

**Division for the Advancement of Women
Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

AIDE-MEMOIRE

**Regional consultation on Reducing the Gender Dimensions of Poverty:
Microfinance Policies, Processes and Practices**

*Accra, Ghana
24-26 April, 2002*

A. Introduction

The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) will organise a regional consultation from 24-26 April 2002 in Accra, Ghana, to (a) analyse the key issues that have emerged from the on-line discussions on micro-finance that were conducted in June and July 2001; (b) facilitate a dialogue among key stakeholders with regard to sustainable and effective microfinance; and (c) develop a consensus on a “minimum package” for technical support and capacity building for microenterprise development. The meeting will be hosted by the Government of Ghana.

The consultation is an essential step of the project funded under the development dividend to assess and improve the viability of microfinance as a poverty reduction strategy and as a tool for the economic empowerment of women and as a follow-up activity to the Beijing Platform for Action Items A: Women and Poverty, and F: Women and the Economy.

B. Background

In the years since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action by Member States, the gender dimensions of poverty have become increasingly recognized and available statistics indicate that women constitute over 90 per cent of the poorest globally. The growing consensus that specific programmes and policies are needed to address this “feminization of poverty” has resulted in a focus on microcredit and microenterprise as one of the means through which to reduce poverty and ensure sustainable livelihoods among women. However, because much of this microcredit and microenterprise activity takes place outside of the formal financial sector, it has been difficult to accurately assess its effectiveness as a tool for economic empowerment.

The long-term poverty reduction potential of such micro-level initiatives needs to be examined more rigorously. In particular, microenterprise experiences need to be analyzed in terms of key factors in their success or failure in order to determine their suitability for successful replication within institutional frameworks and across cultures and economic systems as well as to establish “minimum packages” for establishment and support of viable microfinance schemes. It is also necessary to a) target those women who should benefit most from such schemes and ensure that they have input in their development and implementation; and b) determine whether such schemes do in fact empower women on a sustainable basis as distinct from alleviating poverty within households. This project will focus on Africa and will examine the microfinance policies, processes and practices in that region.

C. Objectives and Organization of the Consultation

“Reducing the Gender Dimensions of Poverty” is a project which aims to assess and improve the viability of microfinance as a poverty reduction strategy and a tool for the economic empowerment of women.

The consultation specifically aims to:

1. Analyse the key issues that have emerged from the on-line discussion held by DAW as a lead-up to the consultation.
2. Facilitate a dialogue among key stakeholders with regard to sustainable and effective microfinance.
3. Develop a consensus on a “minimum package” of support/capacity building for microenterprise development.

D. Expected Outputs

(a) direct outputs:

- Modalities for involving grass roots women and women’s organisations in the microfinance policy and programme planning process developed.
- Strengths and weaknesses of existing microfinance schemes assessed.
- Dialogue towards collaborative efforts between stakeholders including UN agencies, MFIs, women on the ground and formal financial lending institutions at the regional and national level established.
- Methods by which microfinance schemes and strategies can be improved and replicated identified.
- Components of a “minimum package” for empowering women to access and utilize microfinance developed.
- A final report of the consultation meeting containing the conclusions and recommendations produced.

(b) indirect outputs:

- Increased awareness about the role of microfinance in the empowerment of women.
- Ways to improve collaboration and coordination on this issue will be identified.

E. Participants and Administrative Matters

The consultation will be organised by the Division for the Advancement of Women. It will be responsible for:

- programme preparation;
- identification and selection of participants;
- preparation of background document(s);
- preparation of guidelines for presentations for selected speakers;
- drafting and sending of invitation letters; and
- consolidating advanced copies of presentations papers to be prepared by the selected participants.

As the official host institution, the Government of Ghana will be responsible for all other organizational arrangements for the consultation, including the following services and facilities:

1. Administrative and support personnel including secretarial assistance;
2. Office supplies, stationery, office and reproduction equipment such as personal computers, typewriters and duplicating machines;
3. Transportation between the airport and hotel at arrival and departure days for participants and UN/DESA staff;
4. Transportation between the hotel and conference facilities, if required;
5. Access to telephone, telefax and telex services;
6. Conference rooms, meeting facilities and office space as required;
7. Audio-visual aids relevant to the meeting, such as overhead projector, flip charts, etc; and
8. Assistance in arranging hotel accommodation, and change or confirmations of return flight reservations for participants.

Venue and Participants

The consultation will be conducted in Accra, and is scheduled to take place from 24-26 April 2002.

The number of participants will be between 25 and 30. They will include:

1. Representatives of African Member States selected on the basis of their experiences with microfinance for women;
2. Representatives from sub-regional organizations;

3. Representatives from selected NGOs (international and regional);
4. Representatives from other regions;
5. Donor countries/agencies;
6. Representatives from other UN agencies;
7. Facilitator/consultant; and
8. UNDESA/DAW.

DAW/DESA will arrange travel and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) for participants from other countries.

Language of the consultation

The working language of the consultation will be English. Documentation for the consultation will be provided in English.

Passports and Visas

Participants will be expected to make necessary arrangements with regard to passports, visa and health certificates for travel and consultation attendance.

F. Report and Publications

Background document(s) for the consultation will be prepared by DAW/DESA. A consultation report will be prepared by a consultant/facilitator and will be published by DAW/DESA following the conclusion of the workshop.

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