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**PROGRESS REPORT ON
THE ATRCW COMMUNICATION NETWORK PROJECT:
CONSIDERATION OF STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING
THE FLOW OF INFORMATION ON GENDER ISSUES IN AFRICA**

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In April 1992, the African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW) at the ECA, initiated its Communication Network Project. This paper traces the background to this project, indicating the objectives of the project as well as some of the outputs and activities already undertaken. Since the activities of the project are to be seen within the wider context of developing and strengthening the information and communication linkages for the dissemination of gender-related information in the African region, the paper discusses in section one, the strategies and actions necessary for improving the flow of information and data on women in Africa in the intermediate phase, that is, 1993-94. These strategies, mechanisms and actions will be necessary to support the forthcoming regional and world conferences on women (1994 and 1995); section two of the paper focusses attention on those longer-term strategies, mechanisms and actions required to establish and develop a regional information network, a data bank and a communication network embracing women's groups and associations, NGOs on the one hand, and women-in-the-media, on the other. The paper concludes by re-emphasizing the need to systematize the collection and dissemination of information and data on gender issues so as to enhance the knowledge of women's groups in the region and appeals to both government and non-governmental women's structures in the African region to actively support the various measures and actions planned to improve women's networking and communication activities in Africa.

In recent years, the need to provide greater and improved accessibility to information and data on women in Africa has been given concrete expression at several important fora and also in major documents emanating from the region. For example, the 1982 ECA Conference of Ministers of Planning and Economic Development specifically requested the ECA to organize an information network for the dissemination of all information concerning African women. The 1984 Arusha Strategies for the Advancement of Women in Africa¹ further called upon ECA to facilitate the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and information on women and development. This need was further highlighted in the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women². The Nairobi Strategies did not only emphasize the need to strengthen the national machineries and establish information networks and linkages among them so as to effectively implement the strategies up to the year 2000, but also noted the critical role of the UN regional commissions in promoting and catalyzing the development of such national women's information systems. The Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development: the role of women in Africa in the

¹ Economic Commission for Africa/Organization of African Unity: the Arusha Strategies for the advancement of women in Africa beyond the end of the United Nations Decade for Women, Addis Ababa, 1985. 51p.

² United Nations: The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000, New York, 1986. 89p.

1990s³ recommended that "documentation centres and data banks concerned with women should be established in all African countries" as one of the measures to monitor changes in the situation of women.

In the findings of a 1989 needs assessment mission undertaken to four countries of the region, the following was noted: "information resources on women and development were considerable but were scattered, and uneven in quality and quantity. Impediments to access included poor organization of the materials, the lack of national focal points for information on women, and restrictions imposed upon external users by some organizations. Insufficient outreach and repackaging of information to suit the requirements of the user accounted for the under-utilization of existing information."⁴

Just last year, this need for an improved flow of information and data pertaining to women's issues in the African region was clearly articulated during the 1992 series of sub-regional coordinating meetings of the African Regional Coordinating Committee (ARCC) held under the auspices of the five ECA MULPOCs (Gisenyi, Lusaka, Niamey, Tangiers and Yaounde). As though orchestrated, each of these sub-regional gatherings independently adopted resolutions highlighting, as one of their priority concerns, the need for an improved networking and flow of information and data on women in Africa.

Against this background, the initiation in April 1992 of the Communication Network project at the African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW) comes at a most opportune time and in response to a major felt need among women's groups and programmes in the region. The project, which is intended to improve communication links between the ATRCW and its collaborating partners, is being funded by the Government of Italy and will be implemented over a two-year period (that is, April 1992 to March 1994). The project is expected to assist in systematizing the identification, collection, processing and dissemination of information and data relating to women and development as reflected in the work of the ATRCW itself, and to make relevant information resources readily available and accessible to the ever-increasing body of information seekers and implementors of women's programmes in the region. With the forthcoming Fifth African Regional Conference on Women (1994) preparatory to the 1995 World Conference on Women in view, the project will also serve as a crucial input for the information and communication support to the regional conference and eventually lay the ground-work for the setting up of more permanent structures and linkages for regional networking on gender issues.

The Communications Network project, will facilitate the development of more systematic

³ Economic Commission for Africa: Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development: the role of women in Africa in the 1990s, Addis Ababa, 1989. 39p.

⁴ Economic Commission for Africa/UNIFEM: Information needs and resources on women in Africa. In: Report and documentation of the Expert Group Meeting on the establishment of a data bank on women and development in Africa, Addis Ababa, 1989. 31p. (ATRCW/PADIS/EGM/89/5).

channels for identifying existing sources of information and data on women and for communicating these information resources to ATRCW's collaborators (that is, national machineries, focal points, non-governmental organizations etc.) thus motivating the utilization of such resources to better sensitize and make aware, as well as improve upon the knowledge base for policy-formulation and planning relevant to resolving women's issues in the region.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The overall developmental objective of the project is to improve the work relevance, effectiveness and impact of the ATRCW through better communications and increased information dissemination. As such, the project will help enhance the ATRCW's role as a disseminator, serving as a resource centre, distributing data and information and promoting the exchange of experiences in the field.

In concrete terms, the project will serve as a mechanism for:

- i) strengthening the ATRCW's information and communication structures to ensure the inclusion of development support communication (DSC) strategies in all of the Centre's programmes and projects;
- ii) disseminating the data and information generated by ATRCW which will be packaged into usable formats and targeted to a variety of users; and
- iii) publicizing the work of the Centre and improving the clearing-house and coordinating functions of the Centre.⁵

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN TO DATE

In support of the above objectives, the project has already undertaken the following activities:

- a) **Preparation of appropriate information packages** - the project is currently compiling a special listing with annotations on the theme women, the informal sector and entrepreneurship. This compilation focusses on work already accomplished at the ATRCW under the UNDP - funded project "Women in the Informal Sector, Production and Management" as well as other studies undertaken at the ECA on women's access to credit and financial resources and other related topics. Once completed, this package will be widely disseminated to national machineries and focal points, women's groups, research

⁵ Economic Commission for Africa: Improving Communication networks of the African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW) (project submission for bilateral cooperation with the Government of Italy), 1990. p. 3.

institutions and other similar bodies.

Already, two listings of materials (documents and audio-visuals) available at the ATRCW for free distribution to machineries have been compiled and distributed. Subsequent listings and packages will focus on some of the priority themes (such as peace) expected to be tabled before the fifth regional conference in 1994. By focussing the project's outputs on such priority themes, it is hoped to facilitate the process of sensitization of African women and thus promote their interest and involvement in the preparations towards the forthcoming regional and world conferences on women.

- b) **Identification of target groups** - in order to more accurately target the project's outputs and ensure their useability among end-users, efforts are already being devoted to screening and updating the Centre's distribution and mailing lists in order to include all known collaborating national machineries, focal points, NGOs and individuals in the region who could benefit from the project's outputs. A questionnaire to solicit more accurate data on the specific information needs and requirements relating to WID issues has been circulated and responses are awaited. Based on the responses, the ATRCW will introduce a selective dissemination of information (SDI) scheme which will help to focus the Centre's information repackaging activities in order to more directly benefit women's groups in the region.

A special file on women media contacts (i.e. journalists, mass media communicators and the like) has been established in an effort to identify channels both for the acquisition, and for the dissemination of information and data on women's issues in Africa. Direct contacts have already been forged with agencies like the African Women Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), the Kenya Institute for Mass Communication (KIMC) etc. Following missions to Ghana and Kenya, the project is also now in touch with women's national mass media groups which have already expressed keen interest to collaborate in the project's activities, particularly in the preparation of feature articles and other media messages for sensitization and awareness-creation among African women. Efforts will be intensified in the coming months to link up with media contacts in other ECA member States whose collaboration will be sought for the preparation and dissemination of media and communication outputs from the project, especially in the lead up to the regional conference. It is hoped to develop these media contacts into a correspondents network to facilitate the preparation and dissemination of information messages both in print and non-print media.

The project has now established close contact with the URTNA/Programme Exchange Centre (PEC) and has plans to link up also with the Federation of African Media Women (FAMW), the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) and other similar groups which could serve as "information brokers" to facilitate the channelling of information to the various groups and sectors in the region.

- c) **Other planned major project outputs and activities** - some of the project's major outputs and activities for 1993 include:

- i) **preparation of messages to be aired on national television and radio stations** - the project has negotiated for the ATRCW's participation in the 1st African Television Programme Festival being organized by URTNA/PEC in November 1993. ATRCW will accordingly provide cash awards for the best three television/film productions covering women's issues and concerns in Africa, and highlighting African experiences. As part of the arrangement with URTNA/PEC, programmes competing for prizes, as well as non-competition programmes on agreed themes of interest to women will be made available by URTNA for exchange among African broadcasting organizations. Such screening opportunities on national televisions will help to sensitize women's groups in the region about issues of critical concern to African women.
- ii) **preparation of feature articles on women's issues in print periodicals, newspapers in Africa** - the project plans to involve the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) in organizing a competition which will adjudge the best investigative reporting and feature articles on women's issues (using the Nairobi Forwarding Looking Strategies, and the Abuja Declaration as parameters for assessing and reviewing Africa's performance to date). ATRCW will provide cash awards and encourage, especially media women, to participate in the competition to provide some objective analysis and yardsticks for measuring Africa's performance. Using the extensive network of PANA, it is hoped to involve large numbers of media personnel in this competition. Concurrently with the above contest, the project will negotiate for the institution of a regular African Women Features Service which will become available as a regular wire service through PANA's network of national news agencies etc. By creating a special desk at PANA to cover emerging issues of relevance to the African woman (particularly during the period leading up to the 1994 regional conference), it will be possible to keep various national clienteles regularly informed and thus promote their involvement.
- iii) **preparation of informational awareness - building materials such as leaflets, brochures, booklets, posters etc.** - the project intends to engage in the preparation and distribution of these materials to assist in the sensitization of its clientele. However, in order to derive maximum benefit from them, they will focus on some of the major themes endorsed by ARCC and the ECA Conference of Ministers of Planning and Economic Development for consideration at the forthcoming regional conference.

As part of the awareness - building process, the project will plan, as appropriate, books and posters exhibitions to coincide with forthcoming major regional events (for example, the African Regional Coordinating Committee on the Integration of Women in Development (ARCC), in April 1993; and the Regional Congress of the Medical Women's International Association: Near East and Africa Region (the health of women and safe mother-hood) in November/December 1993) in order to highlight women's concerns. As already indicated, planned outputs and activities envisaged under the Communication Network project are intended to systematize the acquisition and dissemination of relevant and up-to-date data and information on women issues in appropriate formats so as to facilitate accessibility of information to all categories of users from decision-makers, through

researchers and academia, to programme managers/officers engaged in action programmes, to the media, to women's groups at community and even at grass-roots levels. However, in order to reach this broad spread of intended users and beneficiaries, efficient (both intermediate and longer-term) strategies which will help to bring about improved flows of information and data pertaining to gender issues need to be considered. It is to these intermediate and longer-term strategies that the remainder of this paper now focusses close attention.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS NECESSARY FOR IMPROVING THE FLOW OF INFORMATION AND DATA ON WOMEN IN AFRICA

With the coming into force of the ATRCW Communication Network project, an operational base not only for the strengthening and expansion of the Centre's information and communication activities, but also for providing more permanent regional infrastructures for eventual networking on gender issues among women's groups etc. has now been put into place.

In order however, to streamline projected activities, it is necessary to separate those strategies and mechanisms which will be required, in the intermediate phase, to directly support the forthcoming regional conference preparatory to the World Conference of 1995, from those longer-term strategies and mechanisms which could ensure the development of improved information and communication infrastructures and networking arrangements to link information/resource centres and programmes dealing with women's issues in the member States of the ECA. These two phases which mutually feed and complement each other are now discussed.

I THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE (1993-94)

- the activities to be implemented during this phase will broadly span a period of two years, and will constitute the major information and communication support for the African regional conference on women in 1994. The strategy is to highlight the impact of the conference by promoting participation so that it can effectively serve as a vehicle for articulating and mapping out Africa's plan of action on women and gender-related issues. The African region, having lived through almost a decade attempting to implement the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies of 1985, is now at the cross-roads to undertake a critical assessment of its performances to date so as to determine what to do next. Such an assessment requires a new structured thinking which can stimulate the different categories of African women to identify, discuss and seek solutions to the issues which affect them most. The region therefore needs to create a critical mass of opinion (reflecting all strata, classes and interests of women and men) out of which an agenda of action, not just for up to the year 2000 but looking twenty or twenty-five years down the line, into the twenty-first century, could be derived.

Deriving such an African agenda, which will be sensitive and responsive enough to serve the future needs of the African woman, while also serving as a bridge to the global agenda (namely, bringing something uniquely African to the global platform), will require the region to engage in the following activities:

- i) **setting up of a new conceptual framework on gender issues in Africa** - on the directives of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, all member States of the UN are to constitute national coordinating committees (NCCs) to engage in information and sensitization campaigns, and prepare national reports for submission to the Commission indicating performances against targets set in the NFLS. For the African region, it is hoped that these NCCs will also constitute themselves as national "think-tanks" to seriously review and appraise national performances using not only the NFLS but also the Abuja Declaration as yardsticks, by involving all the different strata of women, isolating the major persistent areas of concern, and helping to define a new conceptual framework to guide gender issues into the twenty-first century. It is also expected that the activities of the NCCs will closely involve the NGOs operating at the national level in order to derive a clear and unambiguous expression of needs accompanied by a greater involvement by women themselves in women's cause.

To be effective, these national level consensus - building processes should involve consultations among all categories of women, particularly those at the grass-roots level whose needs are not always appropriately articulated for channelling to other layers for actions. These national consultative processes should be further enhanced by similar consultations at the sub-regional and regional levels. A couple of sub-regional seminars/workshops organized under the direct auspices of ARCC could facilitate discussions on gender-related issues and help to evolve a clear future agenda focussing on a few critical issues to which the whole region could become committed and support (irrespective of gender, age, class or status).

At the regional level, the ATRCW, as the overall regional coordinator of the regional conference will require to organize a couple of regional consultative meetings in order to further synthesize the outcomes of the national and sub-regional consultations and to derive the regional package of priority issues which could constitute the framework for the African Plan of Action. In all these consultative processes, the role of the African NGOs should be given due cognisance through close liaison with FEMNET which is responsible for coordinating the regional NGO forum.

- ii) **Information strategy, mechanisms and activities** - in order to support the conceptualization process indicated in (i) above, an adequate knowledge base, comprising information and data resources pertinent to gender and development issues must be put in place. As of now, even though there are many WID programmes and projects in the region, no overall formal system exists to collect, analyze and disseminate information on gender and development issues, nor to facilitate the exchange and sharing of such information and data through appropriate networking arrangements. Examples of efforts in this line are few and far between to make much of an impact in creating greater access to information and gender-disaggregated data. The information strategy will therefore involve:

- a) **finding out what currently exists** with a view to eliminating duplication and wastage, identifying the gaps in existing information resources, making conscious efforts to fill such gaps, acquiring needed information and data, and ensuring greater accessibility to available information resources. Planned activities will comprise the

development and/or strengthening of national resource/documentation centres on gender and development issues. These centres should collect available documents, data, reports, other information source (films, non-print materials etc.) from various government ministries, NGOs etc. and make these available for consultation by potential users. Where national data on gender is inadequate (which is the case in most member States), these resource centres could commission national statistical offices or research institutions to assist in the assembling and compilation of disaggregated data on gender.

Based on these information-gathering activities, bibliographies, directories and other state-of-the art products could be prepared to facilitate the understanding of member States on various aspects of gender-related issues. The role of the resource documentation centres in these efforts will be crucial, and national focal points should actively promote their establishment and development.

At the regional level, specialized compilations and directories could also be prepared. A chart-book, data sheets and similar compilations indicating various parameters on women's activities could also be prepared to indicate the regional status.

- b) identifying institutions/centres which serve as custodians of information
- parallel to finding what information and data exist in the region, there will be need also to document information on those institutions which generate information/data. Since there are so many operators dealing with WID issues in the region and since there is scanty information on the actual operations of most of them, there is need to inventory the institutions and programmes. Accordingly, a data base will be established at the ATRCW to collect and record information on identified institutions, projects and programmes with gender bias. This data base will not only serve to identify the specializations of WID institutions in Africa but will also facilitate networking and sharing of gender information and data at a later date. A printed directory will be prepared for dissemination during the regional conference.
- c) finding those with capabilities to deal with gender-related issues - member States need to be constantly briefed about those personalities with appropriate capabilities to assist them in resolving their gender-related problems. There is a fast growing body of persons with such expertise in Africa. It is thus planned to expand the ATRCW data base of African women experts in Africa. This data base will be available to all member States to access and a special edition of the ATRCW's Roster of African Women Experts, highlighting women working in different sectors, eg. media, medicine, science etc. will be published to coincide with the regional conference.

Also being planned for implementation as information support to the conference will be a special biographical listing of distinguished African women over time who have made

significant contributions to Africa's development in the various sectors of their operations. Entitled "A roll-call of Africa's distinguished daughters through time", the listing will provide detailed profiles of such women. Bearing in mind the positive role they play as "role-models" for the younger generation of women in Africa, the assistance of national machineries and focal points will be sought in the identification of women who may qualify for inclusion in such a biography. It is further hoped that national coordinating committees (NCCs) could arrange for television profiles of such identified women to be screened on national televisions as a way of bringing them directly to the attention of national clienteles. In this connection, the ATRCW plans to negotiate with URTNA, the possibility of the screening of the cumulation of national profiles on Africa's distinguished women through the URTNA regional network.

The net gain of all these various information-gathering activities will be to stimulate greater knowledge about gender issues and to help improve information flows among member States especially in the period leading up to the regional conference. However, in order to give proper accent to, and complement the information strategy and corresponding activities, a well mapped-out communication strategy and activities should also be put into place. These are discussed below:

- iii) Communications strategy, mechanisms and activities - a well-structured communications strategy will help to give maximum exposure to information activities so as to help develop broad areas of consensus and ensure that no major dimensions are ignored. Through appropriate awareness- creation and sensitization, it is hoped to involve the total constituency (that is, all categories and interests of women, as well as men) and thus promote commitment and involvement in the agenda-setting necessary for leading the African woman into the twenty-first century. The African woman needs to become more adept at analyzing, talking about, and negotiating with individuals and institutions that do not share her views on social concerns. Accordingly, gender sensitization aimed at women themselves, as well as men must be built into planned communication mechanisms and activities in order to ensure eventual acceptance of set goals and programmes.

Communication implies a two-way flow, thus both the disseminators and the recipients of information ought to become gender-sensitized in order to avoid insensitivity and to smoothen the path to acceptance of media messages. Media contacts, journalists, reporters etc. for communicating information should themselves therefore become sensitized on gender issues. This will help bring about positive, objective reporting on gender issues.

Accordingly, some of the major planned communication support activities for the regional conference will be:

- (a) Gender-sensitization workshops/seminars - these will help to enhance the capabilities of women and promote their effective participation in the preparations for the regional conference. It is thus planned to organize a series of gender-sensitization workshops/seminars.

At the sub-regional level, ARCC and the ATRCW could take on responsibility, in collaboration with appropriate sub-regional groups, to organize such

group-training for each sub-region. The meetings should bring together representatives of women's machineries, NGOs, media etc. to review and propose new or improved forms of actions for the future. Gender trainers should be recruited to conduct the sessions whose eventual goal should be to ensure that representative groups are appropriately sensitized about gender issues. These sessions should also particularly target women in-the-media groups in order to facilitate their reporting on gender issues .

At the national level, the NCCs could organize similar workshops/seminars which could serve not only as a means to train local women's groups in report preparation but also afford national women's media groups, the opportunity to become better sensitized on gender issues in order to better report on the contributions made by women. The national workshops could also help establish the guidelines for the preparation of appropriate press kits (with local bias)for use by television, radio, newspapers etc.

- (b) **Regional newsletter** - in order to keep all interested parties informed of preparations towards the regional conference, there will be need to issue a special newsletter at intervals to be later determined. The clientele for the newsletter will be the media, national machineries and focal points, women's groups, NGOs, regional/professional associations etc. Information appearing in the newsletter could be utilized by the NCCs which could extract and translate appropriate sections for use by their local grass-roots communities, as necessary.

An editorial board comprising representatives from the five sub-regions (East, Central, West, North and Southern) who will serve as correspondents for their respective sub-regions to report on sub-regional activities will be constituted to produce the newsletter, with the ATRCW serving as overall editor, and FEMNET as sub-editor. The actual production of the newsletter could however, be sub-contracted to a competent media agency or association in the region to facilitate its preparation.

- (c) **Promotion and publicity** - jointly with relevant media associations and organs, appropriate communication messages will be commissioned to inform all sections of the community about the up-coming conference. Posters, flyers, banners, brochures and other publicity materials will be prepared and widely distributed to facilitate visibility of planned regional communication activities. Upon the formal endorsement by the ECA Conference of Ministers of the agenda and themes for the regional conference, a press conference is planned to be staged jointly in Addis Ababa and Dakar to formally launch the preparations for the regional conference.

A round-table encounter will also be organized during the last quarter of 1993 in order to brief mass-media personnel and journalists about the regional and world conferences and to solicit their cooperation in reporting in newspapers and other channels.

A one-day pre-conference seminar for newspaper editors to facilitate news

coverage of the conference will also be organized by the ATRCW in Dakar, Senegal, prior to the Conference.

(d) Media competition for best investigative reporting on African women's issues:

- it is planned to float a competition among women journalists and reporters in order to identify the best feature articles and reports highlighting Africa's performance to date vis-a-vis the major targets set by the NFLS and the Abuja Declaration. Like the URTNA television contest, cash awards will be provided for the best three such features and a selection of other quality reports will be compiled into a document to be published later by the ATRCW to coincide with the regional conference. It is hoped that these investigative reports/features will provide another angle from which to view Africa's performance vis-a-vis these global and regional strategies.

(e) Awards for best television/documentary films focussing on women's issues

- as already indicated, the ATRCW is putting up an award for the best television/documentary film dealing with women's issues as part of the URTNA African Television Festival scheduled for November 1993. Through the URTNA screenings, it is hoped to give exposure to pioneering women in this special area of film production, who will also serve as role models for young African women looking for viable careers to pursue.

The above planned communication activities are by no means exhaustive and are only indicative of some of the major planned activities in which the project will be engaged. The end goal of all these activities, however is to promote greater communication and exchange among the various groups and bodies dealing with gender issues, especially as the region prepares for its regional conference, preparatory to the world conference, 1995.

II LONG-TERM STRATEGIES (1994 AND BEYOND)

- as was pointed out above (intermediate phase (1993/94), the strategies and proposals for information and communication activities during the intervening period 1993-1994 will focus largely on instituting mechanisms and structures which could support the forthcoming fifth African regional conference of 1994. However, it is expected that the strategies and activities themselves would have helped to lay firm foundations for long-term strategies for information and communication support to gender issues in the African region.

As of now, there is no overall formal structure to facilitate the collection, processing and accessibility to information and data and to promote networking among women's groups and organizations in the African region. The foundations which would have been laid during 1993/1994 could be regarded as the pilot, experimental phase to eventual regional

networking. They will therefore constitute the blocks upon which to develop permanent structures to ensure an adequate flow of information and data on gender issues following upon the regional conference. Actions to be implemented to support this development will comprise:

- i) **Regional information network** - the various resource and documentation centres which would have been developed by member states to provide information and data during the preparatory phase to the conference would be nurtured into the nodes of a regional information network which could be formalized with a regional coordinating unit and sub-regional components, if required. Examples of such national resource and documentation centres on gender issues already exist in Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, and FEMNET has enabled to strengthen its resource base in order to support African NGOs.

Accordingly, by the end of the conference, expertise would already have been gained by member States in the professional handling of information and data, in the compilation of bibliographies, directories and the like thus making the national resource/ documentation centres viable collaborators in the proposed regional network. Member States would also have become used to information gathering and processing procedures, and in the development and maintenance of appropriate data bases, thus assuring the acquisition of required information resources to support their national programme formulation on a continuing basis.

At the regional level, the various data bases which would have been developed to collect information on gender issues could be placed at the disposal of all member States. The ATRCW, which is already one of the participating organizations of the Women's Information System (WIS) network (which is coordinated by the Division for the Advancement of Women in Vienna) will be able to expand its bibliographic data base to serve African regional needs, ensuring that its constituents directly benefit from the additional information resources made available through networking with both African and non-African centres with which the Centre shares information. Collaboration with agencies such as the International Women's Tribune Centre, ISIS International etc. would be strengthened and harnessed to support the region's efforts to share information, data and experiences.

Already, there are plans put forward by the ATRCW for the development of a Women's Information Network for Africa (WINA). The information-gathering and processing activities undertaken during 1993/1994 will give a head-start to these long-term plans.

(ii) **Data bank on women and gender-related issues**

with the gender disaggregated data which would have been assembled and collected by member States during the 1993 -94 phase it should become possible to develop a comprehensive regional data bank which will comprise data emanating from national statistical offices, research institutions etc. and focussing on gender.

Structures could be established to ensure the routine collection and updating of data on gender. Appropriate training in the collection and utilization of such data resources could be arranged on a continuing basis to ensure adequate utilization of these resources.

(iii) **African NGO network**

- the preparations for the NGO forum at the 1994 regional conference would have helped to cement relations among African NGOs working in the area of gender issues thus promoting network linkages in support of women's work. Within such an arrangement, spearheaded by FEMNET and other leading NGOs, it will be possible to share research experiences, promote exchanges, and generally serve as a major support to women's groups.

ARCC should institute mechanisms to enable it work closely with the NGO network to further the advancement of its regional coordination efforts. Joint programmes in critical areas of concern to be implemented by NGOs and governmental structures could be designed and pursued.

(iv) **Network of African women-in-the-media**

- in the various preparations towards the regional conference, it is expected that many national associations of media women would have been activated to facilitate the dissemination of information to women's groups. These facilities should be federated with the Federation of African Media Women and similar bodies in order to serve as permanent structures for the channelling of both print and non-print media information. If this group is properly motivated and can keep up the momentum of interest, it could become an effective means for continuous sensitization about gender issues in the region.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing paragraphs, it has been shown that the present activities of the ATRCW Communication Network Project form part of an overall, long-term strategy and work plan intended improve the flow of information on gender issues in Africa. Jointly with other interest groups, the project will continue to provide the needed impetus and drive to facilitate the exchange and sharing of information through networking with other organizations with similar objectives, especially in the region. Over time, it is hoped that the project will develop into an efficient and effective women's information and communication service and network to promote communication among women in Africa. The ATRCW will attempt to mobilize the needed additional resources which will help the African region to realize its goal, but women's machineries, focal points, NGOs and other women's groups should themselves be actively involved to support and agree on actions intended to improve regional networking by showing commitment being willing to share information and data, and prepared to provide both moral and financial resources for the realization of the goal. Living during an information and communication age, African women should take up the challenge to also collectively adopt and utilize appropriate new information and communication technologies which could help the region break down the present barriers which keep us ignorant, uninformed, and isolated.