



THE SECOND ARAB MEETING FOR  
FOLLOW-UP TO BEIJING CONFERENCE

Beirut, 12-15 December 1998



الاجتماع العربي الثاني  
لمتابعة مؤتمر بيجين

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PROVISIONAL ANNOTATED THEMATIC AGENDA

THEME ONE. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR BEIJING PLUS FIVE

1. In its resolution 52/231 on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the General Assembly called upon the Secretary-General in collaboration with the regional commissions to develop a standardized questionnaire with a focused set of indicators for monitoring all critical areas of concern in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Assembly also urged Governments to submit their national plans for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women. Governments were also requested to submit information on their implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, focusing particularly on positive action, lessons learned, obstacles, key challenges remaining and a vision for gender equality in the next millenium. It is hoped that this Meeting will assist Member States in fulfilling the reporting requirements for the special session of the General Assembly on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (henceforth referred to as Beijing plus five), to be held from 5 to 9 June 2000. These requirements include preparing national reports on implementation of the Platform for Action and action plans for overcoming obstacles encountered therein.

*Item 4(a). Framework for national reports with indicators to monitor implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action*

2. The questionnaire on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which was put together by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), will be reviewed with a view to proposing a user-friendly framework for the national reports. The working document therefore contains a proposed framework for these reports, based on the questionnaire, which was supplied by DAW in October 1998. This document was translated into Arabic by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and subsequently distributed to the national Governments for examination and feedback. Broad guidelines and an accessible framework will be prepared for the national reports. Included in this framework will be a focused set of indicators, specific to the region, to monitor progress achieved in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. The proposed framework, including the questionnaire, will be examined at this Meeting.

3. In preparation for the Second Arab Meeting, government experts may wish to prepare a preliminary response to the DAW questionnaire as one step towards the preparation of their national reports to Beijing plus five. These preliminary responses will be shared in 10-minute presentations, and an attempt will be made to respond to queries raised.

4. The first working group at this Meeting will review the draft framework and questionnaire, including the set of indicators proposed for monitoring purposes. Taking into consideration the issues raised during the Meeting, the working group will propose for consideration by the plenary a user-friendly framework for the national report. This working group will also identify a focused set of indicators to monitor progress achieved in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The national reports must be submitted to DAW by 30 April 1999, with a copy to ESCWA. These national reports will be summarized in a regional evaluation report for submission to DAW by ESCWA in December 1999.

*Item 4(b). Model for national action plans for Arab countries, with a vision for gender equality in the next millenium*

5. At a subregional conference held in Bucharest from 12 to 14 September 1996 and jointly organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations Development Programme and the Commonwealth of Independent States, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), a model national action plan was adopted. This plan will be translated into Arabic and adapted to Arab requirements to serve as a working paper for this Meeting. The model national action plan for Arab countries will propose ways and means for overcoming obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005 and produce a vision for gender equality in the next millennium. The working paper will be presented to the plenary for general debate.

6. The second working group will examine the model national action plan for Arab countries and propose modifications for consideration by the plenary if needed. The focus of this group will be a vision for women's empowerment, gender equality and equity in the region for the next millennium.

7. As of July 1998, only 10 Governments from the region had submitted their national action plans to DAW. The deadline for submitting these plans was September 1998. They are to be submitted to DAW and copied to ESCWA.

THEME TWO. INSTITUTION-BUILDING TO ACCELERATE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE  
BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

8. Institution-building is a necessary but not sufficient condition for accelerating implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Beijing Platform focuses on establishing effective and efficient national machineries and mechanisms, and/or strengthening existing ones, to monitor the situation of women. It calls for the enforcement of gender-sensitive policies, direct measures of impact and the introduction of tools, such as gender mainstreaming, that would eventually lead to empowering women and achieving gender equality. One possible mechanism for women to realize economic independence and self-reliance could very well be through building such institutions as microcredit lending facilities, which are specifically designed to alleviate poverty for women in urban and rural areas. The meeting will provide the opportunity to evaluate the environment within which such institutional mechanisms as national machineries can efficiently and effectively function. It will allow the participants to examine the conditions under which microcredit lending facilities may be feasible, potentially providing a replicable example of "good practice". This assessment will assist member States in strengthening their institutional capacity for accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Platform and for mainstreaming gender issues while simultaneously monitoring the advancement of women and targeting gender equality.

*Item 5(a). Guidelines and criteria for institutionalization of national machineries for women and gender equality*

9. The building of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women is one of the twelve areas of critical concern included in the Beijing Platform for Action. The Arab Plan of Action also includes the building of institutional mechanisms among the nine areas it selected from the Beijing Platform as priorities for the advancement of Arab women to the year 2005. Paragraph 196 of the Beijing Platform states: "National machineries are diverse in form and uneven in their effectiveness... Often marginalized in national government structures, these mechanisms are frequently hampered by unclear mandates, lack of adequate staff, training, data and sufficient resources, and insufficient support from national political leadership." Moreover, in paragraph 201 of the Platform, some necessary conditions are specified for effective functioning of national machineries, including location at the highest levels of authority in the Government, institutional mechanisms or processes that encourage greater involvement of non-governmental organization (NGOs) and community-based organizations. Paragraph 201 also states the need for sufficient financial and human resources, specifically with regard to professional capacity, and for the opportunity to influence government policies.

10. Similarly, paragraph 25.2(a) of the Arab Plan of Action states: "Mechanisms concerned with women's issues should be established or strengthened and made permanent, including national committees for women. These committees... should be linked with the highest national political executive authority and mandated to follow up and implement the Arab Plan of Action in conformity with their national legal systems." Specific resolutions on establishing national machineries for the advancement of women emanated from the regular sessions of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and its subsidiary Committee on Social Development, as well as from recommendations of the Commission on Women of the League of Arab States.

11. In the Arab countries, experiences have been diverse with regard to the structure and location of such machineries. Few countries in the region have set up bodies (councils or ministries) that specifically address women's issues and concerns. Some countries institutionalized such machineries in preparation for Beijing and some for follow-up purposes after Beijing, while other countries have housed them within their ministries of social affairs.

12. While there is no standard formula for the structure and location of national machineries, which could be adopted uniformly and replicated without distinction across countries, broad guidelines and a basic set of principles could be followed in institutionalizing such national machineries. This question will be addressed in a discussion paper on national machineries for women in the Arab world based on country experiences in this respect. The paper will cover the purpose, institutional structure, location, human and financial resources, and terms of reference of existing national machineries for women in selected countries and areas in the Arab world, including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen. It will conclude by proposing general guidelines and principles for institutionalizing national machineries for women.

13. Diverse country experiences will be examined and shared, drawing on positive actions taken, obstacles encountered and lessons learned.

14. Taking into consideration the issues raised, the third working group will examine the discussion paper and recommend for consideration by the plenary a basic set of principles and guidelines for institutionalizing national machineries for the advancement of women. The recommendations will be developed according to the criteria for acceleration of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

*Item 5(b). Feasibility and operationalization of microcredit lending facilities for poor women in urban and rural areas in selected Arab countries*

15. The work of building institutional mechanisms and entrusting them with the overall responsibility for monitoring and follow-up implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is complementary to the establishment of institutions such as microcredit lending facilities. These financing institutions will have the

specific responsibility of alleviating poverty and economically empowering women. Moreover, building both types of institutions will accelerate implementation of the Beijing Platform and will ultimately improve the situation and status of women.

16. A position paper on the feasibility and operationalization of microcredit lending facilities for poor women in rural and urban areas in selected Arab countries, such as Lebanon, Tunisia and Yemen will be presented for discussion. Included in the paper will be recommendations for action-oriented policies and concrete measures for alleviating poverty, as well as for empowering women to become economically independent and self-reliant. In so doing, the Meeting will be laying the foundations for this innovative approach that addresses the poverty of women through institution-building and microcredit lending facilities. These recommendations represent a step in the right direction in the alleviation of poverty, one of the three themes of the 1996 Arab Programme for Action.

### THEME THREE. CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING

17. The Meeting will address the issue of capacity-building as one means of achieving gender equality and equity. Providing a two-way critical assessment and self-evaluation of the role of NGOs in the follow-up process to Beijing will highlight a participatory approach between governmental and non-governmental organizations. Building the capacity of NGOs concerned with the advancement of women and with the implementation of the Beijing Platform, and enhancing their role in building a gender-sensitive civil society will be targeted. In addition, the Meeting will seek to raise awareness of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the development and planning formula in order to increase accountability for gender issues while accelerating the process of the advancement of women.

#### *Item 6(a). The role of non-governmental organizations in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action*

18. The Beijing Platform for Action stresses the importance of pursuing a participatory and systemic approach to attain synergy with non-governmental organizations and their full partnership in implementation of development strategies. The post-Beijing period has been characterized by a shift in the scope and coverage of NGOs, from a purely welfare orientation to one concerned with development and the quality of life.

19. A discussion paper on the role of NGOs in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action will be presented for discussion in the Meeting. The paper will be based on a structured interview method evaluating the role of NGOs in selected countries in the three subregions of the Arab world: the Mashreq, the Maghreb and the Gulf States. The findings from each country experience will be synthesized to produce a regional evaluation. In addition, a critical assessment of the role of NGOs in implementing the Beijing Platform will be offered. The paper will conclude by recommending ways and means to forge fuller partnership between NGOs and the national machineries to advance gender equality for women.

20. The fourth working group, composed of a panel of NGOs, will examine the findings of the study and the issues raised in the plenary to produce a self-evaluation of the role of NGOs in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for consideration by the group of government experts. This two-way critical assessment and self-evaluation of the role of NGOs will, by necessity, raise the level of efficiency and promote synergy between the NGOs and national bodies.

#### *Item 6(b). Mainstreaming a gender perspective for policies, plans and programmes at the national level: model action plan*

21. A first step in capacity-building is to raise the awareness of all actors and agents in the civil society and the polity of innovative approaches and new modalities that pursue a holistic approach to development and gender equity. Chief among these is the growing significance of gender mainstreaming, not only as a process, but also as a tool for the advancement of women and their empowerment, and for achieving gender equality.

22. Given the relative novelty of the gender paradigm and the complexity of the gender mainstreaming approach, only a few countries in the region have started, in a haphazard and timid manner, to introduce a gender perspective into those policies, plans or programmes that lend themselves to mainstreaming. Similarly, only a few United Nations bodies and specialized agencies have been successful in their efforts to mainstream a gender perspective into their plans and programmes. The direct link between the status of women at the national level and gender mainstreaming has been recognized in the literature on the subject. The Beijing Platform for Action and subsequent directives from the United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council have expressed a commitment to gender mainstreaming as essential for achieving gender equality.

23. A model action plan for mainstreaming a gender perspective into the policies, plans and programmes of national Governments will be presented to the plenary. This discussion paper will cover the theory and practice of gender mainstreaming in selected Arab countries and areas, including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, with a view to raising awareness of gender issues and gender mainstreaming. National as well as United Nations experiences in gender mainstreaming may be shared in ten-minute presentations to enrich the debate. Taking into consideration the proposed model action plan and the deliberations at the plenary, the fifth working group will recommend a model action plan for this purpose.