

DAWN meets in Douala, Cameroon

Address at the opening ceremony of the DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) African regional meeting on implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action on reproductive rights and health held in Akwa Palace Hotel, Douala, Cameroon Jan. - 5 - 1999

On behalf of DAWN African region, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all our distinguished guests for accepting our invitation to this opening ceremony of our meeting.

Let me start by explaining what DAWN is. DAWN is an acronym which stands for Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era.

DAWN is an autonomous inter-regional organisation of southern women scholars, researchers and activists. DAWN acts as a network and a catalyst which advocates alternative development processes that emphasise the basic survival needs of the majority of the world's people, particularly third world women and their children.

DAWN bases its analysis on consultation with women living in the third world and their experiences for survival to inform policy changes.

By

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DAWN was founded in 1984 on the eve of the Third World Conference on Women which took place in Nairobi, Kenya.

DAWN publishes a newsletter, *DAWN INFORMS*, three times a year which is the networking tool for its members.

In addition, DAWN has produced several publications that contain alternative development paradigms to structural adjustment policies, populations policies etc... Presently, DAWN is focusing on four research programme areas namely;

- sustainable livelihoods
- political restructuring and social transformation

DAWN African Regional Coordinator of DAWN Project on Sexuality, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Right, and Gender Justice.

- political economy
- social reproduction, reproductive rights, sexuality and gender justice.

We are gathered here in Akwa Palace Hotel, Douala, as DAWN African regional members, resource persons and activists in relation to the fourth programme area of DAWN above. This is part of the DAWN process to assess post-ICPD policies. We are here from a few countries in Africa, namely Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Gabon, Sao Tome and Cote d'Ivoire to share experiences from our country case studies on the changes that have taken place particularly in the health sector since Cairo.

Cairo agenda is important to us in that it emphasised the importance of social development policies but went considerably beyond that through its emphasis on reproductive and sexual rights reproductive and sexual health, gender equality and women's empowerment.



At the DAWN meeting which took place at Akwa Palace Hotel on January 6, 1999

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Already DAWN has assessed post-ICPD policies in southern countries of Bolivia, Brazil, Nicaragua, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Philippines and Fiji. This is the attempt to add African region to the list in order to come up with strategies that would be relevant to our hope that African governments are making efforts at comprehensive women's health policy reforms to reduce the high maternal morbidity and mortality rates due to unsafe abortion.

Unsafe abortion was identified in Cairo as a major public health concern in paragraph 8.25. It states that women should have access to services to manage the complications of unsafe abortion under all circumstances in which it is not against the law. In the Beijing plat-form for action paragraph 106k, it added that member states should consider reviewing existing punitive legislation with respect to abortion.

We are also drawing attention to the provision in chapter VII of the ICPD document defining reproductive rights as the right to make reproduction decisions and violence. The chapter also stated that reproductive health services (including sexual health and family planning) should be linked to the primary health care (where it is not against the law), preventing reproductive tract infections, sexually transmitted diseases, and infertility, in addition to maternal and child health services and counselling men and youth for responsible sexual behaviour.

We are also looking at the emphasis in ICPD agreements on partnership, monitoring and accountability mechanisms. In particular, we refer to ICPD paragraph 15.8 which states << governments and intergovernmental organisations; in dialogue with non-governmental organisations and local community groups, and in full respect

for their decision-making and facilitate the contribution that non-government organisations can make at all levels towards finding solutions to population and development concerns and, in particular, to ensure the implementation of the present programme of action. Non-governmental organisations should have a key role in national and international development processes. Similarly paragraph 15.9 re-affirms that << governments should ensure the essential moves and participation of women's organisations in the design and development programmes. Involving women at all levels, especially the managerial level, is critical to meeting the objectives and implementing the present programme of action>>.

In the DAWN case studies so far, positive changes have occurred where there has been a clear case of partnerships, gender equity and equality and accountability in the implementation process.

Finally, the United Nations has started the process of assessing what has been achieved by way of implementing the recommendations of the ICPD of 1994. This is the Cairo + 5 process. There has been regional consultations with NGOs. One of this took place in Dakar, Senegal from the 13th to 16th December, 1998. In February, 1999, there will be an NGO forum and a youth forum preceding the governmental meeting in the Hague. A special session of the UN Commission on Population and Development will hold in New York from March 22nd to 30th, 1999 and the final meeting would be the special session of the UN General Assembly in late June, 1999.

Governments have been appealed to for them to include NGOs and women activists with a programme of reproductive health and rights agenda, in their delegations to the various meetings.

In the Cairo + 5 process of which

this meeting is a part, important issue areas have been slated to be addressed at NGO Forum; these are:

Resources and advocacy: where Population Action International (PAI) is the organisation focal point.

ICPD ethos in practice ... Implementing policies and services, where Family Case International (FCI) is the organisational focal point.

Rights ... Rhetoric to reality: Where International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is the organisational focal point.

Links between reproductive health, empowerment where DAWN is the focal point.

Partnerships: where, health, empowerment, rights and accountability, (HERA) is the focal point.

Thus, this is a very important meeting where the outcome has relevance not only in the Cairo + 5 process but also in the well-being and lives of millions of women, men and children in the third world.

In conclusion, "we understand Cairo to mean that the sexual and reproductive health of people is determined by the conditions in which they live; poverty or wealth and growing inequity; and their ability to exercise that the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action is only possible with greater partnerships to overcome the constraints of inequity, inequality, injustice and lack of accountability. The determination of what these concepts mean and as they are realised must include women's diverse perspectives". This was the consensus agreement of over 200 women from all regions of the world from the Cairo + 5 HERA meeting in Cocoyoc, Mexico from 15 - 18 November, 1998. We in DAWN were part of this consensus.

I thank you all for your attention ♀