

ECA-CEA
African Centre for Women (ACW)



THEME 4

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFRICA'S NEW GENERATION

- 4.1: Changing formal and informal educational and school programmes for the promotion of gender equality
- 4.2: Innovation mechanisms for creating a favourable environment for equal access to jobs for boys and girls
- 4.3: Sensitisation of the media and mobilisation of the media and new communication technologies for the promotion of change of social attitudes and perceptions regarding gender disparities
- 4.4: Formulation of gender-sensitive strategies to promote the health of the youth
- 4.5: Equal access for girls and boys to information technology

*On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Economic Commission for Africa, an international conference was organized under the theme “**African Women and Economic Development : Investing in Our Future**” from 28 April to 1 May 1998. It was attended by policy makers in different government sectors including heads of state and government, representatives from religious organizations, NGOs women’s groups, grassroot associations, youth, the private sector, regional subregional and intergovernmental bodies, the international community, bilateral and multilateral agencies. The aim of the conference was to engage in intensive dialogue in order to :*

- *Share experience on how public policies should equalize opportunities between women and men and redirect resources to those investments in which women’s participation would bring about the highest social returns;*
- *Draw strategic lessons from on-going efforts to implement the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action;*
- *Identify and share “good practices” in strategies and programme modalities for country level implementation of actions recommended by the conference;*
- *Forge partnerships for post-conference development and implementation of the recommended action and programmes.*

The aims of the conference were tackled through four main themes:

- 1. Developing African economies : the role of women;*
- 2. Achieving good governance : the essential participation of women;*
- 3. African women and the information age: a new window of opportunity;*
- 4. Creating opportunities for Africa’s new generation.*

While the four themes were addressed in plenaries and panel discussions, they were also broken down into a total of 22 sub-themes which were discussed in greater detail in self-selected groups. The information in this booklet summarizes the content of the issues in theme 4, the questions that guided the group discussions and the strategic actions that evolved out of the group discussions.

I hope this booklet will be useful for all those participants and organisations wishing to follow up on the proposed strategic actions.

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SUB-THEME 4.1

CHANGING FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATIONAL AND SCHOOL PROGRAMMES FOR THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY



ISSUES ADDRESSED

Gender bias in education

In spite of concerted efforts over the past three decades, to increase girls' and boys' access to schooling and to reduce the disparities between them, there still exists a considerable degree of bias against girls in the education systems in many African countries. The progress has also been uneven across countries on the African continent, in terms of access for both boys and girls and the closure of the gap between girls and boys has been slow. Apart from a few countries in southern Africa, the available indicators of illiteracy, primary school enrolment, the transition from primary to secondary to tertiary reveal persistent disparities between sexes. For Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, the combined primary, secondary and tertiary education gross enrolment ratio for 1994 was 38.4% for girls and young women and 46.6 % for boys and young men.

Gender bias in educational opportunities and its outcome takes many different forms. The Beijing Platform for Action (paras. 74 to 77) emphasizes the following facts :

- ◆ gender bias in curricula and teaching materials reinforces traditional roles;
- ◆ science curricula in particular are gender biased and girls are often deprived of basic education in science, mathematics and training. Science textbooks depict a considerable degree of gender bias.
- ◆ lower transition rates to secondary and tertiary education in most countries for girls and young women;
- ◆ lack of sensitivity to specific needs of girls;
- ◆ lack of sexual and reproductive health education for girls and boys and provision of facilities for pregnant adolescents and young mothers to continue schooling;
- ◆ lack of gender awareness by educators at all levels;
- ◆ inadequate and deteriorating provision of education for girls in particular.

How gender bias in education affects girls women in general

Children's experience of education is profoundly influenced by their gender. There is a vicious circle, which sustains gender differences and disparities in life opportunities from home, to school and to work (paid and/or unpaid).

Both girls and boys experience gender stereotyping and gender discrimination from infancy through childhood to adolescence and early adulthood. The formal educational and training system that bears the imprint of the wider society reflects the perceptions, beliefs, and norms of family and community.

The intrinsic and material value of education for girls and for boys, the range, nature and level of education appropriate for their perceived aptitudes and for their expected roles and positions determine the position that they will occupy in society as women and men. These also determine their positions in paid and unpaid work for the market, the State and in social reproduction.

The educational and training system prepares paid workers for the formal sector which is shaped by the prevailing structure and range of employment and career opportunities, by wages and income levels. In public, and particularly in private sector employment, there is a lower participation of women and there also exists a marked segregation between women and men according to skill, grade, occupation and sector. Women tend to be bunched towards the lower and lower middle-levels of the jobs and skill hierarchy and in a narrower range of occupations. Formal employment for which the acquisition of knowledge and skills is useful, is much less remunerative for women than men, who account for over two-thirds of the share of total earnings. Women are much less present in the scientific and technical occupational categories.

The educational and training system thus continues to reinforce gender bias. There is a close relationship between the gender bias in the educational and employment systems. The Beijing Platform of Action emphasizes the need for the "creation of an educational and social environment in which women and men, girls and boys are treated equally and encouraged to achieve their full potential.. where educational resources promote non-stereotyped images of women and men, girls and boys". This means modifying the formal and non-formal educational experiences of both girls and boys so as to transform attitudes, enhance knowledge and skills.

Strategies to break the vicious circle from home to school and to work (paid and/or unpaid) would have to address the mutually reinforcing institutions of family, school, employment markets, the media, in sustaining gender inequality in education. One major entry point is to develop policies and programmes to challenge the ways in which the school system perpetuates the gender disparities.

How we can change gender bias in education systems

The Beijing Platform for Action identifies a whole range of strategic objectives and actions to enable the wider educational system to become a proactive agent of change and transformation. These are contained in paragraphs 80 to 88 of the Platform for Action. There is a need to share experiences about the extent to which these actions have been put in place in different countries. The discussion in this regard could aim to:

- ◆ review any monitoring mechanisms and outcomes;
- ◆ identify the obstacles in formulating, implementing and evaluating the programmes;
- ◆ prioritize the actions that need to be taken at different levels, regional, subregional, national and sectoral;
- ◆ put in place partnerships for implementing the programmes and to determine time frames and set targets.

GUIDING QUESTION

In addition to giving a framework for discussion, the following guide questions were provided to assist in the group discussion that addressed the issues in greater detail:

- ◆ What are the gender gaps/.disparities in the education system?
- ◆ What are the main ways in which the education systems reproduce gender inequality?
- ◆ What programmes, if any, are currently under way to implement the Beijing Agenda and what is the implementation status of the programmes?
- ◆ What have been the factors impeding or favouring programmes to reduce gender disparities in different countries, regions and localities, among different socio-economic groups?
- ◆ What are the strategies proposed to overcome these obstacles and facilitate existing and potential initiatives?
- ◆ What priorities can the Working Group identify under the Beijing Agenda, which address the objectives of the Conference to help the new generation to attain gender equality and economic development in Africa, and what new priorities, if any, can be identified?
- ◆ What are the existing partnerships under this agenda? How can they be reinforced and what new partners/stakeholders need to be mobilized ?

STRATEGIC ACTIONS RECOMMENDED

The Group, after a thorough consideration of the issues, identified strategic action and interventions required to bring about an effective change in promoting gender equality in the formal and informal education systems. It also identified institutions and bodies that have the capacity to carry out/undertake the strategic action.

1. For the achievement of gender equality in education, political will and commitment of governments are needed to facilitate the creation of policies such as:
 - ◆ affirmative action to increase access of girls at the tertiary level;
 - ◆ affirmative action to increase access of girls at the tertiary level;
 - ◆ free education for primary school-going children, especially for girls;
 - ◆ decentralization to reduce distances covered to get to school and to improve school management;
 - ◆ re-entry of adolescent girls after pregnancy;
 - ◆ increase education budget.
2. Governments, in collaboration with ministries of education, should:
 - ◆ review the curriculum with a view to incorporating life skills, sexual and reproductive health information, as well as human rights and peace education;
 - ◆ improve teacher training to include sensitisation on gender issues;
 - ◆ provide guidelines on how to handle gender issues in schools;
 - ◆ enhance school facilities with science equipment, laboratories and sanitary facilities specific for girls' needs;
 - ◆ develop teaching and learning materials which are gender sensitive.
3. Communities should mobilise and ensure the participation of youth in gender-sensitive youth programmes. Parents and communities should be sensitized to ensure that the socialization process of both girls and boys creates a sense of equality and co-operation. The school should be the core of the community action and activities to avoid alienation and ensure integration.

4. The media (electronic, print and community-based media) should ensure that effective programmes are disseminated and the debate on girls' education is sustained. Governments and the media should promote advocacy and social marketing campaigns at national level for different audiences, including policy makers to ensure their full participation and support.
5. Governments should link labour-saving activities such as provision of water points, health centres, grinding mills and child care centres with education programmes and institute measures that reduce household burdens and poverty, such as bursary schemes for needy girls. It should also create institutions to care for teenage mothers and ensure their acquisition of like skills.
6. The Ministries of education, in collaboration with those of finance and planning should develop indicators for monitoring and evaluating programmes at periodic intervals. To do this effectively, ministries should set up a task force which would establish strategic priorities as related to the unique situation of each country, develop targets and a budget which can be used for mobilising funds.
7. Partnership should be established with all agencies and organizations that are concerned with girls' education and youth programmes as follows:
 - ◆ at the country level: media, NGOs, communities, governments and indigenous organizations.
 - ◆ United Nations agencies such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), ECA and OAU;
 - ◆ bilateral organizations such as the French Co-operation, Italian Co-operation and international NGOs;
 - ◆ parents/teachers: e.g. teachers' associations and unions;
 - ◆ financial and private sector: Employers to give information on the job market and provide internships;
 - ◆ trade unions;
 - ◆ the international community, given the interest it has shown in the conferences on women's education;
 - ◆ regional NGOs such as Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) which should network with other NGOs and international agencies to exchange information and avoid duplication of effort.

SUB-THEME 4.2

INNOVATIVE MECHANISMS TO CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT



ISSUES ADDRESSED

The magnitude of illiteracy

Two-thirds of the world's illiterate one billion people (those who can neither read nor write) are women and 60 per cent of its 300 million unschooled children are girls.

Over the past three decades, sub-Saharan governments, aware that their countries had the lowest schooling rates for girls worldwide and conscious of how far they were lagging behind, have made considerable efforts to bridge the gap between the educational access and schooling of boys and girls. The number of girl enrolments in primary education rose from 51 in 1960 to 76 in 1990 for 100 boy enrolments. Over the same period, the number of girl enrolments in secondary education rose from 51 to 67 for 100 boy enrolments.

In spite of these investments, early drop outs have been more numerous among African girls (out of 100 billion students dropping out of school after four years elementary education, two thirds are girls). Girls are also fewer in university enrolment (in 1990, for every 100 young people enrolled, the figures were 32 women in Africa, 84 in Asia and the Pacific, 94 in the West, 104 in Eastern Europe and 106 in Latin America and the Caribbean. Furthermore girls continue to be absent from the scientific and technical fields which today offer the best prospects for employment.

Why the schooling rate for girls is lower than that for boys

The factors that keep girls from going to school emanate from the perceptions that some African communities have for girls and women. The communities fail to see how useful schooling could be to women in performing their traditional roles as wives and mothers, which, in their view, require no schooling.

Parents see that the formal education system itself creates new expectations and alienates young girls from what their society expects of them culturally.

The risk factors inherent in the school environment: distance from home and girls proximity to men and boys that is considered harmful.

- ◆ Early marriage and pregnancy
- ◆ The involvement of young girls, alongside their mothers, in performing productive and reproductive roles (domestic roles, caring for other members of the family).
- ◆ The lack of financial resources whereby parents, when forced to choose, would rather educate their sons who represent a more profitable investment, in the longterm, than their daughters who would marry into the family of their husbands.

Why it is important to educate girls

Research shows that educating girls has an obvious economic benefit for the girls themselves and for society at large in terms of:

- ◆ a significant increase of the (GNP);
- ◆ an increase in job opportunities, greater productivity and better
- ◆ skilled manpower
- ◆ an increase in family income; and,
- ◆ increased participation in self-employment and in the informal sector.

On the other hand these findings also show that in those countries where gender and educational disparities are reduced, the social benefits can be seen in such areas as:

- ◆ better ownership of family planning programmes;
- ◆ declining maternal and infant mortality rates;
- ◆ generally improved nutrition and health for the whole family;
- ◆ increased life expectancy; and,
- ◆ better opportunities for the emerging generation.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The following questions were provided to guide group discussions:

- ◆ How to make ministries, particularly those responsible for education, employment and youth more sensitive to gender disparities so that curricula and pedagogy can be improved, teachers trained and gender equity inside and outside the classroom can be promoted, and young girls enabled to have greater employment prospects for their economic future.
- ◆ How to create a more girl-friendly environment inside and outside the school setting
- ◆ What strategies to pursue in order to ensure that young girls are well-prepared to take advantage of all employment opportunities.
- ◆ What strategies should be developed to effect attitudinal and behavioural changes among all those involved in the schooling of girls (decision-makers, parents, teaching faculty, opinion-makers, girls and boys) and to galvanize them into building a society based on gender equality.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS RECOMMENDED

In addressing the question of gender equity in education and employment participants of the working group identified the following strategic action:

1. The ECA and other United Nations agencies should sensitise policy-makers on gender issues through:
 - ◆ Training, production and dissemination of brochures and other material on women's issues;
 - ◆ Collection of desegregated data on disparities between girls and boys, women and men ;
 - ◆ Establishment of mechanisms to mainstream gender in all government policies and ensure that enough budgetary allocations are made for gender concerns.
2. Regional and national women's organisations like: African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), CEFA, should work towards the establishment and strengthening of women's networks for effective lobbying and advocacy;
3. The education systems should be reviewed, in order to match the economic and labour demands and to keep abreast of market trends through enhanced collaboration between the ministries of labour and education;
4. Governments in collaboration with concerned ministries should:
 - ◆ train teachers on gender issues;
 - ◆ enact laws or policies that demand parental involvement in the education of girls and development of an enabling environment for girls in schools;
 - ◆ improve the physical structures and facilities in educational institutions by providing electricity and running water;
 - ◆ enact laws and policies that protect girls from violence in educational institutions, particularly violence from teachers and/or community members
 - ◆ provide opportunities for training and skills development for children who are out of school due to economic hardship;

- ◆ encourage girls to take up traditionally male subjects such as carpentry, masonry, mechanics and boys to take on cookery, needlework and nutrition, in order to discourage gender bias in schools;
- ◆ revise school curricula to eliminate stereotype roles of girls and boys;
- ◆ educate parents on fair practices in the home to promote equality between girls and boys in matters of nutrition, home responsibility and education;
- ◆ ratify and implement all international conventions on the rights of children and women;
- ◆ increase resources for education, which include revision of curriculum, purchase of modern equipment and access to modern technology.

SUB-THEME 4.3

SENSITIZATION AND MOBILIZATION OF THE MEDIA AND NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE PROMOTION OF CHANGE IN SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS REGARDING GENDER DISPARITIES



ISSUES ADDRESSED

How the media and new communications technology serve to promote change for social attitudes and perceptions on gender disparities.

The question of women and the media was addressed as one of the critical concerns for women at the Beijing Conference. It stated that the manner in which information on women is dealt with in the various media is a major obstacle affecting the advancement of women. In several countries the image portrayed by the press on women is negative and this has affected their roles and contributions in their communities. As the media portrays women as stereotypes, this tends to reinforce an old-fashioned image of women.

According to the Beijing Platform for Action, the reason for this situation is the fact that men dominate the media world. Women are becoming increasingly numerous in the media world but few hold any position of responsibility, which would enable them to express their viewpoints on events:

- (a) According to United Nations statistics, women in Africa, Asia and Latin America account for less than 25 per cent of the personnel in the written press, radio and television against 32 to 36 per cent in Europe;
- (b) According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) out of 200 newspapers circulating in 30 countries, only seven are headed by women. Issues relating to women only take up a quarter of television time and three quarters of the television news are presented by men.

The introduction of new information technology, has made information more than ever a counterweight that women should utilise if they want to improve their image in the press. In order to put an end to gender disparities in the media, strategies should be developed to improve the image of women, as well as promote the building of a society based on true partnership.

The new generation is crucial for the introduction of these changes because it is more receptive to change than the older generation. Furthermore the new generation has naturally questioned traditional values that are thought to be detrimental to social transformation.

Why the role of the media is important

The media to a large extent is the main mechanism for disseminating the messages that affect the perception of the public regarding men and women at all levels. It also shapes the manner in which men and women contribute to socio-economic development.

The new generation is more sensitive to the dominant cultural roles models that are disseminated through the new information technology in a fascinating manner. While stimulating their creativity and curiosity, this new information technology might lead to mere imitation and could impede critical thinking, if care is not taken.

As a result the national media have a major responsibility towards the new generation. To enable them to construct a new model of society based on gender equality and true partnership between boys and girls, the media should provide them with models that would enable them to recognise each other and react objectively. The information carried by the media should be attractive and should target pertinent issues within the social context. It should thus contribute to the dissemination of useful information on the concerns of the young generation and should be disseminated as wide as possible. The opinion of young men and women should be articulated through the press in order to take greater account of their problems to enable them to seek adequate solutions.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

the following questions were provided to guide group discussions on the above issues:

- How to make information more responsive to the development of gender equality among the younger generation in order to mobilise it to respond adequately to these specific needs in a society based on partnership and shared responsibility?
- What strategies could be developed to involve young men and young women in the production of their own messages which they could share with other young people at the national, regional and international levels?

STRATEGIC ACTIONS RECOMMENDED

In addressing the issue of sensitisation and mobilisation of the media and ICT for the promotion of change in social attitudes and perceptions regarding gender disparities, the group identified strategic action towards the following goals:

- ◆ mainstreaming gender in the media
- ◆ removing stereotyped images of women and men in the media;
- ◆ removing disparities and fostering equity;
- ◆ creating opportunities and fostering participation of women and youth;
- ◆ integrating the views and perceptions of women and youth into media programmes;
- ◆ using the media for social mobilisation on young people, promoting legislative reforms and legal sanctions.

Strategic actions

1. Women and youth should learn to work with the media and to build a sustainable relationship with it.
2. Networks should be formed to promote women and youth causes should include media professionals.
3. Youth should institute a permanent forum for consultation and dialogue with the media on relevant issues.
4. Youth should form alliances with organised media groups, including associations of women in the media.
5. Deserving media partners should be rewarded and recognized.
6. The media should be educated and sensitized about gender and youth issues.
7. Gender and youth issues should be institutionalized in the training of media professionals.
8. In-service training should be organized as an ongoing basis for media professionals.

9. The media should be supplied regularly with facts and figures that are disaggregated by gender and age.
10. There should be training for specialised journalists e.g. development journalism.
11. African regional institutions should be involved in training media communicators.

Action to make the voices of youth heard:

1. Media-relation persons (of both genders) should be appointed in organisations and coalitions.
2. Media literacy should be fostered among programme managers, coalition leaders and other spokespersons.
3. Accurate facts and figures, handy and well-packaged information, including information on the strategies and actions of the Beijing Platform for Action should be readily available.

To use entertainment for education the following actions was recommended :

1. Linking up with associations/unions of entertainers
2. Sensitising and training selected entertainers.
3. Recruiting popular and respected entertainers to work for women and youth causes.
4. Rewarding and recognising entertainers who take into consideration youth and gender issues
5. Involving youth as entertainers to advocate their cause.

With reference to the use of new information technology the following actions as recommended:

1. Encouraging women and youth to become trained, to access and be connected to the Internet.
2. Encouraging women and youth to join users' clubs.
3. Establishing youth and gender-sensitive cyber cafés in African countries

4. Creating gender awareness web-sites with appropriate links
5. Identifying and using traditional communication strategies to devise new strategies to reach the women at the grassroots level and youth
6. Establishing a gender committee to ensure equitable recruitment and assignments of tasks.
7. using modern and traditional communicating methods to change the socialisation process and as a tool to change attitudes.
8. Documenting and promoting good traditional practices.

Partnerships

Youth should forge partnerships with the following :

Private and public media including women media associations; UN agencies; NGOs; ministries of information; users' clubs; artists/entertainers and the private sector.

SUB-THEME 4.4

FORMULATION OF GENDER SENSITIVE STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THE HEALTH OF YOUTH



ISSUES ADDRESSED

The main health problems in Africa

Health and physical wellbeing are basic pre-requisites for the survival of mankind. Among the critical issues that Africa addresses today, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the reproductive health of women and young people have turned out to be the most pressing problems. Beyond the medical problems they raise, considerable socio-economic ramifications are entailed which imperil the socio-economic development of Africa.

In Africa, south of the Sahara, there exists a direct correlation between the health of women and young girls. It is difficult to draw a clear distinction between the young girls and young mother and between the young mother and adolescence, given how early in life girls are married, have their first sexual relations and become pregnant:

- ◆ by the age of 20, at least 80 per cent of the youth have become sexually active;
- ◆ in most African countries, the average age of first marriage for women ranges between 18 to 21, as compared to 21-23 years in Latin America and 22-25 years in North Africa and Asia
- ◆ nearly 15 million young girls aged between 15-19 give birth each year to a child, accounting for more than 10 per cent of births worldwide;
- ◆ illegal abortions, maternal morbidity and mortality are among the highest in the world;
- ◆ UNAIDS estimates at 15 million the number of people who are HIV-positive worldwide. Ten million of them are women of which eight million are African females aged between 15 to 24 years old, which is to say at an age when they should be socially and economically active and helping to develop the African economy.

During the past decade, World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), governmental organizations and NGOs and community associations have

made progress in securing the health of mothers and young people. But the persistence of diseases which have been eradicated elsewhere would seem to indicate that some of the strategies pursued were not suited to the genuine needs of health programme beneficiaries. Given the importance of the reproductive roles of African women and young girls, a health policy governing reproductive health and HIV/AIDS control should focus on a better integration of the gender perspective and seek to change perceptions and behaviour among men and women.

The problems of youth reproductive health persist in Africa

Many factors are responsible for the health problems of youth. Among them are:

- ◆ inadequate access to information and education;
- ◆ the low level of parental education, particularly of mothers;
- ◆ insufficient financial and economic resources for parenting;
- ◆ poor conditions in terms of malnutrition, unwholesome living conditions and lack of access to basic services; and
- ◆ certain socio-cultural practices and constraints.

Possible consequence on socio-economic development

The health among young people has a considerable impact on their socio-economic development as individuals and on the collective life of their society. The adverse consequences include:

- ◆ their inability to seize opportunities for personal improvement and thus contribute to the development of family and community life;
- ◆ increased health costs
- ◆ reduced volume and quality of the national workforce, slowing down economic growth and accelerating poverty; and
- ◆ a reduction of that population stratum that is of an age to care for children and the elderly.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The following guide questions, relating to the health of youth, were provided as a framework for group discussion:

- ◆ How can health and sanitation programmes be rendered more gender sensitive and responsive to youth in such a way as to secure equitable access to girls and boys?
- ◆ What strategies should be pursued in order to provide boys and girls with helpful information on sexuality, reproductive health and conduct so as to avoid unwanted pregnancies, develop self-esteem and build positive partnerships based on shared responsibilities?
- ◆ How can the capacity of communal structures be strengthened and the capacity of parents and educators be built to respond better to the needs of boys and girls alike?
- ◆ How can strategies be developed that would take gender relations better into account in the fight against HIV/AIDS?

STRATEGIC ACTIONS RECOMMENDED

The group formulated the following strategic actions in response to the above issues:

1. Inclusion of reproductive health services in basic primary health care services;
2. Promotion of reproductive health education and training;
3. Creation of counselling services for youth;
4. Inclusion of youth in needs assessment and in the planning of health programmes including reproductive health;
5. Creation of national, subregional, regional and international health networks for youth;
6. Access to decision-making by youth in order to ensure that their needs are taken into consideration
7. Establishment of mechanisms to mainstream gender dimension, as well as other social-related concerns such HIV/AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's), FGM and reproductive health issues in all pertinent government policies and programmes.
8. Make available to youth, displaced persons and post-conflict population, sexual and reproductive health information and services to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancies and STD's including HIV/AIDS. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) activities, social marketing, community mobilisation and specific programmes targeted to teenage mothers should also be included.

Partnership

To implement the above action youth called for partnerships between them and governments, financial institutions, the media, NGOs, ECA, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO and the World Bank.

SUB-THEME 4.5

EQUAL ACCESS FOR GIRLS AND BOYS TO INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY



ISSUED ADDRESSED

Information Technology (IT) and African girls

The 21st century will be the golden age of information and communications. It is therefore crucial for Africa to prepare for it so that the new generation will be able to compete in a world where knowledge of IT constitutes a source of capital and power. The emergence of new information technologies will revolutionize the work-place.

On the threshold of the 21st century, most African girls are excluded from this technological environment; this jeopardizes their future, limiting their social and economic advancement, as well as their contribution to national development.

Strategies therefore need to be established as a matter of urgency in order to improve girls' access to new technologies. This will enable them to secure, on an equal footing with boys, jobs related to the new sectors emerging on the labour market.

Why girls have less access to new information technologies than boys

The main constraints that prevent the access of girls to new technologies include:

- ◆ Socio-cultural obstacles: African families still tend to involve young girls from earliest childhood in household chores either to help their mothers, or as part of their upbringing as future mothers and spouses. Such upbringing, together with the passing on of values that stress submission and respect for traditions, are all constraints that do not prepare girls to pursue studies and scientific and technical careers.
- ◆ As a result, boys and girls have a very different perception of technology: girls seem less interested in machines; on the other hand, they are more interested in the services that machines can offer
- ◆ The educational system reflects that socio-cultural pattern: it still offers little encouragement of girls to go into scientific and technical fields and steers them rather towards subjects traditionally reserved for women.

- ◆ Finally, as result of the small number of women in decision-making positions in the mass media, role models are hard to find, thus making it difficult to spark girls' interest in that field.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The following guide questions were used to facilitate group discussion.

- ◆ What strategies could be developed to overcome the obstacles preventing the access of girls to new information technologies and to allay their fears in that regard, and to promote equal access to boys and girls to new information technologies?
- ◆ What strategies could be developed to involve boys and girls in the production of their own messages to be shared with other young people at the national, regional and international levels?
- ◆ How can an information strategy that projects a more realistic image of women be developed in order to encourage girls to take up journalism as a profession?
- ◆ How can the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other informal sectors be encouraged to carry out innovations in capacity building and training activities in order to increase chances to equal access to information and services, and thus promote the health, education and economic advancement of boys and girls?

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS RECOMMENDED

In addressing the question to equal access for girls and boys to information technology, the group identified the following strategic actions:

1. Establishment of media information and communication technology (ICT) clubs;
2. Awareness creation and equal access to ICT among youth;
3. Introduction of computer science in schools;
4. Sensitization of policy-makers and community leaders about the importance of ICT.

Partnerships

Participants stressed the need for forging partnership with all and agencies and organizations concerned with information technologies. Governments, UNESCO, Environment Training Programme (ENDA) and FAWE were identified as partners to promote the creation of information centres for youth.