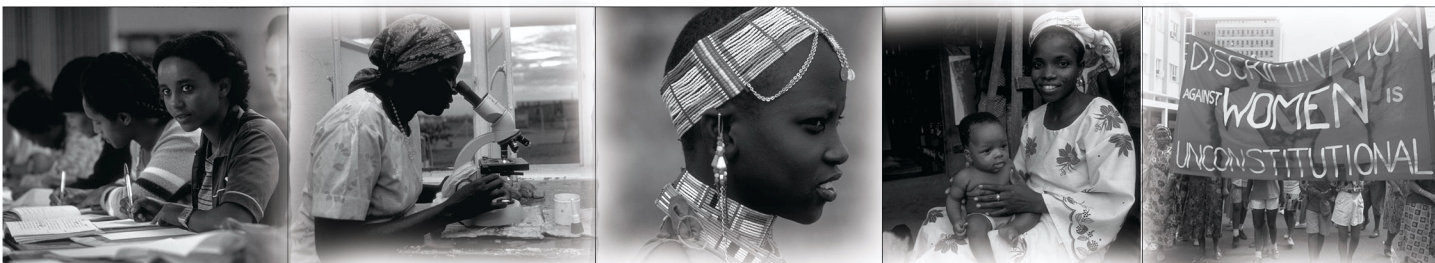




United Nations
Economic Commission
for Africa

5 years after Beijing:

What efforts in favour of African women?



Assessing Women's Participation in the Peace Process

September 2001

5 years after Beijing:

What efforts in favour of African women?



Assessing Women's Participation in the Peace Process

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Executive summary

This report was prepared for the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women held in Addis Ababa from 22 to 27 November 1999. The Conference provided an opportunity to review the overall implementation of the African Platform for Action adopted in November 1994 and the Beijing Platform for Action adopted in September 1995.

The report assesses, in particular, the commitments made by Governments and United Nations Agencies to promote the participation of women in peace processes. It further examines the national, subregional and regional mechanisms for monitoring the Platform for Action. The report contains the views and recommendations of participants attending the Sixth African Regional Conference, who participated in the workshop on women and peace held during the conference.

The theme of Women's Participation in the Peace Process is very important for Africa. Not only do women constitute the majority in pre- and especially post-conflict societies, they are also often the first to start calling for peace. There have been fourteen conflicts on the continent since the adoption of the two Platforms. Africa has the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons on our globe. Against this background, it is important to assess the participation of women in bringing about peaceful positive changes. There can be no sustainable peace without the participation of women who bear the brunt of the wars and internal conflicts. African women Peace activists lobbied hard at the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women in Dakar, Senegal, to strongly influence the resolve of Governments to support the inclusion of women in the peace processes. This commitment was strengthened by the adoption of the African Platform for Action by the OAU Heads of State meeting in June 1995. There are some good examples of Governments that have included women in peace processes.

Through such actions the Governments have demonstrated their commitments. There is still much to be done to ensure that women have a permanent position in decision-making structures.

The United Nations agencies have played an important role in supporting women's participation by committing resources and technical support

to enable women's groups to build their capacity to influence peace processes in their countries. Other initiatives include the promotion of peace education to promote a culture of peace.

The establishment of the African Women's Committee for Peace and Development brings hope to African women that their voice will now be heard in Peace negotiations on our continent. At the international level, the advancements made by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in prosecuting war crimes and the Tribunal's characterization of sexual violence as an instrument of genocide and a crime against humanity are very welcome for the protection of women's rights.

There are new challenges to be addressed in the search for peace. These include the use of new and sophisticated arms and the use of anti-personnel mines. The arms industry continues to make profits while the African people suffer death or permanent disability. African women peace activists are committed to turning their attention and activism to the Northern countries which develop these arms.

There will be no development in Africa until there is an end to conflicts. The challenge of bringing peace to our continent is a challenge to all of us.

1. Introduction

1.1 Women in the Peace Process: Commitments made in the African and the Global Platforms

Prior to the adoption of both the African and the Global Platforms for Action, a regional Conference on Women and Peace took place in Kampala, Uganda, in November 1993. This was a joint initiative of the Economic Commission for Africa, the Organization of African Unity and the Government of Uganda. This initiative was in response to the concerns of African Women about the increasing number of intra-State wars, violent conflicts and civil strife, in the continent, of which they are the major victims. It came in the context of the goals and objectives of the United Nations Women's Decade whose strategies and action plan emphasized the need for the promotion of equality, development and peace. It was also considered time to examine the situation of women in the process of political changes and the role they play in conflict resolution and peace-building.

The African Regional Conference on Women and Peace focused on four areas of concern: the nature and effects of conflict and underdevelopment; women in the struggle for peace; the empowerment of women in the peace process; and a culture of tolerance and violence. The outcome was the Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace which was endorsed by the OAU Heads of State and Government in June 1995. The principal ideas contained therein were incorporated in the African Platform for Action and later in the Global Platform.

The causes of wars and conflicts are varied. War devastates all of society, but armed conflict, political instability and civil unrest inflict particular suffering on women and the girl child. The impact of violence against women and violation of the human rights of women in such situations is felt by women of all ages. They suffer displacement, loss of home and property, involuntary disappearances, sexual slavery, rape, sexual abuse and forced pregnancy in situations of armed conflict, especially as a result of policies of ethnic cleansing and other new and emerging forms of violence.

When Governments, the International community and civil society adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA), they resolved, *inter alia*, to promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the overall incidence of human rights abuse on women in conflict situations.

Governments are called upon to uphold and reinforce standards set out in international humanitarian law and international rights instruments to prevent all acts of violence against women in situations of armed conflict. They are also called upon to fully investigate all acts of violence against women committed during war, including rape, forced prostitution, and other forms of indecent assault and sexual slavery, as well as to prosecute all acts of violence.

Specifically, the PFA, recognizing that the elimination of all forms of violence against women is central to equality, development and peace, calls upon Governments and other agencies to commit themselves to undertaking the following key actions:

Strategic objective 1: Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation.

Strategic objective 2: Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments.

Strategic objective 3: Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.

Strategic objective 4: Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.

Strategic objective 5: Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women and other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women;

Strategic objective 6: Provide protection to women of the colonies and non-self governing territories.

2. Commitments

Both the Dakar and the Beijing Platforms acknowledge that without durable peace there can be no sustainable development; and that without sustainable development there can be no durable peace. They further state that since peace is a pre-requisite for the advancement of women, without peace in Africa, none of the proposed recommendations and actions in the Platforms can be implemented. Considering that both women and men are victims of the consequences of conflict, the representation of both gender groups in all peacebuilding mechanisms is vital. Peace-making is a life-long process that is based on partnerships which are inextricably linked to equality between women and men and development.

Five years after the Beijing Conference, there have been significant developments in the participation of women in the peacebuilding process in Africa. Both Governments and United Nations agencies have contributed resources and goodwill which have helped women to make significant strides in contributing to peacebuilding on the continent.

The following are various commitments made by the United Nations Agencies, Governments and regional entities in connection with this critical area of concern in the two Platforms.

2.1 The United Nations system

PFA identifies the United Nations as one of the key implementers of the Platform. Under the chapter on Institutional Arrangements (C), PFA calls upon the key United Nations agencies to integrate a gender perspective in all their policies and programmes, and to establish a comprehensive implementation and follow-up mechanism for the Platform. In order to be effective in the implementing of the PFA, the United Nations heads to restructure and redefine its institutional capacity. This will include strengthening the strategies and working methods of its various bodies. Furthermore, it stipulates that all entities of the United Nations system focusing on the advancement of women shall have the necessary resources and support to carry out follow-up activities. (Paras. 306-311 of PFA).

2.1.1 The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

UNIFEM has set in motion several initiatives to promote women's participation in the peace process in Africa. Through its African Women in Crisis project, popularly known as AFWIC, UNIFEM focused its programme activities on strengthening women's participation in peace processes and encourages gender-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding. The framework of the Fund's global initiatives situates the promotion of human security as an integral part of any efforts to promote sustainable peace and development. UNIFEM is committed to achieving the following: (a) Building the leadership potential of women to make meaningful contributions to peacemaking processes at all levels; (b) Facilitating efforts to engender peace-building processes at the national, regional and international levels; and (c) Supporting measures to address the fundamental factors that increase women's vulnerability during periods of armed conflict.

2.1.2 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, (OHCHR) is committed to promoting and protecting women's rights in times of war and peace. The agency is committed to ensuring that women and girls' rights in war situations are respected and that women fully participate in conflict resolution. The agency supports the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes, noting that women are true peacemakers and peace-builders in the field and at the negotiating table. OHCHR operates in post-conflict and ongoing armed conflict settings, from violent internal tensions to peaceful democratic transitions, requiring corresponding adjustments in the mandates and modus operandi of the agency.

2.1.3 The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

As indicated above, the strategic objectives of both the Global and African Platforms on the "protection, assistance and training of refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women" state that Governments, intergovernmental organizations, in particular, and UNHCR, are to take

urgent steps to speed up and enhance the involvement of women, including refugees and internally displaced women, in conflict prevention, management and resolution and in the peace process.

UNHCR is one of the key United Nations Agencies specifically concerned with activities relating to violence against women, women and armed conflict, and the human rights of women and the girl-child.

The tragic consequences of man-made disasters such as armed conflict, civil strife and generalized violence trigger the displacement of people, especially of women and their young children, exposing them to the dangers of violence and abuse.

UNHCR promotes women's role in fostering a culture of peace and non-violent forms of conflict resolution through training and peace-education activities. An example of this is the Rwandan women's initiative through which women can rebuild their lives and that of their communities. Other similar initiatives are being carried out in Rwanda, Uganda, Liberia and Kenya via different channels of mass education.

UNHCR is committed to using a participatory approach to combat violence against refugee women. The agency has encouraged the establishment of refugee task forces that offer counselling and support services to women who have been sexually abused. They also advocate for the elimination of such harmful practices as FGM from the refugee community. In order to promote better programmes for the protection of and assistance to refugee women, UNHCR has adopted a gender perspective in all its policies and programmes and has invested financial and human resources in the development of training materials to guide its staff on how to promote women's rights.

2.1.4 The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

In cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UNFPA provides packages for reproductive health services that include care and post-coital contraception for sexually abused women. This is a pro-active strategy that responds to the immediate needs of vulnerable women, or those that UNFPA identifies as women in special needs due to armed conflict.

2.1.5 The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

UNESCO is committed to promoting women's fostering of a culture of peace. In the last five years, the agency has supported initiatives to strengthen women's leadership capacity in promoting a culture of peace. UNESCO adopted the Manifesto 2000 for a culture of Peace and Non-violence in March 1999. The manifesto is a basic framework through which each and every individual is committed to promoting a culture of peace.

UNESCO's commitment to actions that ensure equality between women and men is evident in its action to implement PFA with adequate resources, political will and through the preparation, implementation and follow-up of national plans of action among other things.

As a follow up to the process that commenced in Kampala in 1994, and the resultant Kampala Action Plan, UNESCO has supported the development of a Culture of Peace in Africa by hosting a conference on this theme in Zanzibar, in May 1999. The Conference brought together over three hundred women from various walks of life. It was the agency's contribution to a mid-term review of PFA and aimed to strengthen women's peacebuilding capacity in Africa. UNESCO's project on Civil Education for Peace and Good Governance seeks to document the experiences of women in peace processes.

2.2 National commitments

Several countries took unprecedented initiatives to promote peace and the participation of women in the peace process. Examples follow:

1. The Rwandan Government is committed to the integration of women in the reconstruction of its society. This Government's commitment is captured in its support and hosting of the 1997 Regional Conference on Peace, Gender and Development. The outcome of that conference was the adoption of the Kigali Declaration for Peace, Gender and Development in 1997.

2. The Rwandan Government established a Ministry for the Peace Process which supports the participation of women in grassroots committees in governance issues at this level. The Government also addressed the important issue of women's economic situation and land reform in favour of women in post-conflict reconstruction. In this programme the Government gave women's committees, comprising elected officials, the responsibility of setting up contributory communal funds, intended to help women to start economic activities at the commune and sector levels. This initiative enhanced women's active participation in post-conflict reconstruction in Rwanda. The Government established a National Commission for Unity and Reconciliation to assist citizens in dealing with the trauma of the genocide.
3. The Algerian Government took unprecedented action to facilitate the passing of legislation to decriminalize abortion in order to allow women who had been raped during the armed conflict access to abortion services. The Government further provided multidisciplinary trauma centres to assist women in coping with the trauma arising from the violations inflicted on them. The Government also introduced peace studies in the National School Curriculum.
4. The Angolan Government, through the Ministry for Family and Women's Promotion, has supported the active participation of civil society organizations in the post-conflict reconstruction process. Some of these are women's organizations.
5. In Liberia and Burundi, pressure from women's organizations contributed to the negotiations for national peace. The Liberian Government supported a woman interim President who was instrumental in brokering the peace agreement.

6. In Sierra Leone, the Government included four women in the team of nine participants in the peace talks leading to the development of the Lome Peace Agreement of 1999.
7. The Government of Chad established a National Institution to mediate conflicts. This institution includes women.
8. The Government of Mali supports the active participation of women in peacebuilding initiatives in the country. Women's stand against armed conflict has contributed to the new impetus to reduce the proliferation of small arms.
9. In Burundi, the participation of women initially disorganized due to lack of political will on the part of all the parties in the conflict and, in some cases, strong resistance by political parties. However, the Government established a Ministry of Peace in 1997 to coordinate peace activities. Women were admitted unto the National Unity and Reconstruction Committee in recognition of their important role in the promotion of peace. Women influenced and organized their participation in the Arusha Peace Negotiations and are now officially accredited as observers in the talks. The Ministry in charge of Social Action and Women's Affairs brought together women members of committees in seven provinces to discuss peace and income-generating activities. The Government supported the hosting of the National Peace Festival on the Culture of Peace in January 1998.
10. The Tunisian Government reduced its military budget and encouraged women's organizations to participate in peace negotiations and activities. The Government introduced peace education in the school syllabus.

11. The Ugandan Government included women in its post-conflict reconstruction programme. The result is that Uganda now has a strong institutional base for the active participation of women in decision-making.
12. Several Governments have initiated national education programmes to support a peace culture; these include the Governments of Togo, Rwanda, Algeria and Burundi.
13. Following their acceptance of refugees in their countries, several other Governments have adopted peace education and have addressed the needs of refugee women. These countries include Benin, Chad, Uganda, Tanzania, and Guinea. The following countries also made specific commitments in this area in their action plans:

Angola

The participation of women in the peace process

Burkina Faso

To promote non-violence

Ghana

Identification of as a critical area of concern

Kenya

Identification of women and armed conflict as a critical area of concern

The Niger

To combat violence and the consequences of armed conflict: to provide assistance to refugees and displaced women and to reintegrate them in the process of development; to train women and men to combat violence.

Nigeria

To increase the participation of women at the decision-making levels, protect women in situations of armed conflict, promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution, and reduce military expenditure.

The Sudan

To identify women and armed conflict as one of the critical areas of concern.

South Africa

To increase and strengthen the participation of women in conflict resolution, decision-making and leadership in peace and security activities, and to protect women in situations of armed and other conflicts. To put forward legislation subject to amendment, or new legislation that must be enacted.

3. Statistical data on the status of women in conflict situations

Five years after PFA was adopted, the status of African women did not improve significantly, indeed there has been increased civil strife and conflict. The majority of the estimated 8.1 million refugees, displaced persons and post-conflict returnees in Africa in 1997 were women and children. War and conflict have increased violence against women and worsened the social and economic conditions under which they live. In situations of conflict, refugee and displaced women and girls have often been sexually assaulted. Reports compiled by women's human rights groups indicate that in Mozambique, Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone, women and girls faced extreme violence, including rape and torture. Women living as refugees have been forced to take to prostitution. The United Nations 1996 report to the General Assembly states that women of all ages may be victims of violence in conflict, but adolescent girls are particularly at risk for many reasons, including body size. The impact of armed conflict on children especially girls, is atrocious, reflecting a slow progress in improving the status of African women in conflict situations. Programmes to promote the health of African women through maternal and child care services and family planning services have been undercut by the reduction of finances and other resources at various levels.

A review of data for the last five years demonstrate that women have had to bear the brunt of the continent's harsh social and economic conditions, even though many Governments have ratified conventions and international legal instruments on women's rights. Often, however, international instruments have not been absorbed into national laws.

Moreover, many women are ignorant of the existence of laws that recognize their rights and that can be invoked for their protection. About three quarters of the world's 20 million refugees are women and their dependants.

The 1996 national report of Burundi referred to abuses committed by soldiers in the commune of Gasorwe leading to the death of 200 civilians most of whom were women and children.

Analysis and research on refugee issues (1992) put the number of internally displaced persons at 16 million. This includes 4.5 million in the Sudan, 300,000 in Chad, more than 1 million in Ethiopia, 825,000 in Angola, 2 Million in Mozambique, at least 1 million in Liberia, 2 million in Somalia, 4.2 million in South Africa and half a million in Uganda¹.

As regards the availability of reliable data, little or no data has been generated by Governments or United Nations agencies on the actual situation of women in the peace process in the last five years. It is recommended that for the coming five years the emerging data should be gender-disaggregated in order to show the impact of war and internal conflicts on women and men, respectively. This will strengthen advocacy activities for women. Data and research should also be developed to show what has been the impact of women in peace processes, and whether the result was sustainable peace.

4. General assessment

4.1 Assessment of progress achieved

PFA calls for Governments to establish national machineries for the implementation of the Platform. It also calls for joint efforts between NGOs and government agencies. Several national initiatives have been taken to increase the participation of women in national peace processes. In selected African countries that have experienced conflicts, women's groups have taken up bold and effective strategies to ensure their participation in the peace process. During the inter-agency Best Practices in Peace Building and Non-Violent Conflict Resolution conference in Addis Ababa in 1998, several case studies were revealed.

¹ Center for policy and research on refugees' issues, 1992 p 2

In Liberia, women organized themselves effectively through two national networks to influence the peace process. After the active participation of women, a long-term sustainable peace process was developed that was inclusive of both women and men.

In Sierra Leone, the Sudan, Somalia and North-West Somalia, various women's movements for Peace were formed to promote a peaceful resolution of the conflicts. In Rwanda, women's action was centred on influencing the central political process.

In the Republic of the Congo, women participated in the development of two peace pacts in 1994 and 1997, respectively.

In Mali, the participation of women in an internal conflict involving the Northern Tuareg people has been important in the reconciliation of the communities and the restoration of trust between them. The experience of Liberian women in the peace talks held in Accra, Ghana, where they organized a delegation of six women to make a forced entry into the 1994 Accra Clarifications Conference, demonstrates that Governments and regional bodies may still be gender-biased against women in peace initiatives. Yet their strategic presence at the conference gave the women a high visibility through the print and electronic media. The Governments of Liberia and Burundi also took steps to include women in the peacebuilding process. The Liberian Government supported a woman interim President who was instrumental to the negotiation of the lasting peace that this country enjoys today.

Recognition should be given to the following Governments for having supported women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives in their respective countries: the Sudan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Rwanda, the Republic of the Congo, Mali and Burundi. These countries have taken into consideration the issues and concerns raised by women peace activists in their efforts to bring about national reconstruction.

4.2 Assessment of the strategies of the stakeholders

In addition to these successful efforts to increase and strengthen the participation of women peace networks in order to build their capacity to influence regional peace initiatives, Governments should buttress their commitments with concrete action through legislation and policy so as to ensure that women are included in all structures of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Legislative or policy changes in any of the countries that support permanent inclusion of women in the peace process is crucial. Countries should establish effective national machineries through which women can participate in these processes. In many instances, women have had to lobby intensively for visibility and inclusion. At times, the existing national machineries may not be effective in the promotion of women's rights. It may even be necessary for Governments to legislate stronger conditions such as the inclusion of "affirmative action" in all decision-making institutions. This will guarantee that, at all levels, women are not excluded from participating in decisions that affect them. The national machinery will certainly be more effective with legislative and financial support.

At the international level, several mechanisms are used to monitor and follow up the implementation of the global PFA. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), was mandated by the General Assembly to play a central role in monitoring the implementation of the Beijing PFA. Since 1995, CSW has systematically addressed each of the 12 critical areas of the Platform. In 1998, the Commission for the Advancement of Women examined the following key areas: Violence against women, Women and armed conflict, and the Human rights of women and the girl-child. CSW was also made the preparatory body for organizing the United Nations special session on Beijing +5 held in June 2000.

4.3 Human and financial resources provided by United Nations agencies and partners for the peace initiatives of women

Resources for peace initiatives have come from different sources. Various foreign partners have supported specific activities relating to building women's capacity to participate in peace processes. Some of the resource allocations during the past five years have been as follows:

- (a) The Netherlands Government provided \$US 860,000.00 for capacity building for work at the grassroots level and for training women on peacebuilding skills. The support was for phase one of the peace project;



- (b) UNIFEM provided the AFWIC project with \$US 1,000,000.00 for activities to be undertaken during the period 1999-2001;
- (c) The Swedish Government provided financial support totaling \$US 430,000.00 for strengthening peace movements in Burundi during the years 1998-2000;
- (d) The Italian Government provided financial support totaling \$US 250,000.00 for peace mainstreaming in the Arusha peace process for Burundi;
- (e) The Netherlands Government provided support amounting to \$US 250,000.00 for Somali women in the peace process from 1998 to 1999;
- (f) The United Nations Human Rights Commission has appointed a Special Rapporteur on the elimination of harmful traditional practices affecting the health of women and the girl-child (HTPs) and a special rapporteur on systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflicts.
- (g) The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is also supporting the campaign for the universal ratification of the Women's Convention (CEDAW) and the removal of substantive reservations. Through the United Nations Technical Cooperation Programme in the field of Human Rights, the agency provides a programme that addresses training for police officers, peacekeepers and human rights monitors.

However, fund allocation and the effectiveness of the mechanisms and procedures established to mobilize resources to fully implement the activities contained in the two Platforms have fallen short of expectations. In most cases, the resources allocated for peace initiatives are insufficient. UNIFEM, UNHCR, ECA and OAU need more resources in order to be more effective and financially strong enough to carry out their work. No data was available in the national reports on the financial resources used for peace initiatives in the respective countries.

5. Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation

5.1 Mechanisms for accountability vis-à-vis women as beneficiaries

In addition to the national machineries and the African peace networks, other mechanisms have been set up at the international and regional levels to step up implementation of the PFA.

In 1997, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict. Through this initiative the Secretary-General facilitated achievement of the African Platform's calls for special attention to be paid to the plight of the girl-child. The African Platform for Action recognizes that the girl-child in Africa has special needs. The Special Representative's office will be producing reports to demonstrate the harsh environment in which the African girl-child is raised.

The establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court (ICC) is expected to promote and protect human rights, especially women rights. The Women's caucus that includes representatives from African women's organizations has presented major legal reforms to make the Vienna treaty useful for women. As sexual violence during armed conflict has been ignored for too long, providing a legal framework within the new ICC's jurisdiction to end such impunity is key to women's protection. The women's caucus sought to incorporate a gender perspective throughout the ICC statute by ensuring that structural and procedural mechanisms are incorporated so that gender-based crimes are effectively investigated and culprits successfully prosecuted. The establishment of the ICC is a direct implementation of strategic objective E.3 145 (d) of the Platform for Action.

It is also hoped that the establishment of the African Women Committee on Peace and Development will ensure women's active participation in peace talks and post-conflict reconstruction. The establishment of the Committee has taken long. The recommendation for its establishment was made in 1993 during the Pan-African Women's Conference on Peace held in Kampala. However, the Committee requires adequate authority and finance to be effective in making a difference in the participation of women in the peace process. It is at present supported by ECA and OAU.

5.2 Mechanisms for consultation and dialogue between Governments and NGOs.

The PFA calls for closer cooperation between Governments and NGO's in the implementation of the Platform. The development and implementation of the national plans of action should be a joint initiative and joint action. This approach has been successfully used by some African Governments and NGOs.

6. Results of recommendations of meetings, conferences and other consultations organized at the regional, subregional and regional levels

6.1 Expert group/women's leadership forum for peace

From 4 to 8 November 1996, a forum of experts was organized in Johannesburg, South Africa to deliberate on mechanisms for increasing women's participation in the peace process. The forum was guided by the recommendations of the Kampala Platform for Action (1994) which, among other things, calls for the establishment of a Committee of African Women Ministers and Plenipotentiaries to be involved in policy and mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution of the highest organs of OAU and ECA. It was recommended that the committee should be autonomous and have a joint OAU/ECA secretariat for a specified period of time.

6.2 Conference on peace, gender and development

From 1 to 3 March 1997, a Pan-African Conference on Peace, Gender and Development was held in Kigali, Rwanda. One of the key recommendations of this meeting was to call upon OAU and ECA to speed up the appointment of the Committee of African women Ministers and others to address conflict resolution at the highest policy level in the continent.

6.3 Peace mission to Burundi

In December 1997, a high level African Women's Peace Mission went to Burundi to facilitate the peace process in that country. This mission helped to build Burundi's capacity to peacefully solve its internal conflicts.

6.4 The African Women's Committee on Peace and Development

The African Women's Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD) was set up in April 1998 and officially launched on 11 November 1998 in Addis Ababa. The Committee is a joint initiative of OAU and ECA. Among other things, AWCPD is entrusted with advising the Secretary-General of OAU and the Executive Secretary of ECA on issues of mainstreaming women's concerns and a gender perspective in peace and development initiatives in the continent. There are two main plans in this broad mandate of AWCPD. The first is to facilitate the effective involvement of African women in advocacy for alternative options to war and violence. The other is to promote increased participation by women in decision-making, particularly for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts and other matters of war and peace, thereby inculcating and nurturing a culture of peace and peace-building in the people.

As indicated in the minutes of the first and second meetings of the Committee held in 1998 and 1999, AWCPD has taken peace initiatives and actions in several African countries, namely: Burundi, the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola and South Africa.

6.5 The African First Ladies Forum

At the Fourth World Conference on Women, a significant initiative undertaken was the establishment of the African First Ladies Forum. The purpose of this Forum was to examine the peace situation on the continent. The First Ladies sent a mission to Burundi in 1996 with the aim of appealing to the leaders to stop the internal conflict there. The Forum has held several regional meetings. In 1996, in Abuja, Nigeria, they developed the "Abuja Declaration of Africa's First Ladies on Peace and Humanitarian issues". During their second forum the following

year, they held the First West African First Ladies Meeting in Accra, Ghana, from 27 to 28 July 1998. The meeting noted that it was important for the African continent to address its own problems and that there was need to solve conflicts expeditiously in order to minimize the high human and economic costs involved. In their Plan of Action, the First Ladies, *inter alia*, decided to work with the ECOWAS Committee of Seven on Guinea-Bissau; to offer their services to the Government of Sierra Leone; and to enlist in each country mechanisms and institutions to mobilize relief and humanitarian assistance for victims of the civil war in Sierra Leone. The First Ladies also committed themselves to advocating for and promoting the political, economic and social empowerment of women. They pledged to form an inter-governmental group to monitor and periodically review the implementation of the Accra Plan of Action.

6.6 ECA regional conference on economic development

In April 1998, the Economic Commission for Africa held a regional conference to reflect on its forty years of existence. The Conference's theme was "African Women and Economic Development: Investing in our Future." Participants noted that in spite of the commitments made by African Governments at the Fifth African Regional Conference and the Fourth World Conference on Women, there had not been significant increase in the participation of women in national, subregional and regional mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution.

6.7 Inter-agency workshop on documented best practices of women in peace-building and non-violent means of conflict resolution

To capture the unique contribution of women to peace movements and the non-violent means of conflict resolution in Africa, UNHCR in close cooperation with UNESCO, UNDP, UNIFEM and UNICEF and the co-sponsorship of OAU, convened an Inter-Agency Workshop on Documented Best Practices of Women in Peace-Building and Non-Violent means of Conflict Resolution, from 24 to 26 November 1997, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The main objectives of the Workshop were: (a) to provide a forum for established women's peace movements to

share information and experiences on best practices concerning women's contribution to peace-building and non-violent means of conflict resolution; (b) to consolidate partnership with national, regional, international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations as well as individual peace-promoters in order to enhance coordination and joint action in support of women's community activities on peacebuilding; (c) to strengthen assistance to the establishment of effective mechanisms for mainstreaming women's concerns and a gender perspective in peace negotiations and peace-building; and (d) to support women's active participation in decision-making processes.

Participants from various African countries shared experiences on actual conflict situations. Lessons learnt included the following:-

- (a) The necessity of an institutional framework for promoting women in decision-making;
- (b) The need to promote women's peace movements among neighbouring countries as regional peace and stability will enhance the likelihood of continued national peace;
- (c) The need for women to integrate positive traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in peace initiatives;
- (d) The importance of including grassroots, rural and urban women as well as women of various religious, linguistic, social and political groupings in the recruitment of women into peace movements;
- (e) The need for programmes to initiate, strengthen and sustain peace in the community through peace education in schools;
- (f) The indispensability of acknowledging and maintaining women's continuing role in sustaining peace after hostilities have ceased. Thus, women should not be relegated to the domestic arena.

6.8 The pan-African women's conference for a culture of peace and non-violence.

This Pan-African Women's Conference organized by UNESCO and supported by OAU and the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania was held in Zanzibar from 17 to 20 May 1999. The final outcome was the Zanzibar Declaration: "Women of Africa for a Culture of Peace". It emphasized the importance of: (a) Women's participation in Peace Promotion; (b) Demilitarization and Disarmament (c) Networking between African Women's Movements and International Movements; (d) Communication, Information and Dissemination and (e) Resource mobilization.

The Conference strongly urged the OAU, ECA, ADB, the African Women's Committee for Peace and Development, all international regional and subregional organizations such as ECOWAS, SADC and IGAD as well as NGOs, Governments and the donor community, to support and implement the Zanzibar Declaration and the Women's Agenda for a Culture of Peace in Africa.

6.9 The Sixth Regional Conference on Women:- mid-decade review of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for action. (22-26 November, 1999) Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

6.9.1 Workshop on the involvement of women in the peace process.

Below are some recommendations of this Workshop of the Conference:

1. Governments should secure women's access to decision-making mechanisms, education and training and access to national resources by:
 - (i) Increasing women's access to the decision-making process by appointing more women to decision-making mechanisms at the national, subregional and international levels (including Governments, Parliaments and subregional, regional and international

organizations). In this regard, the quota system should be preferred when it is to the advantage of women, while continuing to promote the principle of competition between men and women;

- (ii) Ensuring the effective representation of women in military institutions, appointing and encouraging more women to become officers at decision-making levels;
- (iii) Promulgating laws designed to give effect to the will of Governments to involve women in decision-making and, above all, to ensure that laws are strictly applied.

On Education and Training, the Workshop recommended:

1. Reforming the school curriculum to incorporate programmes on culture and peace for school children (including respect for property, tolerance and acceptance of differences, among other things). These programmes should be based on the specific cultural experience of each country.
2. Promoting in schools in rural areas and in refugee camps the teaching of the principles of human rights and the content of international conventions on peace in order to protect young people, in particular, against indoctrination.
3. Significantly increasing resource allocation to the education and training sectors and ensuring that women and men have equal access to education.
4. Promoting literacy programmes for women in order to expand their understanding of their role in development.
5. Promoting the teaching of African Geography in primary schools and the preparation of Information, education and communication programmes to promote solidarity between African countries.

On National Resources:

Governments should take practical measures to ensure equitable distribution of national resources by affording women equal access to these resources. In that regard, laws and regulations should be adopted to promote women's land ownership. Financial resources and income-generating activities should be put in favour of women.

On Dialogue, Consultation and Sensitization:

1. Encouraging and promoting women's participation in dialogue and consultations for peacebuilding. In this connection, all discriminatory laws and traditional practices that hamper women's involvement in any consultative process or dialogue should be abolished.
2. Establishing sensitization programmes for women on their rights guaranteed by the laws and regulations of each country.
3. Promulgating laws designed to protect women and children refugees and displaced persons against the following:
 - (i) All forms of conflict-related violence (rape, forcible recruitment into armed groups, destruction of property, physical mutilation and other abuses;
 - (ii) Traditional practices which isolate women from peace processes;
 - (iii) The dangers inherent in the use of landmines.

7. Conclusion

It is commendable that, five years after the Beijing World Conference on Women, there have been noticeable developments in the participation of women in the processes of peacebuilding and conflict-resolution in Africa. Their input in terms of lobbying, peace missions, conferences, recommendations and creating forums and networks at all levels has helped to advance their just cause, their role and their contribution in the various aspects of peacebuilding. They have showed themselves to

be vital promoters of the culture of peace. Governments, United Nations Agencies, NGOs, Inter-governmental regional and subregional organizations and national peace networks have all contributed human and financial resources and goodwill that have enriched women's significant strides in implementing the calls of the two Platforms to involve women in the peace processes on the continent. It is, however, an ongoing endeavour. Moreover, since the peacebuilding process still remains a male-dominated area, much remains to be done to step up and enhance the involvement of women, including refugee and internally displaced women, in all conflict prevention, management and resolution processes.

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