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REGIONAL SEMINAR FOR AFRICA ON THE INTEGRATION
OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO POPULATION FACTORS

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REGIONAL SEMINAR FOR AFRICA ON THE INTEGRATION
OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO POPULATION FACTORS

PLAN OF ACTION



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Plan of Action for the Integration of
Women in Development

A. Introduction

Examination of the situation of women, their integration in development, and of population factors, has revealed these current realities: 1/

- (1) Women are fully engaged in the economic and social tasks in the traditional sectors of African life, often to the point of exhaustion and ill health, yet little progress has been achieved in making their tasks less burdensome and more productive.
- (2) The traditional role of African women in economic life is neither evident nor acknowledged in the modern sectors of agriculture, industry, commerce and government. 2/ Nor is their potential contribution to the modern sector included in development planning.
- (3) Women's lag in opportunities has a serious effect on population factors, and both have detrimental effects on development. High rates of birth, coupled with high rates of maternal, infant and child mortality are the commonest pattern in Africa, although low fertility among women in some areas, resulting from women's poor situation and poor health, also occurs, causing anxiety in those families and countries affected.

At the Regional Seminar on the Integration of Women in Development, with Special Reference to Population Factors, Addis Ababa, June 1974, guidelines were drawn up by which national governments and local bodies, as well as international and regional organizations, might take actions to more fully integrate women into development and influence population factors. These guidelines constitute this Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development.

Participants at the Seminar recommended that each country should identify its own priorities within the Plan, as appropriate to the national development strategy. It was recognized and welcomed that the Plan of Action would in some areas reinforce current national development plans.

1/ The Data Base for Discussion of the Interrelations Between Women's Situation, Their Integration in Development, and Population Factors, UNECA, E/CN.14/SW/37, May 1974.

2/ Report of the Regional Conference on Education, Vocational Training and Work Opportunities for Girls and Women in African Countries, para 22, Rabat, Morocco, 20--29 May 1971.

The Plan should be implemented within ten years, with a mid-term review of progress. It will commence in 1975, International Women's Year, and have its mid-term review in the final year of the Second United Nations Development Decade, 1980.

Since many of the changes are achievable only on a long-term basis the guidelines include both short-run and long-run strategies. Because the vast majority of African people still live in rural areas, where poverty is often acute, actions related to rural life are given greater attention than those directed to urban areas.

The situation of women varies across the continent. Thus implementation of the Plan, and the urgency of particular actions within it, may also be expected to vary from country to country.

The participants in the Seminar laid special emphasis on the importance of ensuring the availability of resources, both human and financial, for the implementation of the Plan. With regard to financial resources it was stressed that:

- All available sources of support should be explored, including community resources and those of the various private funding agencies;
- Programmes for implementing the proposals should be given priority in national development plans, and this could improve their chances of attracting international and bilateral assistance;
- Special efforts should be made to inform both the donors and recipients of such assistance regarding the importance of the integration of women in the process of development.

B. Organizational Machinery

Efforts to widen opportunities for women to participate in development will require action by the society at large through its governmental machinery, non-governmental organizations, and other groups and individuals, all of which may be supported by international and regional organizations. Appropriate machinery and administrative procedures are essential.

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1. On the National Level : Where such machinery does not already exist at the national policy and planning level, the following should be established:

- National Commissions on Women and Development, consisting of leading men and women who would make policy recommendations and action proposals; 1/

1/ Recommended at Rabat Regional Conference, 1971.

- Women's Bureaux or Permanent Secretariats of National Commissions, to undertake research, to formulate projects and programmes, and in general to seek women's integration in all sectors of economic and social development; 1/
 - An interdepartmental body of experts, consisting of men and women from various fields (such as health, education, nutrition, agriculture, training, employment, social affairs, communications and information, population, law, trade, industry), to ensure co-ordination of programmes and adequate representation within national policies and planning;
 - A non-governmental organization (NGO) co-ordination committee, which might assist in organizing women to seek representation in decision-making bodies, to work towards changing attitudes, to supplement public resources and facilities, and to promote international collaboration and exchange of information and experience. The NGO's should also take action to implement recommendations of national, regional and international conferences relevant to women's roles.
2. On the Regional Level : The Economic Commission for Africa is unique among the regional economic commissions in that it has already established a long-term Programme for the integration of women in development. The role of the ECA in stimulating national implementation of the Plan of Action was explored and the establishment of the following additional machinery was proposed:

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- Africa Regional Standing Committee, 2/ to co-ordinate the work of the National Commissions, to advise the ECA Women's Programme, and to co-operate with international and regional organizations, especially the all Africa Women's Conference.
- Pan-African Research and Training Centre for Women, 3/ to assist Governments and voluntary agencies, including women's organizations, in strengthening the roles of women in the Africa Region. The functions of the Centre would include:

1/ Ibid.

2/ Recommended at Rabat Regional Conference, 1971.

3/ Recommended by the All Africa Women's Conference, the Addis Ababa Regional Meeting, 1969 and the Rabat Regional Conference 1971.

- a. Itinerant national training in rural development techniques, small industries, co-operatives, and communications;
- b. Research and collection of information, with special attention to harmonization of data, to development of indicators of women's participation, and to diffusion of information;
- c. A revolving fund, to support co-operative and/or individual entrepreneurship among women;
- d. An African Women's Development Task Force, which would allow skilled women from one part of the Region to serve in another area when so requested.

The programme of the Centre should stress subjects such as those related to lightening women's work, to improving administrative procedures for women's organizations, co-operatives, or trade unions, to generating income-producing activities, to family life, education, and to establishing national machinery to augment women's work for development. Moreover, it would assist national organizations in their submission of applications for foreign assistance. It should also act as a clearinghouse for the exchange of innovative ideas among the countries of the Region. The subregions of Africa should be represented on the staff of the Centre, and particular attention should be given to top-level representation from French-speaking countries.

3. By the Mass Media: Special measures should ensure that wide publicity is given to the Plan of Action through all means of communication -- mass-media, radio, press, television, and cinema. Efforts would also be made to enlist the energies of those change agents and opinion leaders who communicate the ideas of development at the local group and interpersonal levels.

C. Education and Training

The failure of girls and women to be educated and trained equally with men leads to the marginal participation of women in development efforts and in modern economic activities. The results are limited roles for women and inadequate training for the employment opportunities that may be available. A definite correlation has been found to exist between education for females and smaller family size, but the effect of education on fertility is often lost when the education does not result in rewarding employment. Co-ordination of education, training, and employment strategies is therefore desirable for both developmental and demographic reasons.

It was deemed necessary to ensure equal access by girls and boys to education at all levels and to encourage parents to permit girls to continue their education beyond the primary level. Special efforts should be devoted to reducing the school drop-out rate among girls. There should be an integrated approach to education and training, emphasizing needed community skills.

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1. Provide short-term compensatory programmes for women and girls - in literacy, numbers and non-formal education programmes;
2. Introduce training programmes for women at the village level in modern farming principles and use of equipment, agriculture and fishing, co-operatives, entrepreneurship, commerce, and marketing (for example credit, book-keeping, and consumer education);
3. Reform school curricula and ensure equal curricula choices for girls and boys, including agriculture and other employment-oriented subjects;
4. Revise educational material to fit national needs and facilitate changes in attitudes, and include courses on population education and family life education in school curricula at all levels as well as in programmes of non-formal education;
5. Provide social and vocational guidance for girls as well as boys, encouraging girls to equip themselves for a wide choice of employment opportunities.

D. Employment

To be integrated into the development effort means to have legal right, as well as access, to the available means for self-improvement and societal improvement. Important in this respect are opportunities for both wage-employment and the generation of income through self-employment or family-employment. Unless there is greater participation by women in all areas of employment, the objectives of development itself will be hindered. Moreover, increased gainful employment and opportunities for self-employment can be expected to contribute to changes in fertility levels. Government departments and other appropriate bodies should establish positive policies and targets for the employment of women in both the public and private sectors. Special emphasis should be given to the employment of women at the policy and planning levels, including service on international bodies and representation on delegations to foreign countries, and service in the secretariats of the United Nations and in other organizations within the UN system, including the specialized agencies.

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1. Promote employment policies and strategies to incorporate specifically provisions for wage and salaried employment, co-operative, and self-employment for women;
2. Provide public services and facilities, including those for child care, in order to support women in their multiple roles of employee, homemaker, and mother;
3. Integrate manpower and education policies;
4. Apply principles of equal access to all economic activities, including equal pay, availability of credit, technical services, and training;
5. Promote opportunities for employment of women in decision-making and policy positions;
6. Develop programmes for integrated rural development to increase gainful employment opportunities for both men and women, and improve rural infrastructure (roads, water supplies, electricity, village-based services);
7. Recognize the major role of rural women in the agricultural and marketing sectors, and provide training, equipment, village technology, public transportation, water and other facilities to increase their productivity and to improve their lives and the lives of their families and societies.

E. Communications/Mass Media

Because the mass media may influence thinking and shape opinions, they can play an important role in the formation of new attitudes concerning the roles of men and women in society. The mass media may promote the integration of women in development by helping to remove prejudices by publishing the need for, and capability of, women to contribute their talents as full partners with men.

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1. Support of governmental and non-governmental organizations for research on the mass media to determine the image of men and women they portray, their influence in changing attitudes on traditional roles of women, and their capacities to stimulate those legislative and cultural changes resulting in greater equality of men and women.
2. Vigilance by governmental and non-governmental organizations over communications material to ensure that information is provided to men and women on the current situation of women and how such a situation can be improved, on the changing roles of men and women in contemporary society, and on employment and training programmes for the advancement of women.

3. Efforts by governmental and non-governmental organizations to achieve a greater share for women of the decision-making positions within mass-media employment.

F. Health, Nutrition and Social Services

Improved access to health, nutrition and other social services is essential to the full participation of women in development activities, and to a general improvement in the quality of life. To be fully effective, these services should be integrated into overall development programmes, with priority given to rural areas. While the primary objective of such services is social and economic development, they also have a significant impact on fertility and on population growth.

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1. Provide easily accessible water supplies (including wells, dams, catchments, piping, etc.), for safe potable water to improve health conditions and to reduce the burden (which falls mainly on women and children) of carrying water;
2. Strengthen basic health services, using trained medical and para-medical workers to the fullest extent; including in such services the provision of contraceptives with adequate follow-up for protection of the health of the users;
3. Develop nutrition programmes for boys and girls, women and men, including nutrition education in all schools, and improve local food production, processing, preparation, storage and conservation;
4. Provide supportive services for the family, including unified health care delivery systems, child care, assistance to the mother, and advice on growing and use of local foods;
5. Expand the coverage of programmes for old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, and social welfare assistance, in order to help guarantee a minimum level of social and economic security for all persons.

G. Population

Social, economic, and demographic factors are closely inter-related, and change in one or more invariably involves all. Alterations to the pattern in which women have been denied full participation in the development process involves, among other things, changes in certain crucial demographic variables such as age at marriage, age at birth of first child, spacing of children, and total number of children. A decisive factor in such changes is enabling women to determine, in relation to work and family values, when and how often to bear children.

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1. Raise the minimum age of marriage where appropriate;
2. Make available to individuals and couples, through an institutionalized system such as a national family planning programme, the information and means to enable them to determine fully the number and spacing of their children, and to overcome sterility;
3. Involve men as well as women in the effort to ensure responsible parenthood;
4. Ensure balanced demographic, economic, and social development by closely relating population policies and programmes with measures to improve the situation of women;
5. Utilize all humanitarian means (including adequate social security for the aged) to encourage the family size that is appropriate to national objectives;
6. Promote awareness of the deleterious effect on the health of the mother, and the decreased chance of survival of the child, caused by pregnancies during early adolescence and beyond the age of 35 years;
7. Provide education on maternal and child health, and on the means for improving the conditions of infants and young children;
8. Provide services to improve the conditions of elderly persons, particularly in the rural areas.

H. Research, Data Collection and Analysis

Despite a relative abundance of some varieties of demographic, economic, and social data, the indicators which would explain the situation of women are not readily available. These indicators can be developed, however, once the need for them is understood. It is difficult, but not impossible, to measure the extent of women's present involvement in economic activities, and the positive and negative impacts of modernization and development efforts on their work-loads and their lives. Moreover, the various factors which may facilitate or constrain the provision of wider opportunities for women and the establishment of population policies are not adequately studied. Such data are needed as bases for action programmes, for the evaluation of interrelationships, and for assessing the effectiveness of programmes.

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1. Promote collection of relevant material and develop simple indicators on the quality of life; and on changing conditions of women, including those pertaining to education, employment, food and nutrition, access to health services, and availability and disposition of income;
2. Include, in censuses and surveys, data according to urban and rural residence within that collected for sex, age, marital status, family composition, education and skill levels, and participation in both modern and traditional economic activities;
3. Measure the extent of women's activities as regards food production (cash-crop and subsistence), water and fuel supply, marketing, transportation, and participation in local and national planning and policy-making;
4. Study the causes and effects of the prevailing images of women and their roles, including cultural roles;
5. Study the division of labour and the time-budgets for women as compared with those of men, with regard to both economic and household activities;
6. Encourage data collection as a part of all programmes and encourage universities and other bodies to conduct research on family and household situations including the extent of female-headed households, and on the economic, social and demographic benefits of women's wider participation;
7. Establish mechanisms for exchange of information and experience;
8. Conduct research to support the planned use of communications media and of change agents within activities for the integration of women in development and for the modification of demographic patterns.
9. Carry out studies on the effects of polygamy upon women, for example on the threat posed by younger wives to continuation of economic and social security for older wives.

I. Legislative and Administrative Measures

Legislative and administrative measures can be instruments for accomplishing the full integration of women in development. The passage of laws, the enactment of administrative measures, and the enforcement of these can open up equal opportunities and equal responsibilities for women in the economic, social, political, and cultural life of their countries. Through them, Governments can guide and institutionalize

changes in attitudes towards the role of women and can enable women to achieve the equality with men which is envisioned in the UN Charter, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, in various international labour standards, and in other international instruments.

Where such legislation does not exist, women's organizations should support its introduction, and where the legislation does exist, they should investigate the extent of its implementation. Public information campaigns should also ensure that women as well as men have a full understanding of their legal and civil rights, and that they are aware of measures they can take to enforce these rights.

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1. Accord women equal rights with men in the field of civil law and in particular:
 - (a) The right to equality in legal capacity including the right to contract, sue and be sued;
 - (b) The right to acquire, administer, enjoy, dispose of and inherit property, including property acquired during marriage;
 - (c) The same rights as men with regard to the law on the movement of persons;
2. Accord women equal status with men in marriage and in particular:
 - (a) The same right as men to free choice of a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
 - (b) The same rights as men during marriage and at its dissolution, particularly in respect to property rights;
 - (c) The same rights as men with respect to parental rights and duties;
3. Remove legal and other restrictions on the dissemination of information concerning family planning and on the sale and distribution of contraceptive devices;
4. Provide legal aid, where possible free of charge, in both rural and urban areas;
5. Promote the ratification by national governments of the Conventions of the International Labour Organisation, especially where these concern the provision of benefits to women.

J. Summary

Women in the ECA Region have a crucial role to play both in the development of their countries and in the solution of problems arising from current and future demographic trends. In recognition of this, the recommendations of the Seminar aim at drawing greater attention to the needs and the possibilities for action related to promotion of greater integration of women in development. The guidelines include both short-run and long-term strategies for change, and they give special attention to basic improvements at the local level. Although specifics on the condition of women and on the current activities of governments vary throughout the Region, broad agreement has been possible on several general areas deserving priority attention. It is therefore hoped that improving conditions for women, and expanding their opportunities in such fields as education and training, employment, health, and public life, will be seen not only as a matter of social justice, but also as a significant means of achieving developmental and desired population goals, and further enrichment of the culture and personality of all African peoples.

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