



Sixth African Regional Conference on Women
*Mid-Decade Review of the Implementation of the
Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action*

22-26 October 1999
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Women, communication,
information and arts**

SUMMARY

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United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

**Economic Commission for Africa
Commission économique pour l'Afrique**



**Sixth African Regional Conference On Women
Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of
the Dakar and Beijing Platforms For Action**

Summary: Preliminary Assessment Report
ECA/ACW/RC.VI/99/7K

WOMEN, INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION AND ARTS

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Critical Areas : Women, Information, Communication and Arts

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I. Introduction

Since the Proclamation of 1975 as the International Women's Year and the subsequent declaration of the period 1976-1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women, the issue of women has grown in magnitude. A review of activities conducted during the Decade shows a very positive change in the approach to the issue. Increasingly, it is being recognized that the problems of equality and development facing women are the result of an unequal balance of power and authority between men and women. The specific cultural, socio-economic and political realities peculiar to each subregion most often tend to accentuate or to sublimate the situation as the case may be. The new concept of gender whereby culture determines the position, roles and responsibilities of men and women has helped to reveal the origin of received ideas, stereotypes and prejudices propagated by the media and other vehicles.

The fifth Africa Regional Conference on Women held in Dakar and the regional platform for action which came out of it constituted a historical event in the active mobilization of the continent to participate in the Beijing World Conference on Women. Similarly, the participation of Africa in the World Summit went to show the importance it attached to the new economic and social exigencies thrust upon it and which it would have to address if it wanted to develop.

Like the Dakar Platform for Action, the Beijing Platform identifies 12 critical areas of concern and states that a review of the progress achieved since the Nairobi Conference has revealed particularly serious problems in priority areas where urgent action should be taken. All development partners should focus their activities and resources on the strategic objectives in these critical areas which are necessarily interrelated and interdependent. They must create and use mechanisms to monitor what will have been done in each of the critical areas.

To that end, governments, the international community and civil society, including private sector NGOs are called upon to take strategic action in the following areas:

- The persistence of poverty which was increasingly afflicting women;
- Unequal access to education and training and the disparities and deficiencies in this regard;
- Unequal access to healthcare and health services and the disparities and deficiencies in this regard;
- Violence against women;
- Effects of armed conflict on women, particularly those living under foreign occupation;
- Inequality where economic structures and policies are concerned, in terms of production activities and access to resources;
- Unequal sharing of power and decision-making responsibilities at all levels;

- Deficiencies in machinery for the advancement of women;
- Non-respect for the fundamental rights of women and deficiencies in promoting and safeguarding such rights;
- Gender stereotyping and unequal opportunity to participate in communication systems, particularly the media;
- Gender disparities in the management of natural resources and environmental protection; and
- Persistent discrimination against the girl-child and violation of her fundamental rights.

Because these strategic areas requiring action are closely inter-linked, the importance of information and communication, not only as a specific priority area but also as a cross-cutting vehicle that can be used to link all the other critical areas interactively can not be overemphasized.

The Toronto Symposium (February 1995)

Shortly before the Beijing World Conference, UNESCO organized an international forum on women entitled "Access to Expression and Decision". The participants, comprising information professionals, researchers and representatives of various international and non-governmental organizations discussed the importance of the media as a means of access to knowledge, rights, expression and decision-making. This aspect was illustrated with some successful information strategies which had involved women not only as target groups but also as actors in the development process. The symposium successfully focussed on the priority team "remover of stereotypes in the media", and emphasized as the part of the Platform the urgent need to counter the demeaning images and treatment of women in the media.

This Platform identified, in the information progress made, numerous ways of networking to influence the behaviour of individuals, beyond all other forces. It was an opportunity for the communication and media institutions to participate in a special form of promoting the role of women in development on an equal footing and with respect for their rights. The Platform undertook to consolidate this new approach which empowers the media to give more value to the role and image of women by adopting the important objectives which denote a commonality of spirit and approaches to the Dakar and Beijing Platforms.

To adopt positive programmes of action in favour of gender equality, in particularly "equal labour, equal salary", equal access to education, fixing of deadlines for attaining gender parity in decision-making positions and finally combating sexual harassment so as to enable women to prove their potential as media professionals.

To recognize women's authority as information sources, specialists, people with creative ideas and consequently acknowledging their ability as opinion leaders on any topical subject rather than confining them to the role of mere commentators on matters concerning women.

To recognize the importance of global networks of media women who provide to the media itself news on their activities and interests as well as people who use alternative media circuits to get into contact with women's groups and to disseminate information to assist and support such groups.

To include professional media women in committees for the self-management of the media sector and in other executive committees responsible for deciding the direction of programmes, the budget, contracts and personnel matters.

To encourage employers in the media sector to specify in their vacancy announcements and staff rules whether they are equal opportunity employers.

The Toronto Symposium also maps out the action programme to be carried out in order to achieve the set objectives. This action centres on two key aspects: sensitization and training.

II. Objectives Pursued and Planned Measures

Advances in information technology and telecommunications as well as in information have continued to broaden access to information and open up new possibilities for women's participation in the communication world and indissemminating more information on them. However, communications networks are also being used to spread stereotyped images of women for commercial purposes.

The Dakar and Beijing Platforms both state that for as long as women do not participate on an equal footing in technical activities and in decision making relating to communications, the media and arts, they will continue to be given a false image and the reality of their lives will continue to be disregarded. The media could play a major role in promoting women by giving men and women a non-stereotyped, diversified and balanced image and by respecting the dignity and value of the human person.

The specific objective of the world platform is dual, namely:

- To facilitate women's access to information and the media on an equal footing with men; and
- To eliminate gender stereotyping through media surveys and campaigns.

Both platforms recommended several measures for achieving these objectives, particularly:

- Adoption by governments of programmes involving gender sensitization in all training establishments and other organizations linked to the media, specifically for media men and women;
- Drawing up of specific media policies in favour of women;
- Finding the necessary funds for training women in such areas as journalism, film production, videos and specialized areas like the sciences, technology, the environment, economics, politics and related problems;
- Sensitizing media officials and practitioners to the need for increased coverage of women's activities;
- Establishing media monitoring systems to ensure that the images portrayed by them about women are more positive, and holding these media responsible for any propagation of negative stereotypes or exploitation of women and girls for pornographic purposes;

- Promoting and strengthening alternative forms of communication (storytelling, theatre) particularly in the rural areas;
- Conducting studies and collecting necessary documentation on gender and the media, as well as culture; and
- Revising communication policies, ensuring their gender sensitivity, respect for democracy and freedom of expression for all members of the society.

III. The Problems

A. Distorting images in the (male-dominated) media

The science and technology revolution has increasingly enabled the media and other means of communication to increase their scope and power, thus making the world a global village, with almost no secrets. This could also be used to give more scope and content to advocacy by and on women in order to promote their rights and status provided these media are used properly. Also, both the Dakar and the Beijing Platforms cite the media treatment of information on women as one of the 12 critical problems which constitute an obstacle to the advancement of women.

The image that they convey about women are only limited to stereotypes and long-standing prejudices. Item 10 on the media in fact states that the media still protect a deformed image of women, their roles and their contributions to the community and to their country. Since they concentrate on using stereotypes, they tend to strengthen an outdated image of women.

1. The gender gap obstructs the development of balanced views

- According to United Nations statistics, women in Africa, Asia and Latin America account for 25 per cent of the print, radio and television media personnel, as against 30-36 per cent in Europe.
- A study conducted by UNESCO in 1995 (*L'emploi des femmes dans les medias: une histoire inachevee, Paris, UNESCO, 1995* – Margaret Gallagher) stated that out of the 200 media institutions in 30 countries only seven are headed by women, only one quarter of the televised media deal with women's affairs, while three quarters of these media programmes are presented by men.
- The same study by UNESCO shows that feminization of the media does not really imply a real advancement of women at the decision-making level. Out of the 239 organizations observed, only eight (small or periodic radio stations with low coverage) mainly in Latin America are headed by women, that is only three per cent of the cases surveyed in Africa (four per cent in Europe and one per cent in Africa).
- A survey conducted in 1995 in 43 countries put the average of women in the various media at 25 per cent – 30 per cent in Africa. In Tunisia, for example, it was 22 per cent (1994 figures) but increased to 25 per cent in 1998.
- Women have continued in the minority in terms of decision-making concerning media management and programming. They only hold 12 per cent of the positions in the management boards of radio and television media enterprises, and nine per cent in those of the print media.

- In more than 83 countries, women represent at least half of the students of schools of journalism and communication, but even with equal qualifications, women have smaller chances of finding jobs in the media than men. Thus, in these countries, women actually hold only 26 per cent of the permanent full time jobs, as against 79 per cent of permanent part time jobs and 44 per cent of temporary jobs. Yet, women are often absent from circles of owners of media and communications organizations, for they are completely in the minority in the structures and positions where all forms of information are developed and established. Although the administration absorbs most of the women, the technical activities of the information world as well as its development, establishment and management are still dominated by men. Consequently, women are often the passive consumers of information produced by men, and they control only very little of its content and impact.

This situation has started to change, but only on a small scale, because women are now aware of the need for them to produce an alternative information that is concerned with their gender matters and peculiarities. In various parts of the world, women's networks have launched women's radios, community radios and other support mechanisms to express and disseminate their difference.

2. A still more painful gap in Africa

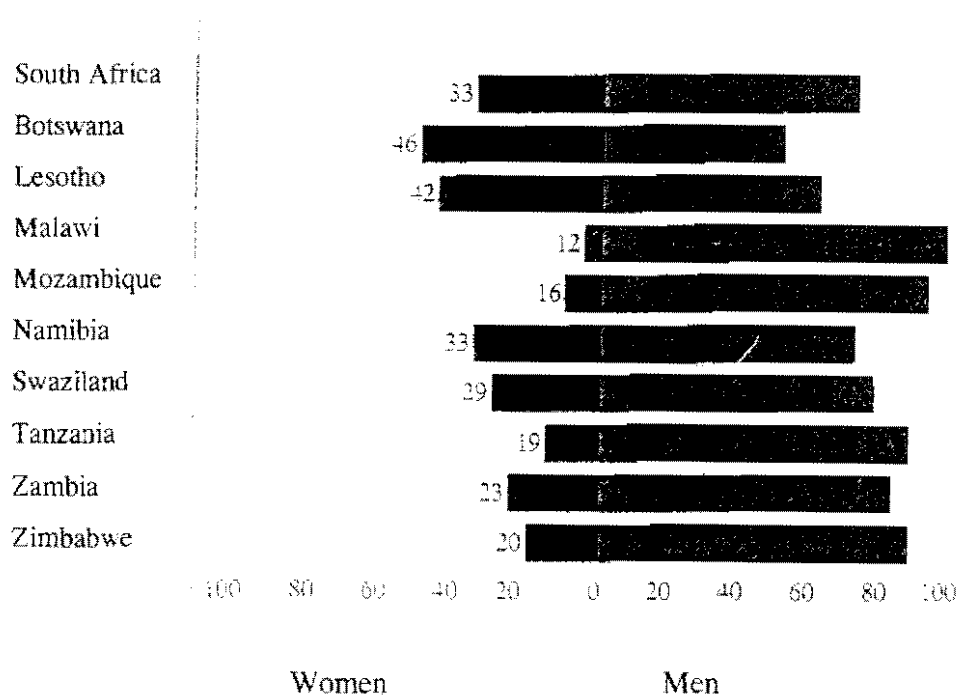
One of the paradoxes of the life of African women is that they have established their aspirations to equality and to the rights using the communication media. However, more than 20 years after their emergence as a real political movement in 1975, African women are still not in control of information and communication and are not even considered full partners in this arena. In terms of employment in the media, for example, women are still far from being at par with men.

The same is the case with programming, management and general control not only of the media but also in other fields of communication and arts.

The problem is not only one of figures, for beyond statistics which is only the tip of the iceberg, there is also, *inter alia*, the problem of tradition, jealously guarded cultural norms and economic models that are not gender sensitive.

Percentage of women and men in the media (1990-1995)

Southern Africa



Source: World Communication Report on the Media and the New Technological Challenges, UNESCO - 1997.

Women's employment in the media

Country	Category	Total No. of Women	Percentage of women	Year
Ghana 2 dailies Ghana News Agency (GNA)	Journalists	107/24	22.4	1989
	Journalists	130/21	16.1	
Kenya 3 dailies	Journalists	250/25	10.0	1992
Nigeria Federal Radio News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)	Training of Journalists	Not available	35.0	1989
			6.3	1989
Senegal <i>Ens. Radio TV.</i> Print Media	Journalists	300/30	10.0	1990
Togo Radio Togo TV. Togo <i>Ag. Tog de Presse</i>	Permanent	49/27	10.8	1986
	Permanent	142/23	16.2	1986
	Permanent	124/41	33.1	1986
Tunisia Radio TV. Print Media <i>Et Ag. TN de Presse</i> (TAP)	Journalists	Not available	22.0	1993

Source: Survey conducted by UNESCO on women's employment in the media and an uncompleted history. Paris, 1995.

B. Using the information and technology (ICT) for the overall development of Africa

According to the World Communication Report published by UNESCO in 1997, development of the information society raises the problem of imbalance between the industrialized and poor countries. The debate sparked off by UNESCO on "the new world information order" exposed the serious disparities that have continued to mark the field of information and the relevant new technologies.

The report states that the wide disparity is most striking for Africa which has only one per cent of the world telephone lines for its 12 per cent of the world's population. In 1994, there were more telephone lines in Tokyo than in the whole of Africa whose population is 30 times more than that of the Japanese capital. In 1995, the continent had one telephone line per 100 inhabitants.

Disparities within Africa : In just 10 years, the number of telephone lines per 100 inhabitants – the tele-density – doubled in the Maghreb. In South Africa, it rose by 2 per cent; but in sub-Saharan Africa the tele-density stagnated.

These disparities also exist in terms of audiovisual equipment, programme production and content. Only four out of 100 Africans have a TV set (that is 14.2 per cent of households, whereas in Asia the ratio is 55.3 per cent of households).

Currently, Africa remains "info poor". In terms of unequal access to ICT within a country which could indeed be caused mainly by economic disparities, there is also worse coming from cultural and geographical disparities as well as differences in gender perception which all combine to hamper genuine efforts to develop the continent.

2. Using ICTs to promote African women: Today, promoting women's contribution as an inseparable part of the overall development process should also find in the development of the media a worthy ally which needs to be put to optimum use. Yet, in Africa, women's control of information and communication remains a mirage considering the high rate of illiteracy still prevailing in the continent.

There are still more illiterate women than their men counterparts in Africa – 63.9 per cent in 1995.

- The rate of primary school attendance is 58 per cent for girls and 73 per cent for boys. According to the UNDP Human Development Report (1996), sub-Saharan Africa (140.5 million inhabitants) has 38 per cent illiterate men and 62 per cent illiterate women. The region had the lowest rate of primary school attendance – only 20.3 per cent for girls as against 25.9 per cent for boys.

Comparative table of illiteracy rates between males and females aged over 15 years (1995)

Subregion/Country	Male population (%)	Female population (%)
North Africa		
Tunisia	21.4	45.4
Egypt	36.4	61.2
East Africa		
Kenya	13.7	30.0
Uganda	26.3	49.8
West Africa		
Togo	33.0	63.0
Central Africa		
Cameroon	25.0	47.9
Chad	37.9	65.3
Southern Africa		
South Africa	18.1	18.3
Zimbabwe	20.1	9.6

Source: Statistical Yearbook 1998 - UNESCO

IV. Follow up Mechanism within the United Nations System

The specialized agencies of the United Nations spend almost 20 per cent of their budget on information dissemination and the use of various forms of electronic communication.

The Division for the Advancement of Women which is part of the United Nations Secretariat, coordinates the implementation of the World Platform for the period 1996-2000. This Division set up the Inter-Agency Committee on Gender and Development comprising the representatives of all the units responsible for women/gender and development matters in all the United Nations agencies.

In October, 1998, the Division sent a questionnaire to governments aimed at collecting information on progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has successfully strengthened its operational activities in implementing the world Platform, through its structural reform. UNIFEM devotes part of its activities to developing mechanisms for disseminating information on women-related activities to the media, partners and political leaders, the website "women watch" is one of its instruments for accessing United Nations information on women's' empowerment and on gender issues.

The United Nations International Institute for Training Research and the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) was established in 1975 on the recommendation of the first World Conference on Women. It develops training methodologies and approaches to various issues, including women's image/participation in the media and parallel information mechanisms.

UNDP has played a very active role in the adoption of national plans for following up on the Beijing Platform, particularly on the African continent. UNDP has devoted 20 per cent of its resources to the promotion of women's advancement and has integrated the gender dimension into all its programmes.

- UNICEF advocates the review of national legislation in African countries. It has financed a large part of the project of translating the world Platform into African national languages.
- The World Bank has integrated the issue of gender parity into the network for poverty alleviation and established women's banks and a wide range of loan activities for women. It is also making efforts to consolidate its partnership with women's groups and NGOs. It focuses its interest particularly on Africa and South-East Asia.

V. Follow-up at the African Level

The African Platform was entrusted the joint OAU/ECA/ADB secretariat with the follow-up. Each of these three institutions has been given a specific mandate in this regard, and one of the terms of reference of the ECA is to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations of the World Platform and to assist with the implementation exercise at the African level.

1. Subregional meetings

During the past three years, the African Centre for Women has organized subregional meetings within the framework of its mandate to follow up on and support states in the implementation of their national plans of action.

On the basis of the problems raised and the ideas which emerged from the discussions, the subregional meetings made a series of recommendations.

To make optimum use of subregional and regional institutions and revitalize cooperation among NGOs, governments and the private sector.

To strengthen information exchange on women among subregions and at the regional level and set up mechanisms to facilitate women's access to modern communication services.

2. Other regional meetings

Other meetings were held on the follow-up of the Beijing Platform and the implementation of the strategic objectives. They include:

The ECA Conference of Ministers held in 1996 which adopted the African Information Society Initiative (AISII) to bring the continent up to date and integrate it into the era of communication for development;

(a) The Second Global Women's Entrepreneurship Forum and Trade Fair (Addis Ababa, 1998);

(b) The International Conference organized to commemorate the Fortieth Anniversary of the Economic Commission for Africa (Addis Ababa, 24 April 1998); and

(c) Ministerial meeting of the Committee on Women and Development (Ouagadougou, April 1999).

Each of these meetings demanded action to strengthen the power and capacity of women by improving the socio-cultural environment around them and by allocating more funds to women - focused activities in all development sectors. However, these meetings did not emphasize information as a priority for development as recommended by the Platforms for actions. The only one that did was the ECA International Conference on "African Women and Economic Development"

The Conference also adopted "**African women and the information age**" as one of its themes and consequently underlined the role of ICT as an instrument of education and democratization which must be used for and by women to improve their condition, increase their autonomy and effectively strengthen their participation in all development efforts.

The workshop specially dedicated to this theme studied four important aspects requiring a prompt and concerted intervention strategy, namely:

- Integration of the gender approach in ICT policies;
- Setting up of information centres for women;
- Using ICT to promote democracy; and
- The impact of ICT on women's activities.

VI. Synthesis of the Progress Achieved

Five years after the Beijing summit on women, it can be said that some changes have started place - though slowly - in the way women's issues are perceived . The gender issue which should underlie every approach to redefine the role of women in the development process seems to be gaining ground.

This is at least true of one of the priority areas defined by the Beijing Platform: "Women, Communication, Information and Arts". In fact, the research conducted on this subject points out that at the continental level many experiments of this have been successfully made and need to be strengthened and widely disseminated. As it is difficult to list them all, we will cite those we consider to be most significant by virtue of their originality and impact.

A. Support from the international community

1. UNESCO: This Organization distinguished itself by its huge arsenal of programmes and projects covering the entire Africa. UNESCO embarked on 10 projects covering five of the 10 critical areas identified by the Platform including women's access to the media. For its triennial plan (1995-1997), UNESCO decided to concentrate actions on the ground, giving particular attention to the following priority areas:

- Development of a women's network (wommed) established in Beijing in 1995;
- Development of activities for training and for using community media and new technologies in favour of women.
- Through close cooperation with ECA, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the Canadian Research Center for International Development (IDRC), the African Networking Initiative (ANI) was established in 1995, followed by the launching of the AISI in 1996 with the assistance of other United Nations institutions.
- ♦ Women's Radio has become a reality made possible by radio production work-shops dedicated to women's training problems and needs. In Cape Verde, Cameroon and Malawi, several rural radio stations run by women for women have been established. They broadcast advice on health, child education, vocational/professional training opportunities and employment, women's role in local development initiatives particularly in the agricultural and other sectors.
- ♦ Also, under UNESCO's auspices, the Net (won) Women's project was launched. It comprises 40 women's groups communicating on the Web and working mainly with the local people. In Senegal, for example, Won recently set up a programme on electronic communication for women, aimed at promoting this medium for field activities carried out by women's groups in Francophone Africa.
- ♦ In partnership with the African Institute for Democracy, UNESCO organized a regional seminar on women and the media in Dakar, in March 1997, in which 12 Francophone African countries participated. Establishment of a regional media centre for women and a Pan-African radio for women as well as development of communication (APAC, UPAFI, FEMMED-WOMMED WAMNET) are some of the key recommendations of the Seminar.

2. **The Francophone Agency** – with the creation of the Francophone Information Highway Development Fund, in June 1998, several projects have been approved, including that on the site developed by the NGO Environnement et developpment du tiers-monde (ENDA) based in Senegal. This site links various African information highways to women and offers training on electronic communication techniques to Africans.

UNDP's Regional Office for Africa has prepared a multi-disciplinary gender programme based on the Dakar and Beijing Platforms. It has three main components: (1) women and leadership, (2) economic empowerment of women and; (3) information and communication strategy. This media strategy is aimed at setting up women's networks, strengthening a South-South transfer of new information technologies and disseminating best practices and lessons learnt through the media.

Inter Press Global News Agency (IPS):. Drawing on the Toronto and Beijing Platforms, IPS has further strengthened its South-oriented vocation by adopting an employment policy and an editorial view based on the gender perspective; and prioritizing women as sources of information. In South Africa, for example, the African Bureau of IPS based in Harare, Zimbabwe, organized a workshop on gender, media and policy in 1996. Various training programmes have been organized for male and female journalists on various themes, including discrimination against women and education for the girl-child.

B. Special regional initiatives

B.1 Networking and electronic networks

For some years now, Africa has gone on-line and is increasingly adapting itself to the networking culture, with the help of private, government and international initiatives. Consequently, scores of electronic networks have sprung up including African women 1996, Femme Afrique – Info, GAIN electronic Network on gender and the Women's Net in South Africa, among others.

B.1.1 – ENDA-Tiers-monde: which was launched with the team Synergie Genre et Developpement (SYNFEV), the "communication for women" programme arrived at increasing the advantage of Francophone African women. It was organized collectively by NGOs and associations on the new opportunities for action offered by electronic communication. ENDA has therefore focused its action on organizing an electronic network to connect women NGOs and to train representatives of women's organizations of Francophone Africa actively involved in matters of women's rights and reproductive health (Dakar 1996). ENDA-SYNFEV has proceeded with its technical assistance mission in four West African countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire) and Cameroon. In 1998, it contributed to many regional meetings on women and communications, including the ECA Conference on "Investing in our Future" Global Connectivity for Africa (Addis Ababa, June 1998) and Networking for Gender Justice (Cape Town, November 1998). It also successfully organized one of its planned demonstrative shows: the training workshop on organization of and participation in electronic solidarity campaigns. This is an evolving site aimed at assisting African women to use the Internet to promote and defend human rights.

B.1.2 -The Association for Progress in Communications (APC). This women's programme plays a decisive role in facilitating networking and information exchange on the World Conference on Women. In 1997, the programme launched an electronic network for coordination and work programmes. The aim of the African women engaged in this programme is less to expand than to bring together an active core of women engaged in the promotion and use of the electronic tool. These women act in their communities and in a network using communication technology as their main tool.

The impact of this programme has been very great in Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Morocco, Senegal, Ghana, Zambia, South Africa and Mozambique.

B.1.3.-FEMNET (Network of African Women for Development and Communication has prepared a questionnaire on the relevance of its priority programmes and the evaluation of its publications and activities. The network has further tried to make up for the lack of information in Africa by publishing a directory of providers of information for sustainable development in Africa.

B.2. Opening of the African Women's Media Centre (AWMC) : the Centre which was established in Dakar in 1997 aims at providing Africans working with the media with more training and professional advancement opportunities.

B.3.- ECA harnesses information technology for development: Determined to tilt the balance of progress in favour of Africa mainly through a new information strategy, ECA took the initiative to establish the Development Information Services Division (DISD) in 1996 to be exclusively responsible for development information. Through this Division, ECA successfully embarked on an ambitious programme aimed at promoting the use of communication networks and new information technologies to compile and disseminate statistical and geographical data for sustainable development. Following the recommendation of the ECA Conference on "African Women and Economic Development" (April 1998), the above-mentioned Division formed a Task Force on Gender-Disaggregated Data (GDD).

B.4.- African Centre for Women (ACW): One of ACW's priority themes identified in the ECA strategy is information for women's promotion to which the Centre has devoted various activities, as follows:

- Launching of a compendium of best practices with the help of the World Bank, to be used to document successive initiatives taken in various areas, including information and ICT for promoting the status and rights of women in Africa;
- Publication of national brochures on the status of women in Africa (1998), culminating in the production of a CD-Rom;
- Proposed establishment of subregional business centres for women entrepreneurs. Nationally, they will be considered as centres for promoting budding enterprises and for information exchange on markets and investment opportunities for women.

C. Impact and limits of the progress achieved

The above-mentioned initiatives - be they international, regional or subregional - all reflect the dynamics inspired and strengthened by the Dakar and Beijing platforms.

Most of these initiatives are relatively recent and therefore their longer-term impact can not be determined, but the following analysis can be made right away:

1. The involvement of women in the information and communication world in Africa has been undeniably effective since the World Conference on Women. African women - particularly in Anglophone African countries - have realized the importance, stakes, and the opportunities offered by the new information technologies, and the need to use these opportunities to serve their interests; and

2. International organizations have initiated a new phase of their information strategy by integrating women into their assistance and training programmes using the gender approach. By so doing, they respect the spirit of the Beijing Conference and honour their commitments to the priority area of women and communication. However, these organizations scarcely evaluate the follow-up to the platforms. **In this connection, it would be useful to point to the questionnaire submitted to governments by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) of the United Nations and the sixth African Conference on Women for a mid-term assessment of the Beijing Platform.**

3. International and regional NGOs have begun to play an increasingly more dynamic role and are currently on the ground, as they are more attached to the realities of target groups, particularly women in rural areas. The evaluation of their actions seems to be the missing link; but an NGO like ENDA has made up for this by carrying out a general evaluation of the first phase of its "Communication for Women" (1997) programme. This concentrated on access to ICT, training and use. This has been used to reform the programme and to establish new activities to back up the actions already developed.

4. It is evident that these NGOs and international networks have devised new and catalytic approaches, especially with regard to the use of communication modes by women to promote their condition in their communities. It is, however, important to note that these NGOs and networks are not working well enough with the African regional structures already in place which they could indeed help to come together and expand. It should also be noted that efforts are directed more to the use of ICT than to encouraging the traditional modes of communication.

5. The experience of the community radio set up in Zimbabwe and the moral radios run by and for women in such countries as Cape Verde, Cameroon and Malawi are appropriate and successful initiatives which the international network needs to further encourage. For example, the world Association of women community radio broadcasters (AMARC) could sponsor similar initiatives by using African structures and skills already in place.

VII. Progress at the Country Level

With regard to progress achieved, it should be stated, first of all, that most African countries have successfully prepared their NPAs in accordance with the Beijing recommendations (45 out of the 51 countries that attended the World Conference). However, fewer countries have opted for the integration of the "women and the media" aspect as a full-fledged priority area in the strategy developed for women's advancement. A second category of countries chose to incorporate it in other priority areas, considering that the importance of the role of information/communication makes it a cross-cutting theme that could be used to back up action in the other priority areas identified. Tunisia and Mali, for example, have integrated this theme into the priority area of promoting women's rights. A third category of countries preferred to withdraw it from among the priority areas of their national plans of action. -These are in the majority.

Varying degrees of progress has been achieved by the subregional and countries in the priority areas reviewed in this summary. The themes selected for the sample survey are as follows:

- (1) Women-and-the-media machinery and priorities;
- (2) Media outreach on the Beijing Platform;

- (3) Training for media professionals;
- (4) Equal employment in the information sector;
- (5) The media and violence against women;
- (6) Women's rights watch and research centers;
- (7) Women's NGOs and the media;
- (8) Women's world of Art;
- (9) Creation of new information and communication structures.

Sampling of National Action

Sampling	Countries
1. Machinery and priorities	Created or strengthened in all subregions
2. Media Outreach	Algeria, Burkina Faso, Tunisia, Mali, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Namibia, Burundi
3. Training for Media Professionals	Senegal, Namibia, Nigeria, Swaziland, Guinea, Rwanda, Seychelles, Togo.
4. Equal Employment in the Informal Sector	Angola, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Guinea, Rwanda, Seychelles, Togo.
5. Media and Violence against Women	Ethiopia, Ghana, Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Mali, South Africa.
6. Women's Rights Watch and Research Century	Cameroon, Senegal, Tunisia, Togo, Burundi, Algeria, Angola, Ethiopia.
7. Women's NGOs and the Media	Tunisia, Cameroon, Morocco, Rwanda, Angola, Swaziland, Ghana, Seychelles, South Africa.
8. Women's World of Art and Culture.	Mali, Tunisia, Madagascar, Rwanda, Guinea, Senegal, South Africa.
9. Creation of new information and communications structures.	Algeria, Angola, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Togo, Tunisia, Zimbabwe.

The review of progress with regard to this specific area in this brief summary may be far from comprehensive but it helps to give some idea of the major directions and as a point for inference.

1. Over the past five years, the attitude of the official media to women (whether in terms of their approach to addressing women's issues or their recruitment policies) has begun to change slightly for the better in some countries and subregions. This change has remained piecemeal, irregular and uneven.

2. Most of the national evaluation reports recognize the lack of government policy commitment to promoting the image of women in the media not only as an issue to be addressed but also as partners who must take active part in the world of information. The stereotyping of women in the media can compromise the efforts being made by other sectors to promote women's rights. The

clichés projected about rural women in particular perpetuate the negative and degrading image of African women in general.

3. On the other hand, the slow pace at which women are securing positions in the profession combines with the lack of commitment by some women themselves to influence the content of programmes disseminated by the various media. This leads us to think that the importance that the official media attach to the issue of women is not one of a genuine policy or properly defined strategy but rather a matter of improvisation which occurs occasionally, if not as an after-thought.

4. Despite the objective limitations of time, document availability and activities surveyed, it has been easy to compare the activities conducted by regional and international organizations (United Nations agencies, NGOs, women's networks and associations) and those undertaken by governments and the official media. It would appear that the progress be made in the priority area of **women, the media, communication and art** is taking place on two tracks. Most governments seem to be far from having achieved cruising speed in the pursuit of the set objectives. Obviously, some of the encouraging advances might boost the critical mass of what has been achieved today in the area of harnessing information for development and for the advancement of women.

5. Women's information has come into its own as a point of reference but the positive achievement remain isolated not to mention the slow pace at which the various governments in Africa are taking action.

The question which arises is how to overcome the inertia and what means could be used to create genuine synergy between government action and the initiatives taken by national, regional and international structures working in the specific areas of the media and information.

It would be inaccurate and even unfair to think that governments are slow to take action about the issue of women because they do not care or are not serious in honoring commitments at a time when the entire international community recognizes that development is a cross-cutting issue which must necessarily main stream women with all their gender specificity as development actors on an equal footing with men. Is the issue one of resources or one of ill-defined policy options?

6. Among the countries which had considered this as one of their priority areas of concern, only Senegal and Tunisia mention budget appropriations. This leads to the thought that the lack of financial and human resources, the urgency of action required in areas accorded higher priority (poverty reduction, education and health access or violence against women) may be among the reasons why government action in this priority area lacks vigor and regularity.

Others might read this attitude as passing the buck to NGO and civil society organizations, which, admittedly, have greater latitude and resources for action in the field. Civil society however, can in no way replace governments which must provide them with guidance and monitor their activities in line with a carefully crafted strategy.

VIII. Persistence of the Post-Beijing Aftermath in spite of a Troubled Regional Context

Over the past five years, Africa has experienced and is still experiencing contradictory occurrences, sometimes positive, with the beginning of democratization in places; and sometimes, bloody and tragic. In fact, no subregion of the continent is free from tension capable of degenerating, in some cases, into an endemic conflict with devastating consequences:

- (a) North Africa, there is concern about the Sudan, which has tensions in the North and South;
- (b) East Africa, the region has three conflicts to contend with Somalia, Burundi and Rwanda;
- (c) Southern Africa, too has conflict - ridden areas, in Angola and Mozambique;
- (d) West Africa, has had to grapple with enduring turmoil in Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The ongoing conflicts in Congo-Brazzaville and the Democratic Republic of Congo represent yet another major challenge for the Central African subregion.

7. Africa is having a honeymoon with the ascendancy of ICTs but not enough consideration is given to the traditional methods of story telling and drama which, if rehabilitated, could compensate for the fact that not all regions and groups of women in need can be covered (by ICTs among other things) for lack of basic infrastructure, training or because of pervasive illiteracy. Mention should be made here of the initiative launched in Guinea to create a network of traditional communicators (griottes, genealogists, story-tellers, go-betweens and religious leaders) and to organize a seminar with the so-called modern communicators of the written and audiovisual media. This kind of initiative is a pragmatic approach that could usefully be developed as an alternative means of communication to be used in women's advocacy.

8. The activities conducted by various regional and international organizations, NGOs, women's networks and associations to promote the status and image of women in Africa by means of ICTs appear to be somewhat isolated from the official media. Indeed, being often under State control, the official media are not as equal or thorough in their pursuit of the Beijing Platform objectives relating to women and information. Nor have we found any indication to show that the official media support these initiatives by reproducing them in their own specific way.

9. The initiatives considered for the purposes of this review show that women in the private sector are not interested in the media or in new information technologies. Neither do they invest in them nor use them to broaden the basis of their partnership with other parties which have already invested in the media and new information technologies. And yet, women cannot aspire to any degree of parity, let alone gain any ascendancy over men in employment, management or decision making in the strategic area of information and communication if they do not associate political clout with financial power. Only Madagascar has set the goal of encouraging women in business to invest in the media and produce radio and television programmes that commend the enterprising spirit of Malagasy women.

The proposed creation of subregional business centres for African women entrepreneurs provides an opportunity that must be seized to make such centres a forum where the prospects of women investing in the media could be considered.

IX. General Conclusions

Today, African women cannot afford to be marginalized or relegated to second place in the development process.

Media professionals should intensify their involvement in the activities conducted by women and other associations if the new African information order is to reflect the specific needs of African women in a world becoming increasingly aware of the importance of the gender dimension as a prerequisite for development and equity.

The image of women in the media has yet to match the seriousness with which Africa has pursued development objectives. While ambitious and commendable initiatives are being taken in countries and subregions, they have been scattered, isolated and little publicized.

ACW could play a lead and federative role by facilitating the establishment of an African observatory to monitor the issue of women in the media.

The observatory would assume responsibility for reporting periodically on the situation, highlighting best practices in the processing of information on women (using an approach which neither devalues nor reduces their role) and assess the progress being made to pursue a strategy which fully integrates the concept of gender. By working with existing national observatories and the African Center for Women and Media, ACW would become a powerful supporting link and an advocacy instrument for women's organization working with the media. It would also help pressure groups like women parliamentarians in their activities to promote women's rights and in their role within the general development process in Africa.