

Special

Promise and performance

The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, adopted unanimously at the fourth World Conference on Women by representatives from 189 countries, reflected new international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere. The signatories were promise-bound to have implementation strategies ready preferably by 1996. Now after five years time has come to take stock of the ground reality, writes

Dr Nazmunnissa Mahtab

BEIJING + Five - Women Development and Peace is the special session of the United Nations General Assembly to review and assess the implementation of the Platform for Action.

The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, adopted unanimously at the fourth World Conference on Women by representatives from 189 countries, reflected new international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere. The Platform for Action is a powerful agenda for the empowerment of women. It called for the integration of gender perspectives in all policies and programmes. It focused on concrete measures to address the critical areas of concern worldwide (PFA, 1995).

The Platform, divided into six chapters, identified 12 critical areas of concern, considered to represent the main obstacles to women's advancement. It defined strategic objectives and spelt out actions to be taken over the next five years by governments, the international community, non-governmental organisations and the private sector for the removal of existing obstacles.

The promise

As soon as possible, preferably by the end of 1995, governments, in consultation with relevant institutions and non-governmental organisations, should begin to develop implementation strategies for the Platform and preferably by the end of 1996, should have developed their strategies and plans of action. This planning process should draw upon persons at the highest level of authority in government and relevant actors in civil society. The implementation strategies should be comprehensive, have time-bound targets and benchmarks for monitoring, and include proposals for allocating or reallocating resources for implementation. Where necessary, the support of the international community could be enlisted, including resources.

Today after five years the time has come to take a stock of all that has been done to implement the PFA.

The government's performance

The government has adopted four important strategies adopted as a follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action:

• Institutional review of WID capability of the government

• Declaration of the National Action Plan

• Formulation of the National Action Plan; and

• The Fifth Five-Year Plan (1997-2002).

Institutional review of WID capability of the government

The review was designed to assess whether the mechanisms, information, skills and commitment required to address issues of women's equality and development have been put in place within the government, and to identify further steps that should be taken. The review included nine studies which were carried out in the period between October 1995 and October 1996. It was finalised at the same time as the government finalised its own plan of action to implement the commitments undertaken at the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The concerns addressed in the institutional review are closely related to those in the plan of action which focuses on policy and programme changes required to implement the commitments undertaken in Beijing. The review zeroes in on institutional mechanisms or infrastructure required to achieve those changes in policy and programmes. It also aims to equip government officials and agencies to continue to address issues of women's equality and development.

Six major themes of the recommendations are:

• A national statement of goals and responsibilities for women's development.

• A national focal point for women's development that can lead and motivate other government agencies.

• Central planning authorities that can take account of the rights and needs of women in an integrated way throughout the planning process.

• Line ministries and agencies capable of integrating women's development into mainstreaming sectoral plans and programmes.

• Increased women's participation in local government bodies and increased attention to women's development by all local authorities.

• Training institutes that are capable of assisting government officials to address their responsibilities for integrating women's development issues.

National Action Plan

The National Action Plan has the following goals:

• To make women's development an integral part of the national development programme.

• To establish women as equal partners in development with equal roles in policy and decision making in the family, community and nation at large.

• To remove legal, economic, political or cultural barriers which prevent the exercise of equal rights by undertaking policy reforms and strong af-

Review of WID capability of the government

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