



A report on the 4th World Congress of Rural Women & Pre-Congress Study Tour

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NSW DPI, April 2007



PREAMBLE

Neabanga (thank you) to the Minister, Director-General Barry Buffier, my Executive Director Wendy Stamp, Director Vera Fiala, and colleague Allison Priest for supporting me to represent NSW DPI at the 4th World Congress of Rural Women held in Durban and participate in the pre-Congress study tour.

The Congress provided unique opportunities to exchange information and explore rural women's issues on a global scale. The study tour provided an excellent opportunity to interact with women and men from all levels of South Africa and reflect on many complex issues prior to the Congress itself. Both experiences have enhanced my knowledge personally and professionally and provided opportunities to promote NSW DPI's Rural Women's Network across an international platform.

The 2007 Congress discussed universal and wide-ranging issues confronting rural women today and shared experiences of successes in addressing these worldwide. It provided rural women with a voice and I was made to feel proud, as African women in particular, constantly thanked Australians for starting the global rural women's congress 'movement'.

But while most have hailed the Congress a success, concerns were also raised about whether the outcomes will be implemented. Acting Director for Gender in the African Union (AU), Yetunde Teriba said ever since the first Congress took place in Australia in 1994, much had not changed in terms of the improvement of the rural women's living conditions in Developing countries. However this African "*bottom-up Congress*" has allowed women to get involved in making decisions to improve their own conditions. She stressed that governments can't keep on planning things on behalf of other people without involving them. It is hoped the Congress Durban Declaration (see Appendix 1) will influence greater policy implementation to positively impact on the economic and social situations of rural women globally. Having such a high level event on their continent provided African women with a unique opportunity to put the spotlight on their region's priority issues. With representatives from across the globe watching, women felt a potent boost in their demands for action.

This report incorporates my observations and reflections of the study tour and Congress experiences, and addresses the following objectives:

1. To represent NSW as part of an Australian delegation participating in the 4th World Congress of Rural Women being held in South Africa.
2. To lead NSW women attending the Congress and pre-Congress study/orientation tour of rural communities, women's groups and farms.
3. To develop potential alliances and exchange information with key individuals and expand international networks involved in furthering gender and rural development issues .
4. Be better informed about current trends, research and initiatives focusing on gender and rural development.



Scenes and people from Khayelitsha Township

BACKGROUND

First Conference, Australia, 1994

I was part of the planning team that hosted the first international Women in Agriculture Conference in Melbourne. This inaugural event attracted over 800 delegates from 33 countries and inspired rural women across the world to come together and discuss issues and opportunities.

Second Conference, USA, 1998

A Second International Women in Agriculture Conference was held in Washington DC and built on the success of the first. Over 1,200 representatives from over 40 countries participated in that event and 140 Australian women attended many of whom were awarded scholarships.

Third Congress, Spain, 2002

The Third World Congress of Rural Women was held in Madrid and over 1,600 women from 70 countries participated, including 160 women from Australia. The Australian preparations for this event were comprehensive due to a large lead time and strong support from the Commonwealth Government:

- Women were well briefed before the event through lead up FarmBis funded workshops.
- Information packages were supplied by the Australian government to all women participating.
- Many women were supported through scholarships from various funding sources.
- Senator Judith Troeth, then Parliamentary Secretary, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry led the Australian delegation which was the largest outside the host country.

Fourth Congress, South Africa, 2007

The Fourth World Congress of Rural Women hosted by the South African Government was held in Durban and over 2,500 women from 60 countries participated. Delegates were drawn from rural women, government, civil society and organisations. The African Congress focused on broader rural issues as well as agriculture. The sub themes explored at the 2007 Congress were:

- Globalisation and eradicating impoverishment;
- Peace and stability;
- Governance for rural development at all levels;
- Environmental security and access and control of resources; and
- Health.

Fifth Congress, India 2010-11

India plans to host the next Congress. These global gatherings of women have become a platform for international networking and offer opportunities to build bridges and develop strategies from the grass roots through to government policy development, regionally, nationally and internationally.

KEY MESSAGES/SUGGESTIONS

- Australian women were well respected for the key role they played in all past conferences and through initiating the first conference in 1994. Having an Australian presence at future events is important. Due to a very tight time frame of less than two months, a small delegation of only 35 Australia women participated (three from NSW) in South Africa.
- The majority of the Australian delegation to South Africa came from South Australia and Victoria as they had been able to access funding for quite a few women to attend. This was an extraordinary achievement considering the short time frame. It is hoped that with more lead time a larger Australian delegation can attend the next Congress. It is recommended that NSW government support a delegation of NSW rural women to participate in the 5th World Congress of Rural Women being hosted by India in 2010-11 and allocate funding for scholarships.
- It was disappointing that there was no official Australian delegation attending or involved. The Australian women worked relatively well as a loose delegation. New networks were formed across States as a result of the time spent together on tours and at the Congress. As part of the closing ceremony the Australian group sang 'I am Australian' to images of the Australian bushland which delighted the musically driven African crowd who joined in.
- Government funded specific rural women's programs such as the NSW DPI's Rural Women's Network (RWN) appears to be unique to Australia and a source of fascination among both the Developed and Developing world.
- Having small RWN gifts such as the Daring to Dream book, scarves, cards and magnets to give away was an excellent strategy for global exposure of RWN activities and future networking.
- It was recommended at the Congress that between the four-yearly events, there should be continental conferences to check on progress made and ensure full implementation of the resolutions and sharing of experiences to better address the challenges. The Australian government should be approached to support such a gathering with representatives from all states and territories involved in the planning leading up to the 5th Congress in India.
- Eight Victorian women (including two funded Koori community women) and two NSW women (including myself) took an excellent pre-Congress study tour. This helped to grasp a basic understanding of many of the issues and provided cultural learning experiences which were very useful leading up the Congress. Such a tour is recommended for future events.
- There was little opportunity for small group workshoping as part of the Congress program. However this happened on an informal basis during meals and other Congress events. All session except for one were dominated by the delivering of papers. A physical space known as the 'Rural Women's Voice Tent' was set up in the Congress venue to encourage workshoping and dialogue between women delegates. It was to run concurrently with the Congress. Although an excellent concept aiming to engage grass roots contributions the 'Tent' caused much confusion and was abandoned.
- A key slogan repeatedly referred to in the Congress – *Akukho okungalunga ngphandle kwethu* (Nothing about us without us) – has relevance to any community development model.



Individuals must be allowed to take control of their own futures rather than being funded with too many 'strings' attached. Government community development projects should continue to display trust that communities know what is best for communities but recognise they may need funding at certain stages.

- Issues such as HIV/AIDS and dealing with violence and conflict especially within in war zones are critical concerns for many rural women. Delegates from Africa, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia provided first hand accounts of how these issues are impacting on women.
- At present the budgets of 22 states of India are implementing Gender Budget Initiatives with 20% of government budgets going towards capacity building projects for women. Gender budgeting was pioneered in Australia and could perhaps be considered again in the future.
- Racial tensions in South Africa are very complex. Attitudes towards non-whites varied greatly amongst people we met. Some treated others with great respect as valued colleagues/employees while others referred to them as maids/servants, with a much diminished status. This was often challenging as outside most of our personal experiences. An overnight stay in the black township of Khayelitsha near Cape Town is highly recommended for anyone wanting an alternative perspective to life in South Africa.
- An issue arose at the Congress about the lack of acknowledgment of 'traditional elders' which created some tensions. It reinforced the importance we have come to place on acknowledging Aboriginal elders and their lands here in Australia. This is a practice that we should continue to be vigilant about as it is so important.
- A tour to Robben Island (where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated) led by an ex-political inmate Thulani Mabaso showed the power of healing. We heard many stories of the atrocities that happened during apartheid. To hear that after the prison closed Mr Mabaso had his gaolers to dinner at his home showed real reconciliation and forgiveness in action.
- Immersion style cultural learning has great impact and government should support more Aboriginal people to establish businesses that tap into the tourist market. There is much we can learn from the fledging businesses being established in Africa which promote cultural pride, build cultural understanding and demonstrate a value of the past by preserving unique customs and knowledge.
- Music, singing and culture have a strong role to play in building community and can have a role in igniting passion and galvanising support for common issues. This should continue to be a feature of NSW Women's Gatherings and could be explored in other areas across DPI.



Contrast of dwellings in South Africa



People from Khayelitsha Township

THE PRE-CONGRESS STUDY TOUR

Life in South Africa is more complex than merely urban versus rural, black versus white. In effect the study trip was a roller coaster ride of experiences and debates such as the complexities of apartheid and our countries past treatment of Aboriginal Australians. Many times I felt the need to reach for the oxygen mask, fasten my seatbelt a notch and even take the brace position!

South Africa is physically a beautiful country but tensions bubble close to the surface and personal security and safety is a constant companion. There are many overwhelming issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and the impacts of rapid change such as globalisation, climate change and the growing pains of an emerging democracy.

It is interesting to note that many white South Africans are feeling the pressure of being in the minority with little career advancement because of pro non-white policies. Having said that, many wealthy Afrikaans continue to live a life quarantined from these changes.

A highlight of the tour was an overnight visit to Mama Thope¹ in Khayelitsha a black township of one million people near Cape Town.

Many of South Africa's 'townships' were established during apartheid when it was illegal for whites and non-whites to live in the same suburbs. During the apartheid era thousands of black people were removed a few kilometres outside major centres and unemployment in these townships is usually extremely high. Most people practice informal trade to make a living. Tourism is becoming the biggest job creator and income generator for these impoverished fringe communities.

We took an informal walk around the streets and were welcomed by the local people who expressed gratitude that white people showed an interest in their lives. It was a strange feeling to be in the minority and an item of interest to the township residents. I got the impression that very few white South Africans visit black townships unless involved in some kind of drive in/drive out charity work.

What looked on the surface as a picture of desperation and deprivation proved inspirational. The dynamic Khayelitsha women running the fledgling Bed and Breakfast (B&B) businesses had entrepreneurial drive which was creating employment and promoting new opportunities for the town. Local musicians provided Marimba music for the evening and staff were employed to assist with the cooking and cleaning. The tourist dollar is being shared around the community and others are starting to see the benefits and embracing these new employment and business opportunities.

¹ Respected women are called 'mama' similar to the 'aunty' title often given to respected elders in Aboriginal communities.

Many township houses are no more than tin shacks and have little or no greenery. The children play in the streets. It is a sense of community that keeps townships together rather than access to homes with four bathrooms, a pool and a five car garage. We met one successful couple who had moved away only to return as they felt more welcome and a sense of belonging in Khayelitsha.

The B&B I stayed in was very modern and run by Nomicina (twenty something) who had a tertiary qualification in international tourism. Her husband was a computer programmer. They had a start in their business because Nomicina's husband was left a house. They added extra rooms and have created a small business with plans to expand. The 'afro-chic' décor was warm and clean. The kitchen featured a fridge, microwave and the dining room computer had broadband internet connection.

We also stayed at a B&B in the town of George which provided an insight into white middle class life. The owner had a five bedroom house with four bathrooms. When the children left home she and her husband decided to establish the B&B. They employ two coloured staff who were treated as respected members of the team.

We visited a rural property near Durbanville which provided an interesting insight into white South African farming life. The farm was beautiful and owned by a young white family. The house was old and gracious surrounded by sweeping lawns and views to the mountains and valleys. The autumn rains due at the end of April had not come yet so the pastures were quite brown. This main farm was part of a portfolio of four farms which produced olives, dairying and some cropping income to the enterprise. They employed 45 workers (black and coloured).

The farmer's wife was very much the 'farmer's wife' and had virtually no involvement in any aspect of the farm except to live there. She had two coloured maids helping her in the house. They prepared meals, cleaned and helped with the child. The house maids worked from 8.30am to 4.30pm and were sometimes engaged in the evenings if the family's child needed looking after. (They were paid 'overtime' although I am not sure how much.) Child care for this family is not an issue. The maids lived about 100metres from the farmhouse. The farm workers were employed from 7.30am to 6.00pm.

The farmer's wife spoke quite openly about her life and was employed off farm. She told us how she'd casually spoken about 'their' farm with members of her husband's family and was told that it is not 'her' or 'their' farm but 'his' farm. This is apparently quite common among a traditional white farming Afrikaan family which does little for promoting equity for rural women black or white. There did not appear to be programs for rural women beyond luncheons and mother's groups for white women.

I was told by the 'farmer's wife' that the 'blacks' were employed in the dairy as this matched their skills ability and the 'coloureds' could drive tractors and take on higher level farm work. She seemed quite shocked when I told her about Nomicina, the B&B owner having an international tourism qualification.



Eastern Cape dairy and olive farm visit



Women at Xhosa cultural centre

I found this racial situation uncomfortable. It is very outside my current life experience. However one of the Koori women from Victoria reminded me that this was common in Australia not so long ago. Her mother had to sit in a separate area of the cinema and was denied the speaking of her native language or practicing culture while being trained to work as a domestic.

The dairy operation supported over 600 cows which were 'housed' in an enclosure under a tin roof. The cows stood on concrete all day or lay on sand 'beds'. They did not go outside on the grass except to walk to and from the dairy. It felt a lot like a 'battery cow enterprise.'

The tour also included two visits to excellent cultural centres which provided experiential learning opportunities with two South African indigenous groups – the San (original Cape bushmen) and Xhosa people.

From the San we learned how to read game tracks and identify various plants and their usages. They demonstrated how to make fire using a stick and string gut contraption. We listened to local stories, learned a few words of the rather difficult San clicking language and saw ostrich shells transformed into bead jewellery which was of much interest to the Koori women.

Ma Bettie's Xhosa experience was at Bongoletu near Oudtshoorn. The Xhosa people have been living in South Africa for over 1,500 years and some are striving to keep their traditional ways alive. Nelson Mandela is one the most famous Xhosa people. Bongoletu is typical of the impoverished townships across South Africa excluded from any significant socio-economic development and has 93% unemployment. Ma Bettie's women's group greeted and farewelled us with traditional music and dance and provided a typical five course Xhosa lunch served in the traditional way.

Another aspect of the tour involved visiting a community preschool/crèche project in a rural village at Klipheuwel where black farm workers lived. The village of about 380 houses primarily provided labour for the surrounding white farmers. The project, instigated by a retired farmer's wife was being developed with church funds. Apparently it is very common for wealthy Afrikaans women to do charity work. The project was providing much needed early childhood educational opportunities and the children were also given a meal. We were told the project was run on strict Christian principles (everything had strong religious overtones). I wondered what effect such religious community development models had on the village residents.

The tour also provided us with a couple of opportunities to experience the African wildlife at game parks. To fall asleep under canvas listening to Hippopotamus snorts is something I won't forget easily.

I feel privileged to be working for a Department that values women and supports their voices being heard. It is important to tap into the global perspective such a Congress provides to reflect on one's practice and ensure *nothing about us without us* remains a mantra to strive for.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM KEY NOTE SPEAKERS

Speakers explored many issues shared by rural women globally such as recognition of the impacts of globalisation and trade on women; concern for sustainable development (social, economic and environment); a need for gender equality; a guarantee of food security and related issues such as access to land, water, finance, new technologies, transport and roads; adequate housing; access to women's health and skills in good governance and an ability to impact on public policies which affect rural women. These are just some points from some of the keynote speakers.

HEALTH: Ms Sheila Sisulu Deputy Executive Director, World Food Program (WFP), told us that the number of rural women has doubled since 1970. There are currently 1.6 billion rural women in the world and 380 million go to bed hungry every day. Hunger and under-nutrition are the number one risks to health worldwide, killing more people every year than AIDS, Malaria, and Tuberculosis combined. She said research shows that empowering women is the key to economic and health outcomes for everyone. *"You empower a man you empower an individual. You empower a woman and you empower a nation."*

HIV/AIDS: Overshadowing any development within many African countries was the ongoing spectre of HIV/AIDS. Dr Marcela Villarreal, Director of Gender, Equity and Rural Employment at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) spoke about the importance of protecting the property and land tenure rights of women in AIDS-ravaged areas as this is vital to prevent rural households slipping into a spiral of poverty. Currently 39.5 million people are living with AIDS worldwide. Losing land or property can unravel the whole fabric of a family, limiting access to safe, inexpensive and nutritious food and forcing children out of school and into employment.

According to a recent FAO report, by 2020, the HIV/AIDS epidemic will have claimed one-fifth or more of the agricultural labour force in most southern African countries. For many women in AIDS-affected households, losing a husband is the first of many losses she will face. She risks being thrown off her farm, perhaps her only source of income and security, by relatives and robbed of her assets.

One presenter told a story of her 79 year old grandmother who maintained a small subsistence farming plot. She had eight children and only one has survived (the speaker). Her grandmother is now struggling to support 13 grandchildren orphaned by AIDS.

POVERTY TRAP: The Deputy President of South Africa, Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka made a stirring address calling for action to fight the poverty trap that shackles rural women.

Empowerment alone and telling women to help themselves has not worked. Rural women had to be actively assisted out of poverty before they could even begin to discuss 'self-help' projects. She asked all Ministers and regional leaders to join her on the stage and pledged a joint commitment to action. This was a very powerful display of her desire to have government show leadership by listening, talking less and doing much.

INFRASTRUCTURE: The **Minister for Agriculture and Land Affairs, Ms Lulu Xingwana** reminded us to get the focus right and it is not the women who are poor but the conditions they live in that are poor. Good Infrastructure, roads and access to markets can transform farming women's lives in so many ways.

According to the FAO, Namibia and Uganda land law and property rights are made up of a complex system of overlapping official and traditional law. For a woman, owning land or understanding her legal rights over a piece of land she farms also has environmental benefits. Women with secure land tenure are more likely to invest in their land than those without legal land rights, through irrigation, for example, or by farming in a more sustainable manner rather than for short-term gain.

LAND RIGHTS AND FINANCE: The **South African Minister for Finance, Mr Trevor Manuel** spoke at the Congress dinner. *"Rural women produce about 80% of the food grown in Africa, 60% in Asia and between 30-40% in Latin America, yet own just 2% of all agricultural land and receive only 1% of agricultural credit."* Rural women are critically important to our society and yet are the most marginalised. Two-thirds of all illiterate adults in the world are rural women. In South Africa 85% of rural women had not completed schooling and more than 40% of rural women are unemployed. Access to micro credit schemes so successful in India and Bangladesh could make a significant difference to rural women across Africa.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND WATER: Mr Trevor Manuel quoted a recent United Nations report showing that South Africa spent more on water than defence. This was met with much applause. Climate change is already impacting on agriculture production and water supplies in South Africa and Australia and would continue to influence health and economic outcomes. The South African government is committed to ensuring all people have access to clean water by 2008. (South Africa is one of the few Developing countries I have visited where it is safe to drink the tap water.)

CASE STUDY: INDIA A DEVELOPING NATION MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The eloquent **Indian Minister for Women and Child Development Ms Renuka Chowdhury** spoke of the many gains made for Indian rural women and shared her experiences from developing policy to driving tractors in a sari. She spoke passionately about the importance of uniting in our diversity rather than focusing on differences and hailed delegates as *"sisters, protectors of our rights, warriors against diseases, nurturers and protectors of the environment, witnesses to history, icons of change in partnership with men."* The global reality for most rural women however is a picture of poverty, malnutrition, abuse and few rights.

India has a population of one billion people and 72% are women and children. Of the 127 million women workers, 106 million are in rural areas and 96% of these are in the unorganised sector. India has the largest population of rural women in the world. The scale of change is daunting and yet we can learn much from Indian government policies which are slowly transforming the lives of rural women and improving their status significantly.

India is making ground breaking advances in the provision of both micro and macro credit support for women without collateral. Micro-credit schemes such as the Grameen Bank model started in Bangladesh are now providing Indian women with opportunities to gain control over their future.

Women with little or no literacy have established self-help groups producing goods as varied as vermin compost, detergents and mushrooms. Through these networks women are learning about new production methods and developing skills such as marketing. They are learning about leadership, self-reliance and building self-esteem.

Ms Chowdhury also spoke of her country's 'Three Es Plan' to uplift rural women from poverty through:

1. Education
2. Empowerment
3. Employment

On the political level, one third of all decisions-making seats in rural areas have been reserved for women who are actively participating in local affairs. Women have already exceeded this target and currently 43% of these seats are held by women.

India has a multi-faceted approach to rural development introducing legislation to protect women from violence, recognising daughters as co-partners and equal inheritors in ancestral property and guaranteeing 100 days of wage employment a year. She also announced that a crèche was being opened in the Indian Parliament on 27 May 2007 and she hopes this will encourage others to follow.

A Child Marriage Prohibition Act was introduced to protect young women. It makes provision for punishment of not only parents, but also anyone involved in the marriage arrangements - from guests through to the caterers. Families and communities are being held responsible for child abuse. Perhaps there are lessons here for Australian communities where child sexual abuse remains a huge issue.

Mrs Chowdhury spoke about India's 'gender budgeting'² initiative started in 2000. At present the budgets of 22 States in India are implementing Gender Budget Initiatives and 20% of government budgets must go towards capacity building for women's projects.

It is fitting that India has agreed to host the 5th World Congress of Rural Women in 2010-11 as it is emerging as a leader and bridge for both the Developing and Developed worlds.

OTHER GENERAL CONGRESS OBSERVATIONS

- Over 60 countries were represented with many chiefs and Ministers taking the opportunity to show support. Most delegates came from mainland Africa. Most delegates spoke English but head phones were provided with real time translators in a number of languages.

² The concept of gender budgeting came from Australia in the early 1980s. Until the change of government in 1996, all Australian Government Departments were expected, as part of their budget submissions, to indicate in what way these would advance gender equality. Gender budgeting aims to bring gender equality in the allocation of public funds, by identifying its implications for women and girls and does not seek to create separate budgets nor claim more money for women but aims to ensure a fair and efficient distribution of resources. For such ideas to be effective they must become entrenched in our systems, enjoy political support, and be reinforced by constant advocacy.

- I talked to a diversity of colourful women called intriguing names such as Truth, Patience, Zama and Miriam. I discussed chicken farming and the potential of raising emus in Africa, to supporting AIDS orphans, establishing rural cottage industries, setting up a cultural centre and marketing glass etchings.
- Music, song and dance were a constant feature of the proceedings and brought a sense of community to the gathering.

The curious beauty of African music is that it uplifts even as it tells a sad tale. You may be poor, you may have only a ramshackle house, you may have lost your job, but that song gives you hope. African music is often about the aspirations of the African people and it can ignite the political resolve of those who might otherwise be indifferent to politics. One merely has to witness the infectious singing at African rallies. Politics can be strengthened by music, but music has a potency that defies politics (Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom p 209).

- African Ministers would often start their speeches by singing a phrase such as *Igama Lamakhosikasi Malibogwe* (women's name must be praised) to which the audience would respond. During a break down in the technology at one point, rather than sit chatting, a lone voice would start singing *Afuni umahlaba amakosikazi* (women want land to plough) and soon the crowd would reach a crescendo for three or four minutes until the speaker could continue.
- I learned that African time is about going with the flow as things happen when they happen. Despite a tight program everything ran two hours late and meal times were 'feeding frenzies' as the hundreds of women scrambled to fill their bellies with protein – an often uncommon item on the daily menu. I suspected that certain health issues relating to unbalanced high carbohydrate diets is an issue as many of the women were obese.
- I was grateful for the opportunity to learn from others and share the Rural Women's Network with women from across the globe. Speaking to many women reminded me of the freedom of speech that is often taken for granted here in Australia. Many countries do not enjoy this right as evidenced when I tried to engage about the current situation of Zimbabwean life with women to a nil response.
- The Congress was not however all smooth sailing as disenfranchised South African rural women protested outside each day claiming exclusion from the event. I didn't find out the full extent of their claims but security was extremely tight and we were bussed to and from venues and told not to walk around alone or at night. For me this issue of potential violence was something I had not experienced. I was pleased to touch down again in Australia.



Sonia Muir with Congress delegates



Appendix One

DECLARATION OF THE 4TH WORLD CONGRESS OF RURAL WOMEN

We, the Rural Women participating at the 4th World Congress of Rural Women in Durban, South Africa from the 23rd to the 25th April, 2007 representing government, rural women organizations and civil society:

Recognise that since the First World Congress of Rural Women was held in Australia in 1994 followed by the 2nd and 3rd World Congresses of Rural Women in the United States in 1998 and Spain in 2002, governments and civil society have made active efforts to take legislative and policy measures to promote awareness, research and understanding of rural women's issues;

Recognise that the objectives of the Beijing Platform of Action remain a binding and practical guide for our actions towards gender equality that is still unfulfilled;

Recognise that rural women still have less access to land, natural resources, infrastructure, financial and information and communication technologies; and that globalization further exacerbates the marginalization of rural women in accessing opportunities, wealth and resources;

Note with deep concern that the economic and financial challenges in many developing countries have severely affected the socio-economic status of women, especially those in rural areas and the continuing rise in the number of rural women living in poverty;

Further note that these economic and financial challenges as they affect rural women are by and large a result of inequities in trading regimes between the developed and developing countries;

Further note that current economic growth theories and practices continue to place a disproportionate burden of poverty on rural women and that water and health are the pillars of development;

Recognize the urgent need to take appropriate measures aimed at further improving the situation of women in rural areas;

We therefore call upon our respective national governments, international and intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the corporate sector to take collective responsibility to work in partnership with rural women organizations to:

ECONOMIC

1. Elevate the matter of employment and freedom from hunger as a central focus of the development agenda;
2. Undertake necessary measures to give rural women full and equal access to productive resources including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and other property, credit/capital, natural resources, appropriate technologies, markets and information, and meeting their basic requirements for water and sanitation;
3. Combine the provision of financing with the provision of seeds, skills development, other resources and market access to guarantee success in poverty alleviation programmes;
4. Support the increase in agriculture production to ensure food security through investments in rural physical and institutional infrastructure and the generation of employment, focusing on development of micro and small enterprises;

5. Support national and regional efforts to make an inventory of cost-effective and appropriate technologies and work towards evolving a mechanism for technology transfer by using the services of national, regional and international organizations;
6. Increase investment in the human resource development of rural women, particularly through health and literacy programmes and social support measures;
7. Increase investments in the generation of data to understand the nature and impact of HIV-AIDS on rural women's livelihoods and coping strategies;

SOCIAL

8. Address the issue of rural poverty in a comprehensive, integrated and holistic manner through mobilizing political, economic and social resources for sustained development and by channelling the flow of national resources and international development assistance for this purpose;
9. Strengthen partnerships to eradicate diseases such as HIV and AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria and all other diseases and ensure availability of primary health care to the women in rural areas;
10. Protect and promote women's full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by ensuring that gender equality principles are mainstreamed into the national and international development agenda and gender sensitisation is carried out at all levels;
11. Take necessary legal, policy, administrative and other measures for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence and other harmful practices against rural women and girl children;
12. Adopt affirmative measures including scholarships at all levels for female students in rural areas, promote non-formal education and literacy programmes for rural women, including women with disabilities and the girl child, in order to address gender imbalances in education and training;
13. Support technical assistance and capacity building programmes including exchange visits, skills and competency training among agriculture extensionists and rural development facilitators;
14. Strengthen and support solidarity amongst women in developing countries and the rest of the world to enable them to play a meaningful role in the socio economic development of these countries and regions;
15. Empower rural women through capacity building and skills development to enable them to participate in the global political and economic forums, for example World Trade Organisation, United Nations, African Union and other international and regional agencies;

PEACE AND SECURITY

16. Support increased peace and security in the world. In this connection the three EEs, namely, empowerment, employment and education (particularly knowledge and understanding of rules, laws and treaties which affect their wellbeing) are critical to women's peace and security.

17. Re-orient policies from nation-centred security to human-centred security which address human rights, including access to basic services e.g. housing, water, land and infrastructure;
18. Meet biennially to monitor the implementation of the 4th World Congress of Rural Women resolutions;
19. Support the ending of all foreign occupation of territories with reference to Western Sahara, Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. We give special attention to the conflict in the Darfur region;

GOVERNANCE

20. Integrate the concerns of rural women into national, international and intergovernmental policies, strategies and programmes, in particular by placing a higher priority on resource allocation related to the practical and strategic interests of rural women;
21. Improve the representation of rural women in all structures of power and decision making including leadership positions in institutions of governance, public and private sector and civil society organizations nationally and internationally;
22. Work towards exploring the possibilities of collaborative research on problems and solutions concerned with rural development and women by establishing partnerships for technology transfer and narrowing down the digital and technology divide;
23. Ensure adequate availability of young professional rural extension workers and creation of knowledge centres in our respective countries;

CALL TO ACTION

- We declare that we remain fully committed to the realization of the aspirations of rural women as reflected in Beijing Platform of Action and this Declaration.
- We commit to continue to work together in the coming years to mobilize political and financial resources and to establish enduring procedures globally, regionally and nationally to monitor the implementation of this Declaration.
- We call upon rural women from developing countries, in partnership with their national governments to take up the space created by the non alignment movement to advance their cause.
- We call upon the members of WTO to accelerate their engagement in the interest of levelling the global trading environment for the betterment of all.
- We further call upon the peoples of the rest of the World to support us in our endeavours to change the world for the betterment of all its peoples by improving the social and economic circumstances of rural women.

Durban, SOUTH AFRICA - 25 April, 2007