



United Nations  
Economic Commission  
for Africa

# 5 years after Beijing:

What efforts in favour of African women?



Assessing Women And Poverty, and the Economic Empowerment  
of Women

September 2001

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of Women

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## Executive Summary

African governments and international organizations expressed their commitments to implementing the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action in their declarations and speeches at the Dakar and Beijing conferences on women. The subsequent National Action Plans showed their commitments further, outlining planned modalities for implementation. These Plans showed that an overwhelming majority of African governments placed poverty reduction and the economic empowerment of women among their top priorities for action.

Country assessment reports indicated that countries faced a number of constraints in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in the areas of poverty reduction and the economic empowerment of women. Commonly reported constraints included lack of financial and human resources; the debt burden, which is a constraint on available resources for gender equity programmes; time constraints associated with women's fulfilment of their multiple roles; war and civil strife.

Despite these constraints, many countries reported progress in implementing some aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action. In the area of policies and institutional mechanisms, countries reported that they have established or strengthened national machineries for the promotion of gender equality. In addition, some countries reported that they have adopted the principle of gender mainstreaming for all public policies and programmes. Other countries reported the passage of affirmative action laws to facilitate women's entry into decision-making bodies, especially Parliament.

Country assessment reports also note that numerous programmes and projects have been designed and launched to contribute to the reduction of poverty and the economic empowerment of women. Commonly reported activities include programmes which provided credit to women; job creation activities; participation of women entrepreneurs in trade fairs and study tours, capacity building for women entrepreneurs and campaigns against poverty. Furthermore, a few countries reported that they have conducted research on gender-sensitive budgets. Many countries also reported activities undertaken to improve education, health, the environment, and political empowerment. All these are long-term strategies for reducing poverty and are more fully covered in the accompanying reports on the 10 priority areas of the Platform for Action that are not the direct focus of this one.

At the level of impacts, perhaps the most pervasive is people's increased awareness of gender equity issues, especially the notion of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes of governments and international organizations. Little was said in the country reports about the amount of change in the level of women's poverty and economic empowerment. However, the relatively low income growth in the African region, especially in such sectors as agriculture, where women predominate suggest that poverty among women has not declined since 1995 when the Beijing Platform for Action was launched.

The achievements to date notwithstanding, much still remains to be done. For instance, many of the plans for mainstreaming gender still need to be implemented. A notable gap also exists in the area of monitoring and the development of indicators for measuring progress. Not many countries gave detailed information on how they assess progress in the implementation of the various critical areas for action.

The Sixth World Conference on Women provided an opportunity for governments, NGOs and international organizations to make further recommendations for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in terms of the reducing women's poverty and empowering women economically.

## 1. Introduction

The Beijing Platform for Action<sup>1</sup> identified 12 “critical areas of concern” as priorities for action<sup>1</sup>. The African Centre for Women (ACW) commissioned the preparation of evaluation reports on the implementation in Africa of the Platform for Action in these 12 critical areas of concern. The purpose of these reports is to assist in the mid-decade review of the implementation by Governments and international organizations of the Platform for Action in the African region. This is one of those reports. It focuses on two closely related areas of concern:

- (a) The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women (Women and Poverty);
- (b) Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources (Women and the Economy);

It should be noted from the outset that although 12 distinct priority areas are identified, the Beijing Platform for Action points out that there are many interlinkages among them. Thus, the objectives and actions advocated for each are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. For example, many of the proposed actions for the reduction of women’s poverty overlap with those advocated in the section on “Women and the Economy” and on the “Education and Training of Women”. This is not surprising because adequate access to employment and productive resources, basic and advanced education and training, and the protection and promotion of women’s human rights, are all strategies for the reduction of poverty among women and among people in general.

In order to describe the context in which the Beijing Platform for Action is being implemented, this report begins by presenting some of the key characteristics of poverty and economic disempowerment in Africa as a whole, and of women in particular. Section 3 then reviews the commitments made by Governments and international organizations with respect to the implementation of the Beijing Platform in the two critical areas for action. Section 4 reviews the achievements made to date, while Section 5 reviews the resources allocated for implementing

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<sup>1</sup> The full list of the 12 critical areas of concern is given in Appendix I.

the Beijing Platform. Section 6 considers the mechanisms which have been established to monitor the implementation of the Beijing Platform, while section 7 presents a summary of the results and recommendations of follow-up conferences held after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Finally, section 8 presents some relevant statistics for the two critical areas of concern in Africa.

## 2. Poverty and economic empowerment of women in Africa

### 2.1 The incidence of poverty

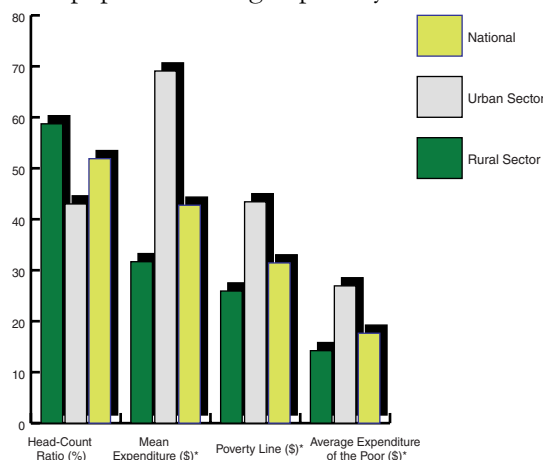
Poverty can be defined as deprivation from resources (physical, economic, social and others) which are needed to achieve a sustainable livelihood. Poverty is recognized to be multi-dimensional in its causes and manifestations, “including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure a sustainable livelihood; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increasing morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion...lack of participation in decision-making and civil, social and cultural life”<sup>3</sup>. More importantly, many of the other aspects of poverty (e.g, health, education, environment, political empowerment) are covered more fully in the assessment reports of the other critical areas of concern. The direct focus of this report is poverty and economic empowerment of women..

A commonly used gauge for measuring the incidence of poverty is the head count ratio. This is defined as the share of the population whose consumption falls below the “poverty line”. The poverty line is a specified threshold of income or value of consumption for a given country, subregion or region, below which one is defined as poor. For developing countries, poverty lines are usually calculated as the monetary value of some minimum bundle of consumption goods and services, such as food, shelter and health required to satisfy basic requirements within a particular social context. Poverty lines may differ among countries/regions in a given space in time and may also vary over time as socio-economic conditions change.

Forty-four per cent of Africans live below the region-wide poverty line of \$39 per capita per month<sup>4</sup>. However, the extent and severity of poverty varies from subregion to subregion. The least prevalent incidence of poverty is found in the North African subregion where 22 per cent of the population live below the subregional poverty line of \$54 per capita per month. In sub-Saharan Africa, 51 per cent of the population live below the regional poverty line of \$34 per capita per month.

## 2.2 Poverty in rural and urban areas in sub-Saharan Africa

In sub-Saharan Africa, the incidence of poverty in rural areas tends to be higher than that in urban areas. Ali and Thorbeck<sup>5</sup> found this to be the case after making comparisons of the head-count ratio, the mean expenditure, the poverty line and the average expenditure for the urban and rural areas (Figure 2.5)<sup>2</sup>. The degree of rural poverty varies from country to country. Côte d'Ivoire was found to have the lowest level of rural poverty, while the Central African Republic had the highest with 78% of its rural population living in poverty.



**Figure 2.5**  
Rural and Urban Poverty  
in sub-Saharan Africa

\*per person per month

Based on the ECA *Economic Report on Africa, 1999: The Challenge of Poverty Reduction and Sustainability*. Addis Ababa: Table 2.4

<sup>2</sup> The data on which these results were based were for the early 1990s. A summary of the data is contained in table 7.4

### 2.3 Gender and poverty in Africa

While useful in providing general understanding about poverty, the commonly used indicators, such as the ones above, do not give much insight into the gendered nature of the underlying causes and the incidence of poverty. They tend to be based primarily on consumption and income data collected at the household level. However, such data are not broken down by gender and therefore do not indicate the sex disaggregation of those classified as poor.

These indicators also do not reflect the gender-based inequities within households. A key challenge for documenting and monitoring the gendered nature of poverty is the development of appropriate and reliable indicators. This would probably entail using the common indicators of poverty discussed above along with information collected from individual households. Meanwhile, there is still a paucity of generally accepted indicators for analysing gender-differentiation in terms of incidence, severity and change in poverty.

For example, the presence of female heads of households is sometimes considered a possible indicator of women's economic poverty, particularly in Africa. However, recent studies have shown that the existence of female heads of households does not always mean higher levels of poverty<sup>7</sup>. Lampietti found that in West Africa, polygamous male-headed households as a group had a higher incidence of poverty in the society. However, it can be argued that, in many cases, women are the de facto heads of households. Even in polygamous households sub-units could be considered as female-headed households. Similar results were found in Kenya, Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, in Southern Africa, Lampietti found that the incidence of poverty was actually higher among female-headed households.

Other indicators for women's poverty which have been considered include family size, women's control over resources and women's levels of education. However, for the most part, there is still a need to collect gender-disaggregated data, develop indicators and use them for policy, and to conduct research and advocacy for the enhancement of gender equality in Africa.

Despite the above indicators, key characteristics of women's poverty in Africa could be outlined as follows.

### 2.3.1 Poverty and women's work

There is growing evidence that, in the past decade, the number of women living in poverty has increased disproportionately to that of men<sup>9</sup>. This is due to a host of socio-economic biases against women in both the market and non-market spheres of life. Efforts to document the extent of these biases and their implications for poverty among women are growing in Africa<sup>viii</sup>.

***Much of women's burden of work and poverty remains "hidden" from official policies, resources and strategies for reducing poverty.***

Official policies and programmes continue to ignore the non-market activities of both women and men. Because women predominate in non-market, household activities, they tend to be more adversely affected by this lack of policy, programme and resource support from Governments and international organizations.

This arises from the fact that a significant amount of the work which women do (especially in subsistence production, informal employment, domestic and reproductive work) tends to be "invisible". Although progress has been made in some countries to include some subsistence production in the System of National Accounts (SNA), much of women's unpaid domestic work is not counted. The World Bank reports that 66 per cent of women's activities in developing countries is not counted in the SNA, while only 24 per cent of men's activities is left out<sup>x</sup>. The result of this "invisibility" is that women's work tends not to be regularly and systematically considered in public policy and in budgetary allocations.

***Higher incidence of poverty has led to increased workload for poor women.*** Women's participation in the market economy has increased, especially in the informal sector. Women in sub-Saharan Africa have tended to enter the informal market more than the formal market in an effort to combat declining real wages and increasing unemployment among women themselves and their male partners. This has been the case, especially since the early 1990s, in the wake of the implementation of economic reform policies in Africa.

At the same time, women's domestic workloads have not declined. Women continue to be primarily responsible for such activities as the care of minor children and the elderly members of the household, cooking and cleaning, fetching water and firewood and managing the

household in general. Numerous time-use studies have shown that women in both urban and rural areas work longer hours than men, when both market and non-market activities are taken into account<sup>12</sup>. This is especially true for poor women who do not have the resources to hire additional labour to take over some of the household responsibilities when they engage in market activities.

### **2.3.2 Poverty and women's health<sup>3</sup>**

***Poor women suffer from poor health and a high incidence of maternal deaths.*** Both men and women in Africa face numerous health challenges often related to poverty. Women, in particular, face an array of health problems related to their reproductive roles. Women living in poverty tend to have poor nutrition, low access to clean water and sanitation, and less access to medical care. In particular, they tend to have less access to obstetric and gynecological care. It can therefore be said that a higher incidence of poverty corresponds with poor health among women and higher maternal deaths.

Data show that maternal mortality rates for sub-Saharan Africa continue to be among the highest in the world, being disproportionately higher than the continent's share of births<sup>14</sup>. Africa accounts for 20 per cent of the world's births and 40 per cent of the world's maternal deaths<sup>15</sup>. The rate of maternal deaths varies from country to country in sub-Saharan Africa, ranging from 600 to 1,500 maternal deaths for every 100,000 births.

### **2.3.3 Poverty and women's education<sup>3</sup>**

***Economic poverty tends to go hand in hand with low human capital resources.*** Various issues of the UNDP Human Development Report show that countries with a low per capita gross domestic product (GDP) also tend to have lower levels of literacy. In particular, women in developing countries, including African countries, tend to have lower literacy rates than men, especially in rural areas. Fifty-two per cent of women in sub-Saharan Africa are functionally illiterate.

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<sup>3</sup> Education and health are dealt with in greater detail in separate evaluation reports.

### 2.3.4 Poverty across generations

***Women's poverty has far-reaching inter-generational consequences.*** Poverty, in general, has an adverse impact on the welfare of children and, given the primacy of women's involvement in the care of young children at a very early age, women's poverty has even more grave consequences on the educational possibilities and capacities of their children than men's. The link between women's control of and access to resources and family nutrition, health and children's education expenditure as well as the link between women's education and that of their children have also been well documented.<sup>16</sup> However, poor women tend to have fewer resources and less education than either poor men or richer women and men.

***Poverty has negative gender-differentiated implications for girls and boys' education.*** This is due to a variety of factors. For example, an increase in the burden of work of women will tend to increase the amount of work allocated to children. In most cases, female children are required to perform more of the household chores, normally considered the domain of women and girls. In some cases, children also engage in market activities such as the provision of additional agricultural labour or even the sale of commodities. Elson and Evers (1997) found that girls in Uganda provided more labour for the production of vanilla, an export crop, than did boys.

A high demand for children's labour, for domestic or other work, has adverse consequences on their education (enrolment, attendance, retention and completion). However, the gender-differentiated rates of boys and girls' education are not simply related to the demand for children's labour. Rather, they are determined by a host of socio-economic factors, including the level of public and private investment in education which have an impact on the relative availability of resources for education. They are also influenced by society's perceived gains from the education of male rather than female children. Although in most cases boys tend to receive more education than girls in Africa, it has been found that in some pastoral communities, boys may actually get less education than girls - as in Lesotho<sup>xiv</sup>.

## 2.4 Women and the economy

Although African women participate in all sectors of the economy, the rate of their participation in the total labour force remains below that of men. Data from the International Labour Organization (ILO)<sup>xv</sup> shows that women's share of the adult labour force ranges from 21 per cent to 50 per cent. The lowest rates are generally in North Africa. For example, the economic participation rates for women over the age of 15 in Libya, Algeria and Egypt are 21, 24, and 29 per cent, respectively. The highest participation rates are in sub-Saharan Africa where women's share of the labour force is 45-50 per cent<sup>4</sup>.

### 2.4.1 Sectoral participation rates

There are sectoral variations in African women's participation in the market economy. Women are predominantly employed in the agricultural sector in Africa, especially in West Africa, Central Africa and Eastern and Southern Africa. It is estimated that women account for 60-80 per cent of the agricultural labour force, and are responsible for 70-80 per cent of the food production in Africa<sup>xvi</sup>. However, women's employment in the industrial sector remains small in Africa, being less than 5 per cent for the majority of countries<sup>xvi</sup>. In general, the percentage of women in the services sector falls between that in industry and agriculture.

Outside the agricultural sector, women's jobs tend to be concentrated in occupations like nursing and teaching. In the industrial sector, women's jobs tend to be non-technical, such as secretarial jobs. Women are still underrepresented in many occupations, especially in the scientific and technological fields.

### 2.4.2 Professional advancement

In all sectors, women are also severely underrepresented in management and decision-making positions. They tend to advance slower than their male counterparts in their careers both in terms of assigned responsibilities and in terms of wage increases. This can mostly be attributed to society's gender biases against girls and women in various spheres of life, including in education and training and in patterns of promotion and allocation of jobs in employment.

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<sup>4</sup> See table 8.4 for a listing of women's participation rates in each African country. The table also contains the economic activity rates by sex in each African country.

Another factor which is often cited for the slower professional advancement of women, relative to men as a group, is their need to take maternity leave and other leaves associated with the care of infants. Although at least 40 countries in Africa have laws or regulations which provide for maternity leave<sup>xviii</sup>, the failure to fully value women's reproductive functions in the market economy results in persistent biases against women's professional advancement.

### **2.4.3 Women in the informal sector**

As noted above, in the past 15 years, the fastest growing source of employment for women in Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, has been the informal sector where women engage in a wide range of activities, particularly trading. This has emerged as an important strategy for women to contribute to family income at a time when the formal labour markets have become stagnant or are growing very slowly. It has emerged as a strategy for dealing with women and men's increasing unemployment arising from the implementation of economic reform policies in Africa. However, for the most part, the informal sector suffers from a lack of systematic and regular support in the form of official policies and resources.

### **2.4.4 Unequal access to resources**

Even producers and entrepreneurs have widely acknowledged that African women have access to fewer resources than men. For example, relative to men, they tend to have lower access to land, credit facilities and education and training facilities. Even in agriculture where women tend to predominate, credit and land ownership has historically been directed to the male head of household, to the detriment of women, and, indeed, to the detriment of agricultural development in Africa.

### **2.4.5 Globalization and new information and communication technologies**

Finally, on a more general note, there are two major phenomena which are changing the way in which economies function, and have profound implications for men and women's current and future abilities to succeed in African and international economies: globalization and new information and communication technologies. Owing primarily to low

literacy rates and lack of training in information technologies, African men and women, especially women, are not able to take advantage of either of these changes as much as do people elsewhere in the world. At the same time, African economies are being affected by these changes.

For example, the nature of the job market is changing, albeit to a lesser extent in Africa than in other parts of the world. Similarly, world capital markets have expanded rapidly in the past ten years as the flow of capital around the world is facilitated by new information technologies and the ever-expanding multi-national companies. The insufficient levels of the critical skills and infrastructure that would enable African women and men to participate in the new information economies is a major impediment to Africa's growth. Not only is Africa unable to take advantage of the advancing technologies, especially cheaper, more effective communication, it is also unable to attract the foreign direct investment needed to support economic development. Worse still, African economies continue to experience significant capital flight.

The above (Section 2) highlights the key characteristics of poverty in Africa, the gendered aspects of poverty and women's participation in African economies. This is, in part, the context within which the Beijing Platform is being implemented in Africa. The Fourth World Conference on Women represents a continuation in a series of landmark meetings on women, their mid-decade reviews, and the subsequent recommendations arising from them. In addition, there have been other international platforms for gender equity, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Thus, the implementation of the Beijing Platform, as the Dakar Declaration correctly points out, is in many ways a continuation of efforts already begun. A key contribution of the Beijing Platform, however, is the articulation of the 12 critical areas of concern, each with specific objectives, strategies and recommended actions. The rest of this paper considers the implementation of the Beijing Platform in the two critical areas of: "Women and Poverty" and "Women and the Economy".

## 3. Commitments

### 3.1 General commitments to implementing the Platform for Action

Various Declarations and Addresses made at the Fourth World Conference on Women expressed the commitments of Governments and Organizations of the United Nations system to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. In the Beijing Declaration, the 189 Governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women committed themselves “to implement the... Platform for Action, ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all ...policies and programmes”. Likewise, the statement of the United Nations Secretary-General, which was read on the concluding day of the conference, expressed the commitment of the organizations of the United Nations system to implementing the recommendations and ensuring a coordinated system-wide response. Similarly, in his address at the conference, the President of the World Bank pledged to commit the Bank’s finances and energy as an advocate and a partner in the fight for equity.

Perhaps the most far-reaching was a commitment to promote an active and visible policy of gender mainstreaming in all the policies and programmes of Governments and other actors, including the organizations of the United Nations system. The mainstreaming of gender was advocated in each of the 12 critical areas of concern, including all those that support the efforts and needs of women in poverty and the economic empowerment of women.

More specifically, for each of the 12 critical areas of concern, the Beijing Platform for Action specified strategic objectives and actions to be taken by Governments, multilateral financial and development institutions, and national and international non-governmental organizations. It also noted that the primary responsibility for implementation rested with Governments - other actors having more of a supportive role.

#### 3.1.1 Commitments for the reduction/elimination of poverty

The Beijing Platform for Action identified the following four strategic objectives for the reduction or elimination of the burden of poverty on women:

- (a) To review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty.
- (b) To revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources.
- (c) To provide women with access to savings and credit mechanisms and institutions.
- (d) To develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty.

### 3.1.2 Commitments for the economic empowerment of women

Likewise, the following were the strategic objectives listed for the promotion of gender equality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources:

- (a) To promote women's economic rights and independence, including their access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources;
- (b) To facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade;
- (c) To provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income and grassroots women;
- (d) To strengthen women's capacity and their commercial networks;
- (e) To eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination;
- (f) To promote the harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.

A commitment to implement the Platform meant, *inter alia*, a commitment to achieve the objectives listed above. Subsequent action plans demonstrated that Governments and other actors accorded varying degrees of importance to the various priorities identified in the Platform. However, an overwhelming majority included the reduction of poverty and the economic empowerment of women as national or institutional priorities.

## 3.2 Commitments by African Governments

In preparing for the Fourth World Conference on Women, Ministers and representatives of African Governments in attendance at the Dakar Preparatory Meeting in November 1994, committed themselves to supporting the implementation of the African Platform for Action<sup>xix</sup>. In their Declaration they made the committed to:

*“adopt the African Platform for Action as a renewed commitment by African Governments and as a blueprint to further accelerate the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies in line with the Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development; The Role of Women in Africa in the 1990s, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and declarations at international and regional levels;”*

The declaration noted, among other things, that the African Platform for Action is Africa’s position paper that reflects the Governments’ commitment to integrate women’s concerns in balancing political, economic, cultural and social policy options and in harmonizing and reconciling economic growth with social equity.

### 3.2.1 National action plans

After the Beijing Conference, most African Governments made public declarations of support for the implementation of the Platform for Action. Notably, the specific National Action Plans<sup>xx</sup> for the implementation of the Platform for Action further indicated Governments’ commitments in most of the critical areas of concern, including poverty reduction and the economic empowerment of women. For the most part, the Plans were prepared as official government documents which outlined the priorities selected by Governments for

implementing the Beijing Platform, as well as the proposed methods and institutional frameworks within which stated objectives were to be met. An evaluation of 48 National Action Plans and/or summaries of these plans<sup>25</sup> submitted by African countries showed that 43 countries had included poverty reduction and/or various aspects of the economic empowerment of women among their national priorities. Box I presents a summary of sectors from the different National Action Plans which referred to the two critical areas.

### Box I

#### Summary of items of national action plans pertaining to the critical areas: Women and Poverty and Women and the Economy

- Algeria: To reach disabled women through social and vocational integration;
- Angola: Women and poverty, and education and training of women, among national priorities;
- Benin: Economic empowerment of women among national priorities;
- Botswana: 1<sup>st</sup> critical area for action: "Women and Poverty, including Women's Economic Empowerment"; also points out the special situation of female-headed households;
- Burkina Faso: To revise and adopt macro-economic policies, improve access to credit, provide access to employment, access to markets and strengthen women's commercial networks;
- Burundi: To fight against poverty among national priorities;
- Cameroon: To improve the living conditions of women; economic empowerment of women among national priorities;
- Chad: To ensure economic empowerment of women and improve the living conditions of women among national priorities;
- Comoros: To include poverty reduction and sustainable development among national priorities;
- The Republic of the Congo: Support for formal and informal sector employment. The plan noted that integrating women in development was part of the country's Economic and Social Plan for 1990 - 1994.
- Côte d'Ivoire: Economy and the eradication of poverty among national priorities;
- Egypt: The Second National Conference on Egyptian Women focused on policy formulation for the advancement of women in preparation for the five-year plan for economic development, 1997 - 2002. One of the recommendations of this conference was to promote employment and policies, making women effective in raising the productivity of Egyptian society.
- Equatorial Guinea: Women and the Economy among national priorities;
- Ethiopia: Poverty alleviation and food security among national priorities;
- Gabon: Poverty eradication and employment among national priorities;
- The Gambia: Poverty alleviation among national priorities;
- Ghana: Ghana draft Platform for Action indicates both Women and the Economy and Women and Poverty as priority areas; Has elaborated further objectives on the strategic objectives outlined in the Platform for Action, and indicated who is responsible for attaining them;

- Guinea: The plan calls for the reduction of poverty and reinforcement of economic roles; Priority is also indicated for the establishment of credit lines and funds to support women's economic activities;
- Guinea Bissau: The economy and poverty eradication identified as national priorities;
- Kenya: Priority areas: social development; agriculture and food security; Labour force, employment;
- Lesotho: Poverty reduction and employment among national priorities;
- Madagascar: Fight against poverty and economic empowerment among priority areas;
- Malawi: Poverty alleviation and empowerment among national priorities;
- Mali: Proposed the facilitation of women's access to credit. The plan indicates that economic promotion would take up 42.2 per cent of the budget (11,135,678,000 cfa) to be allocated to the implementation of the National Action Plan. In Mali, UNICEF provided funding for water projects and small loans to women;
- Mauritania: Combating poverty identified as national priority;
- Morocco: Proposed to alleviate poverty and facilitate the training of handicapped women; promote occupational integration of handicapped women;
- Mozambique: Provide employment opportunities including self-employment, revise national statistical procedures to include women's work in the informal sector, revise concepts of poverty to include access to land and credit;
- Namibia: Gender, poverty and rural development; economic empowerment among national priorities;
- Niger: Improve the economic situation of women and eliminate poverty: apply macro economic policies that respond to the needs of women and revise legislation and administrative practices; establish cooperatives of women's groups and promote small- and medium-scale enterprises run by women;
- Nigeria: Establish income generation activities, link formal banking sector, micro-credit initiatives, target women farmers, provide new skills for food processing, form trade groups; ensure equal access, maximize women's potentials;
- Rwanda: Poverty eradication and economic empowerment included among national priorities;
- Sao Tome and Principe: Poverty reduction identified among national priorities;
- Senegal: 1<sup>st</sup> Area of priority out of five: Economic empowerment of women and fight against poverty; reduce the burden of domestic work on women and girls through the development and implementation of appropriate technologies;

- Seychelles: Human resources development and empowerment of women among national priorities;
- Sierra Leone: To advocate for increased and equitable resource allocation to the social sectors from Government.
- Sudan: Poverty reduction among women and support for their economic empowerment;
- Swaziland: Poverty reduction, especially in rural areas; promote labour-saving technologies, participation and equality;
- Togo: Economic empowerment and poverty eradication identified among national priorities;
- Tunisia: To strengthen economic potential: provide training, access to investment, financing and facilities for launching new projects; combat poverty: protect women with specific needs, encourage small projects by women;
- Uganda: One of four priority areas: poverty, income generation and economic empowerment: sets out strategic objectives as follows:
  - To uplift the economic status of women;
  - To assist women to improve household nutrition, achieve food security and improve household incomes through agricultural production and fishing;
  - To improve women's access to financial services;
  - To develop the entrepreneurial capacity of women;
  - To reduce women's work load;
  - To create a regulatory mechanism to promote gender equity and women's economic empowerment;
- United Republic of Tanzania: To develop a women's bank from existing credit schemes; increase participation of women in decision-making and improve access to education and employment;
- Zambia: To allocate 10 per cent of budget to encouraging women's income generating activities; improve women's access to credit; promote gendered analysis of poverty;
- Zimbabwe: Establish a women's bank; provide credit; target marginalized rural and urban women; provide training and foster development of entrepreneurship.

commitments made by the United Nations family of organizations with respect to the critical areas for action. It outlines the focus areas for subsequent actions in implementing plans in support of the reduction of the burden borne by women in poverty. These are:

- (a) To put emphasis on women in poverty and on the “feminization of poverty” keeping in mind the growing recognition that empowerment of women is often key to raising the standard of living of the people as a whole and contributes to economic growth;
- (b) To increase productive employment for women;
- (c) To focus on increased access to credit and other productive resources;
- (d) To focus on adequate social insurance and social security coverage for vulnerable groups, such as workers in the urban informal and rural sectors;
- (e) To recognize the links between the social, economic, legal and political spheres of action for effective action to eradicate poverty;
- (f) To ensure complementarity between policy reform and direct intervention.

The proposed System-wide Medium-term Plan for the Advancement of Women, 1996-2001, *Commission on the Status of Women - Fortieth Session, and Report of the Secretary General*. E/CN.6/1996/CRP.2. 1996. 11-22 March 1996, stands for:

- (a) Effective, strategic alliances at the local, national and international levels;
- (b) The importance of efforts to prevent and alleviate the effects of natural disasters;
- (c) Research and action on gender dimensions of poverty;
- (d) Further research and data collection to expand understanding about the optimum policies and strategies needed for alleviating poverty among women;
- (e) A survey of the impact on women of globalization, macro-economic policies and economic restructuring with special emphasis on trade policies and on

increasing understanding of how various bodies, including women's organizations, can intervene in the process of policy-making for a positive effect;

- (f) Community development programmes, training and skill formation to assist poor women, especially at the grassroots level, to find employment in the formal and informal sectors and to participate in small-scale enterprises;
- (g) Technical cooperation, advisory services and training as major components of the United Nations system's activities in addressing this critical area of concern.

Likewise, for the area of Women and the Economy, the United Nations system-wide plan indicates the organization's commitment to support efforts which:

- (a) Enhance equality between women and men in the workplace;
- (b) Increase employment opportunities for women, through such actions as the support of women entrepreneurs;
- (c) Increase, through research and data collection, analysis and dissemination, understanding about the conditions under which women work, both in remunerated and unremunerated work. One key area in which the Plan recommends further research is that of the implication, for male and female workers, of globalization, as well as the impact of macro and sectoral economic policies on men and women.
- (d) Provide technical support to enhance Governments' capacity to formulate gender-sensitive employment policies, which, for example, enhance job creation for women, and foster the harmonization of work and family life for both women and men;
- (e) Increase women's access to productive resources, especially micro-credit, training, technologies and markets;

- (f) Support the needs and efforts of rural women for example by increasing the availability of appropriate technology to enhance food production.

Like the Platform for Action, the United Nations system-wide Plan emphasizes that the primary responsibility for the implementation of the Platform for Action rests with Governments, and that the international community will support Governments to achieve their objectives.

### 3.4 Commitments by specific international organizations

In addition to the system-wide commitments made by the United Nations to implement the Platform, individual organizations also expressed further commitments in policy statements and other announcements. These are also reflected in their plans and strategies for implementing the Platform for Action, varying somewhat in accordance with the particular mandates of the organizations. However, as overall priorities, many included the provision of support for the reduction of poverty, and economic empowerment of women.

For example, the Food and Agricultural Organization's (FAO) Plan of Action for Women in Development 1996 - 2001<sup>xxiii</sup> states the following objectives:

- (a) To promote gender-based equity in the access to and control over productive resources;
- (b) To improve rural women's productivity and enhance the benefits they derive from their contributions to agriculture and rural development.
- (c) To reduce rural women's workloads and enhance their opportunities for remunerated employment and income;
- (d) To enhance women's participation in decision- and policy-making processes.

Each FAO Departments has defined its functions, vis-à-vis these objectives, as well as strategies and instruments for the implementation.

Likewise, in a series of meetings in 1996, the President of the World Bank and the Regional Vice-Presidents affirmed the Bank's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and outlined the strategy to be followed in each Region to implement this commitment. The 1996 progress report of the World Bank<sup>xxiv</sup> highlighted their commitment to reduce poverty among women by promoting the participation of grassroots women's groups in economic policy formulation. The proposed means of doing this are poverty assessments, poverty action plans and participatory evaluation methods, country assistance strategies, integrating gender into adjustment operations and economic reform, and protecting public expenditures on social services during the adjustments

Similarly, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and UNDP have also articulated their specific commitments and plans for implementing the Platform for Action. For example, capitalizing on the strategic overlap between the Critical Areas of Concern and the Sustainable Human Development (SHD) paradigm, UNDP expressed its commitment to supporting the "economic empowerment of women, including anti-poverty strategies, sustainable livelihoods, and the impact of globalization". The Platform sees one of UNIFEM's roles as "increasing options and opportunities for women's economic and social development by providing...assistance to incorporate women's dimensions into development at all levels"

Other United Nations organizations committed to gender equity in poverty eradication and the economic empowerment of women include the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ILO, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

## 4. Progress and achievements

### 4.1 Governments

The National Reports on the evaluation of the implementation of the Platform for Action outline the progress and achievements to date, most grouping these in accordance with the critical areas of concern.

While some of the reports separate the achievements in the areas of Women and Poverty and the Economic Empowerment of Women, there is a tremendous overlap in the accomplishments reported for the two areas. The achievements are grouped together as in the following three categories:

- (a) Policies and Institutional Frameworks.
- (b) Activities
- (c) Impact

#### 4.1.1. Policies and institutional frameworks

The relevant strategic objectives from the segments on Women and Poverty and Women and the Economy in the Platform for Action are listed in Box 2.

Policies and institutional mechanisms which promote gender equity in general are likely to have positive implications for the reduction of poverty and the economic empowerment of women. Hence, it is relevant to consider progress made on policies and institutional mechanisms which promote gender equality as a whole, and those which specifically target poverty reduction among women and enhance women's economic empowerment.

##### Women and Poverty:

- (a) To review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty;
- (b) To revise laws and administrative practices to ensure women's equal rights and access to economic resources.

##### Women and the Economy:

- (a) To promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources;
- (b) To facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade;
- (c) To eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination;
- (d) To promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.

Source: Platform for Action

**Box 2**  
Strategic Objectives correlating with Women and Poverty and Women and the Economy.

The national reports indicate that progress has been made in most countries in setting up or in strengthening policies and institutional mechanisms which promote gender equity. As indicated in the section on “National Action Plans”, subsequent to the Beijing Conference, at least 48 countries developed national action plans for the implementation of the Platform. In some, these were developed as an integral part of the overall national development plan as in the Republic of the Congo and Morocco. This often entailed consultations among various stakeholders within and outside Government.

As a part of the implementation of the plans, many countries established and/or strengthened ministries or agencies directly responsible for promoting the interests of women, as in Botswana, Morocco and Nigeria. In some cases, these ministries or agencies have the specific mandate to prepare and implement strategies to support the needs of women and children in poverty, as in Angola. In addition, some countries like Eritrea, Ghana and Uganda have adopted affirmative action policies to promote women’s access to decision-making bodies which determine political, social and economic policies.

At the subregional level, in 1997, Ministers of SADC unanimously approved the establishment of a SADC Gender Programme. In part, this entails the establishment of a standing committee of Ministers responsible for gender affairs in the region, a Gender Unit in SADC consisting of at least two senior officers, and gender focal points in sectoral departments.

Legislation and policies which provide for increased access for women to productive resources have also been reviewed and/or adopted. For example, laws and policies which promote women’s equitable access to land and credit have been adopted in countries like Ethiopia. Kenya made a review of its laws pertaining to women. A gender database was also established. Most countries have laws against discrimination in pay for the same work, although the persistence of inequality in women and men’s wages suggests that these laws are not being implemented effectively.

In South Africa and Zambia, research has been conducted into the development of gender-sensitive budgets. Likewise, with the support of the World Bank, some research has been conducted to promote gender-sensitive economic reform policies in Mali, Zambia and Ghana under the Structural Adjustment and Gender in Africa (SAGA I) initiative.

Overall, it appears that efforts to implement the Platform for Action in Africa have led to a greater acknowledgement of the importance of gender in policy making, and certainly a proliferation of declarations and plans to ensure gender equality. However, evidence seems to show that the amount of substantive work done to review and actually adopt macro-economic policies which address the needs and efforts of women in poverty all over the continent is limited. Similarly, there is no evidence that there has been much change in the past five years in the policies and institutional mechanisms which affect women's working conditions, including the harmonization of work and family responsibilities for both women and men, in both the formal and informal sectors.

#### 4.1.2 Activities

Subsequent to the Beijing Conference on Women, countries embarked on various activities to disseminate the Beijing Platform for Action across the public and private sectors. For example, in Nigeria, the Platform was translated into a number of local languages and was disseminated widely. National action plans and country evaluation reports from such countries as Ghana, Guinea and Senegal suggest they have a wide consultation with civil society in developing implementation strategies.

Numerous programmes and projects addressed both the short-term and long-term needs of women in poverty and the economic empowerment of women. Many of the long-term poverty reduction projects were in the areas of education and health, and are addressed in the evaluation report on those two critical areas. Although this section does not focus on them, it is important to bear in mind that strengthening women's capacities in all spheres, including education, health, the economy, leadership and decision-making, reduces gender-based poverty.

The most widely reported type of activity in support of the reduction of women's poverty and the economic empowerment of women concerned programmes and projects providing credit to women. Women's NGOs have been very active in implementing projects which provide women access to credit in countries like Botswana, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Kenya and Zambia. Multilateral and bilateral donors have also given support to many countries. Some of the programmes set up have enabled women without their own collateral to gain access to credit.

**Box 3**  
**Strategic Objective**  
**correlating with Women and**  
**Poverty and Women and the**  
**Economy**

**Women and Poverty:**

- (a) To provide women with access to savings and credit mechanisms;
- (b) To develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty;

**Women and the Economy:**

- (c) To provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women;
- (d) To strengthen women's capacity and commercial networks;

*Source: Platform for Action*

Other programmes which specifically target women include those designed to create jobs and increase income-earning opportunities for women in Ethiopia, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and other countries. The country report from Nigeria states that in 1996, 1,375 women's groups made up of 6,875 women in 11 states were trained in income-generating skills, marketing and rural economic management, and that training sessions were conducted in such areas as credit and business management and marketing.

Entrepreneurs from such countries as Ghana, Nigeria and Ethiopia participated in national and international fairs for women entrepreneurs. Two such fairs were the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Global Women Entrepreneurs Trade Fair held in Accra (1996) and Addis Ababa (1998) and in whose organization and implementation ACW and UNDP were very involved. Similarly, entrepreneurs attended the ECA/OAU All African Trade and Tourism Fair in Kaduna, Nigeria, in 1997. In the Seychelles and Uganda, financial and other assistance have been provided to support women entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs also participated in the ECA/UNDP-supported study tours to India and Sri Lanka. Others who participated in the follow-up meetings included leaders of associations of women entrepreneurs and representatives of technological and business-support institutions. The tours and subsequent meetings were designed to build capacity, promote exchange of information and increase cooperation among various actors in support of African businesswomen. Among the issues explored was the framework for establishing women's business centres and guaranteed funds.

Campaigns against poverty have been carried out in such countries as Morocco, and several countries have instituted or strengthened programmes to mitigate the effects of macro-economic policies on people living in poverty, especially women and children in countries like Ethiopia, Ghana, the Niger, Nigeria and Zambia.

National evaluation reports and other documents mentioned a wide range of projects and activities undertaken to reduce poverty and promote the economic empowerment of women in Africa. However, there is little data for assessing the amount of change that has taken place in the number, frequency and effectiveness of these programmes during the past five years, and how these parameters may have changed from those of the years before the implementation of the Platform.

### 4.1.3 Impact

**Poverty:**

The reduction or elimination of the burden of poverty on women.

**Economy:**

The promotion of gender equality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources.

Source: Platform for Action

#### Box 4

Relevant Objectives in the Critical Area of Women and Poverty, and Women and the Economy

#### (a) Reduction and Elimination of Poverty among Women

The evaluation of the overall impact of the implementation of the Platform for Action on the reduction or elimination of poverty among women is compounded by several factors. First, there is a general paucity of gender-disaggregated data to allow for a definitive assessment of the impact in the continent as a whole, or even in specific countries. Furthermore, the Platform for Action has been implemented alongside other poverty reduction and economic empowerment initiatives for women. Thus, it is difficult to separate the impact of the Platform *per se* from those of other initiatives. Nonetheless, it is possible to make some comments on the overall state of poverty in Africa during the past five years, bearing in mind the growing evidence that poverty is increasing more rapidly among women and children than among men.

(b) Poverty Reduction and Income Growth, 1995 - 1998

As indicated earlier, the incidence of poverty in Africa for both women and men is still very high. Furthermore, the causes and manifestations of poverty have distinct gendered aspects and have particularly disturbing implications for children. These are also gender-differentiated.

At the 1995 Social Summit in Copenhagen, a goal was set to reduce the number of people living in poverty in Africa by half by the year 2015. According to ECA, this goal could only be reached if there was at least a 4 per cent reduction in the number of poor people each year. This could be accomplished either through income growth or income redistribution. With an average annual population growth rate of 2.5 per cent, this would require an average economic growth rate of at least 7 per cent per annum. Similarly, the World Bank<sup>xxv</sup> estimated that it would take income growth rates of at least 5 – 8 per cent to reduce the number of poor people in Africa.

Considering the income growth rates in Africa in the years since the launching of the Beijing Platform in 1995, unlike the decade from the mid-eighties to the mid nineties when Africa's income was practically stagnant, Africa has experienced some moderate growth. According to ECA's Economic Report on Africa for 1999, in the years from 1995 to 1998, Africa's GDP grew at rates higher than the continent's population growth rate. In 1998, GDP rose to 3.3 per cent, from 2.9 per cent in 1997.

However, this masks the regional disparities on the continent. For example, in 1998, only the North African and Central African subregions grew. The other three subregions (West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa) experienced declines in GDP growth rates. The oil-exporting countries as a group grew at the rate of 3.7 per cent in 1998, while the non oil-exporting countries as a group grew only at the rate of 2.9 per cent in 1998.

Thus, actual GDP growth since the mid-1990s, though positive, fell far short of the minimum levels required to reduce the number of people living in poverty in Africa. Furthermore, there is no evidence of any redistribution of income in favour of the poor. ECA reports that "Africa has the second most unequal income distribution in the world next to Latin America". Thus, using GDP growth and income distribution, poverty in Africa has not declined in the years since 1995, especially among women.

In conclusion, it should be noted that various reports (for example, national reports, and reports of various international organizations) indicate that a large number of activities have been designed and carried out to promote poverty reduction or elimination. In addition, many countries have expressed their commitment to engendering policies and programmes which some have already set up structures to facilitate. However, the rate of economic growth in the continent has been relatively low where population growth rates continue to be relatively high; and many countries are burdened by high external debts. In addition, there is little evidence that Governments have restructured their overall resource allocation in favour of the needs and priorities of women. In such a context, it is unlikely that in the past five years, any significant strides have been made in the reduction of poverty, especially poverty of women.

### (c) Gender Equality in Economic Structures, Policies and Resources

Gender-based inequity still persist in terms of assets (human capital, productive assets and social capital). The adoption of gender mainstreaming of all government policies and programmes, if fully implemented, is likely to improve the situation of gender imbalance in the sphere of social capital by increasing the number of women in leadership and decision-making positions. More gender-responsive government programmes are also likely to bring about a redirection of priorities, and subsequently of government spending patterns.

However, gender-mainstreaming programmes are relatively new in Africa. Thus the jury is still out on whether or not the desired effects will be achieved with regard to the promotion of gender equality in all spheres, including in reducing gender-based poverty and economic participation.

Agriculture remains the primary source of employment in Africa. The proportion of women engaged in this sector is nearly always higher than that of men, even though regional differences exist<sup>xxvi</sup>. The share of women employed in industry remains low, less than 20 per cent even as low as 2 per cent in some countries like Guinea-Bissau and Madagascar.

One noticeable change which has continued to occur in employment patterns in Africa is the expansion of the informal sector, including domestic and cross-border trading, small-scale manufacturing and sales.

For example, a survey conducted by the World Bank found that over 95 per cent of female workers in Ghana and 90 per cent in Zambia are employed in the informal sector. This has been marked by the entrance of large numbers of women as a way households attempt to compensate for the fall in men's real wages and employment. Women continue to be disproportionately employed in the informal sector, a sector which still receives little structured support in terms of such infrastructure as water supply, power and telecommunications). Workers in the informal sector also have relatively low access to credit.

Overall, the rate of unemployment among women continues to be significantly higher than that for men. Thus, although some steps have been taken to pass legislation that increases women's access to productive and other resources such as land and credit, women are still at a disadvantage in terms of access to and control of economic structures in some countries . Furthermore, much work still remains to be done to harmonize paid and unpaid work and to ensure gender equity in the participation of women and men in both regards.

## 4.2 System-wide achievements by the United Nations

At the system-wide level, perhaps the most noticeable result of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action has been advocating for gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes of the United Nations as a key strategy for achieving gender equality. The Report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council in 1997<sup>xxvii</sup> noted that discussions of women's concerns in the United Nations intergovernmental bodies had expanded beyond the more limited fora in which they used to be discussed prior to the Fourth World Conference on Women, for example, within the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and under the item "Advancement of Women" at the Economic and Social Council.

The Report of the Secretary-General also noted that gender sensitivity is apparent in aspects of the work of regional Commissions. For example, the Economic Commission for Africa adopted a resolution to strengthen women's contributions to the second African Industrial Decade as an effort to mainstream gender. In addition to adopting policies and frameworks which promote the mainstreaming of gender in all policies and programmes, individual United Nations organizations

have worked with Governments in numerous programmes to support the implementation of the Platform. This section reviews those in the areas of poverty and the economic empowerment of women.

#### 4.2.1 Policies and institutional frameworks

Many of the organizations of the United Nations have taken steps to produce their policies and programmes. For example, UNDP has adopted a policy to allocate 20 per cent of its programme resources for the advancement of women and aims to achieve gender parity internally by the year 2005.

Similarly, the World Bank's Monitoring Unit, Poverty and Social Policy Department, reported that Country Assistance Strategies (CAS) which focus on gender issues have been developed for such countries as Madagascar, Mali, Senegal, Swaziland, Togo and Uganda. CAS provide the strategic framework for the Bank's lending and policy activities in a particular country. In Africa, it is now being proposed that all CAS should indicate three priority actions to be taken to address the major constraints which women face.

The Bank has also initiated programmes which integrate gender in adjustment operations and economic reforms. Consultative processes have allowed for a greater involvement of NGOs, including women's groups, in policy formulation at the country level. In Africa, consultative mechanisms have been established in the Republic of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, the Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zambia.

Some organizations like the World Bank, UNDP and FAO have at least issued statements or publications on gender mainstreaming within their organizations. For example, the Special Programme of Assistance to Africa, in which the World Bank plays a leading role, has issued Status Reports on Poverty in Africa. The one for 1998, in particular, was devoted to exploring the interlinkages between gender, growth and poverty reduction.

#### 4.2.2 Activities

ECA's African Centre for Women has been a leader in the African region in supporting women entrepreneurs. It has supported and organized study tours to Asia for African businesswomen as well as a major

conference entitled: “African Women and Economic Development: Investing in Our Future” which took place from 28 April to 1 May 1998. ECA also supported studies and such meetings as the expert group meeting to review surveys on women’s access to and control of resources (especially land) in various regions of Africa. In addition, ECA organized subregional conferences to assist Governments in developing their action plans for the implementation of the Platform for Action. At these meetings, it provided training on such aspects as the development of indicators for measuring progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations for his part has appointed a Special Adviser on Gender<sup>xxvii</sup>. The Special Adviser has led the efforts to liaise with various bodies and within the United Nations system. He has thus held consultations with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on developing a project on mainstreaming a gender perspective in multidimensional peace-keeping operations. The Special Adviser has coordinated gender-focused activities with the World Food Programme (WFP), IFAD and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) among others.

The Secretary-General has also appointed a focal point on gender issues in the International Telecommunications Union (ITU). In keeping with the strategy of gender mainstreaming, adopted by the United Nations system, in November, 1998, ITU adopted a resolution to include the gender approach in its work. The focal point is meant to lead investigations and analyses of the impact of telecommunication technologies on women and men.

Other organizations within the United Nations which have conducted numerous research, provided funding and undertaken other activities in support of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action include the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), UNIFEM and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). One notable collaborative achievement has been the establishment of the Women Watch, an internet site on the advancement and empowerment of women. Though maintained by DAW, the site is also supported by the World Bank, UNDP and the Spanish National Machinery.

Increasing food security is key to poverty reduction. FAO, WFP and UNIFEM have been working in the area of gender and food security in

the Africa region both before and after the Beijing Conference. Their activities include targeted provision of emergency food supply (WFP) and provision of credit for the establishment of small-scale farming operations (FAO, UNDP). The importance of a gendered approach to the provision of this assistance, especially to vulnerable groups, is now increasingly being recognized.

In Africa, UNIFEM has focused on strengthening gender expertise in both regional organizations, such as SADC, and national institutions. For example, UNIFEM has been working with SADC since the early 1990s to build gender capacity through gender analysis training, national and regional internships and the creation of a fund to support pilot projects and action research that promote women's economic and political empowerment. UNIFEM has also been working with food sector planners, again providing targeted gender training. This has resulted in the incorporation of "gender language" in SADC's food security strategy.

UNCTAD has conducted studies on enhancing the participation of women entrepreneurs in developing countries. In Africa, the countries selected for the studies were Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Madagascar, Tanzania and Zambia.<sup>xxix</sup>

The World Bank is supporting women-friendly technologies in many parts of Africa. For example, the Bank's support to agricultural research in Uganda and Kenya includes research on improved techniques for growing vegetables near houses; on simple tools for weeding and harvesting designed for use by women, and on improved food processing techniques. A consultative approach is being used at various stages of the project cycle.

ILO, the World Bank and other United Nations agencies contribute both financial and human resources to the Special Programme of Assistance for Africa. The Special Programme has supported research and other efforts to integrate gender concerns in economic reform policies in Africa. For example, the Programme assisted the SAGA initiative, which promotes training for Ministries of Agriculture in West Africa on how to incorporate the gender dimension in the selection, design and implementation of agricultural projects. Similarly, ILO is the lead agency for the Special Programme's priority area "Poverty Reduction through the Promotion of the Informal Sector and Employment-Generating Opportunities" based, *inter-alia*, on reforming macro-economic policies, improving government regulations, developing

market networks between the formal and informal sectors and providing physical and administrative infrastructure. The Report of the Secretary-General<sup>xxx</sup> states that “serious attempts are being made to maintain a gender focus in this component”.

### 4.2.3 Impact of United Nations agencies

By providing financial and technical support, United Nations organizations have stimulated more awareness about the gendered nature of poverty and gender bias in the economy. For example, UNDP’s support for the preparation of national action plans and country reports on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action has helped to build countries’ capacities and create awareness about the Platform’s objectives, strategies, implementation and intended outputs in all areas, including women’s poverty reduction and the promotion of gender equity in economic activities. Furthermore, United Nations organizations have assisted Governments in identifying the nature and extent of poverty in their countries<sup>xxxi</sup>.

The creation of the Women Watch website has enabled the United Nations to increase access to information about women’s issues. Online discussions have now taken place on such topics as women’s health and violence against women, and more information about the activities of the United Nations concerning the implementation of the Beijing Platform have become more readily available. Although many women in Africa still do not have access to the internet, researchers, decision makers and other advocates of women’s empowerment have been able to access and disseminate various information on the website, including reports and presentations made at such conferences as the ECA landmark conference on “African Women and Economic Development: Investing in our Future” held in 1998.

Overall, there has been increased coordination in the efforts of United Nations agencies with regard to the implementation of the Beijing Platform. This has been facilitated by the appointment of the Gender Adviser, the Gender Focal Points and the efforts to reach a common ground on how the Platform was to be implemented, especially with respect to gender mainstreaming.

ECA and UNDP support to women entrepreneurs has enabled participating businesswomen to increase their knowledge about business activities in Africa and other parts of the world. The creation of business

centres, once accomplished, could enable businesswomen to obtain more technical and financial resources in a systematic manner.

## 5. Resources

### 5.1 Governments

Information on human and financial resources for implementing the Platform in general and that for carrying out actions in each of the 12 specific areas of concern was not readily available. In its analysis of the implementation of the Platform up to March, 1999<sup>xxxii</sup>, CSW noted that most action plans did not include budgetary proposals or indicate sources of financing for the strategies and actions selected. However, such countries as Botswana reported having increased the amount of funding allocated to programmes for women.

In some countries such as Botswana, Morocco and Nigeria, national machineries for women have been established and/or strengthened (The Nigerian report notes that the upgrading of the National Commission for Women to a Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development has entailed additional female human resources, including a Cabinet Minister.

The reports indicated that, national and international financial and human resources were allocated for the development of the national action plans and for the evaluation of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. For example, the country report of Nigeria acknowledges UNDP's cooperation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development in the preparation of the report.

The country reports of such countries as Botswana and the Republic of the Congo also indicate that various multilateral and bi-lateral donors, including the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), UNDP and UNIFEM provided support to national gender programmes and/or to NGOs working directly with women. However, no mention was made of the scope of the support.

However, there is not enough information to assess the amount of resources put into the overall implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action as regards poverty reduction and economic empowerment of women.

## 5.2 United Nations System Resources

Information could not be found on the size of the resources available for the implementation of the Platform specifically in Africa. However, some information was available on the overall financial resources devoted to promoting gender equality and fighting poverty by some United Nations agencies.

At its 43rd session, CSW acknowledged the difficulties faced in estimating the overall expenditure for the implementation of the System-wide Plan for the period 1990 - 1995. A United Nations study<sup>xxxiii</sup> on “Technical Assistance and Women: from mainstreaming towards institutional accountability” noted that estimating expenditures on specific target groups was complicated and required further efforts to develop methodology. It also pointed out the importance of a commitment to monitoring resources allocated for both targeted and mainstream gender activities.

However, CSW reported at the same session that individual agencies, funds and programmes were taking steps to increase resources to support the implementation of the Platform. Thus, UNICEF aimed to double its budget for education by the year 2000, with special emphasis on girls’ education. UNESCO increased its 1996-1997 Programme Budget for women and gender by 22 per cent over that for the previous biennium and added ten new special projects for gender mainstreaming, with budgets amounting to \$US 10 million. Similarly, the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly agreed to the creation of three new professional posts for the DAW to enable it to carry out its mandated activities, including coordination, monitoring and outreach activities in support of the work of CSW and CEDAW.

CSW reported at the 40th session that the World Bank pledged to expand its lending for women’s health and education in developing countries, including devoting close to \$US 5 billion per year to projects specifically meant to improve women’s lives and to promote gender equality. UNIFEM devotes its activities to the economic and political empowerment of women. From 1975 to 1995, UNIFEM increased its funding from \$US 2 million to \$US 16.7 million. UNDP has pledged to devote 20 per cent of its funding to gender programmes and has established a Poverty Fund to support the formulation of national strategies to combat poverty, with the main aim of eliminating the feminization of poverty. WFP has a practice of setting quotas for activities aimed at reducing poverty in specified countries.

The FAO Plan of Action for Women in Development, indicates that the plan would be implemented with regular and field programme resources to be stipulated in the various Divisions' biennial programme of work and budget.

The African Development Bank (ADB) provides financing for a wide range of development activities, including those which target women<sup>xxxiv</sup>. During the period 1990–1998, ADB financed 134 projects, 122 of which incorporated gender concerns.

### 5.3 Other international resources

The Consultative Group to Assist the Poorest (CGAP) was founded by Canada, France, the Netherlands, the United States, ADB, the Asian Development Bank, HAD, UNDP/United Nations Capital Development Fund and the World Bank, following the 1993 International Conference to reduce global hunger. It was formally constituted on 27 June 1995. Other participants of the initiative include Australia, Finland, Norway, the United Kingdom and the Inter-American Development Bank.

The CGAP funding, initially pledged at \$US 200 million, is dedicated to supporting the work of pioneer institutions in the field of micro-financing mainly in countries with a per capita income below \$US 800. For example, eligible micro-financing institutions obtain support to build the capacity of financial institutions targeting the poorest groups in the society - often women. One of the central objectives of the programme is to mainstream micro-financing in the World Bank.

The Platform for Action “calls upon Member States to support efforts to redirect and generate resources to support effective follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. Accordingly, United Nations and other international agencies are working to mobilize new funding from sources such as the private sector, Governments that have not contributed in the past, foundations and individuals. UNIFEM has developed a strategy to identify and attract non-traditional sources of funding, while enhancing its relationship with its traditional donors (both public and government).

## 6. Monitoring mechanisms

The reported monitoring mechanisms are mainly institutional reporting and coordinating mechanisms. For the most part, there is a severe paucity of data on actual indicators and observed changes in these indicators.

### 6.1 Governments

Not much information is available on mechanisms established by Governments to monitor the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the areas of poverty reduction and economic empowerment of women. Although most national action plans do identify the actors for the various activities proposed, there is little information on institutional monitoring arrangements, and even less information on indicators for success.

However, some reports do note that following the Fourth World Conference on Women, Governments established or strengthened the existing institutions responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Platform in countries like Ethiopia, Ghana and Morocco. Ghana has established a “Gender Monitoring System” which monitors the mainstreaming of gender in government sectors. Likewise, the Ethiopian Report states that the Women’s Affairs Office in the Prime Minister’s Office has the mandate to coordinate and facilitate conditions for promoting gender equity.

### 6.2 United Nations system

For the United Nations system as a whole, CSW reports to ECOSOC every year the progress made in the implementation of the Platform by the United Nations system. Within each organization, there is usually a delegated Unit for monitoring and reporting on the implementation—usually the gender focal points of the organizations. The Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality provides an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and for cooperation on programmes concerning gender equality.

The Regional Commissions, such as ECA are mandated to monitor the implementation of the Platform in the regions. ECA also has the mandate to assist member States in Africa by providing technical assistance and information and by assisting in the evaluation of the implementation.

Some organizations have outlined in some detail their monitoring mechanisms. For example, the FAO Plan of Action for Women in Development outlines the organization's structures and processes for monitoring and evaluating progress. A Steering Committee on Women in Development serves as a coordinating and advisory body on all Women in Development matters. This group meets at least once a year, and may meet more frequently if required. Members of the Steering Committee are drawn from various departments in FAO which facilitates coordination of the Plan's implementation. In order to accomplish their mandate of providing policy guidance and coordination, the Committee:

- (a) Monitors overall progress made in the implementation of the FAO Plan of Action on Women in Development and assesses and reports on the results and impact;
- (b) Reports and provides advice to the Director-General and the FAO senior management team;
- (c) Serves as a forum for reviewing and clarifying inter-departmental issues relating to the implementation of the Plan;
- (d) Secures agreement and operational coherence between technical and administrative units for Organization-wide actions for monitoring and implementing of the Plan of Action.

In addition to its coordinating function, the Committee *inter-alia* has the authority to commission specialized studies and to organize consultations with technical specialists when needed. Within the FAO the Integration of Women in Development Service has the responsibility for external coordination which involves, among other things, liaising with other United Nations agencies and donor Governments for the implementation of the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Similarly at the World Bank, the President has established a committee of Bank staff to report to him every three months on the Bank's progress in defining and implementing gender policies. The World Bank also formed an External Gender Consultative Group to foster dialogue on gender issues between Bank staff and NGOs.



The Monitoring Unit in the Poverty and Social Policy Department (PSP) of the World Bank reviews documents on all newly approved Bank projects. One of the Bank's criteria for rating projects is whether the project has special components intended to benefit women or whether gender issues are directly addressed. Country assistance strategies and economic and sector studies are also rated for their gender content. These ratings are used mostly as internal monitoring tools.

Another example of a monitoring arrangement within the United Nations system is the Gender Sub-Group of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). DAW is one of the members of the Gender Sub-Group which is chaired by UNIFEM. The gender sub-group is a monitoring mechanism and facilitates the provision of input and guidance on gender issues to UNDG.

## 7. Results and recommendations of the Beijing follow-up meetings

### 7.1 National conferences

Many countries held national conferences to further discuss the implementation of the Platform for Action. For most, the National Plan for Action was formulated as a result of a series of conferences and consultations among Governments and civil society. As discussed earlier, the Plan identified which of the 12 critical areas of concern it considered national priorities. Most countries also indicated the strategies and actions for reaching stated objectives, and also identified actors. The elaboration of the Plan facilitated subsequent implementation.

## 7.2 Subregional follow-up meetings

### **Dakar, Senegal<sup>xxxv</sup>**

25 – 27 November 1997

- Economic empowerment and poverty elimination identified among seven priority areas (para. 59); Responses to ACW questionnaires showed that 13 out of 15 national plans of action identified poverty reduction and/or aspects of economic empowerment of women as national priorities (annex 2);

### **Bangui, Central African Republic<sup>xxxvi</sup>**

22 – 25 June 1998

- Summary of national action plans showed that 4 out of 5 plans identified poverty reduction, improvement of women's lives and/or economic empowerment of women as national priorities;

### **Rabat, Morocco<sup>xxxvii</sup>**

27-30 October 1998

- Presentation of analysis of national plans of action; 6 out of 7 plans identified poverty reduction and/or aspects of economic empowerment of women as national priorities (annex II);

### **Victoria, Seychelles<sup>xxxviii</sup>**

15 – 18 February 1999

- Responses to ACW questionnaire showed that 14 out of 16 countries named poverty reduction and/or aspects of economic empowerment of women as national priorities (annex III);
- Proposed: 6 strategies for speeding up women's access to land (para. 109);
- Discussions and recommendations concerning AIDS and economic empowerment of women (paras. 110-113).

### **Box 5**

#### **Results and Recommendations of Subregional Follow-up Meetings**

### 7.3 Regional conferences

CSW acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century” Second Session. 15 – 19 March 1999.

- CSW proposed “globalization and the economic empowerment of women, especially poor women” among four broad issues which cut-across several critical areas of concern, and needed further analysis and proposals for action.

#### **CSW 40<sup>th</sup> Session, 1996**

- The critical area of women and poverty included in the agenda reiterated the importance of reducing poverty among women in enhancing gender equality.

#### **ECOSOC 31<sup>st</sup> meeting, 17 July 1997**

- The Vice-President of the Council introduced the draft agreed conclusions (E/1997/L.30) on mainstreaming the gender perspective in all policies and programmes in the United Nations system.

#### **ECOSOC 33<sup>rd</sup> meeting, 18 July 1997**

- The Council adopted the draft agreed conclusions.

#### **Social Summit – Copenhagen, 1995**

- A goal was set to reduce poverty in Africa by half by 2015.

## 7.4 International conferences

### **African Centre for Women of the Economic Commission for Africa: African Women and Economic Development: Investing in our Future: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 28 April – 1 May 1998**

- (a) Discussed the importance of analyzing globalization and international trade agreements from a gender perspective.
- (b) Discussed the need to understand and act on the interactions between gender, growth and poverty reduction as an avenue for improving Africa's growth prospects.

#### **Recommended:**

- (a) Reduction of the burden of women's responsibility at the family level, through, *inter alia*, the introduction of appropriate technologies and better sharing of domestic tasks.
- (b) Integrating gender concerns in national budgets and procedures.
- (c) Promoting and protecting women's access to and ownership of land in rural areas.
- (d) Facilitating women's access to markets and regional trade and scaling up women's enterprises. Governments should establish flexible rules and regulations, and simplify registration and procedures for women-owned businesses.
- (e) Mobilizing resources for setting up community social security and insurance programmes.
- (f) Promoting gender-sensitive credit schemes.

## 8. Conclusions

African Governments and international organizations expressed their commitment to implement the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action in their declarations and speeches at the Dakar and Beijing conferences on women. The subsequent national action plans showed their commitments further, outlining planned modalities for the implementation. These plans showed that an overwhelming majority of African Governments placed poverty reduction and the economic empowerment of women among their top priorities for action.

Country assessment reports indicated that countries faced a number of constraints in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in the areas of poverty reduction and the economic empowerment of women. Commonly reported constraints included lack of financial and human resources, the debt burden - a constraint to available resources for gender equity programmes, time constraints associated with women's fulfilment of their multiple roles; war and civil strife.

Despite these constraints, many countries reported progress in implementing some aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action. With regard to policies and institutional mechanisms, countries reported that they established or strengthened national machineries for the promotion of gender equality. In addition, some countries reported they adopted the principle of gender mainstreaming in all public policies and programmes. Other countries also reported the passage of affirmative action laws to facilitate women's entry into decision-making bodies, especially Parliament.

Country assessment reports also stated that countries launched numerous programmes and projects to help reduce poverty and enhance the economic empowerment of women. Commonly reported activities included programmes which provided credit to women, job creation activities, participation of women entrepreneurs in trade fairs and study tours, capacity building for women entrepreneurs and campaigns against poverty. Furthermore, a few countries reported having conducted research on gender-sensitive budgets. Many countries also indicated that they had undertaken activities to improve education, health, the environment, and political empowerment. All of these are long-term strategies to reduce poverty and are more fully covered in the reports on the other priority areas of the Platform for Action.

In terms of impact, perhaps the most pervasive is the increased awareness about gender equity issues, especially the notion of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes of Governments and international organizations. Little was said in country reports on the amount of change in the level of women's poverty and economic empowerment. However, the relatively low income growth for the region, especially in sectors where women predominate, such as agriculture, suggest that poverty among women has not declined since 1995 when the Beijing Platform for Action was launched.

The achievements to date notwithstanding, much still remains to be done. For instance, many of the plans for mainstreaming gender still need to be implemented. A noticeable gap also exists in the areas of monitoring and the development of indicators for measuring progress. Not many countries gave detailed information on how they assess progress in the implementation of the various critical areas for action.

## 9. Recommendations

The following recommendations to enhance further implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action are drawn from country reports as well as from the workshop on poverty reduction and the economic empowerment of women which was held at the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women:

1. To continue to show political will for gender equality in all spheres.
2. To lobby for peace and the elimination of conflict.
3. To put resources into developing mechanisms for mainstreaming gender in all policies and programmes of Governments and international organizations; there should be gender auditing at all levels.
4. To implement policies and programmes which promote overall economic growth.
5. To continue support for women in poverty and their participation in economic activities.

6. To include gender equality in poverty reduction strategy papers; and involve women in the development of such papers.
7. To involve poor women more in preparing, implementing and monitoring programmes for reducing poverty; and support poor women at the grassroots level.
8. To support poor women in pastoral and hunter-gatherer communities.
9. To promote activities for more inter-country trade and cooperation among women.
10. To assist women to gain greater access to markets.
11. To strengthen national and regional organizations in their efforts to register and collect data on women entrepreneurs.
12. To support the training of women in commercial food processing.
13. To support the development of appropriate technologies.
14. To lobby for debt forgiveness.
15. To increase training for women in global, trade and macro-economic issues; and include women in delegations to international meetings such as the meetings of the World Trade Organization.
16. To involve women in debt auditing.
17. To invest in information and communication technologies; and establish tele-trade centres.
18. To continue providing credit to poor women; credit should go hand in hand with training and capacity building to allow for a better management of loans and businesses.
19. To promote women's education in order to promote long-term poverty reduction.

20. To establish benchmarks and indicators for monitoring poverty in the next 12 months.
21. To lobby Governments to increase budgets for agriculture and reduce budgets for defence.
22. To investigate issues of child labour and enforce ILO agreements.
23. To support women in mining, and promote girls education in mining.
24. ADB to set aside an allocation (25%) of resources for lending to women
25. National labour laws to be revised to make them gender neutral and to respect women workers' rights.

## Notes and References

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<sup>ii</sup> Ibid. p47

<sup>iii</sup> Economic Commission for Africa. *Economic Report on Africa: The Challenge of Poverty Reduction and Sustainability*. 1999. Addis Ababa, 1999. E/ECA/CM.24/3

<sup>iv</sup> ibid. para. 78

<sup>v</sup> Appleton 1996; Lampietti 1998; Quisumbing, Haddad and Pena 1995; Whitehead 1998; Woldemariam 1998 – in Blackden C. Mark and Chitra Bhanu (1999) in Blackden C. and Chitra Bhanu (1999). World Bank Technical Paper No.425. *Gender, Growth and Poverty Reduction: Special Programme of Assistance for Africa, 1998 Status Report on Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington D.C.; and United Nations Development Programme (1997). *Progrès dans la lutte contre la pauvreté en Afrique*. New York.

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> United Nations. Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration” (1996). *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 4-15 September 1995*. New York . para. 48

<sup>viii</sup>Blackden C. Mark and Chitra Bhanu (1999). World Bank Technical Paper No.425. *Gender, Growth and Poverty Reduction: Special Programme of Assistance for Africa, 1998 Status Report on Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington D.C.

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<sup>ix</sup> Blackden C. Mark and Chitra Bhanu (1999) World Bank Technical Paper No.425. *Gender, Growth and Poverty Reduction: Special Programme of Assistance for Africa, 1998 Status Report on Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington D.C

<sup>x</sup> Ibid. Section 1.6

<sup>xi</sup> United Nations Development Programme (1997) *Progrès dans la lutte contre la pauvreté en Afrique*. New York.

<sup>xii</sup> UNFPA in Blackden C. Mark and Chitra Bhanu (1999) World Bank Technical Paper No.425. *Gender, Growth and Poverty Reduction: Special Programme of Assistance for Africa, 1998 Status Report on Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington D.C. Section 2.18

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid. Section 2.18

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid. Section 2.13

<sup>xv</sup> ILO STAT Working Papers Nos 1996-1, 1996-2, '96-3, 1996-4 and 1996-5; and *Yearbook of Labour Statistics* (Geneva, various years up to 1996), and national statistical reports in UN Statistical Division website:WWW.un.org/depts/unsd.

<sup>xvi</sup> ECA “ A Study of the Economic Empowerment of Women and their Role in the Socio-Economic Development of Africa”, Addis Ababa, August 1996.

<sup>xvii</sup> ILO STAT Working Papers Nos 1996-1, 1996-2, '96-3, 1996-4 and 1996-5; and *Yearbook of Labour Statistics* (Geneva, various years up to 1996), and national statistical reports in UN Statistical Division website:WWW.un.org/depts/unsd.

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xix</sup> *Report of the Preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace*. Dakar, November 1994. (E/CN.6/1995/1).

<sup>xx</sup> The texts and/or summaries of some of the National Action Plans from African countries are available on-line at [www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch).

<sup>xxi</sup> Summaries of some of the national action plans were made by the Division for the Advancement of Women, and are available on its website ([WWW.un.org/womenwatch](http://WWW.un.org/womenwatch)); Furthermore, in evaluating 48 national action plans, ACW indicated which of the 12 critical areas for action were identified as national priorities.

<sup>xxii</sup> Proposed System-wide Medium-term Plan for the Advancement of Women 1996-2001 *Commission on the Status of Women - Fortieth Session. Report of the Secretary-General*. E/CN.6/1996/CRP.2. 1996. 11-22 March 1996

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<sup>xxxvii</sup> Economic Commission for Africa. *Subregional follow-up meeting on the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platform for Action – North Africa*. Rabat, Morocco, 27 – 30 October 1998.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Economic Commission for Africa. *Subregional follow-up meeting on the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action – Eastern and Southern Africa*. Victoria, Seychelles, 15 – 19 February, 1999.