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**ACTIVITIES AT THE CARIBBEAN SUBREGIONAL LEVEL  
IN RELATION TO THE  
FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN (FWCW)**

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**Subregional preparatory activities**

**1994**

(a) Preparation of a subregional document which synthesized the Commonwealth Caribbean report, commissioned by CARICOM and the national reports of the remaining CDCC member countries. It was planned that this draft subregional document would be tabled for approval at a subregional preparatory conference planned for June 1994 in Curacao, Netherlands Antilles.

(b) Organization of the subregional preparatory conference of ECLAC/CDCC member countries held in Curacao, 28-29 June 1994, and provision of technical assistance to the NGO forum which was being hosted parallel to the governmental meeting, 27-29 June. The objectives of the subregional preparatory conference were:

(i) To approve the Caribbean subregional report to be tabled at the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Conference, Mar de Plata, Argentina, September 1994;

(ii) To consider the special issue papers which have been prepared; and

(iii) To discuss activities which need to be undertaken at the national level.

Twenty Caribbean countries attended the meeting, 12 being represented at the ministerial level. Of those which attended, Anguilla and Turks and Caicos had not yet attained observer status in the CDCC. The meeting also attracted a wide cross-section of observers from the following United Nations organizations: the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the World Food Programme (WFP). CARICOM was represented by Mr. Rudy Collins, Assistant Secretary-General (Ag.), and a team of four advisers and resource persons. Special guests came from the British Development Division in the Caribbean (BDDC).

The Secretary-General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Ms. Gertrude Mongella, addressed the gathering at the formal closing and advised ministers present "to come to Beijing with commitments from their governments and inter-governmental agencies to improve the status of women in specific areas", only in that way, she advised, would the FWCW neither become an avenue for complaints nor a talk shop.

A parallel NGO forum, to which approximately 100 women from the region attended, took place 27-29 June 1994. A report of their meeting was presented at the governmental meeting.

**1995**

- (a) Negotiate and facilitate the attendance of technical and ministerial level personnel of CDCC member and associate member countries to the Board of Presiding Officers Meeting, 3-4 July 1995, Santiago, Chile.
- (b) Organization of a Caribbean caucus on Sunday 2 July 1995 prior to Board meeting.
- (c) Negotiate and facilitate the attendance of non-CARICOM CDCC countries to the UNIFEM/CARICOM/UN-ECLAC Retreat on Conference Diplomacy and Negotiations, 17-19 July 1995, Barbados.
- (d) Negotiate and facilitate attendance of governmental and non-governmental personnel to the UN-FWCW, 4-15 September 1995.
- (e) Provide substantive servicing to governments in attendance at the Twenty-first Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago, 3-4 1995.
- (f) Provide substantive technical assistance to governments during the Caribbean caucus prior to the above-named meeting.
- (g) Update CDCC member governments present at the Seventh Monitoring Committee Meeting, 14 July 1995, Tobago, on preparatory activities undertaken in the region for the FWCW as of June 1995.
- (h) Provide technical assistance to participants at the UNIFEM/CARICOM/ECLAC retreat on Conference Diplomacy and Negotiations in their final preparations for the negotiations at the FWCW.
- (i) Provide technical assistance to CARICOM mission staff in New York regarding CARICOM positions in preparation for informal consultations on the draft Platform for Action of the FWCW (New York, Friday July 28 1995).
- (j) Provide substantive technical assistance to governments during the informal consultations (31 July-4 August 1995) on the draft Platform for Action of the FWCW in New York.
- (k) Provide substantive servicing to governments in attendance at the FWCW, Beijing, China, 4 - 15 September 1995.
- (l) Assisted in the organization of a Panel of Eminent Women to be hosted by the regional commissions during the second week of the FWCW.
- (m) Organize and provide substantive servicing to the Inter-Agency Meeting on Follow-up actions to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. 25 October 1995.

(n) Provide substantive servicing to the UNIFEM/CARICOM Meeting on the Follow-up actions to the Beijing, 26- 27 October 1995.

## **Outputs**

1. *Achieving Social Justice, Equality, Peace and Development : A review of the Status of Women of the Caribbean Subregion in preparation for the fourth World conference on Women, 1995.* (31 January 1995). Presentation to the governments in attendance at the Retreat on the Draft Platform for Action and the reaffirmation of the Caribbean negotiating positions for the Fourth World Conference on Women.
2. *Working document No. 1 in preparation for the informal consultations on the Draft Platform for Action,* 31 July - 4 August 1995.
3. *Caribbean Position on Clustering of bracketed Elements in the Platform for Action - A Guide for negotiations at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW): Action for Equality Development and Peace.* 17 August 1995
4. Presentation to donor agencies and governments on request of CARICOM, organized by Ambassadors of Belize and Suriname, during the FWCW, Thursday 7 September 1995 based on the above-named paper.
5. *Building consensus - From the Commonwealth Plan of Action to the United Nations Platform for Action of the Fourth world Conference on Women.*
6. Presentation to the Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs on the above- named paper on 3 September 1995, in Beijing, China just prior to the FWCW.
7. Participated in the Panel organized by the Regional Commissions on "Beyond Beijing" during the second week of the FWCW.
8. Presentation to the United Nations bodies and inter-governmental agencies in attendance at the Inter-Agency Meeting on Follow-up Activities for the Fourth World Conference on Women.
9. *Report on Outcomes of FWCW and Possibilities for Follow-up in the Caribbean.*
10. Presentation on Review of the Incidence and Characteristics of Violence Against Women in the Caribbean, as reported in the National Reports prepared in preparation for the FWCW, to governments of the subregion, in attendance at the OAS/CIM meeting, Port-of-Spain, 24 October 1995
11. Presentation to governments in attendance at the UNIFEM/OAS/CIM/CARICOM Follow-up to Beijing Meeting held in collaboration with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago 26 - 27

October 1995, P.O.S.

12. *Discussion Notes on the question of Strategic Planning for the implementation of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace.*

### **The FWCW: A Caribbean perspective**

The Caribbean sent a delegation of approximately 500 women and men from 21 islands, to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) and the Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Forum. They formed a small group of stakeholders in the process, who were determined and prepared to ensure that their concerns were heard. Their vulnerability to natural disasters, as residents of small island States, provided them with a special urgency in their negotiations, possibly more evident than other groups.

The FWCW was seen by governments and women in the region as a forum to address their concerns, within the global framework. They were convinced that their issues were not singular to the Caribbean, nor did they all have their origins within the Caribbean economic, political or social environment. Global approaches could, therefore, be found for their solutions.

The region went to the FWCW having identified a number of areas requiring special attention during negotiations. These were grouped as follows:

- (a) The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women/inequality in women's access to and participation in the definition of economic structures and policies and the productive process itself;
- (b) Inequalities in health care and related services;
- (c) All forms of violence against women/effects of persecution and armed or other kinds of conflict on women;
- (d) Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels/insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women;
- (d) The girl child.

It was not surprising, in light of the devastation caused by hurricanes during the course of the FWCW, that the section on the environment which had not featured too significantly before Beijing, became an important issue for the Caribbean during negotiations. The region was successful in having included references in that section to its concerns in Para 246 (effects of rising sea-levels on small island countries), Para 247 (harmful effects of natural disasters), Para 285c (regulations re the transshipment of hazardous wastes and radioactive waste).

The Caribbean delegations performed creditably throughout the Conference whether at the plenary, committee level, working groups or contact groups. Delegates were quite clear on the issues and the Caribbean positions. Their presence was felt through the Chair of the main committee held by the Government of the Bahamas on one day of the proceedings; as facilitators of a number of working groups in the contact group on health; through their work in poverty and the measuring of "the work of women and all their contributions to the national economy ..." (Para 70b); and in other working groups. The document arising out of the United Nations Development Fund for Women/Caribbean Community/Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNIFEM/CARICOM/ECLAC) retreat, which was prepared by ECLAC, was used as a key resource guide during the negotiations.

The collaboration which existed between CARICOM and ECLAC during pre-conference preparations continued throughout the Conference to the benefit of the Caribbean governments. CARICOM was represented by the Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Rudolph Collins, and their Consultant, Ms. Sonja Harris.

The governments opened the CARICOM-hosted morning caucus sessions to the CDCC member and associate member governments who had been working on consensus positions in the subregion during the two and a half year preparatory process. This enabled a strong and diverse Caribbean negotiating group. This group included Cuba, Haiti and the Netherlands Antilles.

At the conference itself, all Caribbean governments had named NGO representatives as members on their delegations, thereby allowing wide access of NGOs to the Conference proceedings. In addition, the governmental caucus held each morning was also made accessible to NGO participants.

The region received appreciative comments from its level of participation in the NGO Forum also. Approximately 200 workshops were presented by the Caribbean region at the Forum, covering a variety of themes including: disaster preparedness for small island states; alternative energy sources; women in political decision-making; elimination of violence against women; and, making women's work count.

Other activities were organized during the period of the conference. Governments from the region used the opportunity to meet with multilateral and bilateral donors present at the Conference. Such a meeting was organized by Ambassadors from Belize and Suriname to explore the critical issues facing the Caribbean for follow-up action and possible donor support. This meeting was well attended by representatives from the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United States, Sweden and Norway. At this meeting ECLAC was invited to make a presentation on behalf of the Governments.

As part of an activity presented by the Regional Commissions, a panel of eminent women was organized to examine the theme "Beyond Beijing". Representing Latin America and the

Caribbean on that panel, was Ms. Lucille Mair, Secretary General of the Second World Conference on Women and former Ambassador of Jamaica to the United Nations.

From all accounts approximately 15 journalists from the print and electronic media were present at the conference. However, the considered opinion was that the numbers present did not result in the quantity or quality of reporting that was expected. A media research project that examines Caribbean media response to the FWCW during its occurrence, would be useful and should inform a strategic media plan to be undertaken in the future.

The consensus on the final morning of the Conference, expressed by Governments and representatives of women's non-governmental organizations, was that the region could feel fairly confident that in most of the critical areas of concern, they had achieved, through the global consensus, the articulation of the kinds of actions which would result in the advancement of women in their region.

### **Where do we go from here?**

During the preparatory process to the FWCW and during the conference itself, there was much discussion of a new paradigm regarding the advancement of women. Is there really new thinking on women in development, and if so, how is it meant to influence future action?

The Third World Survey on the role of women in development, suggests that "the concept of women in development should be given broader meaning and be refocused with a new theoretical framework." It continues. "Policies that target women only cannot achieve the best results, nor can those which assume that policies and programmes are gender-neutral in their effects. Hence, promoting gender equality implies a profound change in the socio-economic organization of societies...".

The new thinking around the idea of women in development seems to manifest itself most clearly around the notion of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the area of policy and planning for development. The Platform for Action addresses in almost every section, the need to do precisely that - mainstream a gender perspective (Para 59) and to ensure gender analysis in the area of policy and programme design, development and implementation (Para 106).

It has been suggested that in terms of application, what has occurred within the framework of women in development, was the creation of components for women in some programmes. The end result was too often that development programmes reinforced women's traditional roles. Also that women in development programmes were dealt with as ad hoc programmes without a coherent centre.

Under the new paradigm which is being referred to as 'gender and development' a more holistic approach to development planning has been suggested. One which considers the interdependent nature of women's and men's positions in society and at the same time embraces the

differences among women: class, ethnicity and other aspects which have to be included in an analysis.

In practical terms it calls for the active involvement of women as well as men in the planning process, and for bringing women into the mainstream of economic development so that each gender can play its own important role in the process. It has also been suggested that this does not mean that specific project components for women should be dropped, but that they should be used as an integrated part of the total plan to empower women.

### **What are Governments expected to do?**

Chapter VI of the Platform for Action states that the primary responsibility for implementing the strategic objectives of the Platform for Action rests with Governments (Para 347). Paragraph 297 states that

**"As soon as possible, preferably by the end of 1995, Governments, in consultation with relevant institutions and non-governmental organizations, should begin to develop implementation strategies for the Platform and, preferably by the end of 1996, should have developed their strategies or plans of action. ... These implementation strategies should be comprehensive, have time-bound targets and benchmarks for monitoring and include proposals for allocating or reallocating resources for implementation. .."**

The governments therefore have the task before them of converting their national reports into plans of action in keeping with the global Platform for Action and prioritizing those actions for implementation over the next five-year period. They are reminded in Para 295 that the "active support and participation of a broad and diverse range of other institutional actors should be encouraged, including legislative bodies, academic and research institutions, professional associations, trade unions, cooperatives, local community groups, non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations and feminist groups, the media, religious groups, youth organizations and cultural groups, as well as financial and non-profit organizations."

Another major area of focus for governments will be the integration of gender analysis and perspectives into National Development Plans, where they exist or where they are under preparation. This will be in keeping with the entire notion of 'mainstreaming a gender perspective' which can be found throughout the Platform. Governments have agreed that in order to achieve the mainstreaming of a gender perspective and analysis, the following factors are necessary: a strong and effective national women's machinery; a gender policy; and not least of all, a robust body of gender-based statistics and training for relevant staff.

These are the structural tasks, often referred to as the instrumental tasks which governments have agreed to undertake in the platform for action.

The programmatic action or substantive objectives of gender equality, women's advancement



and women's empowerment, will no doubt occur in the areas which governments have prioritized for special attention in their subregional preparatory process. The prioritization and the particulars will, no doubt, be spelt out by each government in its national plans of action.

**Non-governmental organizations** should be encouraged to contribute to the design and implementation of the strategies or national plans of action which governments have agreed to undertake. They should also, as was agreed to in Para 298, be encouraged to develop their own programmes to complement government efforts. "Women's organizations and feminist groups, in collaboration with other non-governmental organizations, should be encouraged to organize networks, as necessary, and to advocate for, and support the implementation of the Platform for Action by governments and regional and international bodies".

### **What is expected of the United Nations and its agencies?**

The role of the United Nations and its agencies at the national, subregional and regional level has also been quite clearly spelt out in the Platform for Action.

Para 298 of the platform states "Regional and international organizations, in particular development institutions, ... and bilateral donors, should provide financial and advisory assistance to national machinery in order to increase its ability to gather information, develop networks and carry out its mandate, in addition to strengthening international mechanisms to promote the advancement of women through their respective mandates, in cooperation with governments"

Regional offices of the specialized agencies of the United Nations system should, as appropriate, develop and publicize a plan of action for implementing the Platform for Action, including the identification of time-frames and resources. Technical assistance and operational activities at the regional level should establish well-identified targets for the advancement of women.

The Platform urges regional commissions, within their existing mandates that they should "mainstream women's issues and gender perspectives and should also consider the establishment of mechanisms and processes to ensure the implementation and monitoring of both the Platform for Action and the regional plans and platforms for action." They should ... collaborate on gender issues with other regional intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, financial and research institutions and the private sector". (Para 302).

Regional commissions should coordinate, monitor and report on the mainstreaming of gender into the development framework of governments in the region over the next five-year period and assess the impact of new policy initiatives on the status of women. In addition, they should "promote and assist the pertinent national institutions in monitoring and implementing the global Platform for Action within their mandates. This should be done in coordination with the implementation of the respective regional platforms or plans of action in close collaboration with the Commission on the Status of Women, taking into account the need for a coordinated follow-up to United Nations conferences in the economic, social, human rights and related fields". (Para 302)

## **Conclusion**

For the mission of "women's empowerment", as agreed upon in the Platform for Action, to become a reality, adequate resources, both human and financial, will have to be mobilized.

Just as important, is the commitment of governments and intergovernmental bodies to the success of this mission. The collaboration of our efforts and the efficiency of our planning processes should allow women in the region to reap the fruits of their own labour.