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**PREPARATORY ACTIVITIES OF THE  
FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN:  
PROGRESS REPORT**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This progress report reviews the preparatory activities that are being undertaken by ECA in preparations for the Regional and World Conferences on Women to be held in Dakar, Senegal, from 16 to 23 November 1994 and Beijing, China, from 4 to 15 September 1995 respectively. ECA has prepared and disseminated packaged information on preparatory activities to be carried out at the national level. These preparatory activities include, among others, preparing a regional conference which will serve as a regional preparatory conference to the World Conference on Women and monitoring and assisting member States in the preparation of their national reports.

In addition to the activities being undertaken, the report also highlights some of the constraints being experienced by ECA in the preparation of national reports. Many member States have not yet established national coordinating committees nor national focal points for the preparation of national status reports regarding the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. Moreover, ECA is experiencing difficulties in getting information from member States, preparations at the national level are still at the conceptual stage, outreach and publicity activities are so far very limited and slow.

As the regional structure within the United Nations assigned responsibility for preparing and organizing the Regional Conference and compiling the African report, ECA calls upon African Governments which have not yet done so to establish national coordinating committees and/or designate national focal points without delay in accordance with Commission on the Status of Women resolution 36/8 of 20 March 1992. Member States are urged to initiate preparations for their national reports as soon as possible and to ensure their submission to ECA and to the secretariat of the World Conference in New York by 31 March 1994.

1. It will be recalled that United Nations Commission on the Status of Women resolution 36/8 of March 1992, endorsed by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, requested regional commissions to organize regional conferences preparatory to the fourth World Conference scheduled to take place in Beijing, China, from 4 to 15 September 1995. In pursuance of the resolution, ECA is planning to organize the fifth Regional Conference on Women preparatory to the World Conference in Dakar, Senegal, in November 1994.
2. Since the last World Conference on Women in 1985, there have been many changes in the world political and economic scene. The focus of the 1995 World Conference will be on the partnership between men and women, particularly during this process of change and the responsibilities it entails. This focus will derive heavily from the findings of the assessment of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies (NFLS) which will be drawn from the contributions of the regional commissions. The World Conference will also be an opportunity to strengthen leadership in the struggle for the advancement of women towards the achievement of common objectives in equality, development and peace.
3. In preparation of this Conference, the forthcoming fifth Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in Development to be held in Dakar from 16 to 23 November 1994 will review progress made in the advancement of women in the course of implementation of the NFLS, identify what the obstacles for their implementations have been and come up with concise and action-oriented guidelines which would help accelerate the implementation of the targets set in the Abuja Declaration.

#### **I. ACTION REQUIRED DURING THE PREPARATORY PHASE**

4. Activities leading to the 1995 World Conference will essentially be to:
  - (a) Mobilize women and men at all levels at the policy-making and grass-root levels around the issue of the status and advancement of women; and
  - (b) Evaluate the achievements with regard to the major goals of equality, development and peace. These activities are supposed to be carried out at national, regional and international levels.
5. At the national level, preparatory activities will be mainly to assess progress made in the advancement of women and to mobilize all partners for the attainment of women's objectives. Countries are expected to set up national committees which would serve as catalysts for national preparations. The committees would initiate, organize and coordinate national activities related to the World Conference and ensure preparation of reports on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the NFLS and the targets set in the Abuja Declaration.
6. At the regional level, activities will essentially be to consolidate national experiences, identify common issues affecting countries in the region and adopt a common position on actions to be taken to ensure a much greater involvement of African women in development. It is towards this end that ECA is mandated to organize its fifth Regional Conference. The common position adopted at the Regional Conference will be incorporated in the global Platform of Action to be adopted by the World Conference.
7. The major responsibilities of ECA are to:
  - (a) Monitor, review and appraise the implementation of the targets set in the Abuja Declaration along with the implementation of the NFLS in a regional perspective; and
  - (b) Prepare and convene a regional conference which will serve as a regional preparatory conference to the World Conference on Women. To achieve this:

- (i) ECA's African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW) will continue to monitor and assist member States in the preparation of their national reports through scheduled advisory missions; provide of guidelines to the national machineries for the writing of national reports; schedule meetings with relevant constituent bodies such as the Africa Regional Coordinating Committee (ARCC) for the Integration of Women in Development and expert groups;
- (ii) ECA will also examine the advancement of women with regard to new trends in African development. The experiences of member States and all organizations involved in the advancement of women on the continent will be used for drafting a Plan of Action which will be adopted by the Regional Conference and will constitute the African input to the global Platform of Action.

8. As the regional focal point for preparations for the fifth Regional Conference, ECA has carried out a number of activities that are summarized below:

(a) Following the inter-agency meeting in March 1993, in Addis Ababa, which brought together United Nations agencies and institutions interested in African women's issues, an Inter-Agency Task Force was established to coordinate preparations for the fifth African Regional Conference. Shortly after, the fourteenth meeting of ARCC proposed and the ECA Conference of Ministers of Economic Development and Planning adopted resolution 753 (XXVIII) on "Women in development, the African Regional Preparatory Meeting (1994) for the World Conference on Women: Action for equality, development and peace (1995)" which included the agenda and thematic outline for the fifth Regional Conference;

(b) The Inter-Agency Task Force, comprised of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the African Development Bank (ADB), the African Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET) and chaired by ECA, has met twice in Addis Ababa in April and September 1993. It has considered and adopted appropriate information and communication strategies for the Regional Conference and agreed on inputs to be made by OAU and other United Nations agencies in terms of documentation for the Regional Conference with deadline set for submission of papers to ATRCW;

(c) An information package including guidelines for the preparation of national reports and other information pertaining to the Regional and World Conferences was sent to member States in July and August 1993;

(d) Consultants to assist in the preparation of technical papers for the Conference have been commissioned and a draft Platform for Action is under process;

(e) In November 1993, ECA participated in a pre-conference of the Conference of the French- and Portuguese-speaking African Ministers of Women's Affairs and Rural Development. The main objective of this meeting was to sensitize member States, educate and inform them of the important role played by rural women in Africa and propose strategies and recommendations for the improvement of their status. The report of this meeting will constitute a background document to the Regional Conference as well as an input into the African platform;

(f) Also in November 1993, ATRCW facilitated and participated in the Regional Conference on Women and Peace held in Kampala, Uganda. The issue of peace at this meeting was the priority theme and was

adopted for full consideration at the Dakar Conference. The meeting also adopted an action plan entitled "Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace". Issues from the Plan will be incorporated in the African platform;

(g) In December 1993, ATRCW organized and convened an ad hoc expert group meeting to consider strategies for the enhancement of women's skills in mainstreaming and decision making and to review progress being made in preparation for the Regional Conference preparatory to the World Conference on Women. The meeting was attended by selected women experts from government machineries, non-governmental organizations and women media experts from Algeria, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, the Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania. Also in attendance was OAU and Inter Press Service (IPS). Representing the United Nations family were the International Labour Office (ILO), the United Nations Children's Fund and UNDP. FEMNET also attended the expert group meeting. Strategies and recommendations on the role of the media in disseminating information and sensitizing the different components of the society on gender issues and increasing public awareness about the Dakar and Beijing Conferences were adopted.

## II. NGO FORUM

9. FEMNET, which focuses on strengthening the role of NGOs involved in women's development and the integration of women in the development process in Africa, will be responsible for the coordination of the African women NGO participation in the NGO Forum in Dakar from 14 to 17 November 1994. The NGO Forum will focus on the collective African NGO effort to pursue the implementation of the NFLS for the advancement of women and what the future priorities will be. The NGO Forum will also increase awareness about the Regional Conference, and, later, in the implementation of the results of the Regional Conference. ECA will facilitate the coordination of NGOs preparatory activities at the African level by providing technical assistance as member of its advisory board. In this regard, ECA attended the first Regional Steering Committee organized by FEMNET and held in Nairobi, Kenya, from 4 to 7 January 1994. ECA informed participants about the activities already undertaken and plans for the future in preparation for the Regional and the World Conferences.

10. ATRCW is working closely with OAU and the United Nations agencies. In this connection, ECA has commissioned the United Nations specialized agencies and OAU to prepare technical papers for the Conference, to be submitted to ECA for compilation and reproduction by end of March 1994 at the latest. Much work has also been done to sensitize NGOs and member States and disseminate to them information on the regional/world conferences. A case in point is the Newsletter entitled FEMMELINE, a news update on preparatory activities for the fifth Regional Conference on Women/Regional Preparatory Meeting to the Fourth World Conference on Women, published and disseminated quarterly.

## III. CONSTRAINTS

11. The Commission on the Status of Women resolution 36/8 of March 1992 and ECA Conference of Ministers resolution 753 (XXVIII) of May 1993 called upon member States to establish national coordinating committees for the preparation of national reports and for coordination of national activities in preparation for the Regional and World Conferences. According to information received from member States, 15 out of the 53 ECA member States have established national coordinating committees. Although there is a lot of interest and excitement in the region about the Preparatory Conference, preparations at the national level are still at the conceptual stage, outreach and publicity activities are so far very limited and slow. Given the situation, ECA is experiencing difficulties in getting information from member States. National machineries and focal points

in some countries undergoing civil conflicts and/or in transition are not functioning effectively. Hence communications with such countries is difficult and yet the situation, conditions and experiences of women in these countries must be examined and brought to the attention of the Regional Preparatory Conference. ECA would like to appeal to member States concerned to constitute national focal points for the preparation of the national reports and other activities.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

12. One of the major preoccupations of ECA is to ensure that African women's concerns and interests are fully included in the issues to be brought to the World Conference. In this regard, subregional workshops have been planned for 1994 (between January and March 1994). These will be conducted in the five subregions, namely East, North, Central, West and Southern Africa. The main objective of the workshops will be to sensitize member States, educate and inform them of the objectives of the World Conference and urge men, women and youth to be actively involved in the preparation of the national status reports.

13. The preparation of the fifth African Regional Conference preparatory to the fourth World Conference is obviously a long process and requires proper planning and coordination at national and regional levels. ATRCW will continue to work closely with member States, OAU, United Nations agencies and NGOs to ensure the successful organization of the Regional Conference. In this regard, there is need to keep up the momentum of interests leading up to the World Conference and even beyond, by instituting a vibrant communication campaign strategy to ensure that the national reports have inputs from all levels of the constituents in their respective countries and that information on the Regional and World Conferences is widely disseminated to reach men, women and youth from all walks of life.

14. Africa must prepare well by sensitizing men, women and children through a process of consensus building which will help to highlight critical issues around which the region could come up with a clear, committed statement, namely the Platform of Action.