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African Centre for Women (ACW) in collaboration with the
Government of Seychelles, UNFPA, UNDP and UNIFEM

Subregional Follow-up meeting on the
Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action-
Eastern and Southern Africa

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SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

A. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANISATION OF WORK

- 1) The Eastern and Southern Africa Subregional Follow Up Meeting on the Implementation of Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action was held in Seychelles at the Berjaya Mahe Beach Resort Hotel from 15 to 18 February 1999. It was organized by the African Centre for Women (ACW) of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the ECA Sub regional Development Centre (SRCS) of Eastern and Southern Africa in collaboration with the Government of Seychelles, UNFPA, UNDP and UNIFEM.
- 2) The meeting was attended by representatives of governments, parliamentarians and non-governmental organisations of the following countries : Angola, Burundi, Botswana, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- 3) Intergovernmental organisations in attendance included : Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Cooperation (EAC), Indian Ocean Commission (OIC), and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).
- 4) Subregional networks and regional NGOs included: FEMNET, WILDAF, FERFAP, EA-SSI, SARDC/WIDSAA and IOC.

Opening ceremony (Agenda Item 1)

- 5) The meeting was officially opened by the Vice-President of the Republic of Seychelles, Mr. James A. Michel in the presence of the First Lady of the Republic of Seychelles. Statements were made by Mr. William E. Herminie, Minister for Social Affairs and Manpower Development, Mrs. Josephine Ouédraogo, Director of the ECA African Centre for Women and Mr. Robert Okello, Acting Director of the ECA Southern African Subregional Development Centre (SRDC).
- 6) In his keynote address, Mr James A. Michel, Vice-President of the Republic of Seychelles stated that part of his country's national vision was to achieve genuine equality of the sexes. While gender equality had been enshrined in the national constitution adopted in 1993, the Seychellois had long believed that equality between the sexes was a fundamental fact of life. Notwithstanding its achievements, his Government would pursue its efforts until no barriers, cultural or psychological, stood in the way of the full development of girl-children and of the women they eventually became.

- 7) Mr. William E. Herminie exhorted the participants to pursue the task of evaluating the after-effect of the Beijing Conference from an African perspective, and in particular, in relation to the Subregions of Eastern and Southern Africa. He urged them to analyze national achievements and weakness, and see where national programme of action could be strengthened.
- 8) On behalf of the Executive Secretary of UNECA, Mrs Joséphine Ouédraogo, Director of the African Centre for Women (ACW) thanked the Government of Seychelles for having hosted the meeting. She also drew attention to the two major issues that the meeting would address : national plans of action and the adoption of monitoring indicators for a mid-term review of the Beijing Platforms.
- 9) Mr. Okello on his part informed the participants that ECA's Subregional Development Centres provided their support through the Regional Economic Communities, which were building blocks in the framework of the Abuja Treaty establishing the African Economic Community.

Presentation of agenda and programme of work. (Agenda item 2)

- 10) After a short discussion the agenda was adopted.

The post-Beijing policy environment in Eastern and Southern Africa : country presentations. (Agenda item 3)

- 11) In accordance with the agenda item, delegates from the following countries took the floor in turn to give a brief overview of the policy environment prevailing in their respective countries since Dakar and Beijing: Angola, Botswana, Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- 12) In general, it was noted that most countries had demonstrated considerable political will and commitment in creating the enabling environment to address gender/women's issues. Some countries had put in place complementary policies and legislation to enhance gender equality and mainstreaming.
- 13) On constitutional arrangements, the majority of governments in the Eastern and Southern Africa Sub-Region have established or strengthened and/or upgraded national institutional mechanisms for promoting the advancement of women.

- 14) On the issue of women in power and decision-making, there was an appreciable increase in the number of women in decision-making in some countries.
- 15) While progress has been made in the above areas, concern was expressed by countries who have been undergoing serious socio-political crisis and armed conflict which have created negative impact on the advancement of women.
- 16) Following country presentations, delegates expressed concern with regard to resource allocation, and mobilization ; coordination and monitoring of the implementation process.
- 17) Subregional and inter governmental organizations present, namely FEMNET, WILDAF, EA/SSI, SARDC, FERFAP, IOC, SARDC/WIDSAA, COMESA, EAC also made presentations in which they briefed the meeting on initiatives taken and achievements made since Beijing.

Presentation of summary reports on the implementation of national plans of action in countries of the subregions. (Agenda item 4)

- 18) An overview of the policy and institutional for gender in SADC. In the presentation, the six critical areas for regional collaboration were highlighted as:
 - Gender policy and institutional frameworks
 - Women's human rights
 - Access to economic structures and control of resources
 - Gender equality in power and decision-making
 - Promotion of peace and stability in the SADC region
 - Addressing cross-cutting issues/strategies of all the SADC member countries.
- 19) In the presentation, the challenges faced by the SADC region in implementing the regional action plan were also identified.
- 20) In conclusion, the presenter proposed the forging of concrete partnerships between SADC and other sub-regional bodies; and utilization of regional fora to establish a framework for collaboration between the various regional bodies.
- 21) The ECA Sub regional Development Centre presented a summary report on the status of implementation of the Platforms for Action, based on a questionnaire sent earlier to member States. Of the 18 countries which answered the questionnaire, 14 had already developed national action plan and four are in the process of formulating one.

- 22) Countries reported that the process had created partnerships and synergy both in the development and implementation of their national action plans. However, the general problems in implementing the national action plans included :
- Inadequate human and financial resources;
 - Negative cultural practices;
 - Societal attitudes towards gender issues
 - Lack of trained personnel in gender analysis;
 - Lack of physical facilities (communication equipment, etc)
 - Lack of commitment by some key implementers;
 - Lack of approved explicit national gender policy in many countries.
- 23) More than half of the countries reported that they had developed indicators for monitoring progress on implementation.
- 24) Out of the 18 questionnaires received, 16 countries indicated that they had no specific budgetary allocation for the implementation of the National Action Plan.
- 25) Only 8 countries reported that they had gender disaggregated data. The other countries were in the process of producing the data in collaboration with their bureaux of statistics. During the discussion, that followed ECA informed the meeting that it was not a funding institution. Instead, it was mandated to strengthen capacities in member States through:
- Technical assistance in policy formulation;
 - Establishment of partnership in certain priority areas with development partners and other stakeholders;
 - Dissemination and exchange of information;
 - Advocacy for the advancement of women.

Relationship between National Plan of Action and National Development Plans (Agenda item 5).

- 26) Under this agenda item, the relation between national development plans, national action plans and gender policies was discussed.
- 27) Delegates worked in groups to share experiences on the points of interface on the three planning tools. The salient points from the groups included the views that: priorities of the NDPs, the national gender policy and the national action plan should be interfaced in order to ensure that adequate and appropriate resources (human and financial) were forthcoming for the implementation of the

Beijing Platform for Action. There was need to engender the national constitution in order to have a strong legal framework for the implementation of the Platform for Action. The process of engendering national budgets was critical to the effective implementation of the Platform for Action.

- 28) Gender auditing should be one of the core functions of the national machinery for monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of PFA. Peace is a prerequisite to the implementation of PFA and to sustainable women's empowerment.

In this regard, it was also agreed that the challenges in ensuring an interface are:

- ensuring that gender analysis as a planning tool is fully utilized;
- ascertain that there are adequate skills and capacity for gender mainstreaming;
- ensuring a critical mass that involves all stakeholders for effective and sustainable implementation, monitoring and evaluating of PFA.

Presentation on ECA/ACW structure

- 29) A presentation on the ECA structures was made by the Director of ACW, in which the role and mandate of ECA/ACW were clarified. ECA's strategy and services, it was reported, include economic research, publications, advocacy, capacity building, advisory services, partnerships and technical advisory support in addition to strengthen ECA's supportive role. Five subregional centres have been established as follows: in Lusaka, for Southern Africa; Kigali for Eastern Africa; Yaounde for Central Africa; Niamey for Western Africa and Rabat for Northern Africa. Each subregion has a gender focal point.

The role, status and programmes of ACW were also clarified. The main mandate of the ACW include:

- Mainstreaming of gender within ECA and other institutions.
- Economic empowerment of women.
- Monitoring the implementation of the Platforms for Action.
- Dissemination of information on gender issues.
- Promoting women's human and legal rights.

Presentation of a tool for monitoring implementation

Guidelines for the preparation of country reports on progress achieved in the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action (Agenda Item 6 & 7)

- 30) Agenda Item 6, which focused on tools for monitoring the implementation of National Action Plans and agenda item 7 which focused on guidelines for preparation of country reports were combined in the presentation. The main focus was on guidelines for reporting the process of implementation of the Platforms of Action. The main issues raised during the discussion are :

- Deadlines given by ECA and DAW for submission of national reports: the DAW deadline of 30 April 1999 and ECA's of 30 July 1999 needed to be synchronized.
- The scope of the reports required by DAW which covered all the critical areas of concern while ECA/DAW required major focus on the country priorities.

After an extensive discussion, it was agreed that:

- For African States the July deadline is more realistic to give countries sufficient time to prepare the reports. ECA/ACW was requested to negotiate with DAW on this position.
- There would be only one national report which will be sent both to DAW and ECA/DAW.
- Both Platforms for Action would guide the reporting.
- There should be flexibility in reporting so that countries could include what they considered important.
- The issue of information flow should be given attention.

Follow-up to the implementation Conference on African Women and Economic Development: investing in our Future. Presentation of the various stages of preparation for the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women (mid-term review 1999). (Agenda Item 8 & 9)

- 31) The Director of the African Centre for Women briefed the meeting on the follow-up activities to the 40th Anniversary Conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 28th April to 1st May, 1998.
- 32) Participants were informed that a follow-up Expert group meeting on the Conference was held in December 1998 at ECA. The meeting reviewed and

classified the actions recommended by the Conference. The meeting also formulated a questionnaire for follow-up. The Conference outcome and the questionnaire were presented briefly to the participants.

- 33) Ms. Ouédraogo also informed the participants that the final report of the Conference was being prepared and would be circulated in April 1999.

In the discussions that followed the following points were raised:

- Delay in the production of the report.
- The flow of information with regard invitation to meetings
- The participants suggested that they take the questionnaires home and send them to ECA upon completion.

The Sixth African Regional Conference on Women

- 34) The Director of the African Centre for Women Ms. Ouédraogo described the process for the preparations of the 6th African Regional Conference (the mid-decade review 1999) which will take place in Addis Ababa in November 1999.
- 35) In order to prepare for this Conference the Centre has formed a technical committee composed of the African Centre for Women as the Secretariat, members of the Bureau of the Committee for Women in Development, nine (9) African NGOs, representatives from OAU and ADB, representatives of several UN Agencies and Gender Focal Points of the Subregional Development Centres and ECA.
- 36) One important issue that came out of the presentation was that the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women will be characterised by being "one conference" comprising representatives from governments and NGOs. This marks a major departure from previous Conferences at which NGOs had their own forum separate from government forum allows for dialogue rather than monologue.
- 37) Secondly, the African Centre for Women has undertaken to write to UN agencies, multi-lateral and bilateral donors urging them to support not only the preparations of national reports but participation of both government and NGO representatives.

Panel discussion on strategies for accelerating women's access to land (Agenda Item 10).

- 38) Three panelists presented the state of women's access to land in Africa with particular emphasis to Eastern and Southern Africa. The case of Seychelles was also focused upon. On the whole, it was agreed that there were serious constraints to women's access to land including inequitable laws, traditional practices, religious laws and gaps in national constitutions.

The discussion centred around strategies for accelerating women's access to land. It resulted in the following recommendations:

- a constitution that guarantees access and control of land by women;
- revision of and/or formulation of new laws to facilitate access and control
- formulation of national gender policies that facilitate implementation of laws in favour of women and men;
- gender analysis of economic and investment policies as well as the credit system in relation to women's access to and control of land;
- promotion of legal literacy for women;
- sensitization of policy makers and technical experts on the problem.

Presentation on AIDS and economic empowerment of women. (Agenda Item 11)

- 39) The purpose of this session was to highlight the relationship between the Beijing Platform for Action and strategies to combat AIDS, with an emphasis on the need to empower women economically and politically in order to strengthen their efforts to prevent and mitigate the pandemic. The high rate of morbidity and accelerating rate of infection and transmission of AIDS had a negative impact on economic growth and thus on the economic empowerment of women.
- 40) The AIDS pandemic has presented Africa with such new social realities as increasing number of orphan children caring for their siblings, the phenomenon of street children and impoverishment from taking care of AIDS victims and their families.

Group discussions resulted in the following recommendations to combat the problem of AIDS :

- Men must be involved in the sensitisation process and all other educational processes to ensure that they also take responsibility for the AIDS pandemic.
- Strategies towards women's economic empowerment must take into account the complete lifecycle by focusing on problem identification, implementation, evaluation and be undergirded by research in all sectors.

- Investment in education and training with emphasis on the girl-child must be increased as an approach to reducing economic vulnerability of women and girls.
 - There is need to have a clear AIDS policy and a clearly defined Plan of Action underpinned by a constitution that does not discriminate against those infected with AIDS.
 - Strong, targeted advocacy campaign was necessary as a strategy to combat AIDS.
- 41) It was observed that main women organisations often excluded a focus on HIV/AIDS due to a stigma, limited resources and the lack of adequate awareness about the consequences of AIDS. Cultural and religious barriers also posed serious constraints to effective work on AIDS.
- 42) In conclusion, it was agreed that AIDS work should be treated as a cross cutting issue in all sectorial activities.

Women's National Walk: Communication and mobilization (Agenda Item 12)

- 43) Under this agenda item, participants were informed about the Millennium International Walk, a new initiative to demonstrate solidarity for world peace and elimination of poverty. Groups of women and men NGOs and the civil society are supposed to organize a march at the national level which is supposed to terminate by 17 October 2000. The march with banners and messages should culminate with an International Walk in New York in the year 2000.
- 44) Participants were urged to encourage women to take the lead in this march.