



**Contribution from  
*Women's Action for Development (WAD) - Namibia***

**Consultation Workshop of the  
*"Commission for Africa"***

**Lusaka, Zambia: 13 – 14 December 2004**

**Consultation Workshop  
facilitated by the  
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## 1. **Introduction:**

When talking about development, irrespective of social, economical or political development, it is crucial to explicitly include the role of women. Women resident in the rural areas especially, have remained marginalized, under-developed and down-trodden for generations.

It remains a fact which cannot be denied that a pre-condition for development is to empower women to such an extent that they are prepared to take up their rightful and equal position in society.

It can further not be denied that women are the backbone of society and that they hold the key to the economic prosperity in any country. It is equally true that without the equal participation of men and women at all levels of government there can be no true democracy in any given country.

Many women in the African countryside are caught in a vicious circle of poverty and powerlessness. Thus, to enable those women to break this vicious circle, they must be given personal, as well as economical and political power!

This is precisely what Women's Action for Development (WAD) has been doing for the past decade in Namibia. WAD is a grassroots organization and has worked towards the upliftment and advancement of rural women in the Namibian society, while the organisation has relentlessly worked towards advancing rural women at the local, regional and national levels of government.

WAD's point of departure has been to assist women's self-help groups to help themselves through training, to acquire various economic skills, as well as to train them to become bold lobbyists for social change.

The aim during the past ten years has further been to equip women with the necessary tools in order to acquire self-confidence, pride and human dignity which have been lost due to harmful cultural practices which impede the development of women. Apart from poverty and unemployment it was found that one of the most profound problems prevalent among rural women in Namibia, is the lack of self-confidence. This problem has become so serious that it is blocking women to come out of the shadows and to achieve.

A further unfortunate contributing factor to the deterioration of the self-confidence and self-esteem of women and in particular that of the African women, is their exposure to harmful cultural practices which have impeded the development of women and which were enforced by men (for the convenience of men), and which was further enforced by societal pressure.

Women have indeed been exposed to harmful cultural practices, which have inhibited their development and growth - and they have been the target of soft slavery through male-dictated cultural practices, for generations!

It is further no secret that up until today many women are still deliberately kept in the kitchen and behind the cooking pots, with the sole purpose of bearing children; raising them; and feeding them, very often single-handedly!

Women further spend many unproductive hours in collecting firewood, while they also spend many hours in working on the fields; in putting their children through school etc, instead of also being given an equal opportunity to engage in training programmes and income-generating projects.

Moreover, because boys have all along been viewed as superior to girls, many young girls sadly have to sacrifice their education for the benefit of their brothers, so as to ensure that they are well prepared (above their sisters), to get into positions of power one day.

And what is more - in many instances, women are chased off their land when their husbands die; and many are still being deprived from the opportunity of speaking at public gatherings - thereby unfairly depriving women from the opportunity of unleashing their full potential to become well-respected and dignified citizens of our society.

If one has to draw up a list of the most oppressed and deprived people in our respective countries, and in fact, a large part of our Continent, the African women would, no doubt, top that list.

It is thus, sad to say that our own cultural traditions which are curbing women's growth, are just as guilty as was our colonial powers, of oppressing women and giving them a poor perception of themselves!

Experience shows that money speaks also for illiterate rural women. Therefore it is crucial that women are given the opportunity to earn their own income, but at the same time also be trained on how to handle money in a responsible manner.

## **2. Overview of the Activities of Women's Action for Development (WAD) in Namibia**

### **2.1 Structure:**

*Women's Action for Development (WAD)*, is a Namibian-based Self-Help Organisation which aims at uplifting the socio-economic and socio-political situation of primarily Namibian rural women. The organisation is an Article 21 Company, not for gain and was established in 1994

The organisation is active in 6 regions of the country, with the intention of eventually expanding to all 13 regions of the country when the appropriate funds become available.

WAD receives its core funding from the *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*, a German Foundation, together with other noteworthy local and international donors.

The organisation is outspoken, fearless and dynamic with equally fearless and dynamic goals. It is well structured, go-ahead and successful and has managed to maintain its visibility and vocality in the print and electronic media in the country.

WAD, a male-friendly organisation with a membership of over 10 000, has been successful because of:

- ◆ The sound perspectives, strategies and exceptional commitment of its main donor towards rural development;
- ◆ Its non party-political and non-partisan disposition. Needless to say, this attracts community members from all cultural, spiritual and party-political persuasions to the organisation;
- ◆ The organisation's excellent track record in financial management;
- ◆ The fact that its Training Centres, which are equipped with overnight facilities, have been established in the operating regions to serve day students as well as students from the surrounding villages;
- ◆ The fact that full-time Regional Co-ordinators and Trainers have been appointed to the regions to train project members on a daily basis;
- ◆ The fact that training staff are mobile to reach the most remote villages in the country;
- ◆ The continuous upgrading of the skills of staff members; and
- ◆ The fact that strong directives are continuously being given through to staff and project members by its Management.

WAD further follows an holistic approach in developing its members, while its programme pursues a two-pronged approach of empowering its members in the socio-economic and socio-political fields of development.

## **2.2. "Field Days" - A platform where communities and decision-makers meet:**

During the past ten years WAD introduced "Field Days" within the regions in which it is operational. The purpose of Field Days is to create an informative platform for interaction of WAD members, decision-makers, community leaders, etc as well as other community members.

Since Field Days are being well covered in the media, messages and views expressed, resonate well in all corners of the country.

It has been a real joy for WAD to have experienced the measure of dedication and commitment of the Namibian Head of State, Cabinet Ministers, as well as regional decision-makers and community leaders towards their community members and to see with how much commitment leaders have been enlightening their respective community members on how they can capitalize on opportunities in the sectors of health, education, development, etc.

WAD believes that frequent communication and contact between citizens and decision-makers is a token of transparency and good governance.

Community members likewise respond very well in attending Field Days to be informed and to meet decision-makers and community leaders of their respective regions. This was clearly seen when over 900 community members attended the Kunene Field Day at Outjo (in the north-west of the country), during 2003.

For WAD members, Field Days are highlights on their calendars because they have an opportunity to proudly showcase their products, which result from newly gained skills. At the same time WAD members and Trainers are availed the opportunity to address large crowds of people in order to overcome their traditional inhibitions and to intentionally undo harmful cultural beliefs which prohibit women from addressing public gatherings.

WAD is proud to state that rural women who would not have dared to appear on stage in front of an audience before, eventually became completely comfortable and assertive in organizing such gatherings and even in presenting lengthy feedback reports in an eloquent manner in the presence of important decision-makers.

This merely proves the point that some of the greatest barriers to our performance, are often situated within ourselves.

### **3. Lessons learned: Successes and Constraints:**

#### ***3.1. Socio-economic empowerment of women -***

When WAD becomes active in a region, it works through churches, schools, traditional authorities, decision-makers, etc to reach women. Since WAD follows an holistic approach in empowering its members, women are firstly expected to undergo basic training in *Hygiene, Nutrition, Family Planning, Child Development Care, HIV/AIDS Awareness, etc.*

This is followed by skills development training (of the members' choice) provided that a market exists for the skills in which they are trained.

Establishment of income-generating projects:

The next step is for WAD to assist its project members with kick-start equipment or materials to start viable projects. This is given once only, as WAD discourages a hand-out or dependency mentality among its members. The WAD staff members then further assist the project members on a daily basis with further training, with the view to guide them towards self-sustainability.

Establishment of Savings Clubs:

Simultaneously with the above training, training is provided to the project members on how to start a savings club. The Post Offices in the rural areas are used for this purpose because commercial banks are too expensive for rural people to open savings accounts. One account is opened where a project group would save, although each member has her/his own savings book which clearly depicts her weekly savings.

Since the organisation has many illiterate women in the savings clubs, different colour stamps are pasted in her savings book to assist her to understand how much money she has actually saved. For example, a yellow stamp values 50c; while a red stamp would value N\$1,00; a blue stamp, N\$2,00; a purple stamp N\$5,00, etc.

Savings clubs have proven to be very useful for project members to acquire stronger buying power. For example, when expensive equipment is needed, the project members pool their savings to purchase the item, whereas it would have been very difficult for one woman to acquire that expensive item expeditiously if she were operating on her own.

An unexpected positive spin-off of savings clubs is that it sensitises women, right from the beginning, to keep their families small. For example a woman with 2 children would be able to save much more than a woman with 8 children. This awareness is rapidly grasped by the members and positively filters through to keep their families small, as the benefits are there to be seen and experienced.

**3.2. Successes of income-generating projects:**

Among the successful projects under the supervision of WAD are the following:

- ◆ A 6-member Needlework Project in the central-east of Namibia, which presently has N\$30 000,00 (US\$1,00 buys N\$5,76) in their savings club after salaries had been deducted;
- ◆ An 18-member *Spitzkoppe Community Based Tourism Project* in the Erongo region, which had more than N\$40 000,00 in their savings club at the end of October 2004, after salaries were deducted;
- ◆ A 6 member *Mosquito Net Needlework Project* in the Omusati region in the North, which had close to N\$70 000,00 in their savings club at the end of October 2004, after salaries were drawn.



An interesting positive spin-off of this project, is that, according to the Ministry of Health and Social Services, the incidence of Malaria dropped by 40% in those communities where project members sold their mosquito nets.

- ◆ A 7-member Butchery project in the Omaheke region where a loan of N\$95 000,00 was given to 3 women and 3 men to start a butchery at the beginning of 2000. At the end of November 2000 the project won the WAD trophy for topmost achievers when it was found that they were repaying their loan of N\$2 000,00 per month without skipping a month; salaries were paid to project members according to their profits; enough funds were available to buy more meat to keep the butchery self-sustainable. At the end of May 2004 the loan of N\$95 000,00 was fully repaid without the members having skipped one month for a period of four years.  
This is a real success story!

### ***3.3. Constraints of income-generating projects:***

When the project has made its first profits, the project enters its most sensitive and crucial stage, as project members come forward with all kinds of urgent demands for money. If the Trainers are not particularly careful, the project members will draw all the funds. At this time Trainers have to be particularly vigilant -

- \*to ensure that strict financial management is adhered to by all members; and**
- \*to ensure self-sustainability of the project.**

Therefore, if a sewing project would consist of 6 members and they make their first profits - a portion of the profits is firstly subtracted for materials or any other expenses, to ensure that the project can safely continue.

Thus, only after these expenses have been deducted, are salaries equally divided among the 6 members. Each individual member would then save a portion of her salary, while stamps to the value of her savings, would then be pasted in her individual savings books by the Treasurer of the savings club.

Among the problems which the organisation has encountered within projects in the rural areas, are the following:

- ◆ Project members want to earn quick bucks in working for a fixed salary, while having difficulty in grasping the concept of being co-owner of a project. This is the result of always having worked as employees and not as a “director” of their own projects;
- ◆ Project members want to earn the same salary every month and have difficulty in grasping the concept that salaries will fluctuate according to profits. Therefore, the harder you work, the larger your salary and vice versa;
- ◆ Many project members initially steal from their own projects, while having great difficulty in realising that they are stealing from themselves;

- ◆ Since certain project members have stronger personalities than others, one or more are bound to try to dominate the weaker ones and sometimes take on a position of being the boss of the project instead of working in a team.

But WAD stands firm in sensitising its members that the answer to unemployment is self-employment and that their salaries would fluctuate according to their performance and thus, profits of projects. This awareness gives members an excellent incentive to work particularly hard to improve their monthly earnings.

Funds saved to enable the project to proceed, can initially not be withdrawn without the signature of a WAD representative until such time that the project members understand the concept of working towards the self-sustainability of their project. Only after such time would the WAD representative withdraw her signature.

#### **3.4. Socio-political empowerment of women:**

WAD is one of the women's movements in Africa that actively empowers women in this field, with excellent results. WAD has actively assisted its members to establish 7-member "*Women's Voice bodies*" in the regions in which it is active.

The communities nominate their own bold and assertive female or male representatives during community elections to act and speak as their official mouthpiece in the regions. The *Women's Voices* stand together as a united force and address social problems within their communities themselves, by making use of the appropriate decision-makers, community leaders and traditional authorities to assist them in solving their social problems and in acquiring what they need in their villages. At the same time members are trained on how to mobilise their communities to assist them to acquire their needs, while the print and electronic media are notified to cover the initiatives of members with the view to influence the authorities further to solve the social problems

Among many others, the following successes were attained through the initiatives of *Women's Voices*:

- ◆ The *Hardap Women's Voice* in the South of the country, successfully lobbied their authorities to erect a mortuary at one of the small villages in the region called Gibeon. Today the mortuary is built and it serves as a national monument for women, with the clear message that if they stand together as a united force, they could achieve anything they needed.
- ◆ The *Omaheke Women's Voice* in the east of the country, lobbied the appropriate authorities for a full-time Doctor; a full-time nurse; and an ambulance. The result was that the community was successful in all their requests put forward to the authorities;
- ◆ The *Kunene Women's Voice* in the north-west of the country marched into the shops of a small town called Khorixas and took down all the expired goods from the shelves. They then called the shop owners and Health Inspector and cautioned them that if this did not stop they will take the matter further, which could result in the shop owners losing their licences and the Health Inspector to lose his job. This problem greatly improved!

These are only a few of the successes which the Women's Voices attained in the past and WAD is extremely excited about the self-confidence, pride and human dignity which community members are equipped with as a consequence of these successes. Similarly, other success stories can be sighted.

*Women's Voices* also lobby their appropriate authorities and their communities on educational and health problems, drug abuse, alcoholism, AIDS awareness, as well as to ensure that jobs in the regions are secured for people of that specific region and that people from other regions are not "imported" to their regions to work there.

They are further sensitised of the power which they possess as voters and that they could determine their own destiny in using that power effectively. This voting power should however, be used effectively and responsibly in voting for their own upliftment.

*Women's Voices* also identify and encourage women to stand as candidates in elections, with the view to take up positions of power in the regions.

It goes without saying that WAD very strictly adheres to a non party-political philosophy, but encourages women to fearlessly venture into the male dominated world of politics and governance of the country.

The *Women's Voices* are further trained in lobbying and advocacy skills and WAD continuously sensitises them to make an informed choice when they go to the polls to elect their leaders.

As it was found during 2002 that the Regional *Women's Voices* were firmly established in the regions, WAD assisted the Regional Women's Voices to establish a "*National Women's Voice*" which was inaugurated by the Right Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia during 2002. The National Women's Voice consists of the Chairpersons of the Regional Women's Voices, to serve as the Official Mouthpiece for WAD members on National Level to lobby Parliamentarians, Cabinet Members, or even the President himself, on issues pertaining to the development of women and rural communities as a whole.

### **3.5. People at Grassroots now Para-legal Advisors:**

WAD has also worked together with the Legal Assistance Centre in Namibia to train rural people to act as para-legals at the WAD Training Centres in the regions in which it is active to assist its members to solve their legal problems. The result was that para-legal trainees graduated at the WAD Annual Conference during November 2000 as Legal Advisors.

Other projects which WAD has successfully embarked upon for the benefit of the advancement of women:

- ◆ The production of over 100 000 linen shopping bags, to secure jobs for rural women; to protect the environment and to eventually replace plastic shopping bags, which have become a menace to the Namibian environment;
- ◆ The training of women to produce paper bricks, made from waste paper, to serve as household fuel and to discourage deforestation;
- ◆ The training of the San and Ovahimba communities, the most marginalized in the country;
- ◆ The training of rural communities in Violence against women; as well as in HIV/AIDS awareness;
- ◆ The successful advocating for the availability of the female condom, “*Femidom*” in the country;
- ◆ The training of female prisoners in needlework, knitting and savings clubs, in partnership with the Ministry of Prisons & Correctional Services;
- ◆ The training of women with disabilities in Needlework and Savings Clubs, in partnership with the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation.
- ◆ The training of the WAD staff in First Aid, who in turn, train project members in First Aid at WAD Centres. This has become necessary as hospitals and clinics are sparsely situated in the rural areas.

### **3.6. Harmful cultural practices:**

WAD is about action and the organisation has proven to be a fearless pioneer in its ground-breaking work – emerging boldly and venturing into the field of harmful cultural practices which further impoverish rural settings and which impede the development of women. These include:

- ◆ Witchcraft and Witch doctors;
- ◆ Labola’s,
- ◆ Satanism which is increasingly taking root;
- ◆ Large and very costly weddings; and
- ◆ Funerals, which have now become feasts rather than mourning events!

Through these highly challenging development programmes, WAD has managed to capture the interest and respect of the print and electronic media as well as decision-makers, the Private Sector, etc, which in turn, has brought positive returns to the organisation in terms of opportunities.

WAD presently has a membership of over 10 000 women and men, whilst thousands of other Namibians are positively sensitised regarding the importance of the development of women through its publications and educational talks through the media.

**4. The importance of State Actors and Non State Actors to co-operate for the benefit of the advancement of women in society and thus, the strengthening of the economy;**

It is a well- known fact that Governments are slow to react to needs of people on the ground because of cumbersome administrative procedures which should be adhered to.

NGO's on the contrary can respond more expeditiously and are therefore very useful vehicles to address needs on the ground. The problem with most NGO's is that they operate on limited donor funding. Their effectiveness can therefore also be limited.

The ideal situation would be that Government and NGO's form a close working partnership in which the latter should be responsible for the implementation of policies and decisions, while government should provide funding or part thereof.

It should therefore be a coalition of State and Non - State actors which could synergise resources and skills to address issues of national dimensions, like the upliftment of women.

It is of importance to appreciate the priority which the economic upliftment of rural women in particular, should be accorded, for any meaningful development to take place. In this regard employment creation comes into play, but it is surprising that a stereotype concept of placement within the ranks of the civil service first comes to mind. Many other employment opportunities however exist e.g. instead of ministries and para-statal ordering linen for hospitals, hotels, rest camps etc from corporate outlets, such orders can be placed with organised local women's groups.

In the case of Namibia the pre-independence trade links with South Africa are still exploited to the detriment of the local economy and consequently even orders for linen articles which can be locally produced, are placed with South African manufacturers.

Not only does that practice cause an outflow of money from Namibia but it also denies Namibians to directly benefit from such orders.

Unfortunately the same import syndrome exists with regard to food stuffs and other consumer goods, such as butter, cheese yoghurt, vegetables, fruit, etc.

The ease with which Namibian retailers can import goods from South Africa is a major inhibiting factor for the development of a local manufacturing industry. Since many

women are usually taken up in the workforce of such industries, the opportunity for job creation for Namibian women goes begging.

## **5. Directives for donor countries.**

### **5.1 The Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) Model.**

The funding policies of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) of Germany, WAD's main donor, embrace the principle of initially funding all the needs for the establishment of an NGO for a period of 10 years, after which time funding is reduced before a total termination of support becomes effective.

The above implies all administrative and operational costs, including full-time staff, training centres, the provision of appropriate vehicles and equipment to enhance effective mobility and communication, etc.

The KAS has to be lauded for this policy because the great majority of NGO's in Namibia rise and fall because their donors refuse to fund administrative expenses, running costs and vehicles. NGO's in Namibia with its relatively small economy simply cannot generate sufficient funding from other sources to meet the shortfall.

### **5.2 Financial discipline within NGO's**

The KAS model for the establishment of tight financial controls within an NGO can again serve as example. This actually means operating on a "zero budget" in the sense of receiving kick-start funds at the beginning of the year, while being refunded monthly expenses for the rest of the year. This of course, is carried out within the confines of very strict financial disciplines.

Slack financial control of donor funding within NGO's has proven to be a death trap for many NGO's.

Once NGO's fail to reach bench marks, donor funding tends to run dry which in itself has a negative impact on foreign investments for the country.

### **5.3 Motives for donor aid.**

Development aid should be based on a genuine desire of donor countries to invest in the development needs of beneficiaries. It often happens that donor assistance is rendered merely for political expediency and major economic benefits for donor countries themselves.

### **5.4. Cash handouts.**

Cash handouts should be replaced by donor aided training and effective programmes for people in need of development to lead the unemployed towards self-sustainability.

Cash handouts invariably leads to a dependency syndrome which grows over time whilst no development momentum is generated.

**5.5. Training.**

Donor funded training should focus on the establishment of a pool of local expertise instead of a reliance on expatriates.

**5.6. Measurable progress.**

Measurable progress in local capacity building efforts should be monitored by donor countries and corrective measures implemented timeously.

**5.7. Computers as training equipment.**

It is strange but true that some donor countries refuse to grant requests for funding the purchase of computers and printers, because these are regarded as luxury items.

Computer literacy has become an absolute prerequisite in Namibia for securing employment. Access to the world of Information Technology (IT), should therefore actually be a requisite of donor countries for the utilisation of their funds.

**5.8. Donor funded bursaries.**

The Namibian Government experiences a very high demand for bursaries from students to enroll for tertiary education. The Government however only has limited bursary funding available and consequently , many students fail to enjoy tertiary education, while employers have to rely on foreign employees or unqualified personnel.

More donor funded bursaries for young Namibians who wish to enroll for tertiary studies will go a long way to reduce the shortage of local expertise.

**5.9 The problem of large African families.**

The problem of excessively large families is a typical African problem about which a large part of the first world or developed countries remain silent, as if it is no problem.

The reason for this ostensibly is that it is a sensitive issue which is justified by totally outdated cultural beliefs and developed countries thus prefer not to address this problem for fear of causing offence.

The fact of the matter is that the mere size of African families and the very high birth rate in Africa have a very serious dampening effect on the growth rate of economies which already struggle with several problems.

Because of the large size of African families and therefore many mouths to be fed, clothed and educated, family resources are all utilised primarily for consumer goods and the balance to afford some education for children.

Apart from the fact that children are denied balanced nutritious and regular meals (because of their numbers) they, with very few exceptions, cannot attend tertiary education to prepare them for creative contributions towards African economies and the African inventory of excellence.

Although it may be regarded as blasphemous to say it, the economies of African countries are suffocated by the growth rate of their populations which, in the majority of cases, outstrip that of their economies.

The pressure of the growth rate of African populations vis-a-vis that of economies led to the burden of foreign debt which is popularly used as the reason for the mediocre growth of economies.

Unless the above problem is addressed unabashedly, the redoubling assistance to Africa may only serve as incentive for the continuation of the practice of excessively large families.

#### **5.10. The Scourge of HIV/AIDS.**

As is known, Africa is the worst hit continent by HIV/AIDS - a reality which begs for bold scientific research!

Because of deep rooted cultural perceptions regarding male supremacy and female subservience etc, the continent fails to adjust as speedily as required by the presence of the pandemic to avoid the decimation of populations, in the absence of an effective cure for the disease.

The argument to have more children in view of the decimation of populations, to counter-balance the decline in numbers, is short-sighted, since it merely increases the risk of infection.

Since WAD realises the difficulty of behavioural change of people to curb the spread of the disease, the organisation rallies its contributions to educate Namibians around the free distribution of both male and female condoms in conjunction with demonstrations for the correct use of same. To facilitate the latter, WAD produced a condom demonstration kit which includes a functional replica of a female pelvis, a replica of a male penis, a sample of each type of condom and an instruction sheet - all contained in a handy durable bag with a sling handle for easy carrying across the shoulder by counsellors who may want to move from house to house.

The kit is sold at US\$ 285 + packaging and postage at the current exchange rate.



WAD believes that the combined effect of education and the provision of both types of condoms by all stakeholders in Namibia has led to the stabilisation in the HIV infection rate which is presently experienced in Namibia. This positive development should be the incentive for donor countries to support local initiatives in Namibia and elsewhere in Africa to curb the spread of the disease.

#### **5.11. The Pro-women climate established by the Namibian Head of State.**

Namibia's current Head of State is a very strong proponent of a rapid implementation of the parity principle of gender representation in the chambers of the Legislature. Even though he is not fully supported by his party cadres in this regard his strong views on this matter are clearly reflected in our country.

This pro-woman stance of the Namibian Head of State sets a worthwhile example for other Heads of African States to emulate.

#### **5.12. Inclusion of men in the equality drive of women.**

The mistake is often made by women's groups lobbying for the recognition of women's rights to exclude men from their activities. Men therefore, do not form part of the action and usually shrug off such programmes as merely "women's issues".

To however give credibility and greater momentum to their efforts, women should include prominent men in their programmes who can influence other men at public forums and through the media, to change their mindset.

The male ego of traditional men is a factor to reckon with, especially if women fight on their own for a cause. Changing of a mindset is not easily achieved but donor countries can facilitate opportunities for the above process to start.

### **6. What are the other crucial challenges for Africa?**

The following are worth considering:

- ◆ Concentrate on the holistic empowerment of women, as:
  - the majority workforce and the backbone of rural societies;
  - the key to economic prosperity;
- ◆ Work more forcefully towards gender equality in countries and get women into key positions at all levels of government. Since mothers are the closest to their children they are bound to more forcefully address the crucial social issues, such

- ◆ as education, health, violence, HIV/AIDs, etc faster while concentrating on the solutions for the constraints, rather than fighting to stay in power;
- ◆ Governments and NGOs should work more forcefully together as effective partners to empower the unemployed within rural communities;
- ◆ **Important: More forceful training/sensitisation programmes in HIV/AIDS and Family Planning to reduce the large populations in Africa who should be fed, clothed, educated and who contract diseases such as HIV/AIDS;**
- ◆ To eradicate the “import syndrome” among the business sector and governments, who should train the unemployed to produce commodities such as cheese, butter, yoghurt, bed and table linen; the production of own vegetables and fruits locally, etc;
- ◆ Foreign chain stores should be compelled to make limited shelves available to sell locally produced foodstuffs and articles and should not be allowed to merely take out of communities without considering their social responsibility towards the marginalised people in a particular country;
- ◆ Women should be sensitised to penetrate the so-called man’s domain and to be trained in eg. Welding, Carpentry, Brick-making and Bricklaying, Painting, etc to give them the opportunity to equally tender for large contracts with men;
- ◆ Learners should be trained/sensitised from primary school level onwards, on Information Technology, as well as the importance to become self-employed rather than becoming job-seekers;
- ◆ To train community members to become Para-legal Advisors, to assist communities with their legal problems, such as addressing violence, rape, the unfair treatment of HIV/AIDS victims; to draw up wills to prevent them from being chased off their land when their partners/husbands die, etc;
- ◆ To address harmful cultural practices which further impoverish rural settings, eg. Labolas; Witchcraft, Witch doctors; Large and costly funerals and weddings; etc.
- ◆ Empowerment of farm labourers and guest farm labourers to upgrade their skills in farming and to augment their income;
- ◆ To look at simple but effective income-generation for mothers and the unemployed, on a daily basis, such as the production of linen shopping bags, which are environmentally friendly; a job creator and which have the advantage of replacing plastic shopping bags

- ◆ Since it is the traditional role of rural women to continuously search for fire wood, they spend numerous unproductive hours in search of fire wood, and very often chopping down trees. WAD has found an effective supplement for household fuel, in the form of paper bricks. This has the advantage of saving women precious time to engage in income generation, while curbing deforestation at the same time.

#### **7. How can Women's Action for Development assist African countries with the empowerment of rural communities:**

- ◆ WAD can assist African countries, by setting up a team of Namibian experts that could train rural communities in the socio-economic and socio-political fields of development, using its training programmes as a model;
- ◆ The training programmes will focus on leading income-generating projects towards self-sustainability and setting up "Women's Voice" bodies in communities to identify social problems in their communities; to address the problems with the appropriate authorities and to solve them on their own, instead of continuously waiting for their governments to solve it for them

#### **8. Conclusion:**

One of the major problems which at present is being experienced with the economies of many African countries, is that it is lopsided as far as the main actors are concerned.

It is by far male dominated with women only active on the periphery of the economic mainstream.

If one bears in mind that over 50% of the populations of most African countries consist of women, one will realise that a major segment of the potential workforce hardly contributes to the GDP.

Apart from being discriminatory against women, it denies their economy the consistent growth to which women can contribute. It should also be borne in mind that the more women in African countries, including Namibia, are excluded from active involvement in the mainstream economic activity, the more we are missing out on potential economic growth, but importantly, the greater the drag on the respective economies of countries, will be through a dependency on social benefits to be paid by Governments.

The empowerment of women will have a positive spin-off regarding both of the above. It is an undeniable fact that the African woman acts as the "*Minister of Finance*" of her household with whatever meagre or copious income she receives or earns she has to make ends meet for the family.

This reality establishes a need for a very judicious utilisation of available resources as well as pro-active planning to satisfy the needs of her family for tomorrow.

These and other qualities of women should be honed and exploited on the macro level for the benefit of the entire country. It remains true that women constitute a major untapped resource of ingenuity in the African context.

Harmful cultural practices, male domination, colonial neglect, deprivation from education etc. created the situation prevailing in most African countries that women form the silent background majority, endowed with much potential but totally hamstrung.

Africa will not realise its potential growth for as long as women remain sidelined from the mainstream economic activities of countries on our continent.

There is no doubt that the development model of Women's Action for Development provides a sound platform on which could be built. An important inbuilt component of the WAD model is that it exploits the hunger of the African women to attain success in business for the sake of caring for her family.

WAD helps them to attain that success which becomes such a propulsive force that results of exponential magnitude compared to the original inputs, are achieved. It is our experience that success leads to more success because it becomes a morale booster.

A climate is created at the same time within which information and empowerment on a much wider scale than merely economic empowerment is readily welcomed and absorbed.

Women's horizons start growing wider and they start thinking bigger and start developing needs for greater sophistication in the business world, but also in their inter-exchanges with other community members. A realisation of self-worth facilitates the development of own opinions and a broader view of the world than the one they had before.

Our training in Assertiveness and Lobbying skills stand them in good stead to boldly state their own needs or to negotiate for a more beneficial deal.

Women wield much economic and political power and it should be skillfully developed and harnessed to remain a constructive force at all times.

Finally, it should be stressed that the development assistance to Africa should, to a large extent, be focussed on the development of its women.

The spread of HIV/AIDS, a callous behaviour towards effective Family Planning, harmful cultural practices, male domination, the abomination of crimes against women etc should be eliminated as barriers to development. These are great inhibitors of female development because they are based on an inculcated fear factor which blocks female growth.

The time has come for Africa to act NOW!

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**Veronica De Klerk**  
**Executive Director**  
**Women's Action for Development (WAD)**

