

PARALLEL ACTIVITIES

During the conference from 17:30 to 19:00 on 24 November 1999 and Thursday, 25 November 1999 from 9:00 to 13:00, parallel activities were organized. Various NGOs and United Nations Specialized Agencies, Programmes and Funds organized workshops, briefings, caucuses and short video presentations on subjects such as a campaign on violence against women, the multipurpose platform being used in Mali and maternal mortality.

Workshop on land and property rights

A workshop on Land and Property Rights was organized by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNHCS), (otherwise known as Habitat), UNDP, UNIFEM and ECA. Presentations, including one by a consultant, provided an overview of the situation of women *vis a vis* the right to land. The participants looked at land reform and how this it is impacting on women including those in urban areas, which is of increasing concern due to the rate of urbanization in the continent. An account was given of the efforts of one grass roots women's organization to ensure that a land redistribution programme did not exclude women. Discussion centred around country experiences, highlighting the importance of the issue and its link to human rights, poverty and food security. Concrete proposals were made for future initiatives.

The point that land and property rights are also political and governance issues was raised. Lack of transparency and accountability combined with a low level of representation of women in decision-making at the level of community and local authorities as well as at national level. This negatively affects the involvement of women in decision-making and sensitization of law enforcement agents such as the judiciary, land administration boards and so forth.

Participants recommended that appropriate research be undertaken in order to: document the current reality of women *vis a vis* land and property ownership and use; the effects of land reforms and redistribution programmes on women; and the milestones in the struggle of women for equal rights to land and property. It was suggested that this documentation be done at local and national levels, but that information exchange and future initiatives be undertaken at subregional level, so as to benefit from various experiences and to strengthen work on local and national-level initiatives. The group also requested that subregional, regional and international agencies working on women, poverty, governance and similar issues relevant to land and property rights (e.g ADB, COMESA, ECA, ECOWAS, UNCHS, UNDP, UNIFEM, SADC) collaborate on forming a support mechanism for regional initiatives.

Another proposal made was to set up a regional inter-agency initiative or technical group initiated by the East African Subregional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI) linking the organizations and UN Agencies named above with appropriate resources and women's networks.

Poverty and economic empowerment

The Council for Economic Equity for Women in Africa (CEEWA) and the World Bank Institute together ran a Forum. The World Bank Institute focused on its recent report "*Gender, Growth and Poverty Reduction*", while CEEWA focused on engendering national economic policies in Africa as a means of sharing experiences on initiatives designed to promote women's participation in economic policy formulation and their increased access to natural resources.

Workshops on entrepreneurship/rural women/leadership

The African Federation of Women Entrepreneurs (AFWE) organized a workshop with a short video presentation on the "Role of African Women Entrepreneurs in the Economic Empowerment of Women and Youth in the 21st century".

A Workshop on "*Developing Alternative Frameworks for African Women in Leadership*" was organized by Akina Mama wa Afrika and a Forum entitled, "Beijing +5: What do National Plans of Actions contain for rural women?" was organized by FAO. During the Forum, the establishment of a network of rural women was announced.

Gender and gender mainstreaming

UNIFEM organized a briefing entitled "*Gender and Media: Lobbying at the PrepCom for Beijing +5 Review*". FEMNET organized a workshop on *Gender Mainstreaming* and also used the opportunity of the conference to invite a group of approximately 50 to plan the participation of African women in EXPO 2000 to be held in Hanover, Germany in 2000.

A workshop on *engendering national budgets* was organized by UNDP and UNIFEM. Participants were briefed about the importance of gender budgeting as a tool for enhancing gender equity and equality and ensuring a fair distribution of resources to all members of society. Work done in this area in specific African countries was presented and the need to raise awareness on this issue and build capacity was stressed.

Constitution reform

African women parliamentarians met on 25 November 1999 at a workshop convened by the Kenya Women's Political Caucus and funded by UNDP and UNIFEM, to discuss *the role of women in constitution-making and constitutional reform*. The workshop was attended by delegates to the conference who had made valuable contributions to constitution-making processes in their own countries. Experiences from six African countries – Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia – were shared. In addition, a presentation on the implications of constitution-making for women with disabilities was made.

Workshop participants observed that most African independence constitutions were influenced by colonial powers and were therefore oppressive to women. They also noted that many such constitutions did not expressly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which amounts to a barrier to the advancement of women. Constitutional reform in African countries such as South Africa and Uganda, had resulted in some of the most progressive constitutions in the world. Determined to ensure constitutional equality for all

African women, the workshop made several recommendations concerning various aspects of the issue.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs)

Representatives of the African Information Society Gender Working Group (AISGWG), Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Africa-Women's programme, FEMNET, International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Task Force on Gender Issues, Worldspace Corporation and Wommed-Femmed, (a network supported by UNESCO), presented their work and discussed various issues surrounding information and communications technologies (ICTs) as they involve and impact women. Issues discussed included using ICTs as advocacy tools, and realizing benefits for women from technology trends and developments.

HIV/AIDS

An entire morning was devoted to HIV/AIDS, with presenters from UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNIFEM covering different aspects of the issue such as HIV/AIDS and reproductive health of African youth, and its impact on children and HIV/AIDS as a gender issue. Participants were briefed on the current situation whereby in Africa, the rate of infection is much greater for women as compared to men and the number of orphans is skyrocketing. The trend is expected to continue its upward climb for the foreseeable future. Concern was expressed for some countries in Africa in which religious leaders are denying the existence of an HIV/AIDS problem and preaching that message to their congregations.

Women in mining

The SADC Women in Mining Trust, with assistance from ECA and UNIFEM, organized a Forum on Women in Mining as a means of disseminating information about how women are faring in traditionally heavily male-dominated professions, recommending specific steps to improve opportunities for women in mining and highlighting initiatives already underway. Specific country experiences as well as general concerns affecting women miners were discussed.

NGO capacity building

The NGO Abantu launched its "GAP Alliance" (Alliance for Gender and Policy Advocacy). The main principle of the alliance is to strengthen the capacity of NGOs to influence governmental policies in order to make them more responsive to gender concerns. The objectives of the alliance include information dissemination, promotion of good practices, and building the capacity of women's associations and of organizations that work in collaboration with African women.

Violence against women

The Inter-African Committee (IAC) on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children organized a Forum on 22 November 1999 after the plenary entitled "*Traditionally Condoned Forms of Violence: How to Bring about Positive Changes of Attitude*". The guest speaker was Mme. Chantal Compaore, First Lady of Burkina Faso and Goodwill Ambassador of IAC. Panelists made presentations to a large audience.

Statistics on women

On the last day of the Conference, media representatives were invited to a launching of a CD-ROM in the final stages of production by ACW. It is entitled, "*The Status of Women in Africa*" and contains gender-disaggregated data on a wide range of social, political and economic development indicators that especially affect women.

Gender and the media

About 60 men and women from national and international print, radio and television media attended the media symposium of 21 November 1999, a pre-conference activity. All subregions were represented and both public and private media representatives. The participants were welcomed by Mr. Peter da Costa, Senior Communication Advisor for ECA, and by Mme. Joséphine Ouédraogo, Director, African Centre for Women (ACW), ECA.

Mme. Ouédraogo explained the objectives of the Sixth Regional Conference and the process of reviewing the implementation of the African and Global Platforms for Action which was the focus of the Conference. She gave some examples of areas in which greater effort was needed to improve the situation of women and stressed that implementation could not be left only in the hands of governments, as they frequently lacked political commitment, positioning and adequate human and financial resources. She pointed out that the African Platform lacked adequate stress on institutional mechanisms for implementation.

She stressed the need to involve journalists and other media practitioners in the work of the Conference, and invited their support for sensitization of decision-makers and of the general public on women's issues. They were key to the follow-up action on policies and strategies and she invited their contribution to the evaluation of progress achieved with gender and development in Africa. She invited the media to:

- Study the needs and demands of women and compare them to the current levels of response and action;
- Review tools of information and institutional mechanisms in place for implementation of the recommendations with regard to the twelve areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform ;
- Study the texts of the commitments made and review the extent to which rhetoric has been transformed into resources and action;
- Assess the degree to which women are involved in political and economic decision making, and their access to economic and political structures;
- Upgrade the negative portrayal in the media of women as sufferers to that of positive actors for change;
- Lobby for access to statistical data for situational analysis and for national planning, especially for production and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data;
- Examine shifts and changes in concerns and actions since the Dakar and Beijing Conferences in 1994 and 1995 respectively;
- Target the gender and women's programmes being launched at national and regional levels;
- Assess actions and the accountability of Members of Parliament and of government institutions, NGOs, civil society, the United Nations system, and so on;
- Assess the level of awareness and sensitization in each county;

- Assess the level of consideration of women's roles and concerns in each sector, and the adequacy of the resources available;
- Analyze the reasons for insufficient progress;
- Involve themselves in follow up to the actions decided at the Conference, to be contained in the Regional Plan of Action and the Declaration.

Mr. da Costa, in his intervention, emphasized the need for the media to see themselves not only as reporters and broadcasters but also as development activists with a collective responsibility for the development of Africa. Development should not be left only to governments but the media should be a powerful group that helps to influence the development agenda. He deplored the negative, stereotyped way in which African women were portrayed in the international press, as refugees and victims of hunger, disease and war. Many national newspapers, in their turn, relegated women's issues mostly to fashion and culinary pages and ignored their substantive contributions to their communities and economies. He urged truthful reporting that gives an accurate picture and announced that the lack of gender-disaggregated data would be remedied somewhat by the upcoming release by ACW of a CD-ROM, with national statistical data on women and girls in various sectors.

He raised a number of questions that challenged professional media policies and practices:

- Are women's causes being advanced by media reports, or are they possibly facing a backlash?
- Is gender analysis being used to help to change stereotyped images and to recognize women's voices and the truth about their contributions?
- Is editorial policy facilitating or hindering coverage?
- Does policy mainstream or categorize coverage?
- Does coverage go beyond mere reporting of women's projects and events to in-depth analysis and insistence on accountability?
- Is effort being made to employ women writers and other women media professionals?

Floor interventions were frank and useful and included such comments as the following:

- There is inadequate understanding of gender and gender analysis and some journalists feel that women's issues in Africa have not been dealt with sufficiently.
- Men are not being involved enough as gender issues are being treated as a responsibility for women only; men should be involved fully if progress is to be made.
- Editors and producers need far more sensitization on women's issues and tend to be mostly men. They are in a position to do a great deal to affect professional policy and practice and public opinion but very few have adopted gender analysis. Ways and means should be found to influence editors and producers on women and gender issues.
- More women producers, editors and writers are needed, and more journals and newspapers for women. Women's pages and women's magazines need to be upgraded to cover more than fashion and beauty and household advice. They should also reflect conceptual and substantive issues and terms of women's wider involvement in intellectual, legal, political and economic activities.
- Society in general needs gender sensitization and training. Attitudes towards women and women's activities are still lagging behind the reality and world standards.

- Media professionals should strive to assess national capacity for women's advancement and the effectiveness of institutional mechanisms and help to lobby for filling the gaps in information, accountability and structures.

Some participants said that there are certain difficulties in promoting women over the public media in some countries, and of drawing attention to such harmful traditional practices as female genital mutilation, which, in the countries of the Horn particularly, affect more than 90% of women and girls. Due to tradition and belief, the exposure of certain issues is often obstructed and the media should take up such matters and press for change persistently. It was recommended that attention be paid to the legal environment, to equal rights and opportunities, since law is the standard bearer of society. The UN Conventions that set global standards for the status of women should be monitored to ensure their adequate reflection in national legislation. It was also felt that the media should embark on conscious efforts to entrench gender analysis in coverage of issues. The case of Inter Press Service (IPS) was noted as a good example of increasing women's voices in stories and as journalists in the field. The need for training in and commitment to gender analysis was also noted.

It was suggested that one way for the media to promote attitudinal change is by featuring positive, progressive female role models in the society. There were instances of a media backlash against women's activities due to general fears that women want to oust men and take over; some men and women feel threatened by departure from tradition. Men were accused of sometimes deliberately hampering women's access to and use of information. A serious challenge for media professionals, therefore, is how to cover women's issues with accuracy and awareness without creating resistance to advancement of women.

UNHCR and IOM were particularly concerned about the undignified and degrading image of African women refugees and migrants. They were being portrayed as unfortunates, starving, having AIDS and other diseases, as prostitutes, disorganized and unable to help themselves. These images were far from the reality and neglected or ignored the resourceful, creative ways in which these women sought to better their lives. IOM commended the Ethiopian media for the recent series of stories on the abuse of migrant women workers, and its exposure of the larger picture of the trafficking of African women and girls.

It was pointed out that the involvement of women in media work and in information dissemination was sometimes heightened in post-conflict situations, as part of their overall involvement in reconstruction activities. In Rwanda, the genocide experience mobilized women's involvement in print, radio and television communications for peace, reconstruction and development. However, the disparity of treatment between women refugees in Kosovo and women refugees in Africa was also noted. Disapproval of such unequal, discriminatory treatment of Africans was expressed.

It was agreed that the necessary human resources were in place to carry out improved coverage, but African media especially, lack money and need support, even to travel to certain areas, or to carry out freelance work. The group felt that more allocation of resources was needed for women, including women working in the media. There was a general lack of money and means to get funding. Government funding left media representatives less free to follow their own inclinations. It was recommended that

agencies and NGOs should support journalists financially, especially travel expenses, so that they can go and get the facts for themselves. Such support of the media should be seen as incentives for coverage.

Improved gender reporting and improved portrayal of women by the media in the new millennium would require gender sensitization and training targeted at both men and women media professionals. It was since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) had developed into such a powerful factor for speeding up change. They were barely mentioned in Beijing, but now should be taken seriously by women in their strategies and programmes. Access to the Internet was affecting the lives of both men and women, giving people access to information, enabling them to create information resources on the Internet, as well as to share and disseminate information. Interconnection with Internet information resources would help to upgrade coverage by national and community radios and television stations.

Real commitment to change was said to go beyond information access and information dissemination, to communication as a two-way process. However, language barriers remain still constraints, as many women, especially rural women, do not speak and read European languages. There was also the factor of dozens of local languages in one nation.

It was felt that more radio and TV for women was needed, with a national and local focus, and in local languages. It was also recommended that NGOs and the private sector become more involved in radio and TV for women and about women and their relationships to men and to social institutions.

The meeting was closed after the main points were summarized and participants were urged to come up with more collective strategies and practical ways of moving forward, “selling” and “packaging” gender stories, often in a hostile, unsensitized and unsympathetic environment.