

GENDER WORKSHOP 1991-11-23

Councillor Mrs Hart introduced the three keynote speakers, namely Professor Brenda Gourley, Dr Devi Rajab and Mrs Cindy Khumalo. She welcome them and all delegates to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. She said that many invitees, including those women Councillors who were not present, had conveyed their regrets that previous engagements had prevented their attendance.

Once the keynote speakers had delivered their addresses, the meeting broke for tea. After tea, the meeting was divided into seven smaller groups which held discussions for approximately 1 hour. Thereafter, the meeting adjourned for lunch. Once the meeting resumed, Councillor Mrs Hart called on each group to present its findings and recommendations. These are set out hereunder:-

Group 1

This group made the following recommendations:-

1. That an Advisory Committee comprising women from and elected by every sector of the community, representatives of women's organisations and the City Council, be appointed to deal with women's issues and make recommendations to the Council thereon, the terms of reference to be as follows:-
 - 1.1 Raising of funds and lobbying support for:-
 - the provision of shelter for abused women and children,
 - the furtherance of existing organisations which assist abused women in the provision of accommodation etc, and
 - the provision of Council funding, possibly by way of a sweepstake or lottery.
 - 1.2 The establishment of an Information/Advice Bureau, the objective being to keep women, across the board, fully informed of:-
 - crisis housing facilities,
 - medical facilities for the abused,
 - legal aid facilities re maintenance claims etc., and
 - the courses offered by the Department of Manpower to develop skills and provide employment opportunities.
2. That the City Council rigidly adopts the following employment practices and publishes a Mission Statement to that effect, with a view to encouraging businesses in the region to follow suit:-
 - equality of the sexes (irrespective of race or creed) regarding employment and promotion opportunities,
 - the provision of child care facilities,
 - the establishment of a sexual harrassment panel,
 - the provision of maternity and paternity benefits, and
 - the provision of transportation for women who work late at night.

3. That the City Council give urgent attention to the upgrading of street and railway station lighting.
4. That the City Council investigate ways of assisting the informal sector workers, possibly with child care facilities close to trading zones, and overnight shelter at places of trading.

Group 2

This group maintained that:-

- the Workshop was comprised mainly of "middle class" women who were not in a position to evaluate the major issues facing all women in the area. Thus it was proposed that workshops be held on a widespread basis in order to obtain the input of the majority of women in the region,
- there was general discrimination against women at all levels of society in the workplace, in society and in the home,
- women across board were vulnerable to rape, battery and sexual harrassment, and
- women generally bore the brunt of poverty.

The group determined the needs to be, inter alia, as follows:-

- the provision of a safe house in every community where battered or abused women could find overnight shelter.
- the availability of low cost housing.

It was also suggested that a Women's Centre be established which provided:-

- legal aid-services re maintenance, etc.,
- after-care for rape and battery victims and the prevention thereof,
- woman to woman counselling,
- literacy classes, and
- training for the development of skills.

This group also favoured the establishment of a Women's Committee.

Other suggestions made were that:-

- the City Council give more attention to the design of open spaces in order to eliminate dark tunnels, alleyways etc.,
- the City Police be encouraged to give greater consideration to the protection of women, and
- Council funding be allocated for organisations working on behalf of women.

This group also felt that the City Council should be gender sensitive as an employer, particularly in the allocation of skill levels.

Aversion was expressed to the publicity used by Durban to attract tourists, it being contended that scantily clad women presented a discriminatory image.

It was pointed out that when the City Council held a conference and offered entertainment for the partners of delegates, the term "spouse" should be used rather than the term "wife".

The group stressed the importance in this transitional stage, for the upliftment of women and the elimination of oppression and in this vein it was proposed that the City Council encourage businesses in the district to provide finance for services to the community.

Group 3

This group maintained that the panel of speakers had spoken from the point of view of career women and had not adequately covered the needs and aspirations of the average working woman. It was suggested that this be addressed at a future forum.

The speaker said that the group had included representatives of DIMES who had contended that:-

- inequalities existed in the Council's employee establishment regarding income levels and promotion opportunities for women,
- job reservation existed, eg. there were no women constables,
- racial discrimination had been practised in the restructuring of the Council, and
- women were victimised if they were assertive.

The group said that the above factors should be addressed, bearing in mind the difficulty of making one's voice heard in a beurocracy, especially for women who were not trained to be assertive.

It was requested that transport be provided for women who work late at night, particularly for Council employees. It was stated that if the City Council was concerned about the needs of women, it should be looking very closely at its gender practices in the role of employer.

The following hardships were seen as generally affecting all women in the greater Durban area:-

- violence against women or the threat thereof,
- inadequate family planning clinics and other similar facilities,
- insufficient advice and information on available services for women,
- poor variety of available contraceptives,
- the non-provision of pap smears, and
- inadequate child clinics, particularly in the outer areas.

It was felt that the Local Authority could assist in addressing even those issues which fell under the purview of central government.

Public transport operative in the evenings was deemed inadequate and, as a priority, it was considered necessary for the Council to upgrade the lighting at transport nodes and to give attention to the personal safety of passengers.

The group discussed public toilet facilities and identified three areas, namely poor hygiene standards, facilities which should be included thereat such as a place to change nappies or breastfeed and the provision of a sanitary towel vending machine service. Another aspect relating to toilets was the need for policing to prevent molestation.

Lighting in public places was, it was maintained, inadequate and thus increased the potential for assault.

Much attention should be given by the City to providing housing to meet the needs of the lower socio-economic groups, it having been agreed with a previous speaker's comment that women generally bore the brunt of poverty. In this regard, the group maintained there was discrimination in the allocation of housing and that the traditional husband/wife/children family received preference. Rentals should be pegged to income.

The group expressed disappointment that the City Council's proposed visit overseas, to learn from other countries' re the provision of third world housing facilities, had not taken place.

Further, this group maintained that:-

- the security aspect of housing for the lower socio-economic groups should be given a higher priority,
- the City Council should endeavour to assist squatters and should take steps to facilitate the development of informal traders,
- assistance should be given to internal refugees who were mostly women,
- the Beach Bylaws discriminated against women and/or particular cultural practices,
- rates were not utilised to the benefit of women, for instance facilities such as creches and literacy programmes should be funded therefrom,
- an investigation should be conducted by the City Council into the protection of women from abuse by the possible amendment of central government legislation,
- shelters for battered and abused women were vital requirements,
- the City Council should identify bylaws which discriminate against women and attend to suitable amendments,
- there was a need for the City Council to address gender and racial discrimination practiced by it in terms of its employee establishment,
- Council funding should be provided for the realisation of the above objectives as well as the furtherance of organisations already working on behalf of women in the City. It was also suggested that the City Council pressurise the central government to permit the greater utilisation of funds for this purpose.

Lastly, this group expressed the view that affirmative action should be taken and that recognised organisations should be included in the decision making process by means of frequent consultation.

Group 4

This group felt that the City Council, in its capacity as employer, should take great care not to practice any discrimination and to provide requisite facilities for its women personnel. In this regard, it was suggested that consultation be held on an ongoing basis with the women's forum of DIMES.

Regarding the statement made at the meeting that one third of Durban's councillors were women, this group queried the number of women's issues being brought before the Council and the action being taken.

The concept of a Women's Centre was supported, funding therefor to be provided by the City Council. Such a Centre should be accessible to all women in the region and to this end it was suggested that some of its functions should be decentralised or incorporated into existing clinics and community centres. It was envisaged that the Women's Centre would deal, inter alia, with the following issues:

- education empowerment,
- child care,
- legal rights,
- provision of information, and
- conducting of workshops on women's issues.

Research and consultation would be necessary to ensure that such Women's Centre met the needs of all sectors of the community.

This group supported the idea of a Women's Advisory Committee and saw one of its major roles as being to scrutinise the bylaws of the City to ensure that women's needs were taken into account.

The lack of child care facilities was mentioned as a major concern and it was felt that at conferences and workshops such as the one in progress, child care facilities should be provided.

The group discussed the issue of disciplinary bodies and enquired as to what kind of punitive measures were taken when cases of sexism and racism were reported.

The need for education for men, particularly regarding their role as fathers, was seen to be crucial. In this vein, it was suggested that the City Council provide paternity leave for its employees.

It was suggested that daylight saving might be advantageous for women.

This group also commented on the poor lighting in streets and public places, specifically transport nodes.

It was suggested that the City Council liaise with the South African Police regarding an information desk at all police stations to fully inform women of their rights relating to battery and rape cases, etc.

The group discussed the possibility of the City Council funding and providing self defence classes for women and greater security at public facilities, particularly toilets.

It was suggested that the City should cater for women's needs such as down ramps on pavements to facilitate pram pushing. Pram facilities should be provided on buses.

There was concurrence with a previous speaker regarding the need for tampon/sanitary towels to be available for purchase at public toilets.

Group 5

This group questioned the endeavours made by the City Council in inviting women to the Workshop who were not easily accessible by post or telephone.

It was felt that the guest speakers had spoken from a narrow perspective and that a wider spectrum of speakers would have been more desirable. In this connection, it was mentioned that not all women had husbands and children and that the needs and rights of women in all of their diverse circumstances should have been addressed by the speakers at the outset.

It was suggested that the Durban City Council act as a strong lobby against unjust laws passed by the central government.

The Durban City Council should, it was maintained, be an example and that in reviewing its mission statement, cognisance should be taken of the representations made at this Workshop. The group endorsed previous speakers' comments regarding the City Council being a trendsetter in respect of non-discriminatory measures concerning its women employees.

A firm stand should be taken by the Council against sexual harassment in the work place. It was also proposed that the City Council motivate for amendments to be made to the Labour Relations Act to end discrimination against women on the basis of pay and other employment criteria.

The City Council should, it was submitted, make public recommendations concerning the issue of pay and employment conditions for domestic workers.

In keeping with practices being followed world wide, the City Council should involve itself to a greater degree in welfare issues.

Other proposals were that:-

- shelter be provided for the homeless,
- clinics and family planning clinics be better staffed and more sensitive to the needs of the various sectors of the community,
- literacy training be instituted,
- women in the informal sector be given greater consideration, and
- the City Council liaise with the Joint Services Boards in the provision of many shelters for battered women, these to be carefully guarded.

The group was heartened by the convening of this Workshop but felt that ongoing consultation with the community was a must.

The group supported the concept of the establishment of a Women's Committee, to be fully representative and comprised of women from every sphere of employment and business activity. It was suggested that a lawyer be also elected thereto.

The group felt that a representative of such Women's Committee should be co-opted onto the Management Committee. A centralised Women's Centre was also supported and counselling, creche facilities and free legal advice were some of the activities envisaged. This group identified the Durban Railway Station as a suitable venue therefor.

Group 6

This group supported the concept of a Women's Advisory Committee comprising of women from all walks of life.

Child care facilities were called for, not only for use by women employees but also for their male counterparts. Subsidisation of child care centres was seen as essential.

The group proposed a home industry centre to assist informal trading and alleviate congestion in the City. It was suggested that the co-operative could sell items on behalf of individuals traders. This would enable women to return home to their families.

Training facilities for women, especially in the informal sectors, was seen as a necessity as women were, in many instances, the sole breadwinners (the violence in the country having made this reality more stark).

Encouragement and support by women of women was seen to be vital and the need to promote and engender this was highlighted.

Women of child bearing years should not be penalised when seeking employment.

A central information centre should be established in order to fully inform women of all support systems available to them.

Assistance should be provided by the City Council regarding the housing of low income groups of all races.

It was stated that bus drivers, road sweepers and park labourers were predominantly male and that this situation was unsatisfactory, particularly in view of the modern technology employed which eliminated the need for muscular labour. The principle of equal pay for equal work should also be strictly adhered to. Advertisements for employment should be a-sexual, a-racial and a-religious.

London, Edinburgh and Cardiff all had women advisory committees and the City Council should request information from such cities thereon.

Training centres should be established similar to the Federation of Entrepreneurship Development in Moore Road, to encourage women to start their own businesses. Other business establishments should be encouraged to participate in the support of these groups.

Support groups for victims of rape, battery, etc. should be much in evidence. Life Line and other similar organisations should be closely consulted and an Information Centre established. The Council should take a facilitative role in developing support systems.

Reference was made to Doctor Padayachee who had established a child abuse centre and Martin Kapiko who ran a self protection programme. Both such organisations were investigating the possibility of establishing safe houses and it was suggested that the City Council liaise with them.

The need for safe houses and shelter accessible to all women in the region was seen as of paramount importance.

It was suggested that womens' movements be assisted by way of grants-in-aid for hall hire tariffs on a collective basis.

The elimination of sexism and racism and a moving towards democracy was called for and it was suggested that the City Council employ the services of trained researchers to assess the extent of the need.

Group 7

This group believed that women needed to be educated on a wide scale regarding attitudes, perceptions, values and the general holistic framework of life. It was maintained that apathy among women in South Africa was very prevalent and this was seen as being due to the perception of inferior status being impressed upon women by the media, educational institutions, and by virtue of living in a paternalistic environment.

Empowerment at a rural level was seen to be necessary. The informal sector women selling grassmats at the Durban Railway Station needed empowerment and it was thought that the encouragement of co-operatives would assist. The speaker suggested a similar concept as that mentioned by another group regarding a home co-operative scheme. It was argued that if women were able to eliminate selling their goods on the street by having a centralised market therefor, their development would be enhanced and would ultimately benefit the entire community.

All barriers, whether political or cultural should be discouraged by a unified umbrella body for women which would incorporate the many sub groups which were currently scattered all over the region. This would provide proper co-ordination for womens' issues. Such action would result in women becoming a force to be reckoned with.

It was suggested that a survey be conducted by the Durban City Council on the needs of women generally and the issues facing the majority of women at home, in the workplace and in society.

Discrimination should not be practised against the disadvantaged groups regarding the question of housing. The provision of housing subsidies did not always address this and often resulted in the more privileged groups receiving more than their share of benefits. In this regard, it was suggested that a spread of resources be achieved. It was suggested that the City Council subsidise the purchase of building materials for employees.

In closing, this group said that it supported the other issues raised by previous speakers.

ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MAYOR, COUNCILLOR MARGARET WINTER

Councillor Mrs Winter drew attention to the fact that the majority of the groups had proposed the establishment of a Women's Centre. She advised that there was a group of women who had been working for many months in the framing of a policy and constitution for such a Centre and that this would be achieved in the near future.

Councillor Mrs Winter said that there were many initiatives which were not widely known and that there was a need for better liaison by way of a Central Information Bureau.

She undertook to furnish all delegates with information regarding the Womens' Centre once the structures therefor were in place.

ADDRESS BY COUNCILLOR PETER MANSFIELD.

Councillor Mansfield said that in his opinion, the input made by delegates at the Workshop had been of a very high calibre. He encouraged delegates to run for public office and said that he would be astonished if a non-racial City Council were not in place within the next four years. He went on to say that he appreciated that although the City Council was not representative of the majority, it was a structure which could be utilised by the people. He amplified this by saying that when three or four people telephoned a councillor on the same issue, this was usually sufficient to give the matter the desired impetus.

Councillor Mansfield indicated that when distributing a record of the proceedings of the Workshop to delegates, a list of the names and telephone numbers of the City Councillors would be included. (It was subsequently agreed by delegates also to include a list of the names and telephone numbers of delegates who had attended the Workshop as well as a list of the invitees.)

He said that he had envisaged this Workshop as being a small step in the direction of the City Council taking gender issues more seriously. However, he indicated that in his estimation, much more had actually been achieved.

Councillor Mansfield remarked that it was most significant that the vast majority of speakers had proposed the establishment of a committee to deal with gender issues. He said that he believed that such a mechanism could have a significant influence on the City Council's decision making. He advised, however, that it would not be possible in terms of local government legislation, to grant such body any decision making powers.

He undertook to do everything in his power to urge the City Council to establish such a committee, comprised of representatives of the community on the widest possible basis as well as Council representation. He indicated that it would be difficult to achieve the desired diverse and widespread representation and that suggestions to this end would be welcome. Once such body had been constituted, it would be in a position to wrestle with the other issues raised at the Workshop.

Councillor Mansfield said that whilst it was true that racial discrimination was a major concern at this point in time, it was important not to overlook gender discrimination in the struggle for a non-racial and democratic South Africa.

He remarked that women formed the majority of the white electorate and surmised that this would remain true once non-racial government was introduced. Notwithstanding this, he said that when canvassing for election, he had never been asked (by any prospective voter) his views on any gender issue. He intimated that if the electorate were to display more concern about gender issues this would have an impact on the decision making body.

Councillor Mansfield closed by thanking Councillor Mrs Hart and all others involved in convening the Workshop. He also thanked delegates for their attendance and for the noteworthy contributions they had made. He reiterated his belief that the City Council would establish or assist in establishing a committee to deal with womens' issues as proposed by the Workshop, but cautioned that this would take a few months to achieve, especially in view of the Council's imminent recess period.

Councillor Mrs Hart discussed the possibility of holding a further workshop during the first quarter of next year. She requested delegates to submit particulars of individuals and/or organisations to whom invitations should be addressed. She closed by thanking delegates for giving up their Saturday and for contributing to the Workshop in a very creative way.

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