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UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN: EQUALITY, DEVELOPMENT
AND PEACE

Status and role of women in education

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its thirty-first session the General Assembly adopted resolution 31/134, entitled "Improvement of the status and role of women in education". In the resolution the Assembly recalled that the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women emphasized the need to take all appropriate measures to ensure to women equal rights with men in education at all levels, and further recalled General Assembly resolutions 3520 (XXX), 3521 (XXX), 3522 (XXX), 3523 (XXX), 3524 (XXX) of 15 December 1975. It recognized that the full and complete development of a country requires the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields and the necessity for women to have equal rights, opportunities and obligations with men, particularly in the fields of education and professional and vocational training, to enable their full participation in the process of development. It further recognized the importance of promoting the education of women and its impact on the rearing of the young generation, as well as the importance of exchange of experience in the elimination of illiteracy and improvement of the educational standard of women at the national, regional and international levels.

2. However, having noted that despite world-wide progress in reducing illiteracy, the illiteracy rate for women far exceeds that of men, and in some cases continues to rise, the General Assembly appealed to all States which had not yet done so to become parties to the following conventions: the Convention against Discrimination in Education, 1960; 1/ the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958; 2/ and the Human Resources Development Convention, 1975. 3/ It called upon States to undertake, whenever necessary, in their economic, social and cultural programmes, specific short-term and long-term measures aimed at improving the status and role of women in education, bearing in mind the provisions of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the provisions of the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year 4/ concerning education and training, particularly with respect to an increase in literacy and equal access of women at every level of education, as well as the provisions of the three conventions mentioned above and other appropriate recommendations.

3. In the resolution the General Assembly further called upon States, whenever necessary, to undertake all possible measures to eliminate illiteracy among women, especially during the United Nations Decade for Women. It also called upon States which have not yet done so to consider undertaking all appropriate

1/ United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 429, p.93.

2/ International Labour Organisation, Conventions and Recommendations, 1919-1966 (Geneva, 1966), Convention No. 111.

3/ International Labour Office, Official Bulletin, vol. LVIII, 1975, Series A, No. 1, Convention No. 142.

4/ Report of the World Conference of the International Women's Year (United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.76.IV.1), chap. II, sect. A.

measures to introduce free and compulsory education at the elementary level and, where possible, free education at all levels, including professional, vocational and technical education, which should be accessible to women without discrimination; to promote co-education and to ensure that men and women have equal access to scholarships and all other study grants.

4. After recommending to States to introduce measures to expand the exchange of experience on issues concerning the improvement of the status and role of women in education, particularly through courses, seminars and symposiums organized at the national, regional and international level, the General Assembly invited Member States as well as the specialized agencies concerned, regional commissions, interested intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations having consultative status with the Economic and Social Council to submit to the Secretary-General their observations concerning the improvement of the status and role of women in education. This information would be taken into account by the Secretary-General in preparing a report, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), to be presented to the General Assembly at the thirty-third session. The present report is prepared in compliance with that request.

5. The question of the improvement of the status and role of women in education has been a continuing concern of the United Nations. The present report describes the scope of the most recent United Nations action in this vital area and the responses communicated to the Secretary-General by Governments, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations. Information from interested organizations of the United Nations system, including concerned specialized agencies and regional commissions, may be found in another report which will be before the General Assembly at its thirty-third session and which contains a study on the joint interagency programme for the United Nations Decade for Women. Furthermore, the observations requested in accordance with paragraph 6 of Assembly resolution 31.134 will be fully discussed at the seventh session of the Sub-Committee on Education and Training of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination under the item entitled "Co-ordination and harmonization of activities of the United Nations system aiming at providing education and training for women". The meeting is scheduled to take place in 1979. It is expected that the consultations and conclusions reached at the meeting will be used in the preparation of the Programme of Action of the second half of the United Nations Decade for Women to be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its twenty-eighth session in January 1980, and at the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women to be held in 1980. It should be noted in this regard that in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1978/32 on the subtheme of "Employment, Health and Education" for the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women, the Conference will place a special emphasis on elaborating new strategies for integrating women into the development process, particularly by promoting economic and employment opportunities on an equal footing with men through, inter alia, the provision of adequate health and educational facilities.

6. In the light of the foregoing and the information submitted in this report, the General Assembly might wish to note that the issue of the status and role of women in education is central to the current and planned efforts of the United

Nations on behalf of women's advancement, and decide to resume consideration of the issue, if necessary, after the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women.

7. The substantive part of the report is divided into three sections. The first section deals with United Nations action falling within the purview of General Assembly resolution 31/134. It deals with action taken to implement mandates calling for review of progress achieved and action taken within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination. The next section discusses action taken at the national level by Governments and non-governmental organizations. The final section concerns measures taken by intergovernmental organizations. At the end of the present report are appended three annexes, listing the States parties to the Convention against Discrimination in Education, 1960 (annex I); the States parties to the Discrimination (Employment and Education) Convention, 1958 (annex II); and the States parties to the Human Resources Development Convention, 1975 (annex III), status as at 31 August 1978.

II. UNITED NATIONS ACTION FALLING WITHIN THE PURVIEW OF
GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 31/134

A. Action undertaken to implement mandates calling
for the review of progress achieved

8. The issue of the educational status of women is regularly dealt with under the reporting system established for monitoring the implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and related instruments, which was originally adopted by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1325 (XLIV) of 31 May 1968 and 1677 (LII) of 2 June 1972 and is now reinforced by the recommendation contained in paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 3520 (XXX) of 15 December 1975. Thus, the Commission on the Status of Women at each session since 1969 has considered reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Declaration, which among other things dealt with the education and training of girls and women. The latest report, entitled "Promotion of full equality of women and men in all spheres of life in accordance with international standards and the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women" (A/32/216 and Add.1 and 2), was submitted both to the General Assembly at its thirty-second session and to the Commission on the Status of Women at its twenty-seventh session. This report was based on replies to requests for information addressed to Governments, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. The information requested, which covered all articles of the Declaration, including article 9 on education and training, focused on developments regarding action undertaken, the situation existing in law, the situation existing in fact and the discrepancy if any between both situations, including any obstacles preventing full implementation of the Declaration and any general trends.

9. Concerning education and training, the report analyses and/or highlights information received from 19 Member States, one specialized agency and four non-governmental organizations. Such information, which was used in the preparation of section III below, dealt with:

(a) Equal conditions of access to, and study in educational institutions of all types, including universities and vocational, technical and professional schools;

(b) The same choice of curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff of the same standards and school premises and equipment of the same quality whether the institutions are co-educational or not;

(c) Equal opportunity to benefit from scholarships and study grants;

(d) Equal opportunity for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult literacy programmes.

10. Within the context of the review and appraisal exercise of progress achieved

in the implementation of the World Plan of Action ^{4/} called for in General Assembly resolutions 3490 (XXX) of 12 December 1975, 3520 (XXX) of 15 December 1975 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2060 (LXII) of 12 May 1977, a questionnaire was sent out on 25 July 1977 to Governments, which in its section 3 dealt with education and training including cultural activities.

11. On the basis of the replies received, a report was prepared and submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its twenty-seventh session (E/CN.6/611). The section of the report dealing with the education and training of women was based on replies from 15 countries. ^{5/} The information received dealt with equality of access to all levels of education and training; legislative and other reforms towards equality in education for males and females; female enrolment at all educational levels; special measures to encourage the education and training of women including adult education; special programmes to improve women's skills; revision of educational materials, curricula and teacher training and elimination of illiteracy.

B. Action undertaken within the framework of the
Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

12. The attention of the General Assembly is drawn to the study of the interagency programme for the United Nations Decade for Women which will be before it for its consideration at its thirty-third session in compliance with its resolution 32/138.

13. This programme, which was developed within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination and for which the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs was the focal point, originated in paragraph 5 (b) of resolution 3520 (XXX). It contains, inter alia, a synthesis of continuing and planned activities for the advancement of women undertaken by interested organizations of the United Nations system. One of the nine principal objectives into which activities of the United Nations system are classified therein is "to achieve equal access and opportunity for both sexes in education and training of all types and at all levels".

14. Material under this principal objective concerns the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). Therefore, that part of the study which relates to principal objective 4 will provide the General Assembly with a picture of the global effort which is under way

^{5/} These also included countries which had responded too late for their information to be used in the preparation of a previous report on the subject.

within the United Nations system on behalf of women as regards their education and training.

15. Another aspect of international action in direct implementation of General Assembly resolution 31/134 is the inclusion of an item on co-ordination and harmonization of activities of the United Nations system aiming at providing education and training for women in the agenda of the Sub-Committee on Education and Training of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination at its sixth session held in March 1978 at Geneva. It is expected that a full review of the question will take place at the seventh session in 1979, where the matter might also be reviewed in the light of Economic and Social Council resolution 1978/32 on the subtheme of "Employment, Health and Education" for the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women.

III. MEASURES AND ACTION UNDERTAKEN AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

A. Measures and action undertaken by Governments

16. The reports of the Secretary-General mentioned in section II above (A/32/216/Add.1 and 2 and E/CN.6/611), were prepared on the basis of information provided by 29 countries on one or more aspects of the education and training of women. 6/ Most of the reporting countries described educational reforms and special measures taken to improve the education of women at all levels - primary, secondary and university - and including vocational and technical training. The various methods and programmes included legislation, compulsory education, co-education and the provision of incentives such as scholarships. The educational level of women increased in most of the reporting countries, both developing and developed, as a result of increased schooling facilities at the primary and secondary levels. Most efforts, however, were directed at raising the literacy levels of populations as a whole; relatively less attention was given to the particular problem of female illiteracy.

17. This section of the present report contains information regarding the extent to which these countries reported on various aspects of education and training conducted with the specific objective of benefiting women. Inasmuch as this information is to be found in documents A/32/216, Add.1 and 2 and E/CN.6/611 mentioned above, the relevant information is presented here in summary form.

1. Equal access to education and training at all levels

(a) Legislative action

18. Special legislation and reforms for equality in education for males and females were reported by some countries, while others cited the existence of draft legislation to this effect. A few stated that equal rights in education and equal access to education were already guaranteed to men and women through legislative or constitutional means. Lingering problems of tradition and culture were cited by some countries as limiting women's participation in the educational system or creating discriminatory practices in education.

(b) Special programmes to encourage education and training of women, including study grants

19. A number of countries reported providing special services and incentives to encourage women of all ages to pursue their education through the secondary level and beyond, including vocational schools and training colleges. One Government

6/ Australia, Austria, Barbados, Bulgaria, Central African Empire, Chile, Cuba, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, German Democratic Republic, Germany, Federal Republic of, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Ivory Coast, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Singapore, Spain, Sudan, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and United States of America.

noted the establishment of a women's unit within the Department of Education; another reported the organization by the Secretary for Women of special courses on family orientation, home management, sewing, cooking, nutrition and hygiene. Among the special measures reported were the creation of conditions enabling women to attend any advanced training courses deemed necessary, programmes facilitating women's participation in vocational training, leave of absence for economically active women with children, government assistance to parents with limited income and special facilities such as creches at universities and training colleges. The existence of adult education programmes was cited by a few countries, which noted that women comprised from 37 per cent to over 50 per cent of the enrolment in such programmes. Several Governments reported that women and men had equal access to scholarships and study grants.

2. Free and compulsory education

20. A number of countries reported that education was compulsory, usually up to the age of 15, and a few stated that primary and secondary education were free. Another Government reported that it was considering the enactment of free and compulsory education. It was noted by one country that compulsory education to the minimum age of 17 also contributed to assuring adequate schooling for girls.

3. Co-education and curricula

21. Reports from only a few countries indicated co-educational schools and non-differentiated curricula for males and females. Several Governments, however, reported taking measures to ensure equal treatment, and a number of countries cited efforts to eliminate sex-role stereotyping in textbooks and curricula and to provide new training opportunities for women and girls.

4. Efforts towards elimination of illiteracy, including adult education

22. With the exception of one country which reported that illiteracy had been completely eliminated, a number of replies indicated special efforts to combat illiteracy. Some countries reported an intensification of literacy programmes using new techniques; in those efforts, rural women were a major priority.

23. A number of Governments reported that women were taking advantage of centres for vocational education and other opportunities to learn skills, particularly new ones, and acquire special training. Several countries also pointed out that assistance was being provided to support child-care centres in order to facilitate women's participation in adult education programmes.

B. Activities and observations by non-governmental organizations

24. Five non-governmental organizations supplied the Secretary-General with information regarding their activities in the field of education. These included the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, the International Federation of University Women, Soroptimist International, the Women's International Zionist Organisation and the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations.

/...

25. The International Federation of Business and Professional Women stated that it was undertaking activities for higher education for women in at least eight countries, including Argentina and Nicaragua, as well as providing grants and vocational guidance at primary and secondary school levels in 11 countries.

26. The International Federation of University Women referred to reports from its Belgian affiliate, noting that all kinds of education, including technical schools, are now open to girls. The British affiliate observed that some of the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge Universities, formerly reserved for males, now accept women undergraduates, while the French affiliate noted doors of more schools opening for girls, for example, those of the Ecole polytechnique and the Ecole des mines. A number of affiliates (e.g., in the Republic of Korea and in Canada) reported increasing numbers of women in all educational institutions at all levels. The affiliate of the Netherlands reported that it had asked all universities in the country to implement "positive discrimination" in favour of women. The organization further reported that its affiliates in other countries, as for example Kenya and Nigeria, were providing fellowships to girls at secondary school levels, as well as grants to women for post-graduate work.

27. Soroptimist International stated that its efforts to implement the objectives of the United Nations Decade for Women included work towards equal access to the same educational programmes and to enrolment at all levels, the extension to women of training for vocational skills, including improved methods of farming, and giving a number of grants and scholarships to girls and women.

28. The Women's International Zionist Organisation reported giving assistance in the field of general education.

29. The World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations referred to action of its affiliates to provide equal access to scholarships.

IV. MEASURES AND ACTION UNDERTAKEN BY INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

30. In compliance with Economic and Social Council resolution 48 (IV) of 29 March 1947, the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States and the Commission on the Status of Arab Women of the Arab League regularly submit each a report concerning their activities to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. At the twenty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women both these organizations submitted reports which contained, inter alia, information pertinent to the present report. 7/

A. Inter-American Commission of Women

31. At its eighteenth assembly held in 1976, the Inter-American Commission of Women approved a regional plan of action for the United Nations Decade for Women, based on the World Plan of Action. The Commission's regional plan of action covers six priority target areas, chosen from the World Plan of Action, including education. Each of these areas is designed for short, medium and long-term action thus covering the Decade.

32. With specific reference to education, the Commission stated that education as a fundamental principle of social justice and a basic right of the individual in achieving full self-realization continues to be a priority line of action for the integral training of women.

33. The implementation of this line of action has been emphasized with a stronger approach towards effective activities needed by the countries. Thus the education of women in the Americas is being promoted to speed up their participation in the social and economic development of the hemisphere. To this end, the Commission is giving strong encouragement to affording women access to all existing educational and training opportunities and is promoting the development of new training activities for women.

34. Its chief action priorities are as follows:

1. Short-term

(a) Increase activities of integral training of women so that they can fulfil their role in the family, at work and in the community, with special attention to rural women and underprivileged women in the urban sectors;

(b) Promote access by women, under equal conditions with men, to educational programmes, with emphasis on the technical and scientific fields;

7/ These reports are reproduced in documents E/CN.6/616 and E/CN.6/617.

(c) Implement specific projects in non-formal education, through the mass media, that are aimed at the integral training of women, making use of the national infrastructure of the Commission;

(d) Develop education programmes outside the classroom oriented towards changing attitudes towards the role of men and women in society;

(e) Develop educational projects to train women and men as co-equal partners in society, jointly responsible for the destiny of mankind;

(f) Encourage greater consideration of women and urge more women to apply for Organization of American States fellowships, particularly for fellowships related to the six substantive areas to which the Commission has given priority;

(g) Re-examine the regional activities of the Commission, such as courses, seminars, workshops, etc., in terms of cost-effectiveness.

2. Medium-term

(a) Continue national promotional activities for the integral training of women;

(b) Continue promoting increased applications by women for Organization of American States fellowships;

(c) Develop a follow-up project on the recipients of the educational services offered by the Commission over the last five years, with the co-operation of the National Committee of Co-operation with the Commission;

(d) Promote creation within the Organization of American States of special fellowships programmes for university women in the social sciences to do research in their own countries, chiefly in the following areas: the impact of development programmes on women and the image of women in the mass media.

These fellowship programmes will be joint operations, with technical assistance in preparation of research from the Commission at Washington and the Commission's Multinational Women's Center for Research and Training at Cordoba, Argentina, in an effort to produce comparative data.

3. Long-term

(a) Expand the activities for the integral training of women;

(b) Step up assistance from the Commission to the National Committee of Co-operation to develop educational activities in accordance with the needs of each country;

(c) Collect and publish on a regular basis information on fellowships given by other institutions and distribute this information at the national level through the women's bureaux and the Commission's Multinational Women's Centre for Research and Training.

35. Among the activities undertaken by the Commission to improve the status and role of women in education has been a workshop entitled "Inter-American Applied Laboratory on the Technical Education of Women". This workshop was held by the Commission at Buenos Aires in April 1977, with the support of the Government of Argentina and the Regional Educational Development Programme of the general secretariat of the Organization of American States. The objectives of this workshop were to identify specific problems and to prepare action programmes in order to ensure that technical education provides integral training to women that prepares them to be able to carry out properly their roles in their homes and in the community and to develop those skills which will enable them to meet the requirements of the labour market.

36. The workshop was attended by 23 specialists in the field of technical education and career advancement from the ministries of education in the member States. The laboratory entered its second phase during the month of November 1977 with two activities: round tables in each participating country to analyse the application at the national level of strategies drawn up at the laboratory, and the incorporation of the results from the research conducted at the laboratory as part of the research plan to be carried out by the Department of Educational Affairs of the general secretariat of the Organization of American States.

37. The Commission also reported that during the course of this year the Multinational Women's Centre for Research and Training of the Inter-American Commission of Women would be inaugurated after a number of years of planning and negotiation. It is envisaged that this Centre will serve as the Commission's base of operations and will be equipped with the technical and financial facilities needed to develop fully the Commission's policies on the question of research and training of women so as to integrate them fully into the national life. This Centre will also conduct information and institutional documentation activities.

B. Commission on the Status of Arab Women

38. At its fifth session held in October 1976, the Commission on the Status of Arab Women adopted an agenda which included, inter alia, item 4 entitled "Symposium on traditions and social attitudes that hinder the full participation of women in different sectors of life". The symposium was held on 25 October and made recommendations including the following:

(a) Women's organizations and unions for women, workers and farmers should hold symposia and meetings to improve the status of women and their basic role in building society and to clarify the traditions and customs that hinder their progress. These organizations should act for change, particularly in schools;

(b) Special attention should be given to the elimination of illiteracy among women, particularly young girls;

(c) School curricula in Arab countries should be reformed in order to ensure that a positive image of women is taught.

39. In April 1977 the Commission on the Status of Arab Women, in co-operation with UNICEF, held a training course for personnel in family and women's programmes in the Gulf area.

40. The course was designed to prepare a nucleus of women leaders in the Gulf area who would be able to improve the standards of programmes for women, especially by training the personnel in these programmes in their home countries. To this end, the course had the following objectives:

(a) To enable participants to understand the importance of training and to consider appropriate methods of planning and implementing training programmes;

(b) To examine the situation of women in the Gulf area, the obstacles to their full integration into the development process and appropriate strategies for improving the situation;

(c) To develop awareness of the need for effective co-operation between various sectors and agencies working for the promotion of women;

(d) To enable the participants to exchange experiences concerning their work with women and the organization of training facilities for personnel in their respective countries.

The course also provided the opportunity for experts in women's programmes from various Arab countries to discuss issues and to examine strategies for integrating women into the development process.

ANNEX I

States parties to the Convention against Discrimination
in Education, adopted on 14 December 1960 by the General
Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization. Status as at 31 August 1978

Australia

Barbados

Central African Empire

Chile

Egypt

Finland

France

Iraq

Israel

Jordan

Liberia

Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

Saudi Arabia

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

ANNEX II

States parties to the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)
Convention, adopted on 25 June 1958 by the General Conference of
the International Labour Organisation. Status as at 31 August 1978

Angola
Austria
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belgium
Bolivia
Chad
German Democratic Republic
Guinea-Bissau
Guyana
Haiti
India
Iraq
Israel
Jamaica
Lebanon
Liberia
Nepal
Netherlands
Norway
Portugal
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Tunisia
United Arab Emirates

ANNEX III

States parties to the Human Resources Development Convention,
adopted on 23 June 1975 by the General Conference of the
International Labour Organisation. Status as at 31 August 1978

Argentina

Cuba

Cyprus

Ecuador

Finland

Guinea

Hungary

Mexico

Nicaragua

Norway

Spain

Sweden

Switzerland

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
