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COMMISSION ECONOMIQUE POUR L'AFRIQUE



ECA/ACW/MR/USA/2000

MISSION REPORT ON
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL SESSION ON BEIJING +5
31 MAY TO 12 JUNE 2000, NEW YORK

by

Hannah Tiagha
Social Affairs Officer
African Centre for Women

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INTRODUCTION

The General Assembly Special Session on Beijing + 5 was to conduct the mid-decade review of the implementation of the Global Platform for Action. The actual review was to take place from 5 to 9 June 2000 in New York. The African Centre for Women decided to attend the review session as observers but more importantly to support the African delegations to participate effectively at this meeting. In this context, ACW planned to organize a number of parallel activities during this period some of which would directly serve to enhance Africa's participation at the Special Session. They included an **Information Workshop** for the African delegates; a mechanism for facilitating information sharing and consultations among African participants; the launching and viewing of the CD-ROM on the "**Status of Women in Africa**"; reporting and disseminating information on the Conference from an African perspective through written and electronic media; disseminating ACW publications on the status of implementation of the Platforms for Action in Africa; and co-ordinating Africa's participation at the Round table sponsored by the Regional Commissions on collaboration between governments and NGOs.

In the light of the above, ACW decided to send me, Hannah Tiagha on mission to New York to co-ordinate these activities and to ensure that all arrangements were in place as programmed.

Additionally, during the Special Session, the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) decided to organize a one day consultation on "**The role of National Machineries in Follow-up to Beijing + 5**" on 12 June in New York. The aim of the consultation was to assess the outcomes of the Special Session and to start initial discussions on potential partnerships in building the capacity of national machineries in national agenda setting including planning and budgeting processes. The Director of ACW who was unable to attend this consultation asked me to attend.

MISSION OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this mission were as follows:

To ensure that African delegates were informed about the modalities for participation at the Special Session, and that they were familiar with the programme and procedures of the meeting.

- To facilitate information exchange and informal consultations among the African delegates during the Session
- Ensure the launching and viewing of the ACW CD-ROM
- Ensure that the ECA Information and Communication Team was well briefed about the organization of the meeting, key parallel activities and possible key interviewees in order to have access to critical information for effective reporting
- Ensure Africa's participation in activities jointly organized with other Regional Commissions and the dissemination of ECA/ACW's documents on relevant information about Africa's achievements and priorities with regard to follow-up to Beijing

- To participate in the DAW consultation on the assessment of the outcome of the Special Session and discuss possible collaboration in building the capacity of national machineries for follow-up of the outcome of Beijing + 5.

THE MISSION

Information Workshop on the Special Session on Beijing + 5

Prior to the mission, all member States had been invited by ACW to participate in the **Information Workshop on the Special Session on Beijing + 5** on 3 June. The Workshop was to provide participants with information about modalities for participation at the meeting, the programme and agenda, the role of the Preparatory Committee as well as the status of negotiations of the **Outcome Document**. In addition, it was to brief them about a possible mechanism for informal consultations among the delegates and the role of the African Group in New York.

The Workshop was to be jointly organized by ECA and OAU and participants were informed accordingly. A planning and harmonization meeting was therefore held between ECA/ACW and OAU before departure to New York. The OAU Office in New York was also informed likewise. In New York, however, the organization of the Workshop was streamlined with the working modalities of the African Group. It was therefore announced under the auspices of the African Group and was chaired by the UN Mission representative of the country that was the chairman of the month of June, i.e. Gabon.

Participation at the Workshop was mostly at the experts' level even though at least 6 countries were represented at the ministerial level. Around 30 countries are estimated to have attended the meeting. A number of UN agencies were also represented. The briefing was carried out by a representative from DAW and by an Expert from the Gabon Mission to the UN. Participants asked several questions of clarification and requested additional information, particularly on the participation of NGOs and informal consultation modalities. They particularly appreciated the distribution of documents on the Special Session and the clarification on some of the parallel activities and where to get daily information on them.

Additionally, the Secretary-General of the African Women Committee on Peace and Development also briefed participants on the objectives and the work of the Committee. For several participants, it was the first time they had heard about the Committee. They were mostly interested in knowing how they could work together at the national level.

The ECA/ACW CD/ROM on "**the Status of Women in Africa**" was also launched at this meeting and each participant given a copy of the CD and the write up on it.(more on this later)

Other informal consultation meetings

On 2 June, I had an extended consultation meeting with the OAU office in New York as well as the OAU Team from Addis Ababa. The main objective was to clarify among ourselves the objectives of the **Information Workshop** and the need for a mechanism for informal consultations among African delegations similar to what had been set up during the Preparatory Committee Meeting in March.

The OAU position was that considering that the Missions to the UN in New York were supposed to communicate all developments about the Special Session to the national capitals

regularly, delegates coming to the meeting should be well informed and therefore should not need additional information. OAU also maintained that there was no need for informal consultations because Africa participated formally in the negotiation process of the final outcome through the Group of 77 and the African Group was the official representative of African countries in this process. In this context, OAU felt that setting up another mechanism for informal consultations would not be useful and would upset the African Group as had happened in March after 3 informal meetings.

The ECA position was that flow of information into and within Africa was a difficult process. Contacts with member States on a regular basis had demonstrated that they do not have information that they were supposed to have. It was the reason why they had adopted the document "**Modalities for Africa's Participation at the Special Session**" which had emphasized the need for special efforts to ensure that they had the necessary information for effective participation at the meeting. Informal mechanism for consultations would allow them to exchange information on issues under discussion and empower them to express their views in Committees or other meetings with confidence, knowing that they were expressing the priorities and consensus of Africa.

The outcome of the consultation was that OAU would urge the African Group to call informal consultation meetings that would be chaired by the Chairperson of the month. Subsequently, in addition to the announcement of the Information Workshop under their auspices, two meetings were called, on 6 June to brief the Ministers on the status of the Conference and the negotiations; and the second one on 7 June in which African delegates drafted and distributed widely their position on issues that had paralyzed a consensus, indicating that they would not concede to anything that was contrary to the Beijing Platform for Action. The latter two meetings were chaired by the Minister in charge of gender affairs from Gabon.

The launching and viewing of the CD-ROM

The ECA CD-ROM was programmed for the first launching during the **Information Workshop** which was attended by African delegates only besides a number of UN agency representatives. All participants were received a copy of the CD and other written materials on the same. The overview and main objectives of the CD were presented by the ACW Director, Ms Ouedraogo, while the contents, the structure of the tape and how it should be operated technically were presented by the Consultant, Dr Wanja Thairu. The CD-ROM generated much interest even as the gaps were pointed out by Ms Ouedraogo and the need for member States to be engaged more systematically with the collection of gender disaggregated data in all sectors.

The second launching was organized on 8 June and was open to all who wanted to attend. The Deputy Executive Secretary was also present. The discussion was much more extended during this session due to availability of time. In particular, it generated interest from representatives of research institutions and international NGOs in America and Europe who were eager to exchange information and possibly collaborate in the collect of gender disaggregated information and data. Each participant received a copy of the CD and other written materials on the tape

Collaboration with ECA Communication Team

The ECA Communication Team was represented by three staff members and was coordinated by Ms Mercy Wambui. Most of the collaboration entailed having daily meetings to discuss the events of the day that needed coverage, developments in the negotiations with regard to the **Outcome Document**, African delegations reaction to the various developments and possible interviewees in this regard.

The Team worked effectively covering as many activities, publishing a daily newspaper on the Special Session and parallel activities and conducting taped interviews for written and electronic media. The **ECA News** and the latest **GenderNet** were well nourished as a result.

Collaboration with Regional Commissions and other UN agencies

Inspired by the experience of the mid-decade review of the implementation of the Platforms for Action and under the co-ordination of the Economic Commission for Europe, the Regional Commissions decided to organize a round table discussion on the benefits and experiences of collaboration between governments and NGOs. Each of the Regional Commissions was to identify a speaker who would speak as a panellist during the round table.

For the African region, ACW invited Ms Winnie Byanyima to be the panellist. Before and during the mission, I coordinated her travel arrangements and liased with her to ensure that she received all the relevant information. She participated effectively at this event.

ACW was also invited to a meeting organized by UNDP for the different actors (governments and NGOs) who had activities sponsored by the agency. The objective was to share experiences on these activities and their programmes in general and especially their plans for future action. I used this opportunity to discuss ACW's project on women's economic empowerment and to share with them what the programme of work for the next five years would be.

Collaboration with DAW in Consultation on the Role of National Machineries in Follow-up to Beijing + 5

As stated above, the Division for the Advancement of Women organized a one day consultation with the following objectives :

- To have a better understanding of the **modus operandi** of national machineries in national planning process and structures
- To promote learning and exchange on strategies for gender mainstreaming in national and local planning
- To develop a consensus on essential factors enabling national machineries to effectively pursue their mandate (Platforms for Action) and meet new and emerging challenges (outcome of Beijing + 5 appraisal).

The Consultation was conducted entirely in plenary since participation was restricted to less than 20 people (mostly representatives of member States and NGOs from Africa, Asia and Latin America, and some UN agencies). With the assistance of Facilitators, discussions were conducted around specific topics derived from the objectives defined above. The organizers asked me to facilitate the topic on "**the critical areas of consensus over what needs to be achieved in the next five years**". By the end of the Consultation, there was consensus on:

- The anatomy of an effective institutional framework of a national machinery
- Constraints to mainstreaming gender in national planning and budgeting
- Emerging challenges and implications for the role of national machineries in Beijing + 5 follow-up

On the basis of the outcome of the Consultation, areas of possible collaboration between ACW and DAW emerged. DAW expressed great interest in following up with further discussions on concrete ways and areas of collaboration.

CONCLUSION

The mission set out to accomplish a number of objectives that in my view were met for the most part. The Special Session was an important forum for Africa to streamline its priorities with global priorities through effective participation. Delegates from Africa and especially the Ministers seemed to understand the need to speak with one voice and to utilize the machineries available to articulate and protect their interests. I feel that more work is needed to sensitize them even more on the importance of playing their political role fully in such fora.

ECA/ACW also effectively utilized the opportunity provided by the Special Session to sensitize its partners about its work, the gaps that still remain and the importance of working together to close them.