and have never been regarded as chattels..... During the struggle for political independence African women made vital contributions to independence movements in many countries.

#### **ADEBAYO ADEDEJI**

Former Executive Secretary of the ECA  
Statement at the Fourth African Regional  
Conference on Women  
Abuja, Nigeria, November 1989

## **VI. THE AFRICAN INITIATIVE TO ACCELERATE THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN: THE AFRICAN PLATFORM FOR ACTION (APA)**

41. The Fifth African Regional Conference on Women was held in Dakar, Senegal from 16 to 23 November 1994, in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, that was held in Beijing, China from 4 to 15 September 1995. The Regional Conference was organized jointly by the Government of Senegal and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). It included an NGO Forum, an inter-African Youth Consultation, a meeting of Technical Experts and a high-level Ministerial Meeting. In addition, five Eminent Persons were invited to attend and deliver key statements. The Conference adopted a Platform for Action in Africa, which clearly spells out the strategies and actions needed to bring about the advancement of the African continent through a process in which women and men are recognized as equal partners. In particular, the APA determined the priorities, programmes and modalities for implementation, as well as proposals of ways and means of access to resources and the necessary institutional arrangements.

42. Fifty two African member States of the UNECA attended the Conference. The Conference was also attended by: twelve observer delegations from non-African member States of the United Nations; twenty representatives of UN bodies and specialized agencies; the Organization of African Unity (OAU); the African Development Bank (ADB); observers from thirty seven international and regional organizations; over one hundred Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) with 3,500 delegates from 48 countries, and representatives of the youth from several African countries. The Women of Eritrea, Namibia and South Africa were participating for the first time in the fourth yearly African Regional Conference on Women and their presence was a real booster to women's struggles on so many liberation fronts in Africa and the preparation of plans for a common and better future. It comprised an essential starting point of a process of social, economic and political renewal for the building of a sustainable development model, which would give pride of place to the quality of life as well as redefined relationships between men and women.

43. The overall objective of the Conference was to re-examine the conditions of African women thirty years after the independence of many countries in the region, ten years after Nairobi and five years after Abuja. During the intervening periods, awareness had been raised among legislators and policy makers regarding the need to improve the condition of women. Obstacles to their advancement had been proposed from time to time. However, now was the time to articulate actionable programmes and strategies underlying medium and long-term objectives, as well as spelling out ways and means for their implementation.

*These should be part of the introduction.*

44. Prior to the Fifth African Regional Conference, the Abuja Declaration had provided clearly defined targets to be achieved in the areas of equality, development and peace by the year 2000. It also spelt out the set of objectives to be achieved, identified the priority areas of action, and the roles to be played by national, regional and international organizations. An important effect of the Abuja Declaration was to raise the overall awareness on the disadvantaged situation of African women by leaders, policy makers, development planners and the women themselves. Coming five years after the adoption of the NFLS, it became a catalyst through which gender concerns became major factors in development planning, thereby providing the basis for a subtle shift in emphasis from a rather narrow focus on women in development issues, to a much broader and integrated gender perspective incorporating both women and men issues of concern for the overall well-being of African societies.

45. The 1994 Dakar Conference strived to complete the herculean task of building and arriving at a consensus on a Platform for Action based on the identified eleven critical areas of concern. It also sought to elicit firm commitments from African Governments, NGOs, bilateral and multilateral organizations, the UN system and other international organizations and development partners, to allocate the necessary resources for the implementation of the African Platform for Action (APA). By adopting the APA, the conference rendered it implementable, and an important regional contribution to the Global Platform for Action, adopted in Beijing, China, in September 1995.

**A. Policy Issues Covered in the High Level Ministerial Meeting at the Dakar Conference**

46. The high level ministerial segment of the Conference was opened by the President of the Republic of Senegal who stated that both men and women are crucial to the well-being of society as well as to the collective destiny of the African people. He emphasized that peace, democracy and human rights form "an inseparable whole which is supported by freedom to live and grow in a violent-free environment".

47. The policy issues that were deliberated upon by the African Ministers responsible for women's affairs were:

- (a) Feminization of poverty undermines the dignity of the female person;
- (b) Legislation and customs which are often discriminatory to women and which therefore hinder their access to education, training, health services, land ownership and credit facilities need to be changed;

- (c) Eliminate outmoded division of labour which reserves external activities to men and reserves activities for women which are under-recognized, un-remunerated and difficult to quantify;
- (d) Women and children are the first victims of violence as well as illicit trade which forces them into prostitution rendering them highly prone to HIV/AIDS infection;
- (e) Women should participate directly in development projects that concern them; creating women's associations should be encouraged because these assist women to take up responsibilities in their families, communities and countries;
- (f) Development cooperation with the international community is an avenue that can sustain Africa's efforts in several key areas, inter alia,
  - i) collecting gender disaggregated data at national and international levels and utilizing them in all development projects thereby accommodating the specific characteristics and needs of men and women;
  - ii) focusing on sustainable rural development by creating income-earning opportunities that can foster self-reliance and investment in services which will produce spin-offs and multiple effects for the short, medium and long-term for both women and men;
  - iii) systematically involve women in national and international strategies that concern them; women know their specific needs best and also know the most appropriate means of responding to them. They should not therefore be obliged to accept action plans imposed upon them by inter-national organizations in which they would not recognize themselves;
  - iv) it is imperative not to give preference to emergency aid at the risk of neglecting a strategy of sustainable development;
  - v) financial resources allocated to projects aimed at the promotion of women should be increased and better coordinated at national and international levels, and at government and NGO levels;

- vi) the dignity of all human beings in their diversity and their complementarity must be acknowledged in order to establish real peace and equality, and where these qualities have ceased to exist in the African region, they ought to be restored soon;
  - vii) structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) have to "have a face" and take into account the human and social dimensions in order not to introduce unnecessary hardships, especially to women and children. Although SAPs had achieved some progress in certain countries, an essentially higher economic growth rate would be required to secure tangible results in the struggle to combat poverty in Africa.
- (g) Africa should establish appropriate mechanisms to translate into concrete action the need for growing interdependence between states, people and the civil society in order to reduce the overdependence of African economies on external factors, an objective clearly stipulated by the African Economic Community which provides a framework for the development of regional and subregional integration and trade;
  - (h) A special protocol would be included in the Treaty establishing the African Economic Community to highlight and legitimize the concerns of women;
  - (i) In order to promote the economic empowerment of women, financing institutions should take concerted actions along complementary lines in order to achieve tangible results. Effective cooperative mechanisms should be established among these institutions in order to promote the welfare of African women;
  - (j) Peace is an indispensable precondition for development and equity; peace and development cannot therefore be attained as long as women who are part of the population are marginalized, impoverished and disenfranchised. Equity is the requirement for true development and it is imperative to forge solidarity between men and women, to enable them to meet the common goals of development;
  - (k) Women should be at the forefront in promoting their human and civil rights. They should also be involved in the search for strategies for building confidence in and among themselves, and for increasing their participation in the political arena;

- (l) The African Platform for Action prescribes strategies to be pursued by all development agents including Governments, NGOs, bilateral and multilateral development organizations, in their efforts to promote the political, economic and social empowerment of women. All development actors should commit themselves to the successful implementation of the programmes and strategies outlined in the APA;
- (m) Given the urgency and relevance of the theme of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Action for Equality, Development and Peace, African countries must map out strategies for the advancement of women within the framework of respect for African values and democratic principles;
- (n) The call and demands by women for greater participation in the decision-making process at all levels should be based on constitutional and legal provisions, and be seen as a partnership between men and women in various fields.

48. With regard to African Unity and integration, the ministerial meeting emphasized that Africa must pursue the path of unity and integration for sustainable development. The establishment of the African Economic Community provided the continent with the opportunity to promote its interests and aspirations. Women have a vital role to play in the integration process and a special protocol on their involvement had been added to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community. The unanimous view of the Ministerial Meeting was that Africans must assume responsibility for their destiny and to this end, the content and implications of the theme of the Fourth World Conference on Women should be properly understood in the quest for global equality, gender equity and sustainable development.

## **BOX 5**

Banking on African Women is investing in the equitable and lasting future development of the continent"

**Babacar Ndiaye**

Former President of the ADB Group

Statement at the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women

**Dakar, Senegal**

**November 1994**

**B. AN AGENDA FOR AFRICAN WOMEN'S ACCELERATED  
ADVANCEMENT**

49. The meeting of the Technical Committee of Experts of the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women (16 - 20 November 1994), agreed that future actions for the accelerated improvement of the situation of women in Africa must reflect emphasis for:

- ⇒ strengthening of national machineries and NGOs;
- ⇒ women's education and training especially in science, technology and vocational education;
- ⇒ intensified efforts towards reproductive health and child care;
- ⇒ promotion of women entrepreneurs and farmers particularly through access to credit and other inputs and factors of production;
- ⇒ improvement and expansion of extension and advisory services;
- ⇒ affirmative action programmes and gender sensitization at all levels of society.

50. In order to operationalize the proposed agenda, the Technical Committee of Experts made several recommendations viz:

- (a) Countries should establish or strengthen national machineries for integrating more women in the development process than is currently the case;
- (b) The established/strengthened mechanisms should promote African women's solidarity and the awareness of their rights and obligations, and should also assist them to defend their interests through their strong participation in labour unions and related associations.

To this end, each African country should formulate comprehensive strategies on women;

- (c) Focal points on women's issues should be set up in all areas of national activities, including in the public and private sectors and NGOs;
- (d) In order to ensure that efforts towards these goals will be pursued by all Governments, ECA in collaboration with Africa's development partners should set up a regional watchdog machinery, to monitor progress reached by every country in the integration of women in all aspects of national development;
- (e) Each country should establish a trust fund for women to cater for specific needs of women.

#### **BOX 6**

"We have ..... inherited a social structure and social mores which have condemned the women of our country to the ranks of the most oppressed and exploited. This has meant the all-round and sustained suppression of half our population to the grave detriment not only of the women themselves, but to our country as a whole."

**AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS,**  
South Africa 1994: 82nd Anniversary Statement

#### **BOX 7**

"Through their action, the women ..... should also ensure that they ... focus on the fundamental question of the emancipation of women by addressing such matters as their socio-economic upliftment, raising their levels of education and training, ensuring their participation in decision-making structures and creating the conditions for their liberation from demobilization by household chores".

**AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS,**  
South Africa 1994:  
82nd Anniversary Statement  
Year of Liberation for all South Africans



**C. FOCUS OF THE AFRICAN PLATFORM FOR ACTION: AFRICAN  
COMMON POSITION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN**

52. Concern with the positive evolution of the situation of women and girls in Africa has been a vital component in the formulation of the African Platform for Action. The orientation, content and purpose of the "critical areas of concern" illustrate the extent to which African countries, and particularly the women, have developed a sensitivity and awareness that embraces their concerns not merely as mothers or household support pillars, but also as individuals in their own right, in need of the full enjoyment of their fundamental freedoms and privileges, and who are vital agents in the attainment of the goals spelt out in the African Platform for Action for the accelerated advancement of women and society in all fields. The strategic interventions proposed by the African Platform for Action aim at responding to the gender-based disparities and the vicious cycle of disadvantage affecting women's socio-economic and political advancement. The APA amplifies women's concerns in the continent and illuminates specific areas for further action as we approach the 21st century. It reflects African realities by promoting a harmonious transition to the sharing of responsibilities between men and women, particularly with regard to the identified critical areas of concern and the necessary interventions.

53. In order for the APA to be meaningful, it aims to provide guidance and the framework to move from analysis to action which will be a critical turning point for the accelerated advancement of women in the region. In spite of the diversity of need and priorities in Africa, the APA is a document of consensus that represented one voice for Africa at Beijing, and a common vision for the improvement of the status of African women at all levels. It is a synthesis of regional perspectives and priorities and a framework for action in the formulation of policies and implementation of concrete and sustainable programmes for the advancement of women. An underlying and fundamental premise of the APA is that governments, development agents, policy-makers and citizens, both men and women, need to hear from the people they are trying to assist, in this case African women. All over the world, usually it is the women who are not heard and whose problems are not visible. The African Platform for Action is one expression, and the most recent one at that, of the priority needs and concerns of women, and the myriad ways in which they become manifested in the region..

54. Irrespective of regional, subregional, national and local differences in gender issues -- themselves arising out of cultural, historical, political, economic and social structures situated in time and space -- there are basic similarities that unite women as they strive to eliminate major obstacles to their advancement

wherever they exist, particularly obstacles associated with gender-related discrimination in legal, economic, cultural, political and social status. The disparities and inequities between the rights and opportunities of women and men vary greatly in degree and character from region to region and from country to country, but they tend to be concentrated in the same areas, and this is clearly reflected in the APA. In a word, there are several commonalities in women's problems regardless of social and economic context - similarities that were very apparent during the promulgation of the APA and that are reflected in the eleven critical areas of concern. These priority concerns, together with an explicitly expressed commitment to eliminate the causes of the major gender-based disparities, are at the core of the APA.

55. The Document opens with a Declaration by the Ministers and representatives of African Governments participating at the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women. The Declaration notes that despite some progress, obstacles still remain in the regional implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies (NFLS) largely due to series of crises that have beset some African countries and which have impeded effective implementation for the realization of the NFLS. The Declaration reaffirms the commitment of African Governments to the realization of the NFLS in line with the "Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development: The Role of Women in Africa in the 1990s", and calls upon UN institutions and Africa's development partners and NGOs to commit themselves to the successful implementation of the African Platform for Action (APA), which was adopted as a renewed commitment by African Governments to further accelerate the implementation of the NFLS at regional, sub-regional and national levels.

56. This renewed commitment was further reinforced by OAU member States<sup>†</sup> at the Thirty-First Ordinary Session of the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa on 26 - 28 June 1995. At this session, the OAU members adopted the "Addis Ababa Declaration on the Dakar African Platform for Action on Women" (AHG/Decl.2(XXXI)). The Declaration inter alia affirmed the collective conviction that freedom, justice, peace, equality and dignity are legitimate aspirations of the African women. It called for:

- ◆ immediate consideration of all the critical areas of concern;
- ◆ regional and international cooperation and solidarity in order to transform the present inequitable systems;
- ◆ it endorsed the APA and affirmed that it constitutes the ideal framework for the effective promotion and advancement of African women;

- ◆ external indebtedness;
- ◆ failure to promote the integration of women as equal partners, particularly in politics, popular participation and in key decision-making.

## **VII THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN**

59. In the regional review of the process and progress of implementation of the NFLS, several gaps and critical areas of concern were identified at the national and regional levels and these constitute the core of the African Platform for Action as follows:

- A. Women's poverty, insufficient food security and lack of economic empowerment;
- B. Inadequate access to education, training, science and technology;
- C. Women's vital role in culture, the family and socialization;
- D. Improvement of women's health, reproductive health including family planning and population-related programmes;
- E. Women's relationship and linkages to environment and natural resource management;
- F. Involvement of women in the peace process;
- G. The political empowerment of women;
- H. Women's legal and human rights;
- I. Mainstreaming of gender-disaggregated data;
- J. Women, communication, information and the arts;
- K. The girl-child.

In the following section, each of these eleven critical areas of concern will be described briefly. The intention is not to duplicate these areas as already presented in the APA. Rather, the attempt is to give the rationale, the conceptual basis and a wider setting of Africa's critical concerns, within the framework of the strategies and actions needed to accelerate the advancement of women in the region. Details of the proposed actions, the necessary institutional mechanisms, and the mobilisation of resources for implementation, can be found in the African Platform for Action as adopted in Dakar, Senegal, November 1994.

**A. WOMEN'S POVERTY, INSUFFICIENT FOOD SECURITY AND LACK OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

60. More than 550 million people, or 60% of the world's rural population live below the poverty line. In Africa, poverty has reached alarming levels and women bear a disproportionate share of this poverty. During the last two decades, estimates indicate that the proportion of women living in absolute poverty has risen by 50%, while for the men it has risen by 30%. This feminization of rural poverty can be attributed to several factors *inter alia*, cutbacks in basic and essential services as a result of restructuring policies; environmental degradation which impacts much more negatively on the smallholder and subsistence agriculture; increasing male out-migration which leads to feminization of smallholder agriculture; increased number of female-headed households which are often the poorest and most disadvantaged of rural households; women's limited access to productive resources and services; and civil strife and armed conflicts which contribute to the growing number of displaced women and refugees who are forced to provide for their families under exceptionally harsh circumstances. A combination of these factors and trends is particularly evident in the African region. This has grave implications in view of the fact that Africa's populations are all almost rural-based with figures ranging between 60% and 85%. They live very close to the environment and primary resource base, the largest majority of them are women and youth, while many countries in the region are experiencing political and civil instability which is threatening to dislocate them from their accustomed places of abode and livelihoods. Women are at the beginning of the food production chain that sustains both rural and urban populations. In developing countries, rural women are responsible for more than 55% of the food grown; in Africa they are responsible for 70% of food production, and they comprise 80% of the agricultural labour force.

61. Strategies intended to ease the burden of poverty must take fully into account the predicament of rural women and ensure that the flow of productive resources and social services to rural populations have a positive impact on firstly, food production for consumption by rural households and the country at large and secondly, on sound environmental protection and management practices. An analysis of the linkages between gender, poverty, nutrition and lack of economic empowerment must of necessity address the issue of access to and control of productive resources: land, labour, capital, technology and extension services. Land tenure and land use systems, and access to water, fuelwood and other primary natural resources are determined by the prevailing political social and

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economic conditions, as well as by the gender relations of the society, and this must also be taken account of.

## **BOX 8**

"The weakness of the dominant economic paradigm in not fully taking account of gender issues in economic reform policies, compounds women's already perilous economic and social status".

**UNICEF, 1994:**  
Girls and Women in Africa:  
A UNICEF Perspective for Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage

### **(i) Women and nutrition**

62. The major nutritional deficiency diseases of concern in the developing countries are Protein-Energy Malnutrition (PEM), Iron Deficiency Anaemia (IDA), Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDD) and vitamin A deficiency. All four show gender differentials in prevalence and severity, with the first three representing a more serious problem for women than men.

63. Two aspects of the status of women act as probable indirect determinants of their nutritional status. Firstly, the cultural importance of childbearing in terms of a woman's status and her fulfilment of family expectations is a critical factor. Women tend to be under considerable pressure to bear as many closely spaced children as possible. Secondly, intrahousehold food distribution is also significant; adult women consume much less nutritious food than men, yet they often work longer hours and do more strenuous work than men. In addition, food proscriptions and taboos affect women's nutritional status.

64. Inadequate nutrition in women is therefore often a function of gender biases in access to food and health care.

## (ii) Food distribution within the family

65. The issue of preferential food distribution within the family has increasingly gained recognition as an important determinant of women's nutritional and health status. It is now an accepted fact that malnutrition does not affect all members of a household equally, except in times of drought and famine. Food is not equally divided within households, but reflects the order of precedence and perceived social/cultural value of the consumers including factors such as religious practices. In both developed and developing countries, recent research has shown that food distribution based on sex differences always favours males. Such unequal food distribution is reflected by differences in morbidity and mortality within households. Effective gender-based development interventions therefore require knowledge of household resource allocation patterns, and given the heavy workload borne by poor women in both rural and urban settings, such knowledge is critical in formulating realistic strategies and programmes.

Is this true?

66. According to WHO, a number of factors tend to influence the nutritional and food security status of women in Africa, for example:

1. The differences in men's and women's lifestyles and roles place women at greater risk of nutritional deficiency than men;
2. Where the social and cultural status of women and girls is low, their access to food and medical treatment is restricted, resulting in their lower health status;
3. Age and gender affect the quality and quantity of food allocated to household members; women are generally disadvantaged in this allocation;
4. Expanded cash cropping negatively affects local food availability and increases women's workload;
5. There is direct correlation between rural women's energy expenditure compared to their nutritional and calorific intake: they expend more energy but have much lower calorific intake;
6. Men's agricultural labour does not influence family nutrition levels significantly. Women's agricultural labour does;
7. The gender division of labour generates disproportionate time and energy costs for rural women;

8. Farming in marginal areas has greater health impact on women than on men.

The lives of women in most African countries therefore differ significantly from those of men for cultural, biological and socio-economic reasons. These differences tend to place women at significantly higher risk than men, of malnutrition and mortality. The importance of women's nutritional status to their own health, productivity and quality of life, and to the survival and healthy development of their children and other family members who depend on women's domestic, field and market work, warrant serious and special efforts to reduce malnutrition among women.

68. Behind most food security policies is the assumption that once a household obtains sufficient food, all its individual members will be adequately nourished. However, gender bias in nutritional status and food distribution within the family does exist. The UN Decade for women ushered in a tense phase of research on women and gender nearly all of which underscored the fact that most development initiatives had either ignored women, failed to recognize their particular or special needs, or even made their situation worse. This certainly seems to be the case with regard to the food security and nutritional status of most women in Africa, particularly in the rural areas.

### **(iii) Women's lack of economic empowerment**

69. According to World Bank estimates, the African economic crisis of the 1990s has subjected 216 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa (about 48% of the population) to absolute poverty since 1990s and this number keeps increasing. This has been compounded by the SAPs which have led to an increased workload and more working hours for women as home managers, as they attempt to maintain a certain level of purchasing power, accommodate less nutritious foods, economize on water, fuelwood energy and other household utilities.

70. Certain other conditions obstruct women's full participation in the process of economic growth and development. Although women account for 70 to 80% of agricultural activity in Sub-Sahara Africa, in several cultures they lack access to land ownership and security of tenure. Their productivity seems to be limited to subsistence crops while proceeds from cash crop farming are reserved for the men. Women work twelve to thirteen hours longer per week than men. But much of their work remains invisible to the national economy and they receive little income. Little or non-existent income means reduced resources for household maintenance and improvement, which is the traditional responsibility of women.

In general in Africa, women earn only 10% of the income from formal employment while owning only 1% of Africa's assets.

71. Empowerment of women and the improvement of their status particularly through education, health and economic opportunity plus enhancing their decision-making capacity is a critical component. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women and of giving them knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary for their full partnership in the development process through their full integration into population, health, education and income generating activities, both as active participants and as beneficiaries. Several goals have to be set inter alia,

- ◆ empower women and close the gender gap as soon as possible
- ◆ encourage women to participate at all levels of the political process in each community and society;
- ◆ promote the fulfilment of their potential through education and skills development, particularly through the elimination of illiteracy among adult women;
- ◆ eliminate all legal, political, cultural and social barriers against women, by assisting them to know, establish and realize their rights, especially those pertaining to their sexual and reproductive rights;
- ◆ enact concrete measures and adopt them in order to increase women's capacity and ability to earn income, to achieve economic self-reliance, to inherit, own and dispose of property, and to have access to credit;
- ◆ collect and disseminate gender disaggregated data that can be used to help enforce laws related to discrimination in hiring, wages, benefits, training, job security, and eliminating gender disparities in income;
- ◆ determine which procedures and gender-specific indicators to adopt for analyzing women's participation in development programmes and for assessing the impact of these programmes on women's social, income, economic and health status and their access to resources.



## **BOX 3**

... all countries - developed or developing - find it necessary to adjust from time to time to changing economic parameters and circumstances. What often constitutes the difference is not in regard to the need to adjust but in the capacity to adjust to changing economic circumstances.... Africa has to adjust. But in adjusting, it is imperative that ..... the transformation of structures that fundamentally serve to aggravate the African socio-economic situation .... be the focus of attention .... Adjustment and transformation must be conceived and implemented as inextricably linked and intertwined processes ....

### **ADEBAYO ADEDEJI**

Former Executive Secretary of the ECA, in  
"African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for  
socio-economic recovery and transformation" ECA, 1991

## **B. INADEQUATE ACCESS TO EDUCATION, TRAINING, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

72. Education is the single most effective measure for women's empowerment, and through which they are able to reap the social benefits of that empowerment. Increased female education has demonstrated the immediate spinoffs particularly through reduction in infant mortality, positive effect on the cognitive development of a woman's children and the degree to which educated mothers encourage their children to go to school and to complete their education. Education is therefore a critical area of concern owing to its impact on the welfare of the family and the alleviation of poverty at the household level. Women's entry into the labour market, their access to gainful employment and acquisition of the relevant entrepreneurial skills and expertise, are often hampered by either illiteracy or their low levels of education.

73. Forty five national reports received by the ECA from functioning national machineries confirmed that little progress had been achieved in education and in prevention of high rates of school drop-outs of girls. The adult female literacy rate of less than 50 per cent in Africa is the lowest in the world. In 1990, the adult literacy rate of males was 61 per cent while that of females was 39 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. This high level of illiteracy among women is a serious impediment to development in the region. In most countries, the formal education

system is still too small - or too few pupils emerge from it successfully - to reduce the absolute number of illiterates, while non-formal education programmes are not sufficiently widespread to compensate. The continued crisis in the education sector can be explained, to a large extent, by the sharp decline in expenditure on education and the rapid population growth compounded by inappropriate investment in human resources and misallocation and mismanagement of resources, as well as negative aspects of SAPs. Levels of illiteracy in the region have steadily been on the increase since the beginning of the last decade and are projected to reach 146.8 million by the year 2000, compared to 132.3 million in 1980. The educational process reinforces existing gender inequalities which in turn shape the perceptions that influence curriculum designers, textbook writers, audio-visual aids designers, as well as teachers and pupils. However, the full impact of appropriate policies and programmes to address the gender disparities in education is yet to be assessed. Decisions on what is to be learnt, at what level and by who, and delivered by whom are male-dominated thus perpetuating gender-based stereotypes. This renders the curriculum inappropriate.

74. Adult female literacy rates in Northern Africa are amongst the lowest, and the access of girl children to schooling remains well below that of boys. In Sub-Saharan Africa, about 65% of women over the age of 15 are illiterate as compared to 40% of the men. In 1990, more than 20 million African girls aged 6 - 11 years were not in school; thus unacceptably high gender disparities in literacy rates, as well as primary and secondary education still persist. In several countries, disproportionately high drop-out rates for girls in later years tend to offset the gains of initial primary enrolment. At the secondary school also, for every ten boys enrolled, there are only six girls, while at the university level, women represent less than 30% of the student population.

75. All available indicators point to severe and persistent crises in the education sector of most African countries. Gross enrolment ratios are consistently on the decline while attrition rates particularly of girls have been on the increase and the quality of education has been sliding. Between 1988, 1980 and 1990, out of the total female population, the annual gross enrolment ratios were 85, 64 and 32 per cent for primary, secondary and tertiary levels respectively. Girls are disadvantaged in terms of the quality, relevance and appropriateness of the education and training they receive. There is also a pronounced discrepancy in educational attainment between rural and urban communities and between males and females, a factor which has adverse implications for Africa's recovery and long-term development. Africa's education system is pyramidal, with a broad base at the primary level moving precipitously through the secondary level to a narrow apex at the tertiary level. In this scenario, women's access to education is concentrated at the lowest level. Approximately 23 per cent of primary school

graduates enters secondary institutions while less than 3 per cent of those who leave secondary school continues to tertiary levels of education. Gender discrepancies also increase from the lower to the upper levels. The implementation of the education policy implicit in SAPs which advocates focusing on the promotion of universal primary education, would tend to saturate the economy with primary school graduates while only a handful of university and technical level graduates would be available with few skills to confront the integrated and technology-driven global economy.

76. The 1990 World Summit for Children and the Jomtien Goals of Education for all by the year 2000 cannot be achieved unless a major restructuring of the school system occurred in order to create a girl-friendly environment, giving high priority to expanding access of education to women and girls, especially provision of education for those who are house-bound or in difficult circumstances. If such restructuring and reorientation occurred, about 90 million African girls and women would have access to basic education and literacy. A major strategy has to incorporate the reinforcement of advocacy for substantive reforms of the educational system, in terms of structure, substance and content.

### **Table 1**

Ratio of women to men studying science and technology in third-level education by region, 1970 - 1990

(Number of women for each 100 men)

<b>REGION</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>
Africa	24	21	24
Asia and the Pacific	33	45	70
Eastern Europe	61	81	74
Latin America and Caribbean	37	54	80
Western Europe and Other	29	49	67
World	32	43	56

Source: Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development  
United Nations, New York, 1995

**Table 2**

Ratio of women to men studying law and business in third-level education by region 1970 - 1990 (Number of women for each 100 men)

REGION	1970	1980	1990
Africa	12	43	36
Asia and the Pacific	25	56	70
Eastern Europe	64	134	124
Latin America and Caribbean	30	92	115
Western Europe and Other	25	54	85
World	25	63	102

Source: Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development  
United Nations, New York, 1995

79. Certain socio-cultural constraints impede women's access to vocational and technical education and training thus making it difficult for them to acquire higher and relevant technical skills. Through training, some initiatives have been taken to strengthen the capacities of African women. Some of these initiatives include training in technical skills and management, extension services, access to new technologies, and research and policy support. Despite these efforts, critical gaps still remain. In addition, initial refresher and advanced training has been lacking and where it exists, it has been at the low level and not relevant to employment requirements. Vocational and technical education must be integrated into the curriculum as part of mainstream education. It is essential that in the future, such programmes be oriented towards the special needs of the youth. Women should be viewed as users and agents of change in science and technology. Their technological and scientific knowledge and managerial skills should be improved in order to enhance their participation in industrial production and design, innovation, product adaptation and production techniques. In a number of African countries, measures have been introduced to increase women's participation through revision of the school curricula, the promotion of equal opportunities in vocational training and the introduction of appropriate technology. In spite of these efforts, the involvement of women in science and technology and their contribution to the process of industrialization is still minimal. Women's participation in science and technology subjects at higher levels as well as their

participation in scientific research and the formulation of science and technology policies should therefore be promoted.

80. While the low level of development in science and technology including the industrial, information and communication technologies in the region affect the socio-economic well-being of the populations, the lives of women who are overstretched with the responsibilities of sustaining the livelihoods of their families are even more burdensome. The application of science and technology should benefit women in both the formal and informal sectors. In both rural and urban areas, women shoulder heavy and laborious tasks of agricultural activities, which could be greatly eased by the adoption of simple and appropriate environmentally sound technologies. The direct linkage between access to an application of science and technology and the improvement of the lives of women cannot be overemphasized. There is no doubt that science and technology are the driving forces of economic and social development, and hence the need to include the direct involvement of women. Technology is gradually changing African societies and it is essential that women benefit from it and participate in the process from the design level to the application stage. This implies their involvement in the transformation, conservation and increased commercialization of the locally available materials. This can only be achieved if girls and young women are encouraged to study and apply science and technology.

The overall objectives as spelt out in the APA are:

- (a) To provide gender-responsive education and remove disparities from national policies and programmes for universal primary, secondary and higher education and adult literacy;
- (b) To achieve gender equality in retention, quality and achievement in both formal and non-formal education;
- (c) To take positive actions to encourage women, especially young girls, to enter new fields of science and technology which offer better job opportunities and career prospects.

Some of the proposed measures include:

- (a) Improve access to schools and provide appropriate and community-based facilities, particularly in rural areas;

- (b) Conscientize parents and the community at large to the importance of girls' education and the support they should be provided on a continuous basis using all means of information and communication;
- (c) Give incentives to families to minimize the opportunity cost of girl's education through provision of scholarship/bursaries for the education of girls;
- (d) Provide gender sensitive occupational and educational guidance and counselling services to girls at all levels of the education system in respect of career choices and personal development;
- (e) Take positive action to promote women's interest in, and benefits from, scientific and technical education, thus encouraging women to enter non-traditional fields;
- (f) Encourage cooperation among African women with a view to promoting the sharing of experience in new and traditional technology;
- (g) Make available appropriate technologies aimed at reducing the workload of women and girls;
- (h) Provide technical and financial support to training programmes for women;
- (i) Promote rural industrialization schemes thus reducing rural-urban immigration through the involvement of rural women in agro-based industries.

### **C. WOMEN'S VITAL ROLE IN CULTURE, THE FAMILY AND SOCIALIZATION**

81. As far back as 1954, the GA recognized that in many parts of the world, women were still subjected to customs, laws and practices relating specifically to marriage and the family, and that were inconsistent with the principles of the UN Charter and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All countries were therefore urged to take measures aimed at abolishing such practices "in recognition of the human dignity of women", in order to contribute to the benefit of the family as an institution. The GA was seeking to safeguard the "complete freedom in the choice of a spouse", to guarantee the right of widows to the custody of their children and the freedom to remarry, and to eliminate child marriage and betrothal

before puberty. However, from 1967 when the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was adopted, and particularly from 1975, the GA and all those interested in and supportive of women's "liberation" went beyond the position articulated in 1954, by encompassing all types of discriminatory customs and practices to which women may still be subjected in denial of their human dignity.

82. In general, most countries have abolished various laws that flagrantly discriminate against women, with some countries acting quickly while others have been relatively slow. In numerous countries, in principle, the UN Charter was the first international treaty to mention the principle of equal rights of men and women in specific terms and its preamble expresses faith in "the dignity and worth of the human person" and "in the equal rights of men and women". Several articles of the UN Charter proclaim the goal of "human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion": The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the GA in 1948 also set forth many specific rights to which every individual is entitled. However, the concept of the equal rights of men and women did not originate with the UN. Throughout history, there were occasions when the legitimacy of a society based on the subordination of one sex to the other, was debated and challenged. This challenge gained force and momentum in several countries during the 19th century when women began to struggle forcefully and often militantly for the right to be recognized as full human beings. Women began to protest in earnest against obligatory submission to laws in which they had no voice; against exclusion from public affairs of the community and of the state; against lack of property and personal rights, and of civil status upon marriage; and against subjection to what many women considered arbitrary and often tyrannical, male power and privilege.

83. Throughout the world in this century, especially since 1945 when it was written in the UN Charter, recognition in law of the principle of equal rights of men and women has gained considerable ground. But only very recently have many countries begun to recognize that any society as a whole, and not only women as individuals, stands to benefit from the full participation and *contribution* of its members, and that it should actively correct the injustice of discrimination against women. Many widely held beliefs, traditions and patterns of behaviour are derived from underlying (but erroneous) notions of a natural distinction between men and women. It is important and realistic to recognize that such notions, based on custom rather than biology, may well take a long time to be recognized as discriminatory against women and as a fundamental offence against their human worth and dignity.

**(i) Women and the family**

84. We must accept the importance of a gender approach to the family when considering policies aimed at alleviating poverty. The family is not a homogeneous unit. If we wish to support and include the family in development processes, it is vital to recognize that the outcome will differ, depending on whether we direct our attention to men or women.

85. The United Nations defines the family as "the smallest democracy at the heart of society", a definition which encapsulates much of which is important about the family: its relationship to the wider world of politics, its function as people's emotional base and security, and its central role in society. The family is the basic social unit and is one of the most universal concepts that exists. It can mean different things to different people and often it is not a democracy. However, women as mothers and nurturers are central to all the images of the traditional family, all over the world.

**D. IMPROVEMENT OF WOMEN'S HEALTH, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INCLUDING FAMILY PLANNING AND POPULATION RELATED PROGRAMMES**

**BOX 10**

The challenge facing African societies today is to empower households and communities with the knowledge and practical support needed to reduce suffering, illness, and mortality more effectively than in the past. The health of household members is affected (among other things) by the nutritional value of the food they eat; the safety of their drinking water, their habitual self-care practices, their purchase and use of pharmaceuticals and their visits to traditional healers and providers of modern health care. These behaviours are profoundly influenced by the "enabling environment".

Source: **Better Health in Africa**  
**World Bank, 1994**

86. Good health is a basic requirement for human welfare and a fundamental objective of socio-economic development. Yet most of Africa's 53 countries lag far behind other developing countries in the overall improvement of health services



and health delivery. Infant mortality is 55% higher and average life expectancy is 11 years less in Sub-Saharan Africa than in the rest of the world's low-income developing countries. Maternal mortality, at 700 women per 100,000 live births, is almost double that of other low and middle income developing countries, and more than forty times greater than in the industrial nations. Millions of Africans suffer from malaria each year and an estimated 170 million are afflicted by tuberculosis, not to mention the HIV/AIDS which is already a serious threat in several African countries.<sup>25</sup>

87. Ill health then has a powerful effect on economic progress. Productivity in some countries could increase by up to 15% if illness and disability were attacked more strenuously. A substantial reduction in maternal morbidity and mortality would greatly increase women's contribution to economic development. Better control of disease would allow expansion of agriculture into lands previously uninhabitable. Investments in education would yield a greater return because of longer life expectancy; greater control over reproductive health through reduced maternal and infant mortality would pave the way for the demographic transition that is essential to economic progress; and pressures on households to borrow and use up savings during times of illness would be greatly reduced.<sup>25</sup>

88. Women occupy a special place in health improvement programmes because they participate in, and manage, numerous activities that affect the health and well-being of their families. Women perform approximately 60 to 80% of all agricultural labour in Africa and this places them in an important position to ensure safe drinking water and adequate cooking and preparation of food; e.g. in Kenya 89% of rural women over age 14, but only 5% of the men, fetch water and fuelwood as one of their normal tasks. Research findings on determinants of infant mortality show that the mother is the most important health worker for her children, thus reflecting the strong correlation between female literacy and lower infant mortality. Further, studies of Government expenditures on health show that their effects are likely to be greater when they interface with an educated female population. The central position of women in household management and reproductive health must therefore be emphasized.<sup>23</sup>

89. Poor health causes pain and suffering, reduces human energies, and makes millions of Africans less able to cope with life let alone enjoy it. Poor health also shackles human capital, reduces returns from learning, impedes entrepreneurial activities and holds back growth of gross national product (GNP).<sup>25</sup>

### **(i) Female education and health**

90. The education of females is so important to health improvement that it ranks as a crucial cornerstone in any reformulation and planning of health policies and services that aim to improve health outcomes rather solely improving the delivery of health care services. Women with more education tend to marry and to start having children later; they make better use of health services, and they make better use of information that will improve personal hygiene and the health of their children. Indeed surveys in several African countries have shown that the single most important influence on child survival is the level of a mother's education. Data for thirteen African countries between 1975 and 1985 show that a 10% increase in female literacy rates reduced child mortality by 10%, whereas a change in male literacy had little influence. Thus the effect of a mother having attained secondary-level education may contribute to lowering the infant mortality in a given family by as much as 50%. An educated female population tends to significantly increase the effectiveness of Government expenditures on health, while on the contrary, an uneducated female population results in a dramatic fall of the impact of Government expenditures on health.

91. Most analyses of the interlinkages between women's health and the environment have not concentrated enough on the social origins of much ill-health for women, and consequently, they have underestimated its real dimensions, dynamics and implications. Many health problems of African women are exacerbated by overwork and poor nutrition, which are indicators of the low status of women in traditional societies. If the development process is to become more effective and if the advancement of women is to be accelerated, women's vital role in productivity and family well-being must be given official recognition and must be fully compensated.

92. In creating an enabling environment, the approach should be towards more pluralistic decision-making. The tradition of hierarchical decision-making in matters affecting health must give way to more participatory decision-making. This is not a new concept with respect to African health matters. As long ago as the Alma Ata Declaration of 1978, the notion of greater community involvement in decision-making was proclaimed as one of the antidotes to illness and disease. The participation of local community groups in the design and implementation of health and health-related activities has a significant impact on success and sustainability, which in turn arise in part from the recognition that tradition is an important factor in community life and must be taken into account. The Alma Ata Declaration of 1978 stressed the importance of providing primary health care for

everyone in the developing countries and the need for strong community participation in achieving that goal.

**E. WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIP AND LINKAGES TO ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

93. It is no longer acceptable to view development solely in terms of capital and technological inputs, however pervasive and manifest these two are. The state of the environment upon which all capital and technology are vested and are dependent upon, and the state of the human resource without which there would be no capital and no technology, must be considered as integral components of any analysis of the development process. Environmental sustainability and human resources development have now become widely integrated in the definition of development at national, regional and international levels. However, the success of development efforts also depends upon making women full partners. They must be enabled to contribute their efforts but above all, they should share equal in the benefits of development.

94. Women comprise 51% of the African population and through their actions - or inactions - in environmental management, they are critical determinants in the shaping of a sustainable future. Women in Africa, are custodians of natural ecosystems whether as managers, producers, consumers or care-takers. Throughout history, women have operated as integrators, connectors, convertors and managers of natural, and often limited resources. Throughout a woman's life, she is the linkage between children and the elderly, homes and markets, production and domestic resource uses, conversion of raw materials and use of the products thereof -- and in all these roles, she is a determinant of many ecological capacities and qualities.

95. The goal of sustainable development is to integrate environmental parameters into development and women must be a centre-piece of this integration. When women's perceptions, intuitions, knowledge systems and experience are excluded from the development process, this effectively shuts out the possibility and potential of new options from half the world's population and this denies the human species the chance to double human ingenuity. Ignoring or under-valuing the aggregated knowledge acquired by one half of the world's population in the course of human evolution, threatens the future of the earth and its peoples.

96. Principle 20 of The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development that was adopted at the UNCED in 1992 stipulates that "... women have a vital role in environmental management and development and their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development."

97. UNCED's Agenda 21 underscored the need for creative and effective partnerships and in particular Chapters 24 and 38 called for an "increase in the proportion of women decision-makers, planners, technical advisers, managers and extension workers in environment and development fields." Agenda 21 further called for the establishment of mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the implementation and impact of development and environment policies and programmes on women, and to ensure their contributions and benefits. Women's full participation in environmental management is essential for achieving sustainable development. Too few women have been involved in decision-making with regard to policies, programs or funding for the environment and this impacts negatively on overall development efforts.

98. With reference to research, data collection and dissemination of information, Chapter 24 of Agenda 21 urged countries to develop gender - sensitive databases, information systems and participatory action - oriented research and policy analyses with the collaboration of academic institutions and local women researchers on the following:

- (a) Knowledge and experience on the part of women of the management and conservation of natural resources for incorporation in the databases and information systems for sustainable development;
- (b) The impact on women of environmental degradation, particularly drought, desertification, toxic chemicals and armed hostilities;
- (c) Programmes to create rural and urban training, research, and resource centres in developing countries that will serve to disseminate environmentally sound technologies for women.

99. It is now an acknowledged fact that the deprivation of traditional means of livelihood is most often the result of environmental degradation resulting from natural and man-made disasters such as droughts, desertification, deforestation, erosion and inappropriate land use practices. Such environmental degradation pushes many poor women and poor households into marginal environments and habitats with critically low levels of essential resources such as water, vegetation cover and woodfuel. The 1985 Nairobi Strategies (Paragraph 226) emphasized that poverty and environmental degradation are mutually reinforcing, and they

become even more so when women are involved as the key environmental custodians and managers in economies which are still heavily dependent on primary production and raw materials. Under conditions of extreme poverty, women become more and more dependent upon the environment in order to meet the survival needs of their families. Under the relentless exploitation and utilization, environmentally derived resources - water, soils, fuelwood, etc... become more and more depleted and a vicious cycle of want and scarcity becomes unleashed. The physical/climatic/human dynamics of problems such as drought and desertification, deforestation, soil erosion and famines can be largely explained with reference to such linkages. Thus, the gender dimension of poverty is manifested in the unequal burden borne by women in managing consumption under conditions of scarcity. The failure to take gender into account has therefore contributed to some degree to the perpetuation of poverty.

100. The linkages between gender, poverty, environment and development are therefore particularly marked in the rural areas of Africa. The malaise that characterizes these linkages stems from several factors, for instance,

- . Rural populations, the majority of whom are women are invariably inadequately served and rarely reached by development resources;
- . The remoteness of rural locales from national decision-making centres places them at a marginal and disadvantageous position;
- . Rural populations not only in Africa but the world over, tend to cling to their traditional gender relations, while productive and reproductive functions - of both men and women - tend to be merged;
- . Education facilities and services tend to be concentrated in the urban areas and priority access to these resources is given to men and boys because of socio-cultural factors;
- . Restrictions are imposed on rural women and these bar them from participating in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

101. The above constitutes the social, economic and political framework that women operate under, which places them at the end of the distribution chain of productive resources and social services. Yet the flip side of this coin is in stark contrast in terms of what women actually do. Both men and women are equally dependent on the capacities of natural ecosystems but their relationships and

interactions with these ecosystems are often subtly different. Women are practitioners, major users, consumers and experts in numerous ways which all cumulatively determine many ecological capacities and qualities in different natural ecosystems. By tradition and practice, women have managed prescribed - and sometimes even proscribed! - resources, whether these limits are determined by natural conditions, custom, culture, family or community status. Since managing finite resources and capacities is the major challenge of the 21st century, and since the goal of sustainable development is to integrate environmental parameters into development and economic activities, then women are very well equipped to meet both the challenge and the goal. We should not isolate or separate female perceptions, knowledge systems and initiatives on the environment. To do so is to shut out the potentials and possibilities of new options from more than half of Africa's population, thereby denying ourselves, and the future generations, the doubling of Africa's ingenuity and potential. In other words, no society can afford to ignore the accumulated knowledge acquired over millennia by the women who continue to live and to interact so closely with the environment. This would threaten the future of Africa and its peoples. ✓

## **F. INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN THE PEACE PROCESS**

### **BOX II**

"War is a costly business while the attainment of peace only requires love, tolerance and respect of one another."

Mrs Gertrude Mongella, Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Statement at the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women, Dakar, Senegal, November 1994

102. The enthusiasm, hope, emotion and commitment manifested by African women at the "Peace Tent" of the NGO Forum in Dakar in November 1994, brought out forcefully the imperative need for women to play a decisive role in peace making, peace building, and conflict resolution and management, in line with the 1993 Kampala Plan of Action for Peace in Africa. It is essential to make the access of women to decision-making, particularly decisions having to do with peace, a national priority. Women can bring pragmatic and conciliatory solutions to peace efforts, and help open new avenues for the establishment of democracy and peace. Maintenance of peace should be not by force of arms but by means

also of food/arms security, social security and education. The question of peace is so crucial to the African continent that, if the theme of the Fourth World Conference on Women could have been re-phrased with Africa in mind, it might well have read "Accelerated actions towards peace, development and equality" for clearly, the prevailing situation in many countries of Africa has demonstrated that there can be no development, and certainly no equality in the midst of war, civil strife and conflict where women and girls are the major victims. Peace is not just the absence of war, violence or hostilities but a situation where political, economic and social justice prevail, and where every individual enjoys fundamental human rights and freedom. Very few African countries can therefore be said to have enjoyed sustained periods of peace during the last decade. Over the last two decades, the continent has experienced numerous full blown conflicts and currently, other conflicts are raging in the region.

103. Militarism in Africa has reduced the quality of life and has destroyed physical infrastructure and social services. In many African countries, expenditures on military hardware and machineries of war are two to three times more than the expenditure on education and health. Women and children are the most vulnerable groups during armed conflicts and they comprise the majority of the victims. They suffer most from the accompanying disruptions as displaced persons or refugees, characterized by poverty, disease and alienation. According to the UNHCR, one out of every ten African women is a refugee; some of the most critical issues for women in the African region are those connected with pervasive wars, political conflicts and civil strife. The Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace was adopted in November 1993. It called for, among other things, involvement of women in the peace process and the adoption of meaningful policies on women that ensured their full involvement in political and economic issues, as well as those of social and human development.

104. Both in the NGO Forum's "Peace Tent" as well as in the main Conference, women participants in particular focused on the detrimental effects of arms purchase and sale, and of violence against women and girls. All participants emphasized the importance of peace education, of information and communication at all levels, and of the need for African countries to be ready and willing to provide asylum to refugees and displaced persons, and to develop programmes to cater for their survival and needs. Great emphasis was also placed on the importance of the role of women in the peace process, and the need to involve them in the mechanisms for conflict prevention, resolution and management. The need for women to organize themselves was recognized, in order for them to form lobby/pressure groups to influence all decisions affecting all aspects of their lives. Women should have access to decision-making positions in the national armed forces to enable them to influence decisions on arms purchase and armed conflicts,

and subsequently on peace-keeping. To this end, the Kampala Action Plan on Peace and Development must be adopted and implemented by all African member States. The necessity of creating mechanisms at all levels for giving peace a chance was also emphasized. Human rights and peace education should be included at all levels of the education systems. In addition, it was suggested that a code of conduct derived from traditional peace-making procedures and practices should be established for conflict prevention and resolution.

## **G. THE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

### **BOX 12**

"The political space belongs to all citizens; politics is everyone's business and affects the lives of each of us ... There is no doubt that the more women are associated, in numbers corresponding to their percentage of the population, in the political decision-making process, in parties, in elected bodies in Governments and in international bodies, the more they can be associated with this process as protagonists and the more they can change the modalities and outcomes of politics. Only then will the concept of democracy find concrete and tangible expression."

*who?*

**WOMEN AND POLITICAL POWER**  
Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva 1992

105. In 1952, the GA adopted the UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women which legally binds the States Parties to accord women political rights - including the right to vote and to hold public office by election and by appointment - on equal terms with men without any discrimination. Despite the progress achieved, much still remains to be done to secure full political equality and empowerment for women, particularly in access to public office and key decision-making positions. Discriminatory practices still exist in connection with appointments, promotion, terms and conditions of career services, retirement and pension rights.



### **BOX 13**

"The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs"

#### **ARTICLE 8 OF THE UN CHARTER**

### **H. WOMEN'S LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

106. The principle of the equal rights of men and women was established in the preamble of the UN Charter 50 years ago and is now a principle of international law. It has been specifically and consistently pursued in a series of subsequent UN General Assembly resolutions and numerous other legislative instruments especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979. Despite these international, regional and national initiatives, the barriers to equal treatment and opportunity for women are high and virtually impenetrable and overall progress for women has been slow. National laws defining women's status are at best an incomplete guide to assessing the situation of women in any country. Wide gaps exist between laws, women's knowledge and understanding of them, and enforcement of the law by authorities. These gaps are especially evident in rural areas where women lack the most basic information about their legal rights.

not complete

not only rural, it's everywhere

### **BOX 14**

"In cultures where women are relegated to lower status within the family, where they have no say in the choice of their husbands, and where they have little or no decision-making authority, they frequently lack self-respect. This is clear in what they say as they describe their lives or their feelings about personal worth".

Source: **Third Word Women Speak Out**  
**Perdita Huston, 1979 pp. 47, 48**

107. An important view emerging from the African region relates to the critical issues and challenges in the current campaign to ensure women's rights as human rights.

Some issues:

- barriers to funding women's rights;
- obstacles posed by sovereignty to the protection of rights;
- conditionality of aid;
- how to hold Governments accountable.

108. The Conventional view that women's rights are different and separate from consideration of the human rights of women has impeded action to uphold the basic rights and fundamental freedoms of women as human beings. Most violations of women's rights remain unchallenged, and actions to expose and oppose such violations forms only a small part of human rights action and litigation internationally. Lack of attention to women's human rights is found at all levels, local, national, regional and global, and encompasses all human rights and freedoms -- from political participation, to freedom from torture; from free and responsible parenthood to property rights.

(i) Legal and human rights

109. Women at the Fifth Regional Conference affirmed their solidarity with all those men and women throughout the world, who are working to ensure respect for the rights of women, and by so doing, ensuring respect for the inalienable rights of the individual.

(ii) Legal literacy

110. Legal literacy should be seen as a process for women's individual and societal empowerment and as an essential component in a broader strategy to achieve social justice. We must find ways of promoting women's capacities to understand and critique the law and the scope of rights, to assert rights, and to take action to change limiting definitions of gender roles, status and rights in the law and in daily practice. Through legal literacy, women can gain the skills needed to enforce the law or to challenge it in order to assert rights, redress injustices and gain access to economic and political resources.

### **(iii) Violence against women**

111. Violence against women must be regarded as an obstacle to development. At the beginning of the women's decade, the issue of violence against women was not on the agenda which called for Equality, Development and Peace. But in the country-based regional review of the advancement of women during the last ten years in Africa, this issue ranked amongst the highest priority areas of concern and proposed actions towards halting or controlling violence against women and girls ~~were more numerous than for any other critical area of concern~~. As African women seek full and equal participation in their societies, the problem of gender based violence has surfaced in virtually every country within the region as one of the major obstacles not only to the attainment of the three goals of the decade, but also as a major obstacle to the full attainment of women's legal and human rights. Startling and graphic accounts of the extent of the problem of domestic violence in Africa, combined with the violence that characterizes wars, ethnic and civil strife, leave little doubt that this subject must immediately take its rightful place on the peace and development action agenda for the continent. Though the types of abuse vary from culture to culture, there are common areas of agreement about what needs to be done to overcome the economic, social, cultural and legal origins of violence, largely within the context of access to legal services and education, and legislative and judicial reform.

#### **BOX 15**

"Implementation is the most difficult part of solving the problem of discrimination against women, and of making equality between men and women a fact."

**EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN - A CALL FOR ACTION, p. 23**  
**United Nations, New York, 1975**

## **I. MAINSTREAMING OF GENDER DISAGGREGATED DATA**

112. As more attention is focused on women and as the issue of their accelerated advancement becomes more imperative, it has become increasingly obvious that there is a critical gap and dearth of gender-specific data in virtually all sectors of development activity, on which to base appropriate and gender-based policies and decisions. Typically, development plans and strategies continually fail to disaggregate by gender; they do not take into account physical and physiological differences, and more often than not, they simply assume that certain effects and outcomes will be valid for females and males alike, irrespective of biological, social and culturally based differences. Policies, programmes and research activities which focus specifically on women still tend to centre around their reproductive roles and capacities, thereby overlooking the need for women's health and overall well-being during all stages of their life cycle. A complete turnabout and reorientation is therefore necessary in order to fill this information gap and to promote gender-specific research aimed at producing the hard data necessary to demonstrate the disadvantaged status of millions of women in Africa, particularly those in the rural areas.

## **J. WOMEN, COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION AND THE ARTS**

113. The lack of information on women's activities is often given as a reason for their neglect in the planning process. However, oft-times, even when the information is available, there is insufficient use made of it. It is widely recognized that most of the impediments to the advancement of women in Africa stem from the fact that the mass of the people, particularly the women have limited or non-existent access to basic information which would empower them to express their views and opinions about significant development problems and to participate in the process of democratic transition. Modern media of communication, particularly radio broadcasting can be used most effectively to disseminate to knowledge and information and to promote tolerance, democracy, respect for human and women's rights and peace building in Africa. For instance, specific measures can be instituted such as gradually increasing community radio stations and newspapers, encouragement and concerted revival of the long-standing moral traditions of African societies which can be adapted to various broadcasting format, particularly with regard to gender issues. In addition, specific media programmes can be produced and disseminated, with women and youth as special targets, to educate them on their rights and responsibilities, and to facilitate their participation in the democratic process and the building of peaceful societies.

## **Harvesting Information Technology for Development**

114. African States and their development partners have been working actively to expand information networking in the region. This activity can be intensified with a special focus on women. African countries must become full actors in the global information revolution in order to reduce the gap between the haves and have-nots, and between men and women, thereby opening the possibility of reducing substantially the marginalization of the continent and of the women. Participating in the information society offers tremendous opportunities for African women professionals and researchers. Throughout the region, particularly in the rural areas women and people in general will dramatically gain access to communications and information, thereby accelerating and bolstering sustainable development. An increased flow of information will also increase Africa's participation in the global dialogue on issues pertaining to gender disparities and equity, the environment, human rights and democratization, among others. Current constraints to Africa's entry into the global information society lie in the area of policy, human infrastructure and culture. Changes are necessary in attitudes about information and its use in order to create cultures and societies that are information hungry and information sharing.

## **K. THE GIRL-CHILD**

### **BOX 16**

"In the developing world today, many more boys become literate than girls. In some countries, twice as many boys as girls are brought to health centres for treatment. Employment rights, social security rights, legal rights, property rights, and even civil and political liberties are likely to depend on the one crucial chromosome distinguishing human male from human female."

**JAMES P. GRANT:**  
**The State of the World's Children,**  
**UNICEF, 1992**

115. One half of Africa's children, numbering about 170 million, are girls who represent more than half of the total female population. To promote genuine development in Africa must involve improving the status of girls who tend to be disadvantaged, relative to boys, from an early age. Long before they are adolescents African girls become mothers themselves in terms of the roles and responsibilities bestowed upon them -- cooking, cleaning, looking after younger siblings, fetching water and firewood and even farming. By the time girls are ten or fourteen years, they work at least seven more hours a day on household chores than boys of the same age. As poverty levels worsen and as the extended family and kinship support fabrics fray, many more responsibilities fall on the girl-child. The imperative of improving the situation of the girl-child has gradually become widely accepted. At the 1990 World Summit for Children, leaders of the world acknowledged that gender disparities must be attacked from childhood.

116. By 1994, nearly all African countries had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and most of them had elaborated follow-up National Programmes of Action. At the International Conference on Assistance to African Children (ICAAC) in 1992, African countries committed themselves to review and reform legal codes and legislation to remove all gender biases, strengthen mechanisms for the promotion of women and children, increase resources to meet girls' and women's needs and to increase the representation of women at the highest policy-making levels. They also undertook to ensure the protection of the female child from all forms of harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation and forced early marriages. If African countries can replace the girl-child's 'cycle of disadvantage' with a 'cycle of opportunity', this would constitute one of the most widely beneficial achievements in the continent in the 1990s.

117. The APA called on African Governments to pay special attention to the girl-child in order for her to grow up with the requisite confidence, education and health, and to be able to take up with dignity, her place in society as an equal partner to boys and men of her own age. The focus of attention on the girl-child should revolve around eliminating discrimination in education, training, health and nutrition; advocating elimination of negative cultural attitudes and practices against her; enhancing the capacities and esteem of girls; and sensitizing the girl-child about social, cultural, economic and political issues and problems and how these impact on her. The specific actions that were recommended include inter alia,

- ◆ undertaking research on the situation of girls and disaggregating information and data by gender and age;

- ◆ reviewing policies and legislation to ensure promotion of girls' interests, security and well-being in education, health and early marriage, and to support NGOs and community based organizations in their efforts to promote positive changes in practices and attitudes towards women and girls;
- ◆ in the realm of girls' education, some specified relevant actions are related to, provision of skilled training after primary education, exposure to sex education right from primary school, inclusion of gender equality in school curricula and syllabi, and mobilization and encouragement of both men and boys in order for them to promote girls' and women's status and work for equal partnership between the sexes;
- ◆ the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women also called for the formulation of a code of conduct which would promote and sustain solidarity among older women and the younger girls.

## CONCLUSION

118. African governments and their development partners have recognized that strengthening and empowering women can be a powerful catalyst for overall social and economic development in the region. Consequently, many governments have embarked on policy reforms pertaining to a wide array of issues that intimately and structurally affect women -- universal education, reform, banking policies, the legal system, property rights, asset holding, transfer of ownership, inheritance and so on. National machineries and institutions responsible for women's issues have been established and/or strengthened to formulate policy in economic, social and legal matters in order to remove obstacles to women's empowerment.

119. Support to African governments on these endeavours is increasingly available from their development partners and the UN system. Of special significance is the recently launched UN Secretary General's "Special Initiative on Africa" in March 1995 which will support government efforts to reform laws that have facilitated the subordination of women. Activities will focus on reviewing existing laws and practices and how they have disadvantaged women and the support of efforts aimed at the enactment of laws and changes of practices to empower women regarding land ownership, access to credit, technology, extension services, etc, all of them designed to improve their productivity, incomes and, in turn, eradicate their poverty.

120. From within the continent, the APA is the initiative that offers the opportunity to be decisive in moving to effective implementation of the critical action areas. The identified areas of <sup>concern</sup> ~~action~~ are fundamental to the advancement of women and they form the cornerstones of the hope that the next generation of Africa will break away from the cycle of want and deprivation that currently has a stranglehold on the continent. The actions proposed in the APA have powerful implications for ushering in nothing less than a gender revolution in Africa. The Secretary General's Special Initiative on Africa has emphasized that,

"Empowerment of Africa's women through education, improved health and access to resources has constructive and fundamental implications for all African society. While these actions will not automatically remove discrimination and gender gaps, they are necessary towards that end."

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121. An attempt has been made here to telescope the proceedings and outcome of the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women. The overall aim has been to provide a wider conceptual and operational basis against which the critical gaps identified in the APA can be addressed, understood and rectified.

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