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Women for Conflict Resolution and Consensus Building in Angola

Guidelines

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Index

PART ONE
Introduction

PART TWO
Research results

PART THREE
Suggestions for the empowerment of women and female groups in conflict and post-conflict situations

PART ONE

Introduction

1.   INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

With a contract dated 5 May 2000, the European Commission granted CERFE funding for the project entitled "Women for Conflicts Resolution and Consensus Building" (B7-7021/ANG/PV/68B/99) to be conducted in the framework of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights.

The institution charged with carrying out the project is CERFE, working in collaboration with ASDO (Assembly of Women for the Development and the Struggle against Social Exclusion). Both organisations have many years' experience in research, training and capacity-building for development and combating poverty and social exclusion, in Italy and abroad. CERFE and ASDO have been working in close collaboration with Angolan civil organizations (in particular the Rede Mulher/Angola) and with government institutions concerned with promotion of women and the family.

The project has as its general goal that of contributing to the processes of reconciliation, social integration of vulnerable groups and local economic development through the strengthening and empowerment of women and of their forms of collective association.

The specific objectives of the project are as follows:

i)   improving the capabilities of organizations and groups of women to carry out projects and initiatives aimed at the reconciliation and social integration of vulnerable groups and local economic development;

ii)   fostering stronger links between female groups, on the one hand, and NGOs and public agencies, on the other, for the purpose of rendering the action of such groups more effective.

While these objectives were kept during all project activities, as already explained, the project also aimed at strengthening individual women's leadership and social action for conflict resolution and consensus building, not only in women's organisations, but also in mixed organisations, in the community and in society at large.

The project consists of three components:

1. research activities in strict sense (see theoretical and methodological frameworks);

2. training, technical assistance and experimentation activities; in particular, a training course for women leaders of mixed and female organizations, at the end of which the participants set up an association, which gave rise to a reference centre for women;

3. public communication and networking activities; in particular, a seminar to launch the project (4th December 2000), 6 numbers of a newsletter published, other dissemination and networking activities.

To sum up, the project is proposed as an action research aimed at obtaining, through experimentation in the specific Angolan context (in particular in the province of Benguela), knowledge and practical information for local, national and international actors concerning the positive role that women, when adequately supported, can exercise in the context of societies undergoing or emerging from civil conflicts.

For the implementation of the project, CERFE formed a team composed by Alessandra Cancedda, sociologist, director of the action-research and by Irma Marchitelli, sociologist and trainer, co-director of the action-research. In addition, the team availed itself of a group of experts in the field of research, training and public communication. The project backstopping programme from Rome (Italy) was co-ordinated by Maria Letizia Coen Cagli, knowledge manager.

The results of this action-research (part two) and the suggestions for women's empowerment in conflict and post-conflict situations (part three) are presented in this document drafted by Alessandra Cancedda.

2. THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

The research is within the framework of studies relating to **gender and conflict,** the number of which has increased noticeably at an international level over the past few years[1]. However, emphasis is not given so much to the consequences of war on women's lives as to their **active role** in civil conflicts and reconstruction. In this regard, attention is drawn to some women scholars[2] who made an appeal to no longer consider women only as victims of wars but also and above all as protagonists of the social, cultural, economic and political dynamics typical of societies in conflict and in the post-conflict period.

Furthermore, the reference and starting points of the research are studies on **gender and leadership**, which, interpreting the latter as a process which involves not only the highest decision-making positions in companies or political bodies but also the intermediate and lower levels of organizations, raise the question whether there are or not particular characteristics of female leadership. In particular, reference is made to the much-discussed issue related to women's preference for certain leadership styles, called **transformational leadership**[3] or democratic leadership[4]. Nevertheless, we also follow those who have tried to adapt the meaning of transformational leadership to the context of development, thus passing from a concept of transformation as a mere managerial "style" to one meaning a tendency for female and collective social action as a whole to change the surrounding social reality[5].

However, the research does not aim at showing the differences between the lines of conduct of men and women, but simply at studying women's behaviour and cognitive representations, in the light of their active role in

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[1] For a review of these studies, see *Development and gender in brief,* **Issue 3 "Conflict and Development",** http://www.ids.ac.uk/bridge/Dgb3.html; http://www.ids.ac.uk/bridge/Dgb 3.html

[2] For example, Birgitte Sorensen, *Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources,* **UNRISD, WSP Occasional Paper No. 3.**

[3] **Bass B.M. and Avolio B.J.,** *Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership,* **Sage, Thousand Oaks, 1994; Beverley Alimo-Metcalfe, "Waiting for fish to grow feet! Removing organizational barriers to women's entry into leadership positions",** in: Tanton M. (ed.); *Women in management: a developing presence,* **Routledge, London, 1994**

[4] Eagly A.H., Johnson B.T., **"Gender and leadership style: a meta-analysis", in:** *Psychological Bulletin,* **103(2), 1990.**

[5] Antrobus P., **"Transformational Leadership: advancing the agenda for gender justice",** in *Women and Leadership,* **edited by C. Sweetman, OXFAM, Oxford, 2000, pp.50-56.**

reconciliation and reconstruction. This subject has rarely been dealt with up to now, and usually only with reference to organized women and not ordinary ones. As the research is focused on this aspect, it has intentionally not gone into problems related to violence and discrimination against women, the latter preventing women access to resources and power. However, these problems are kept in mind as important elements within the context and are extensively dealt with by other studies. Thus this research can be considered as having the limits - and perhaps the merits - of an **eminently explorative study**, which, like all similar studies, aims at giving rise to further questions to be answered, both by going more thoroughly into the problems and with concrete action by public authorities.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research was carried out in two towns, Benguela and Lobito, and its object was **women's contribution to resolving conflicts** (broadly speaking) and **strengthening social cohesion**. In particular, the research aimed at finding out if there were any kind of **social action**, that is, an introjected operational model (made up of both cognitive - opinions, statements, myths, symbols etc. - and operational - actions and lines of conduct), shared by most of the women and in some way linked by them to the **female identity**, which made them take this action.

Once this form of social action was discovered, an effort was made to understand the social strata where it was more widespread (social class, educational level, professional situation etc.).

Further effort was then made to have a clearer idea of its **nature**, raising two questions in particular.

Firstly, the question arose as to what extent it was an action aimed at **change**, or, on the contrary, whether it was simply a **routine** social action (i.e. orientated at reflecting the institutions and keeping them functional, particularly in emergency situations).

Secondly, following models established within the framework of studies on gender and leadership, the question arose as to what degree women's social action was typical of **a transformational style**, meaning by

this a style aimed at obtaining long-term results and acting on people and immaterial aspects. For operational purposes, transformational style has been related to the following types of action: information, education, training, attention to human resources, prevention and social integration; and to the following cognitive items: optimism for the future and positive orientation towards education.

In conclusion, research was carried out on the **origin** of female social action, looking for the main sources of women's information in general, and for concepts about women's role in society, as well as for the main **communication circuits** where this information passes.

Starting from a specific theory of **social capital**[6], according to which the latter is the product of interaction among a series of processes or elements (the emergence of a **civil society** brought about by collective actors with a sense of social responsibility; the presence of certain **territorial factors**; the absence of **poverty and social exclusion**; the presence of **policies** and the absence of **normative obstacles**), an effort was made to track down these elements in the two towns and find out how the women were related to them. This specific survey was carried out with the aim of finding possible **factors which reduce or strengthen women's action** for social cohesion and conflict resolution.

4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The territorial scope of the research includes the municipalities of Lobito and Benguela, limited to the towns of Benguela, Lobito and Catumbela and their surroundings:

- Benguela: areas from A to F;
- Lobito: areas from 1 to 9;
- Catumbela: areas from 1 to 5.

Research information **sources** and the **technical instruments** used to consult them were the following:

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[6] CERFE, *Civil Society, Social Initiative and Social Capital in Somalia and Guatemala. Final report.* Study conducted for the World Bank, Rome, 1999.

- a survey on a sample of 400 women representative of the female population of the towns of Lobito, Catumbela and Benguela (stratified by areas and age groups) carried out by means of a structured questionnaire (QAS);

- a census of female groups, carried out firstly by distributing semistructured questionnaires (QIG) to qualified informants for each area (a total of 81 questionnaires) and secondly by distributing census forms (SC) to 183 female groups singled out during preceding interviews;

- interviews with 31 leaders of female groups using, a semistructured questionnaire (QLG);

- interviews with 20 qualified municipal informants (10 Benguela and 10 Lobito) on territorial factors and social exclusion; using a semistructured questionnaire (QRES-FT);

- interviews with 13 qualified provincial and municipal informants on policies, using a semistructured questionnaire (QPOL);

- statistical and documentary information on territorial factors in provincial and municipal archives gathered by using a special grid;

Furthermore, a range of other sources have been taken into consideration:

- the records of selection interviews for the Course, carried out with 43 women, leaders of female and mixed organizations;

- notes and diaries kept by the project team, related to setting up the Course and the Reference Centre start-up activities;

- the documentation concerning the 33 microprojects worked out by the 40 participants of the training course.

Gathering the information in the field was carried out between December and March 2001 by a team of interviewers of the *Departamento de Processamento de Datos del Gabinete do Planeamento - Governo Provincial de Benguela*, coordinated by José Maria Martins.

In particular, the survey took place between the end of February and the beginning of March 2001.

PART TWO

Research results

1.   Nature and Origin of Women's Social Action: Main "Findings"

The research discovered that the women in the two towns of Benguela and Lobito (a sample of 400 of them were interviewed) have been in the last few years the protagonists of a widespread, often invisible social action aimed at conflict resolution and social cohesion.

Figure 1 - Women's involvement in social action orientated towards cohesion
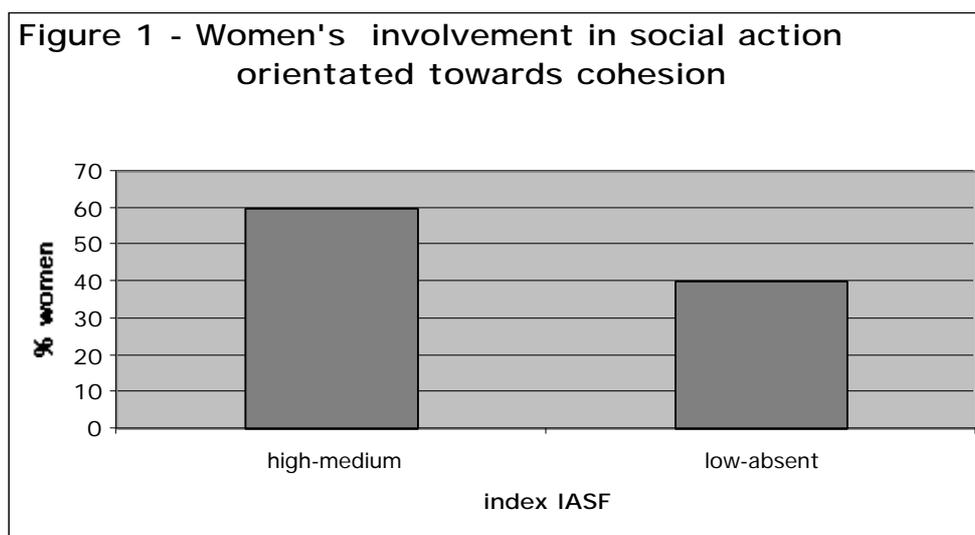
Source: CERFE, 2002

The analysis revealed that almost two out of three women, 60.1%, are oriented towards contributing to social cohesion (IASF high and medium). The analysis was made by calculating special indexes (IASF[7] and ICR), of the actions carried out by women in the last few decades, as

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[7] The female social action index IASF, with a value between 0 and 1, was calculated for every woman interviewed, considering her answers on one hand to a series of questions regarding whether, in her lifetime, she had carried out or not any action related to social, political, economic and anthropological reconstruction, and on the other, to a series of questions regarding opinions and statements concerning women's capacity and possibility to intervene in these spheres. The total index value is given for 50% of these cognitive aspects and the other 50% to operational ones relating to actions carried out. The index of orientation towards conflict resolution (ICR, value 0-1) was also calculated, 50% based on answers to questions about women's actions for conflict resolution and prevention and the other 50% based on their statements and opinions about it. According to the scores obtained for IASF and ICR, the women were subdivided into: women involved in social action (or to conflict resolution oriented) high (7-10), medium (4-6), low (1-3) and none (0).

well as their opinions and statements about women's chances and capacities to act in this field.

Furthermore, **half of the women** (50.2%; 77.9% of those involved in social action) reveal a strong orientation to conflict resolution (ICR high and medium). This means that most of the women, at least once in their lives (and a good half of them systematically), have done something against the logic of war, among which: doing their best to prevent acts of retaliation or revenge for political reasons; helping somebody with opposing political beliefs in mortal danger; reconciling members of the family divided for political reasons and carrying out social activities in "enemy" areas. This tendency to cooperate with other women of opposing political beliefs in the name of a common female identity - in a certainly easier situation compared to what was typical of the most violent times of the war, but not without significance for this - was found also in the effective cooperation and the spirit of friendship that was typical of the participation of women of different political beliefs - also of different religious faiths, ages and social classes, during the training course.

Women's orientation towards conflict resolution also emerged from the women leaders' capability to insert such a topic in the social and environmental microprojects they planned during the course (see below).

Figure 2 - Women's involvement in conflict resolution

Source: **CERFE, 2002**

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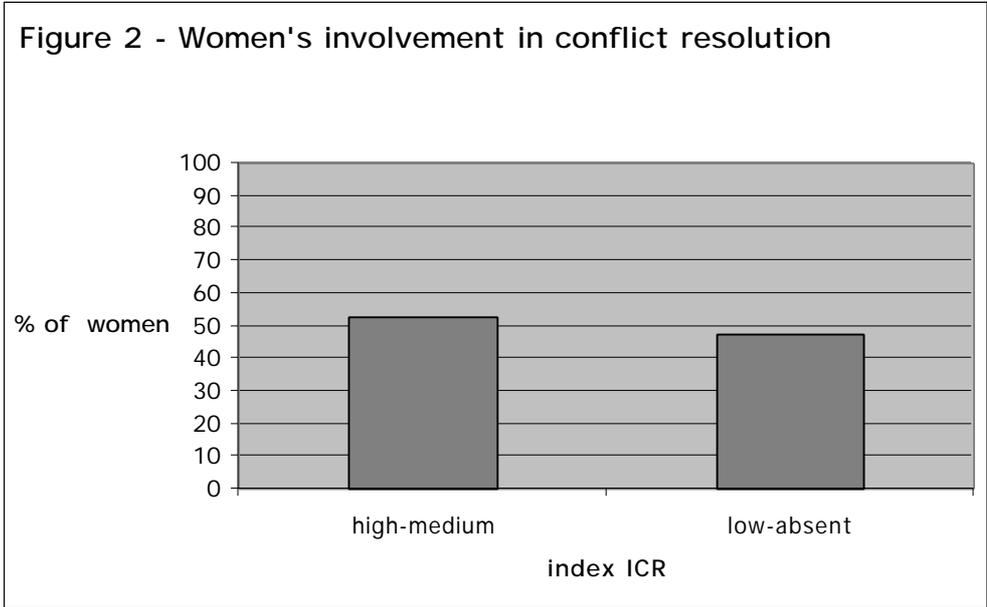
The research has made it possible to highlight the following five findings on the nature and origin women's social action in conflict-ridden societies:

- women contribute to conflict resolution and social cohesion more in the public than in the private sphere;

- women transform the public sphere giving rise to a "new public spirit";

- women are agents of change and not guardians of the status quo;

- women are the bearers of an 'agency' for knowledge;

- the importance of mass communication for female social action.

Some elements in support of these conclusions will be given further on.

1.1. Women contribute to conflict resolution and social cohesion more in the public than in the private sphere

Although political and literary rhetoric attribute the main reason for women's commitment to conflict resolution and social cohesion to their maternal role, women do not contribute to these objectives only in the private sphere, as mothers and wives, but above all in the public sphere, as citizens and workers. Even if the women in the two towns constantly support their husbands, parents and children, in the last few decades they have taken part tirelessly in a series of **actions that have nothing to do with the well-being of their own families, but with that of the community, the town and their workplace.**

This can be seen above all from the list of actions linked to social cohesion which the women declared they had carried out. Some of the most common actions are eminently "public": for example, voting in elections (84.8%); taking initiatives to improve sanitary conditions in their own districts, villages or towns (68.5%); psychological or concrete aid to people displaced, and those traumatized or injured in the war, outside their own families (36%); overtime work for services to keep public interest services functioning in overload situations (25.5%) or taking part in debates on reconciliation (25%). The practice of cooperation among women of opposing political beliefs in social and training initiatives, like those carried out in this project and others, must also be added.

Table 1 - **Very widespread actions (carried out by more than 20% of the women)**

	type of action	% of women
1	voted at the 1992 elections (% women entitled to vote)	84.8
2	took initiatives to improve sanitary and environmental conditions in their own districts, villages or towns	68.5
3	spoke to their children about the importance of not resorting to physical violence	52,5
4	took initiatives to support people alone or abandoned	47
5	undertook new working activities to ensure the maintenance of the family	44.8
6	convinced their children and grandchildren to show respect to people of the opposing faction	42.8
7	gave psychological or material aid to people displaced, traumatized or injured by the war, outside their own families	36
8	cooperated to spread information on sanitary issues among their own families, friends, acquaintances and the population.	34.5
9	worked in services of public interest	33
10	helped adult family members who were invalids or traumatized	28.5
11	took initiatives to improve the basic educational level of the population	27.5
12	frequently took action to stop their own partners from behaving violently	25.8
13	voluntarily chose to work overtime to keep services functioning	25.5
14	contributed to debates, conferences, discussions, civic and moral educational activities regarding peace and reconciliation, giving their own experience and knowledge	25.5
15	renewed ties among relatives or friends interrupted by the war	25
16	took part in initiatives in their districts or towns to guarantee daily life in emergency situations	24.3
17	took initiatives to reduce crime levels in their districts	22.5
18	took initiatives to defend women from sexual and domestic violence	22
19	undertook to raise funds or gather material to keep services of public interest working in emergency situations	20.5

Source: **CERFE, 2002**

Table 2 - **Generally widespread actions (more than 5% but less than 20%)**

|	type of action	% of women
20	spread information on human or political rights among the population	18
21	endeavoured to prevent acts of revenge, retaliation or other kinds of violence connected to the conflict in their district or neighbourhood	16.5
22	took initiatives to improve the quality of some public services	16
23	took initiatives to give work to people belonging to vulnerable groups or to long-term unemployed people	15
24	reconciled family members who had fought over politics	14.8
25	organized alternative solutions for their children's education	14.5
26	took on male tasks in the family	14.3
27	took initiatives to encourage recreation and enliven the leisure time of young people and adults	12.8
28	town-country trade	12.5
29	cooperated in building or rebuilding schools	12.3
30	transformed non-profit-making occasional activities into profitable commercial activities	11.8
31	helped people with different political opinions but in mortal danger	11.3
32	assisted children in families unable to take care of them (without adopting them)	9.5
33	undertook social activities where most of the people had different political opinions from their own	8.3
34	cooperated in building hospitals, health centres, chemist's and dispensaries	8.3
35	opposed forced enlistment of young people	7.5
36	asked the authorities or police to respect their rights or those of others	7.3
37	opposed requests for money from public officials for services due anyway	5.8
38	helped people not accepted because they had taken part in the war to be reinstated in the community	5.8
39	took initiatives to improve running middle and high school education	5.5

Source: CERFE, 2002

On the contrary, **some actions linked to expanding the maternal role** *tout court* (for example, adopting or caring for children without a family) were found **in fewer cases than expected.**

Table 3 - **Actions not extensively taken (less than 5%)**

	type of action	% of women
41	took initiatives to relieve some people's state of poverty	4.8
40	cooperated with women of opposing factions for daily survival	4.8
42	held family celebrations all the same despite the war (always/ often)	4.6
43	indicated the presence of mines to mine-removing teams or to the authorities	4.5
45	looked after children without families	4.3
44	adopted children with families unable to take care of them	4.3
46	organized parties and ceremonies in the district	4
47	contributed with their own work to getting farm production back to normal	4
48	cooperated in building or restoring other structures	4
49	adopted children without families	3
50	cooperated in building or restoring markets	2.5
51	organized exchanges of visits, meetings or everyday activities among people who live in areas controlled by the two factions	2.3
52	trade from united areas to government areas	2.3
53	prevented conflicts between people with opposing political beliefs from degenerating in work-places	2
54	took care of children from families of the opposing political side (without adopting them)	0.5
55	adopted children suffering from psychological or physical traumas	0.5
56	took care of children suffering from psychological or physical traumas (without adopting them)	0.3
57	started off a company	0.3
58	adopted children from families of the opposing political side	0.3

Source: **CERFE, 2002**

A more concise, quantitative analysis of the extent of the various actions encountered among the women of Benguela and Lobito confirms what has just been stated.

Figure 3 - Diffusion of actions in the public and private sphere
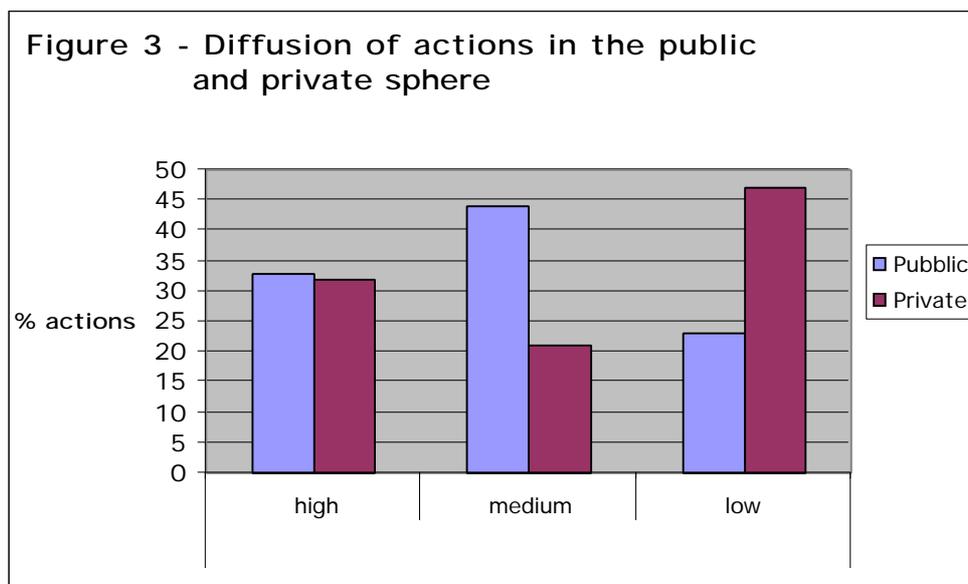
Source: **CERFE, 2002**

Subdividing the 58 actions gathered on the basis of their relation both to the public and the private sphere, and also based on the percentage of women who carried them out (widespread, "medium- and low- spread actions), a double-entry table is obtained. The percentage of actions among those relating to the private sphere, which turned out to be scarcely diffused, is much higher (47%) than the percentage of scarcely diffuse actions related to the public sphere (23%).

As confirmation that the importance of the maternal propensity in female social action is only relative, a reminder could be made that among the microprojects proposed by the participants in the formation course, those which involve kinds of analogic reproduction of the maternal role (for example, projects for infancy) **were limited in number compared to the total, i.e. only 4 out of 33** (see the following table)

THEMES OF MICROPROJECTS DRAWN UP IN THE TRAINING COURSE	
Participation in spreading literacy and prevention of 'micro' conflicts	2
Literacy and human rights	5
Literacy and recovery	3
Literacy, human rights and recovery	1
The environment	1
Human rights	3
The fight against the social exclusion of young people and adolescents	4
Mother-child and infant health	4
Micro businesses	1
Microcredit	2
Water and recovery	3
Training of cadres	4
Total	**33**

Source: **CERFE, 2002**

1.2. Women transform the public sphere and give rise to a "new civism"

Women's social action is revealed in their tendency, among others, to spread **greater respect for "the common goods" and more competent rules, and ways of living in a community**, among the population and public officials. This regards environmental sanitation, health, efficient public services and knowing and observing human rights and citizens' rights as regards public administration. This action is carried out in various fields: from poor outlying communities to institutional seats where cadres and provincial officials operate, according to the professional and personal vocation of each woman and female organization but having features in common. In an African society often accused of having little civic sense, it is therefore women themselves who are bearers of a kind of "**new civvies**" and who are building a new democratic order.

In particular, studying the themes faced in the microprojects proposed by the participants in the CERFE training course, **a cluster linking conflict resolution to literacy, to education in human rights and sanitary and environmental education** stands out. The tendency to link these aspects rests on a "theory" (formulated in the participants' project documents) which states that local microconflicts between immigrants and residents have in common above all the fact that the population and public officials do not know about these aspects.

In the same way, **the tendency of women who set up associations to scrupulously observe procedures provided for by law** can be interpreted as a conviction of how important it is to respect laws and rules, for example not carrying out public activities before the organization is legalized (as in the case of the association which runs the Reference Centre).

Also the list of actions gives interesting indications on the subject. Not only, there is widespread evidence of actions which involve exercising civic sense and commitment directly, like, for example, initiatives to improve sanitary and environmental conditions in the women's own districts, villages or towns (68% of the women). However, also some of the everyday actions that women carry out in their private lives aim at improving their families' civic attitude within the community (for example, speaking to their children about the importance of not resorting to physical violence - **52.5%**; or convincing them to behave respectfully to people 'of the other faction' - **42.8%**.

It must be underscored that women civic commitment is exercised **loyally and not in conflict** with the institutions and often by forming a **partnership** is formed. Various microprojects were conceived in partnership with the institutions (ministry of justice, of education, of health etc.). This also came about for female groups which in theory could have taken an attitude, if not in conflict with, at least dialectical, towards the institutions (like, for example, the women belonging to the female association UNITA, who offered to cooperate with the government in the field of quality of hospital services).

Therefore it isn't a matter **either of civil society in the sense of spreading and strengthening NGOs as a reality alternative to or opposing the State** (the latter process is where female groups even now find great difficulty) **or of so-called mechanical solidarity** (family, clan and ethnic types) which is the core of some theories on social capital, but of a phenomenon closely linked to a sense of the common good, the *civitas* and *polis.*

On the contrary, as regards women's contribution to civil society, meaning a body of organizations, it should be pointed out that, although female associations are spreading, they are still qualitatively weak in the over-all panorama of Angolan NGOs.

WOMEN GROUPS: A SUBSTANTIAL AND CULTURALLY SOLID REALITY, BUT STILL WITH LIMITED CAPACITY TO ACT

The research included a census of female groups, meaning those composed exclusively or principally of women, and anyway with women leaders. Quantitatively speaking, female collective action in civil society, meaning the number of groups, is quite substantial. A census was taken of **183** groups, the equivalent of **16 every 100,000 inhabitants;** of which 109 in the municipality of Lobito (80 in the town of Lobito and 29 in the town of Catumbela) and **74** in the municipality of Benguela (the town of Benguela)

83.1% of these 183 groups are made up exclusively of women, while 16.9% are made up mainly of women and have women leaders, but admit men as well. These associations are numerically quite large: **almost half the groups (46.4%) have more than 50 members**, while 21.3% have between 21 and 50, 12.0% between 11 and 20, 9.8% between 6 and 10 and 9.8% less than 6 members.

Female groups are **quite varied as regards type,** as **19** out of the **22 types** sought were found.

The most numerous type is the church groups (46.5%), which, together with the religious congregations (9.8%) make up a total of over half the groups.

The local branches of **female associations of political parties** stand out among the other types (14.7%); this is the only other type that includes over 10% of the groups.

Other groups are less numerous: health workers, especially birth attendants (4.9%), cultural, artistic and musical groups (4.9%), provincial and municipal administration bodies (3.3%), associations which represent vulnerable groups (2.8%) and other local associations (2.2%), professionist associations (2.2%), teacher groups (1.6%), community groups (1.6%), local and provincial sections of national NGOs (1.1%), mutual aid groups (0.5%), work cooperatives (0.5%), radio editorial staff (0.5%), women entrepreneurs associations (0.5%) and trade union associations (0.5%).

The "quality" of the groups was obtained mainly from a sample of the groups themselves, i.e. 31 groups belonging to 12 of the types present, interviewed in detail.

The elements taken into consideration were: a group culture, an agency (meaning a well-defined mission and tendency to innovation in group activities), the quality of the action taken, resources available, the degree of the group's formalization (identity 1) and relations with outside circles (identity 2).

On the whole, the quality turned out to be rather low (0.41 on a scale from 0 to 1), especially as regards resources and the groups' relational capacities. In fact, the order of the components which emerges has culture at the top of the list (0.53), followed by agency (0.45), by action (0.43) by identity 2 (0.33) and at the bottom by identity 1 (0.30). This confirms what emerged from preceding researches in Angola (Huambo)[8] : that there is **an imbalance between the size, culture and intentions of women's groups on one hand, and the capacity for effective action and influence on the outside world on the other.**

1.3. Women are agents of change and not guardians of the status quo

The propensity of women for rebuilding the public sphere and their loyalty towards the institutions do not imply, however, that they have adjusted to the situation and are resigned to it. It is often affirmed that women's main role in wars is to guarantee that everyday life goes on in an altered context. However, the research has revealed that limiting women's action to this function would be simplifying far too much.

In fact, two types of action common among women were discovered by using special indexes[9]:

a. **an "ordinary" social action**, whose main aim is to guarantee that the institutions work normally (family, work-places, community etc.) in an emergency situation;

b. **a social action orientated towards change**, whose aim is to bring about a change in the actual situation (also in this case, in the family, in the neighbourhood, in the community, in work-places etc.).

The result was that almost all the women involved in social action (i.e. 95.9% of women with a high or average IASF index) have taken part in actions clearly aimed at change, while the ordinary kind of social action, where any positive consequence has arisen unintentionally as a result of women's tendency to 'maintain normality', turned out to be quite widespread (85.1%), but does not represent the only or principal type.

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[8] L. d'Andrea, A. Cancedda, *Mulheres e organizações de muleres na resolução dos conflitos, e no proceso de desmobilização e integração dos grupos vulneraveis em Angola (provincia do Huambo)*, Final report of the action-research carried out for UNDP-UNOPS, November 1999.
[9] The indexes (IAZCAM and IAZORD), to measure ordinary actions and actions for change, were set up with the same criteria used for IASF and ICR.

Figure 4 - Routine action and action for change carried out by women involved in social action
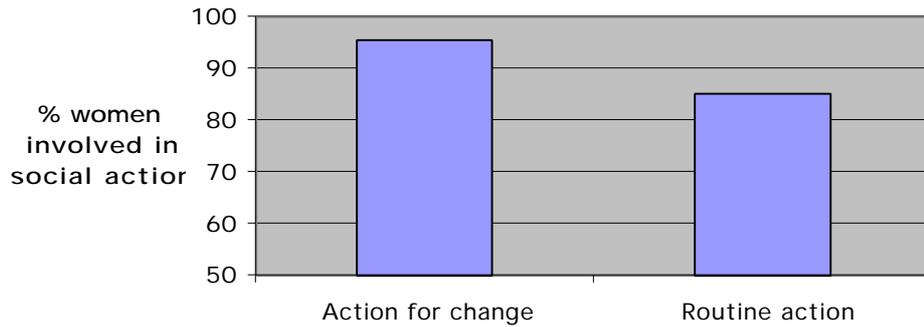
Source: **CERFE, 2002**

Figure 5 - Opinion on the evolution of living conditions in the next years cohesion
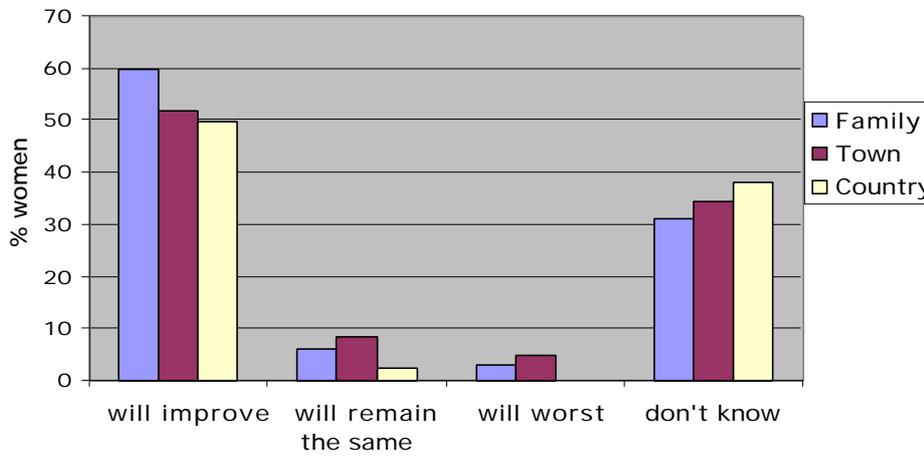

Source: **CERFE 2002**

The propensity of Angolan women to transform the current reality functions on a long-term rather than a short-term basis. Thus, in a social context in the clutches of emergency problems, women appear **far-sighted** and surprisingly **optimistic**, which is borne out by their mostly positive opinions of the possible developments in their own family's situation and in their own towns and villages in the next few years. As regards this, 59.8% of them consider an improvement in their own family's situation likely in the next few years, 52% an improvement in living conditions in their own towns and 49.8% an improvement in their country's situation. It should be pointed out that these opinions were expressed in February 2001, therefore when the prospects of peace, which came about in the Spring of 2002, still seemed a long way away.

1.4.   Women have an agency for knowledge

This mixture of optimism and the growing number of **more highly educated women** has probably led to an **agency** among women, **i.e. a strong intention to operate in favour of knowledge**, which is a precious resource for development. This agency emerges in the research both, for example, from the **great importance given** by the women of the two towns to **professional training and higher education,** and from their more general **capacity to foster education** - from supporting literacy to training cadres - as an indispensable instrument for spreading that new civism dealt with earlier.

In this regard, mention could be made of the fact that **29% of the women interviewed have taken initiatives in order to improve the population's educational level** (for example, by organizing, or cooperating to set up literacy courses, by undertaking to help children from disadvantaged social classes to attend school, by fighting to make primary schools function better). Furthermore, the fact that **5.5%** of the women have taken initiatives to make high school (*ensino medio*), university education (*ensino superior*) or vocational training (*formação profissional*) function better should not be underestimated.

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Figure 6 - Women who contribute towards improving
              education
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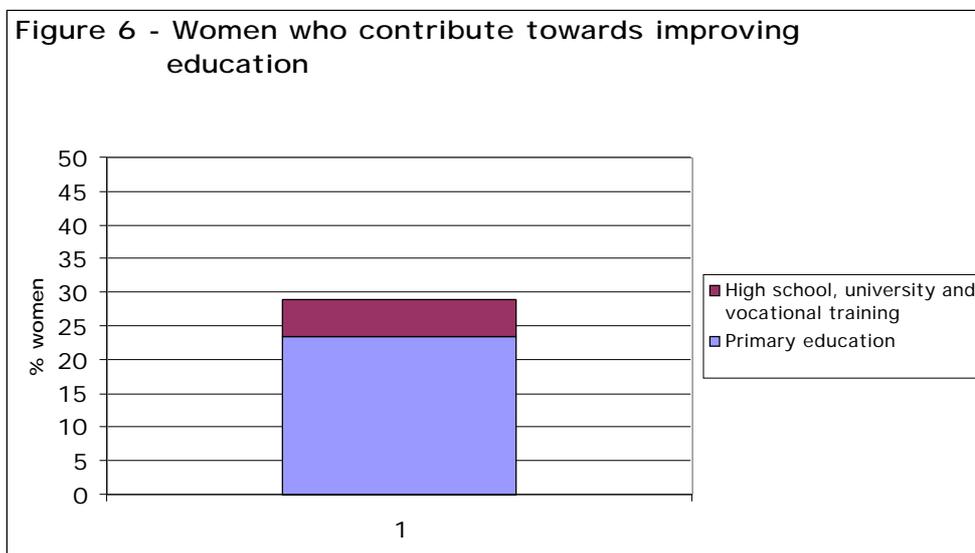
Besides, it is widely held by the women of the two municipalities that
women can do a lot or at least something to improve the educational
system, as the following diagram shows: in fact **59.3% of the women
agreed on this.**

Furthermore, it should be underscored that:

- 15 out of 33 microprojects have fostering literacy or training as their
  main aim;

- the Reference Centre has been conceived by the women who
  founded it mainly as a training agency.

As regards women attending high school, results of the 400 interviews
give **quite a number of women with diplomas (22.8%),** also some women
graduates (1.6%) and women who have attended vocational training
courses (7% languages, 5% computer courses, 11.8% others). Considering
the difficult conditions women have to face in order to organize their
family and professional duties, and the limited training opportunities in
Benguela (one university centre with a single faculty, Science of
Education, as well as a correspondence unit linked to the Faculty of Law
in Luanda), the percentage is anything but unimportant.

Moreover, an **interesting connection between female cognitive capital and involvement in social action** has been found:

a. there is a higher percentage of women with **8th class diplomas** (31.3% compared to 23.2%), high school diplomas(28.3% compared to 14.4%) and university degrees (2.0% compared to 0.0%), among the women involved in social action.

b. also the women who attended professional training courses (29.2% compared to 15.4%), who have some knowledge of foreign languages (56.3% compared to 32.5%) or who use a computer (10.0% compared to 1.3%) and the internet (3.3% compared to 0.0%) are more numerous among women involved in social action.

Figure 7 – Educational level and involvement of women in social action
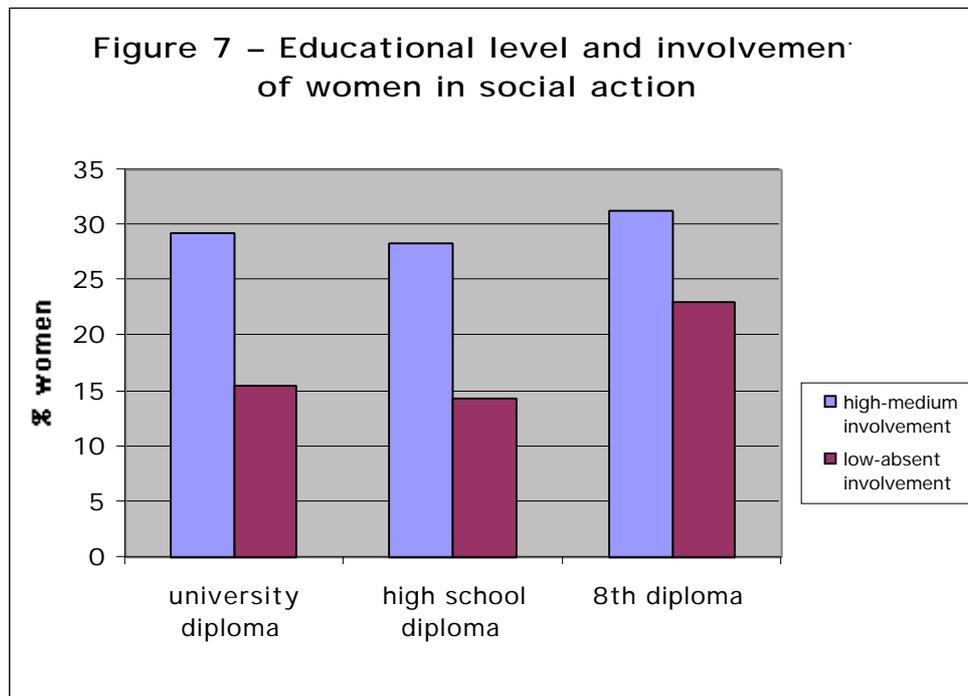
Source: CERFE, 2002

Therefore the women not only have the capacity to foster knowledge, but through them **cognitive capital becomes an instrument of development at the service of the community**. To be sure, this instrument would be even more powerful if the women had greater **access**

to means of information and communication. At present, they have **little access**:

a. 18.4% of the women have a telephone in their homes (however, it should be pointed out that the domestic telephone service is often interrupted due to breakdowns or brief suspensions because the user hasn't paid the bill, in view of the high costs of the service);

b. Only 6.5% use a computer at home or at work, 2.8% use a fax and 2% use the internet;

c. Female organizations hardly use these means as out of 31 organizations studied, only one has a computer and one a fax, while none uses the internet;

d. there are practically no public libraries; both the town councils of Benguela and Lobito have one, and also the regional Museum of Ethnography in Lobito, with some collections of mostly old texts without any attraction for the population.

e. there are no places where newspapers are sold regularly (except for a stationer's in Benguela and one in Lobito which receive and sell some copies, generally days late).

1.5. The importance of mass communication

In short, the research offered another surprise: the importance of communication, especially mass communication, in spreading ideas about the role of women and in starting off female social action.

The research has highlighted that there is a **communicative circuit and a female symbolic world**, which live not only on oral communication among women (at church and school, in public offices and other gathering places) but also on **enormous inputs of mass media communications.** This gives a modern dimension to female social action and to the over-all reality of this province, despite the continuous difficulties in communication, in transport and in economic social activities, all due to the shortcomings of some infrastructures.

Figure 8 - Membership female and/or mixed groups and involvement in social action
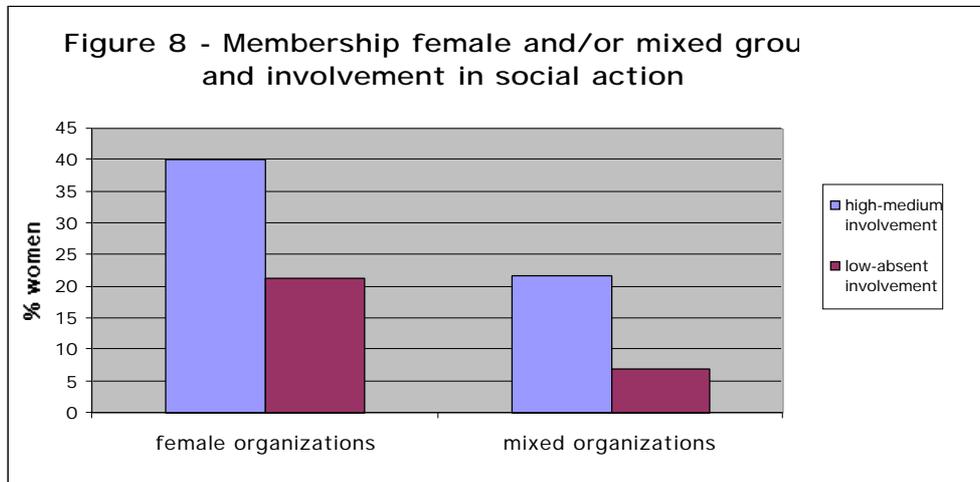
Source: **CERFE, 2002**

As regards a communicative circuit and a 'female' symbolic world, it is above all clear that the women involved in social action have frequent contacts - more compared to women not involved - with other women leaders of religious bodies (76.3% compared to 49.4%), of political organizations (18.3% compared to 6.9%), in public administration (20.0% compared to 5.0%), and of NGOs (15.4% compared to 1.9%). After all, organizing the course and setting up the reference centre were carried out simply by utilizing these communicative circuits among women leaders. Moreover, it's worth pointing out that the women most involved in social action are also more frequently members of female and/or mixed groups.

Likewise it seems significant that half the women interviewed (47.5%) were able to indicate a **famous woman, either in Angolan or world history, who has done something positive.** A good 55.8% of the women involved in social action were able to do so, compared to 35.0% of those not involved.

Table 4 - **Famous women who have done something positive in Angolan and world history, according to the women in a and Lobito**

The famous woman's name	No. of times named*
• Rainha Ginga	88
• Deolinda Rodrigues	74
• Princess Diana	20
• Lucrecia Paim	15
• Rainha Nha Catolo	8
• Mother Teresa of Calcutta	6
• Maria Eugenia Neto, Irene Cohen	3
• Albina Assis, Emilia Guardado (Miss Angola 1999)	2
• Indira Gandhi, Clara Seth, Miriam Makeba, Margaret Anstee,	
• Ana Paula dos Santos	1

* The total number of times the famous women were named, 217, is higher than the number of women who named them, as some of them mentioned more than one name.

Source: **CERFE, 2002**

It is noteworthy, as regards the importance of mass media as a means of synchronizing female social action, that as many as 44.2% of the women involved in social action watch **TV news programmes** every day (compared to 19.45% of those not involved) and 25.4% listen to **radio news programmes** (compared to 11.3%).

Figure 9 - Exposure to the mass-media and involvement in social action
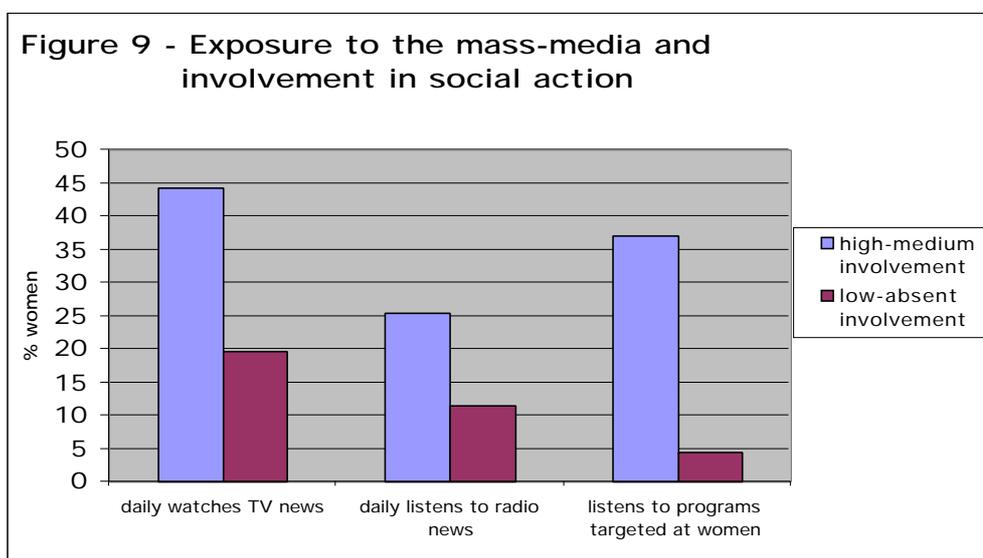
Source: **CERFE, 2002**

Moreover, 75% of women involved in social action follow radio-TV programmes on women, at least now and then, and 19.2% every day (compared respectively to 36.9% and 4.4% of those not involved). In short, 45.0% of women taking part in some form of social action have "often" heard of women's role in society in radio-TV programmes (compared to 28.1% of those not involved in social action).

Figure 10 - The main sources of information on the role of the women involved in social action
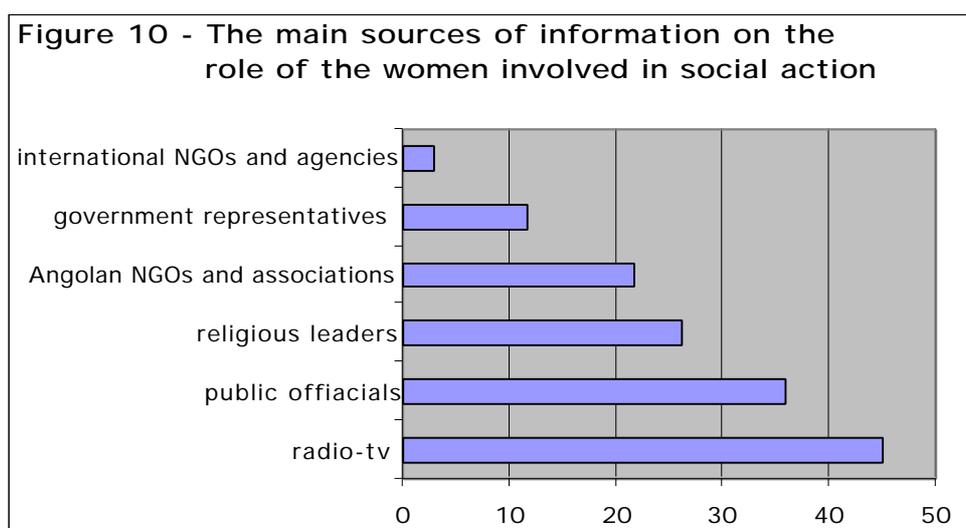
Source: CERFE, 2002

Therefore at present, for the women who have undertaken social action, the mass media are the main source of information on the role of women in society, followed by public officials, by religious leaders, by associations and national NGOs, by government representatives ending up with international agencies and NGOs at the bottom of the list.

2. SOME POLITICO-INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF WOMEN'S SOCIAL ACTION

The research has highlighted two possible consequences of women's social action at a politico-institutional and social level:

- the emergence of female leadership with new characteristics;
- the emergence of a middle class with specific functions regarding the management of knowledge.

## 2.1. Women as an emerging leading class: a new kind of leadership

In the context described above, better-educated women tend to take on a leadership role which makes them a potential, emerging ruling class. The quality of leadership that women have in particular is **their broad vision and the capacity to look beyond the present and the past** (with its legacy of political and ideological conflicts). This implies, among other things, that the development of social action and collective female action is **relatively untouched by the contingencies of the politico-military situation at top level,** where they do not interfere with the population's everyday life. It is evident from the following diagram that female social action only slightly diminished after hostilities began again in 1998, while there was an increase in the period of peace following the Lusaka agreements.

Figure 11 - Women who took social cohesion and conflict resolution actions in some periods of the recent Angolan history (only women involved in social action)
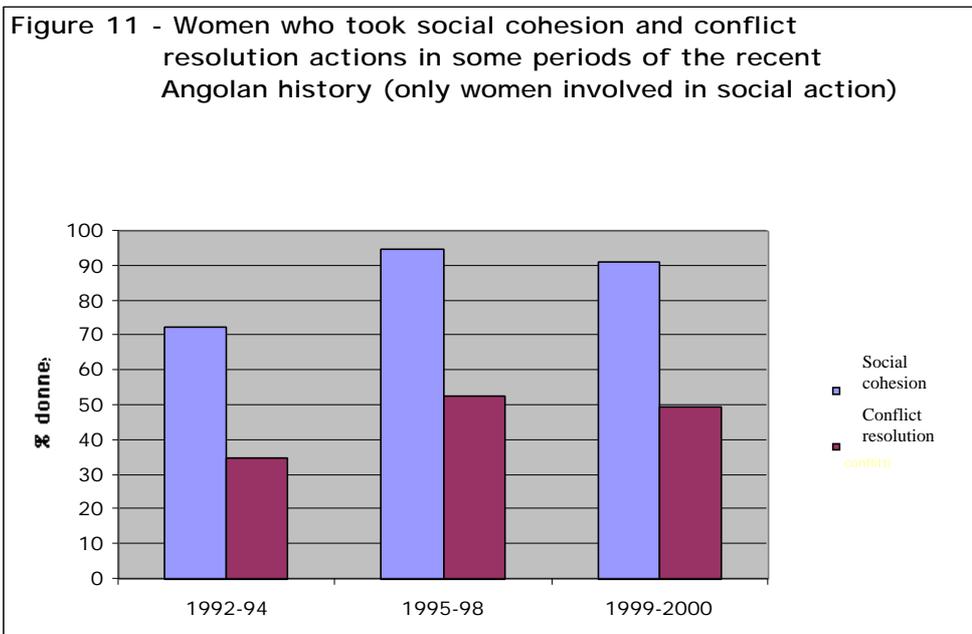
Source: **CERFE, 2002**

If leadership is not a position but a process or a kind of relation, the research highlights the fact that women want to give this process new features. Adopting a **transformational leadership style** seems to be typical of women, as they are more heedful of long-term benefits, of people and of intangible aspects than of the immediate results, of material things and aspects of reconstruction.

Most of the women involved in female social action have, in fact, a "transformational" attitude towards reality, characterized by **optimism, by a tendency to prefer actions with long-term results, by a capacity to take action on behalf of people and on immaterial aspects rather than on structures and objects** (this could be called giving more importance to development than to emergency). These capacities taken as a whole and measured by the transformational index (ITR), were noted in 83.3% of the 240 women involved in social action who were interviewed. To complete the picture, also the opposite capacity, called "transactional", was measured with another index (ITS), and although it turned out to be present also, it was to a much lesser degree[10].

Figure 12 - Transformational and transactional attitudes among women involved in social action
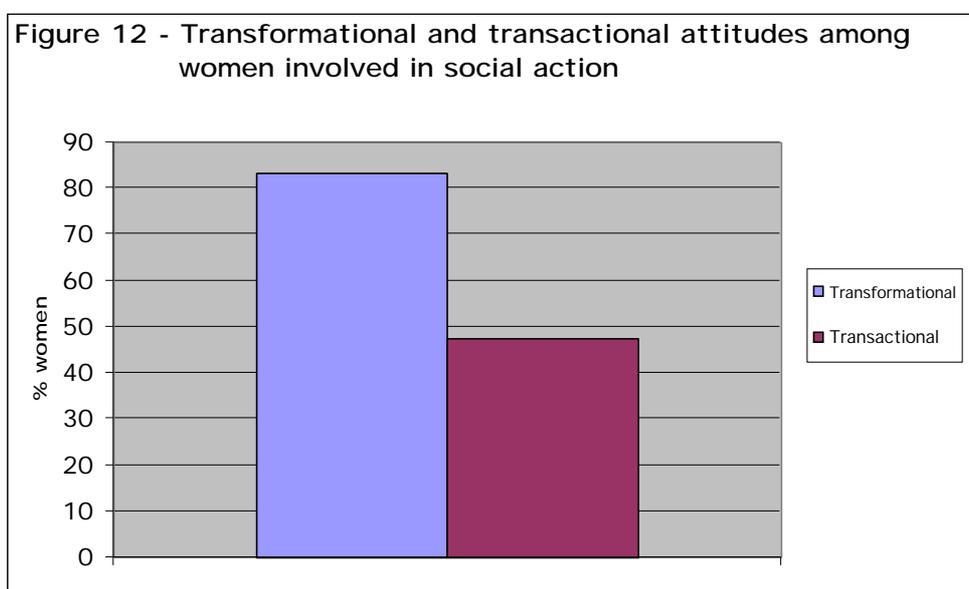
Source: **CERFE, 2002**

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[10] The ITR index, like preceding ones, took into consideration both cognitive-type indicators and operational-type indicators, giving the former the same importance as the latter. In particular, the ITR index took into account answers related to carrying out actions pertaining to education, to training, to attention to human resources, to social prevention and integration and to cognitive items like optimism or a positive orientation towards education and upbringing. On the contrary, the ITS index took into account the questions about actions dealing with the rehabilitation of infrastructures, with the distribution of aid in emergency situations, with economic initiatives, and also with cognitive elements like pessimism or unccerainty about the future, orientation towards economic benefit and a preference for 'materialistic' values.

The importance of women's support of a **democratic leadership style** should not be underestimated either, considering a context where fully democratizing social and political life is still at the beginning. In particular, there is a widespread awareness **that female leadership, in this meaning, must be different.**

It should also be noted that women leaders of organizations, both female and mixed, including the participants in the training course, have a particular concept of leadership, where the **capacity to listen** and understand and the **absence of authoritarian tendencies** are the two most important requirements.

Table 5 - Praiseworthy qualities in a leader according to Benguela women leaders

Quality	No. of times mentioned
• at people's disposal, capacity to listen and understand	6
• not authoritarian, propensity not to keep distances	6
• competence	5
• sense of responsibility	5
• capacity for relations, communication, conversation	4
• friendliness, likeableness	4
• self control	4
• strength of will	3
• dynamism	2
• punctuality and perseverance	2
• intelligence	2
• self-confidence	1
• self-sacrifice, unselfishness	1
• optimism	1

Source: selection interviews with 43 candidates for the Training Course for women leaders of organizations, November 2000.


2.2. The female middle class: an active, urban middle class

Up to now the researches have often dwelt on the agency of poor or rural women or anyway those in the informal sector of the economy, whose main aim is above all to carry out strategies for survival[11]. The

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[11] Narayan, Deepa, Chambers, Robert, Kaul Shah, Meera, and Petesch, Patti. 2000. *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change.* New York, N:Y: Published for the World Bank, Oxford University Press.

research has brought to light 'another' female social protagonist, i.e. **urban middle class women.**

Special mention should be made of the fact that almost two thirds of the women involved in social action belong to the middle class (61.3%) and just over a third to the poor or working classes (38.8%), while the proportion is reversed among the women not involved in social action (61.3% belong to the poor or working classes and 38.8% belong to the middle classes).

Figure 13 - Social class and involvement in social action
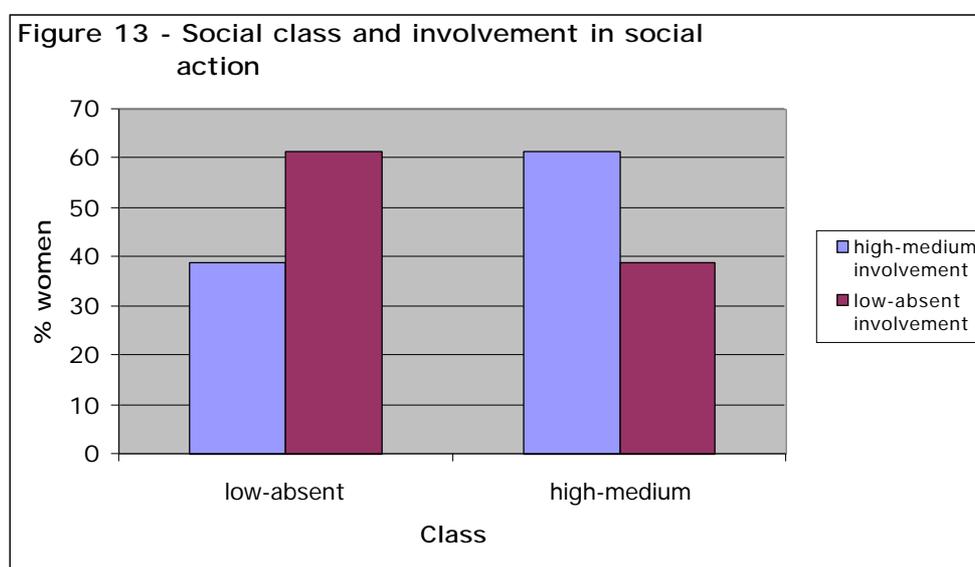
Source: **CERFE, 2002**

More women involved in social action tend to **participate in the labour force** (67.6% compared to 45.6%) and **be employed** (49.2% compared to 15.6%). In particular, province there are numerous teachers (4,422 women out of a total of 13,847), nurses and other health operators, but also a few journalists, lawyers and doctors (for example, 14 out of 29 women are doctors). Also considering these women have a favourable attitude towards training and learning, they could be considered social actor with potential in the field of what is sometimes called the "**knowledge society**". This is also found in Africa and Angola even if not so conspicuously as in advanced industrialized countries.

What we are talking about is an **urban social actor**, and this should be underscored. In fact, women's social action turned out to be widespread in the two towns studied, and one of its most important expressions, **conflict resolution, more often has women in urban and peripheral areas as protagonists than women in rural areas** (90.9% of the women orientated towards conflict resolution live in towns and only 62.3% of those not orientated).

Besides, the type of **problem** requiring action is urban (often linked to managing the urbanization process). For example, the themes of the microprojects include small businesses and microcredit in the informal urban sector, training cadres and technicians, managing the environment, water and sanitation in the informal settlements; fostering literacy for displaced people, the fight against social exclusion and the prevention of microcrimes among young people, children and adolescents; human rights and the prevention of microconflicts.

In short, the kind of **culture** brought by the women who start it off and the kind of **social** and association **relations** where this culture thrives, are both urban. The women involved in social action have an enormous personal social capital which often reaches outside their local limits (for example, they more frequently have relatives and friends in Luanda - 77.2% compared to 40.6% of those not involved in social action), in other provinces (71.3% compared to 50.0%) and outside Angola (16.3% compared to 3.8%).

Also the type of collective action has an urban nature, since, as already pointed out, it covers religious groups, community committees, mutual aid and female party branches, but also groups typical of towns like professional and sectorial associations, associations of teachers, of health workers and women entrepreneurs, editorial staffs of the mass media, NGOs and other associations with social aims.

Figure 14 - Participation in the labour force and involvement in social action
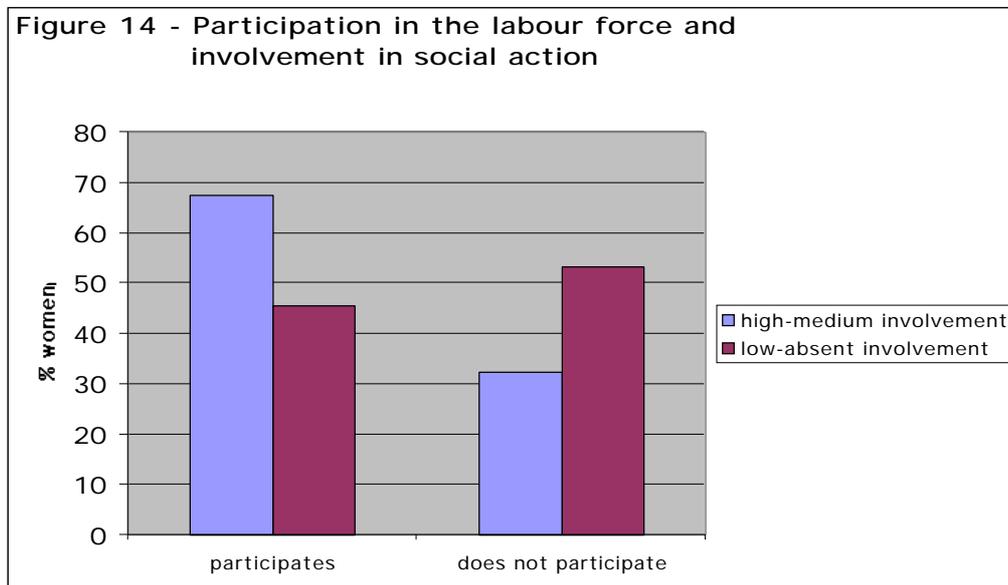
Source: CERFE, 2002

The middle classes of Benguela and Lobito are in very real danger of **impoverishment**, so in theory they are justified for being worried, above all about their own interests and immediate needs.

Despite this, the middle class women seem to be constantly involved in the problems of others (borne out **by the fact that each woman, the groups and microprojects tend to be concerned with subjects other than themselves or their own family**). Above all, the 'others' in this case are not even the family nucleus (as in the traditional model of 'care') or the extended family (as in the model of clan or ethnic solidarity), but people and communities in the most disadvantaged areas of the two municipalities, generally different from those where the women live. This is a new element compared to the stereotype which associates higher education and standard of living in the African middle class with a tendency to simply accumulate without investing in development and without positive effects on the weaker classes.

2.3 Social exclusion and impoverishment: a deterioration factor for women's social action

Up to now it has emerged that a higher educational qualification, having a job, social contacts and relations and access to communications

and other services, all enable a certain part of the female urban middle class to carry out widespread social action. However, it must be kept in mind that women of this same social class are constantly under pressure from duties linked to their daily lives. Perhaps their problems are less dramatic than those faced by women in rural areas or by displaced people, but in any case resolving them requires a great amount of effort and time from the women, reducing their capacity to participate in civic activities.

Therefore it has become important to find out to what extent a process of social exclusion and impoverishment is taking place in the municipalities of Benguela and Lobito, as they could have harmful effects on female social action.

Within the framework of the research, information was gathered by means of interviewing 20 qualified informants (10 in Benguela and 10 in Lobito) about the presence of some social risk factors which, by accumulating, tend to contribute to the process of impoverishment or social exclusion, also and above all among the social classes not yet poor. Based on the estimations whether various indicators for every risk factor were present or not, the following chart was drawn up.

Table 6 - The social exclusion process in Benguela and Lobito

Social risk factors	Benguela	Lobito
• Habitat	1	2
• Health	1	1
• Work	2	2
• Intelligence	1	1
• Gender	1	1
• Family	2	2
• Communication	1	0
• Institutional disorganization	0	0
• Social security	2	2
• Social Exclusion index	0.55	0.59

0 = weak or absent
1 = average presence
2 = strong presence

Source: CERFE, 2001

As the preceding table shows:

a. most of the risk factors (9 out of 11 in Benguela and 8 out of 11 in Lobito) are present in both towns;

b. the most widespread factors are difficulty of access to **work,** the lack of **social security** and risks due to critical elements in the **family** structure;

c. furthermore, Lobito has a very high **habitat** risk (linked to bad housing and environmental conditions) and **intelligence** risk (linked to the fact that the structures for fostering and defending local human resources function poorly). However, these risks are also present in Benguela, even though to a lesser extent;

d. a "public administration" risk was found in Benguela, not noted, on the contrary, in the other town, also because the administrative offices are more concentrated in the capital of the province;

e. the **extent of the social exclusion process** does not seem very different between the two towns and is **notable in both**.

Some further information will be given later, on how the various risk factors obtained are distributed.

Work
The difficulty in finding work is a widespread and strong risk in both municipalities. All the phenomenology taken into consideration (unemployment in general, of young people and long-term, underemployment, employment without trade union protection etc.) is extremely widespread.

Social security
The lack of a social 'safety-net' for weak groups is considered a very strong risk factor in both municipalities. In particular, attention is drawn both to the lack of social assistance and to reception structures for vulnerable subjects, both to kinds of dangerous or unhealthy working conditions and to the lack of insurance cover for workers.

Family
As already said, this is one of the strongest and most widespread risk factors both in Benguela and in Lobito. There are large families and kinds of family break-ups - divided families, single-parent families and a great number of street children - which are one of the most serious problems of the Benguela social reality.

Habitat
The habitat risk factor is average, as already mentioned, in Benguela and very high in Lobito. Informal settlements are very widespread, made up of precarious housing with no water or sanitary services available, in the Lobito municipality, on the outskirts of the municipal administrative centre and in the districts of Egipto Praia, Kanjala, Catumbela and Biopio. These settlements have sprung up also as a consequence of the influx of displaced people from the interior of the province and from other provinces. However, this phenomenon has also struck the outlying districts (*bairros*) of the town of Benguela. The municipal administration of Benguela has reported a further problem: the buildings of the 'established' part of the town are very old. By now 30 years old, they belonged formerly to the State and have seriously deteriorated as regards water, electric power and sanitary services, above all due to the chronic absence of maintenance which in turn is due to the difficult financial situation both of the public administration and of the residents. There is a problem of open rubbish dumps in both towns with serious consequences for public health.

Intelligence
This is quite a widespread risk factor, a little higher in Lobito than in Benguela. In both municipalities there are problems like insufficient buildings, school rooms and didactic equipment, the total lack of cultural infrastructures, widespread illiteracy and school abandonment, but also the lack of opportunity for professional training and employment for people with high educational qualifications.

Health
The health risk factor is at an average level both in Lobito and in Benguela. Some of the most widespread illnesses related to this factor (above all malaria) are due to the unhealthy environment, to alcoholism and (even if more controversially and not fully ascertained) sexually transmissible illnesses and AIDS.

Crime
This risk factor has an average level in both municipalities and appears in problems like the lack of street lighting, an inadequate police force when faced with cases of banditry and street crime, whose extent, however, has not reached a level of social alarm equal to the one, for example, in Luanda.

Gender
This risk factor is at an average level in both municipalities, and appears, among other ways, through the spread of domestic violence and prostitution.

Public administration
The level of this risk factor is reported as only average in Benguela. The shortcomings regard the preparation, considered not to be quite up to standard, of public officials in contact with the public, and the inadequacy of emergency services.

Communication
As telephones, television sets and postal services are available, this risk factor is not reported as particularly widespread, even though on this point the considerations made regarding territorial factors related to difficulties, above all in using the telephone service, hold good.

Gender differences
Most of the risk factors concern both women and men. However, some gender differences have been noted regarding some of these factors. Sometimes the difference emerges in the way some risk factors arise, for example, the 'health risk': **women** are apparently more seriously affected by illnesses like those **sexually transmissible**, according to some key informants (not according to all, indeed), and are also obviously more affected **by the lack of mother-child services**. On the other hand, it seems that **men** are more subject to illnesses and kinds of disturbance like **alcoholism, mental illnesses** (it's enough to think of traumas connected to participation in fighting) and **drug addiction.**

Furthermore, as various national surveys[12] have pointed out, **women** are seemingly more damaged by some constitutive elements of two of the most widespread risk factors in the province. These are the 'intelligence risk' (for example, they are apparently more subject to **illiteracy or to the problem of school abandonment**) and the "family risk" (for example, they apparently suffer more from the strain typical of **single-parent families and families separated by divorce**).
On the contrary, it's worth noting that **men** seem more exposed to risk factors like **institutional disorganization,** above all they seem more involved in **political conflicts** and different kinds of **political**

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[12] INE (GMCVP) - UNICEF, *Indagine sugli indicatori multipli* (MICS), 1997.

discrimination (neither of which was found to be very common in either town). This is an important point for the purposes of this research, as the fact that women are less exposed to these factors is certainly in their favour in the context of national pacification and reconciliation.

Suggestions for the empowerment of women and female groups in conflict and post-conflict situations

As mentioned before (see institutional framework), one of the aims of the project was to work out guidelines for the support of women and women's organizations within the peace process and post-conflict reconstruction. Such support is essential if the social action of women is going to have an impact.

Following are some suggestions in this regard, keeping in mind both the policies and strategies that are largely in use at an international level and the specific local problems that emerged from the research and the project.

1. ADOPTING POLICIES TO ENHANCE FEMALE HUMAN RESOURCES

A first suggestion, as a preliminary step, regards the opportunity to adopt some of the intervention methods that widely characterize policies for cooperation and development and policies for gender equality.

· **Raising awareness**

The first thing to do is to create a greater, more widespread awareness of what the women actually do in societies experiencing conflicts. This is also a way to revise eventual stereotypes and restore a more faithful image of women's social action. This study is to be considered only an initial step in that direction.

· **Creation of an enabling environment**

The second step regards the creation of an enabling environment to the empowerment of women within the society. It is a well known fact that unless a great deal of effort has been made to sensitize both men and women in a society, as well as the institutional actors, making them more conscious of the importance of the role played by women, it is very difficult to realize undertakings that will give them greater recognition.

- **Local capacity building**

Very often it is not sufficient to increase awareness if the subjects involved aren't capable of putting into effect what they have promised. This was particularly apparent in the present research, above all for collective female actors who showed considerable awareness and sensitiveness about a whole series of issues linked to reconstruction and conflict resolution, but were not always able to convert their ideas into effectively viable projects. The third step, therefore, regards the capacity building of single women, women leaders, groups of women and, lastly, institutional actors who will be called upon to enhance the social action of women.

- **Empowerment**

Particularly where groups are concerned, the capacity building of women leaders has to be part of a wider empowerment policy aimed at removing other recurring difficulties such as, the lack of financial resources, weak institutions, poor management and insufficient transparency, the lack of internal democracy, inadequate association ground rules, the deficient quality of partnerships.

The above-mentioned deficiencies can be overcome in part through benchmarking (comparing good practices implemented in similar contexts); building networks; tutoring by other organizations or federations of organizations; the spreading of technological innovations; facilitating international contacts; creation of reference centres; creation of lines for funding in international organizations and the public administration and the setting up of funds for micro-projects; facilitating access to financial institutions. Both single women and leaders of mixed organizations can take advantage of these actions (for example, training and learning about new technologies, access to funds, consulting and reference centres, international contacts).

- **Networking**

Having regular contacts with other women whose situations are similar but in a different context, whether at the country, subregional (SADC), continental or global level, is an opportunity that in Angola has yet to be fully developed, particularly as regards the involvement of women and groups in the provinces and not just in the capital. Hopefully, once better travelling conditions for people have been achieved, there can be more contacts among women.

· **Partnership**

For some years there has been more and more talk in Angola about creating partnerships between the government and civil society. Without any doubt the practical realization is still in the embrio stage. What is needed is a better understanding of what a partnership is and how it differs from simply delegating the implementation of policies to non-governmental organizations, in a context which is still characterized by a predominance of public actors over civil society ones. Furthermore, care must be taken to see that the involvement of women doesn't reproduce once again a model of female submission. In this regard, the international organizations should make their wealth of experience available to help the institutional subjects in Angola create authentic and effective partnerships that will be useful for the reconstruction of the country.

· **Institutional reforms**

Lastly, but without dwelling on the matter, surely some thought should be given to actions at the political, juridical and administrative levels aimed at integrating women's social action and the gender perspective into the public administration reforms, specifically regarding policies to decentralize and deconcentrate public services and those regarding the development of democracy locally.

2. FIGHTING SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND IMPOVERISHMENT

In a situation such as Angola's, it is impossible to think of a policy to enhance women's social action without, at the same time, considering ways to fight social exclusion and impoverishment which affect the women and the population at large. More specifically, it is necessary to reduce those factors that are widespread in the two municipalities and those are: the difficulty in finding jobs and having an income, the lack of adequate social security networks, the crisis of the family structure, insufficient defense of and promotion of local human resources, and poor housing conditions and access to services.

Some priority objectives in this sphere might be the following:

a. **Increasing job opportunities for both women and men, also by promoting the creation of new enterprises**
Policies aimed at the creation of new enterprises are still in the embrio stage in Angola. Most definitely, the women have the same potential as men as is evident in the dynamic way women entrepreneurs get together. Yet, there are still very few women who manage to start and keep an enterprise going. Therefore, a systematic policy is needed in this sphere that would have bearing on the factors that make entrepreneurship difficult or easy, like for example, access to credit lines.

b. **Strengthening the social security networks and structures to support families and the women**
Despite the end of the war, for a long time yet Angola will be facing emergency situations with regards to poverty, abandonment of widows, orfans and other vulnerable groups by society, the breaking up of families and violence in the home, the problem of street children. The burden of these situations seems to fall on the female population which, unless it is supported by adequate services and networks, tends to shoulder all of the load and consequences of these risk factors.

c. **Improving the habitat by means of adequate measures to upgrade the cities and recover the environment, especially in the suburban areas**
A healthy environment is indispensable to defeat, or at least reduce, endemic diseases that seriously affect the everyday lives of the Angolans. Malaria, for example, keeps people away from work for too many days and even causes a number of deaths, intestinal diseases and acute respiratory problems are particularly dangerous for children and adults, as well.

d. **Increasing and improving access to elementary, middle and high school and improving professional training in relation to the job opportunities available**
First of all, the country has to defeat illiteracy, which involves women in particular, because without a minimum literacy level it is impossible to actively participate in the social and economic life of the nation. Secondly, the quality of the educational system has to be improved and schools endowed with facilities. Thirdly, the middle

and high schools, as well as vocational schools, have to improve their teaching programmes so that they will correspond to actual job opportunities.

3. GREATER ACCESS FOR WOMEN TO THE TERRITORIAL FACTORS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

A second precondition for enhancing women's social action is the existence in the area of the services and facilities needed to perform economic and social activities, and making sure that women have access to them. In this regard, the following objectives can be determined:

a. **Improving public transport**
   The present lack of public transport systems means that a lot of time is wasted and money spent, in particular by women who have very little access to private transport, to travel back and forth between the two cities of Lobito-Benguela and Benguela and the capital. The women have little time and money to spare and what little they have should be used more profitably from the social and economic point of view.

b. **Improving telecommunications, the use of new technologies and access to the Internet**
   In this province the telecommunications network is being further developed as proved by the spreading of the Internet and the recent activation of a cell phone service. However, much needs to be done to improve the service and widen access to information technologies and the Internet, especially among the women.

c. **Improving access to information and cultural and professional updating services** (distribution of newspapers, libraries, cinema, theatres, etc)
   The lack of cultural facilities is very noticeable and serious considering the importance of Benguela in Angola. Regular access to daily papers, having libraries with updated bibliographies, the realization of cultural events are elements that could strengthen the local social capital, supporting the natural propensity of women to further knowledge.

d. Modernizing the banking system and increasing access to credit
Despite the large number of banks there are circumstances which limit the services they offer. In part, this is due to peculiarities in the Angolan financial system, for example, the double currency. Access to credit lines is especially difficult and this affects female entrepreneurship.

e. Creating and strengthening centers of assistance for community organizations, NGOs and small enterprises
Another element that would strengthen the social and female capital is represented by a more effective technical assistance and better training for the less expert organizations by national and international agencies that have the expertise in how to work out social and economic projects, the economic and financial management of NGOs and enterprises, the management of human resources, the juridical aspects and governance of associations.

4. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PROJECT

Having said all of this and before entering into the final recommendations, it is useful to review what seem to be the main lessons learned from this project. Particularly significant, in this regard, was the realization of the training course for women leaders and the ensuing experimentation which involved the setting up of a reference centre for women.

a. Middle-class professional women in cities constitute a highly potential area
The project made it possible to identify, as beneficiaries, a group made up of middle-class professional women (teachers, professional women in the health-sector, public officials, small entrepreneurs, etc.), who rarely receive much attention because they don't represent high-level political leadership, the object of programmes to strengthen governance, nor do they belong to the poverty-stricken classes who receive emergency aid. The women in this group, which includes the founding leaders of small and medium local organizations, risk remaining unknown to international cooperation entities, or at best, being occasionally involved in projects that aim to satisfy beneficiaries of other types.

b. **While the gender approach spreads, there is still a lot of room for positive actions directed towards women only**
In Angola and the rest of the world there is a lot of talk, and rightly so, about passing from an approach that just concerns women to one that centers around gender relationships. In a context where positive actions focussed on women are few and far between, the gender approach risks being misunderstood as not wanting to give them some modest privileges, like access to certain forms of intervention (training, for example), in presence of an imbalance. Even in our project, the fact that only women were selected as beneficiaries initially created some doubts in the local environment. However, once it was understood that the organizations – even mixed ones – and the community could receive the benefits indirectly, the whole thing was readily accepted.

c. **Women make good use of the opportunities they are offered**
Even within its limited resources, the project demonstrated that women tend to make good use of the rare opportunities offered them in terms of training and the possibility to experience concrete actions. Attendance at the course was regular and assiduous. The distance teaching required a lot of effort on their part – between one cycle and another the participants had to call meetings with their own organizations, do interviews, draft notes and reports, and so on, all of which they did religiously. Also, the course did not have any incentives, like income support for participation in training activities. This fact shows that the women leaders think knowledge is a reward in itself, and the impact is immediate.

d. **The empowerment of women comes through their concern with problems that aren't just related to women**
From the very beginning the project discouraged the women to be preoccupied only with matters that regarded them as a separate group. One of the criteria given for the organization of micro-projects was precisely the presence of both women and men among the beneficiaries. This rule, which might appear to be misleading with respect to the aims of the project, turned out to strengthen female leadership within the organizations, especially the mixed ones, where some participants saw their positions improve thanks to the possibility of being able to draw up projects that corresponded to the *mission* of their own group, even without necessarily aiming to promote the role of women. On the contrary, sometimes within the organizations there is the tendency to limit the responsibilities of

women to areas considered female or gender related, excluding them from more central and strategic issues.

e. **It is possible to find a balance between empowerment of individual women and the strengthening of organizations**
    The action research tried to always keep in mind the two sides of women's action and that is, on the one hand, the collective action of organized women and on the other, the individual social action of women who are not organized - and the horizontal action that arises from informal relations among women in mixed organizations. Both the training course and subsequent experimentation, therefore, tried to reinforce capacities of participants as single individuals, but at the same time always keep a channel of communication with the organizations open, through them. It must be said that the women easily moved within these two dimensions, individual and collective, taking the course as a chance for personal enrichment, yet, without neglecting the mandate received from their association or church of belonging.

f. **Contact among women coming from different backgrounds (political, religious, family, professional, associative, etc.) is a source of enrichment**
    The project made it possible to successfully test not only living together, but also the satisfaction of cooperation among women of all ages with different and opposing political ideas, or belonging to different religious denominations. This heterogeneity , which could have created problems within a training course, in actual fact, turned out to be an enriching experience because it increased the opportunities for exchanging information and helping one another. Of course, this wouldn't have been possible if there hadn't been a horizontal female identity that enabled participants to see themselves as members of the same gender despite the differences.

g. **The women were slow in getting things done, but their committment was unwavering**
    At some periods during the project the activities seemed to progress very slowly, both for organizational reasons and because the beneficiaries needed time to "digest" the content of what they had learned and have enough time to put it into practice. This was particularly true during the distance-learning periods between cycles and the subsequent setting up of the reference centre. It's hard to say whether this is a typical characteristic of these women, but , in any

case, this apparent slowness did not have any consequences on their committment or the final result. Those participants who had initially expressed some doubts about the lengthy duration of the course (8 months) changed their minds when they understood the importance of this kind of formative experience, with alternating class and practical activities, in order to have a significant impact on their personal, associative and professional lives.

h. Women leaders are overburdened with collective undertakings on national issues; they need to be able to spend more time on local initiatives

During the project, a lot of attention was paid to the activities that the women's organizations carry out in the province. It became obvious that the women's organizations are involved in a large number of committments at the national level and for some these tend to be considered their most important activities. Without wanting to detract anything from these important events which have undoubtedly contributed to the formation of a progressive female social action, as the research project demonstrated, it is felt that more time should be devoted to innovation and experimenting with basic initiatives at the local level, ones that are not part of national initiatives or policies.

i. Women leaders have their communication channels which can be enhanced – but sometimes they aren't enough

One aspect of the project that was greatly appreciated was the use of communication networks that put women leaders from the province in contact with each other and with people who could bring their knowledge and significant experiences in the fields of development, the fight against social exclusion, and conflict resolution. This communication circuit allowed them to identify and quickly contact people for initiatives and activities. However, local expertise has its limits, so in some cases, to overcome this problem , contacts were necessary with people operating at the national or international level. As can be seen from the survey, in this sphere, the social capital of groups and single women shows some shortcomings. The reason lies, in part, with the unfavourable logistic conditions making it difficult for people and information to circulate, and, in part, with the fact that very few know foreign languages which prevents interaction with communities that don't speak Portuguese.

j. Over-emphasis on the logical framework in the planning of projects may limit the women's creativity
In the area of cooperation for development, a lot of importance is given to planning, respecting the targets, consistence between means and ends, result indicators, and so on, in order to avoid the errors and inefficiencies of the past. Today, anyone interested in intervention of a social nature and, above all, in receiving international funding, has to have a managerial culture and project-cycle expertise. Even the smallest women's groups know this and it was noted that there is a surprising general knowledge of typical management and project-cycle language among them. The risk of all this, verified during the project, is that there is a tendency to lose the value of other approaches and other ways of reasoning that may be more creative and perhaps less noticeably - but more substantially - rational. We do not wish to indulge in easily created stereotypes, but these "different" approaches are also a strength of the "female" point of view (which, of course, can be adopted by men as well as women). The institutions and international donors who want to sustain the women in their reconstruction activity, should be careful not to use the "logical framework" as if it were a cage and should not consider the consistence between means and ends as the only criterium by which to evaluate women's social and collective action.

5. "DECALOGUE" FOR SUPPORTING WOMEN'S SOCIAL ACTION

The following recommendations regarding the empowerment of women and women's groups in conflict resolution and consensus building are derived from the afore-mentioned series of lessons and from what was said in paragraphs 2 and 3 with regards to the fight against social exclusion and the promotion of female access to the social capital.

> **Encouraging collaboration among women of different territorial, ethnic, political and religious origin as a pilot experience in national reconciliation**

In societies that have emerged from civil war and, sometimes even in the midst of hostilities, we need to put our stakes on women's ability to set the conditions for the eventual peace, in advance, by encouraging contacts, the exchange of experiences and collaboration among women - in

particular grassroots leaders - belonging to opposite sides in the war, whether it be due to political, ethnic, religious, racial, or other divisions. Besides being symbolically valuable, experiences of this kind can function as an experiment in different forms of dialogue and living together peacefully, even if at the beginning they just involve activities of a social nature carried out together.

Sustaining women's collective and social action to end conflicts and encourage social cohesion

When promoting conflict resolution, and more in general development, it is advisable to sustain and encourage both the collective action of groups and associations of women and the social action carried out by ordinary women, as well as action that is horizontal with respect to the formal and informal networks of women leaders of mixed organizations. In order to do so, the development projects should give more space to NGOs and grassroots women's organizations. They should also ensure adequate participation of women not just as beneficiaries, but as active participants in the management committees and other institutional bodies set up for the implementation of projects.

Promoting female leadership with transformational characteristics

It isn't sufficient just to sustain the women who belong to women's organizations. It is also fundamental that women gain better positions in the leadership of mixed organizations, whether private, public or civil society. This will not only guarantee that they have equal access to decisional positions, but will also encourage the spreading of a different kind of leadership, either transformational or, at least, more democratic, which women seem to prefer. This could be particularly important in the process of democratic development in Angola as well as in other countries.

Sustaining the middle-class women in the cities and also those of the rural areas with the aim of overall development

While governments, international organizations, NGOs and other subjects involved in development policies tend to give priority to raising the standards of living of poverty-stricken rural women, they tend to forget the city and middle-class women whose action and leadership capacities need to be reinforced. This is even more desirable given the fact that middle class women, although undergoing impoverishment, are not just "selfishly" pursuing their own interests, but, on the contrary, are already engaged in multiple actions to help the poorer population – female or not.

Widening the opportunities for women to learn and be trained

As provided for in the Beijing platform, women should have greater access to learning and training, not only at the primary levels, but also at the middle and high school levels, as well as professional training, so as to enhance their propensity to divulge and further extend the knowledge they have. The government authorities concerned with education and donors from the international community should shoulder this responsibility together with the women themselves.

Giving women access to new technologies

Within the efforts being made to reduce the digital divide between north and south, greater attention should be focussed on giving the female population access to the new information technologies and telecommunications. The difficulties existing in the post-war reconstruction and the pressing emergencies in other fields should not be considered an excuse for delays in this area, nor should they perpetrate unbalanced gender situations. All women, and in particular older women, should be encouraged to learn how to use the computer and the Internet by means of permanent training courses, even set up as proper cooperation projects.

Integrating conflict resolution into projects not centered around this subject

According to the women and based on their intuition and experience, the subject of conflict resolution and creation of social cohesion should no longer be treated as specialistic but across-the-board, so as to mainstream it into all of the projects that are carried out in any society that has just come out of a civil war. In particular, there should be a number of projects, even micro-projects, to enhance the link between recovery of the environment and urban upgrading, functional literacy, civic education and human rights and the prevention of conflicts between different groups within a population.

Removing the legislative obstacles and simplifying the bureaucracy for setting up organizations and enterprises

In order to facilitate economic and social action on the part of women (but not only) in the national reconstruction, steps must be taken to simplify the bureaucracy involved in setting up associations and enterprises, both from the legislative point of view and regarding the mechanisms used for the practical implementation of existing laws and regulations. The women and their organizations, considering their particular respect for the law, might be taken into consideration as reliable partners in the verification and monitoring of the institutional and organizational reforms planned by the governments.

Giving women an active role in mass communications

The press, radio, TV, journalists' associations and all other entities in this sector should give women greater access to the means of social communication and allow them to play a more active role, particularly because they are assiduous users. This should lead to assigning much more space to female social and collective action on the media through suitable forms of partnerships between women and professional operators in the communications sector. It should also lead to a proper, non-stereotype representation of women on TV and radio programmes and in print. It should also entail that more women would be present on editorial and management staff.

Encouraging the presence of women in bodies set up for the reconstruction and reconciliation of the nation

Lastly, as many international campaigns have solicited, it is essential to guarantee the presence of a qualified female leadership in all stages of post-war reconstruction, from the negotiation of the peace treaties to the realization of the conditions needed to achieve a lasting and stable peace, which includes national reconciliation. This should happen, not only to guarantee a balanced representation of the female gender in advisory and decision-making organizations, but also to make sure that the potentialities and experiences of women in conflict resolution are fully enhanced to the benefit of the whole community.

6. FUTURE PROSPECTS

In the new scenario that is opening up in Angola with the prospect of a final peace settlement, it is now possible to identify certain areas where women's social action could be encouraged and enhanced.

a. **Women as facilitators in the reception of internally displaced persons and in projects aimed at their resettlement in their areas of origin**
For quite awhile, there has been a sizable inflow of displaced persons *(deslocados)* from the areas controlled by Savimbi's UNITA and this is a testing ground for local communities' reception capacities. The women are already mobilized to facilitate integration with residents and in the coming months, their role will become ever more decisive. Furthermore, in the future the delicate process of people returning to their home communities will have to be managed, stressing the importance of again taking up productive activities in the war-damaged areas. Also in this sphere, an alliance between the displaced women and women residents could turn out to be fundamental.

b. **Women as the link between the community and the demobilized soldiers**
Once again, as was the case after the agreements of Bicesse and Lusaka, there is the problem of re-integrating demobilized soldiers. Unless it is well handled, this process risks causing deviance, anomie

and loss of identity, social unrest and problems of public order. Experiments conducted in previous programmes (for example, the UNDP-funded SECOR programme) have shown that one way of helping demobilized soldiers to re-integrate is to do so through the women in their families. The latter, in fact, are less affected by a sense of having lost their roles because they are no longer fighting, and are more inclined to come out into the open. Creating a bridge between the community women and the women whose families have former combatants, can, therefore, be a winning strategy for an effective social re-integration of this group of beneficiaries.

c. **Women as an influential actor in decentralizing the public administration and promoting partnerships between the State and civil society**
For some time there has been an ongoing debate on the prospects of decentralizing the public administration. The aim is to bring the citizens and the government closer together thus to give a new impulse to democracy and development in local areas. In this context, different forms of partnerships between government institutions and civil society will become more and more important. They will have to be less occasional and more substantial. The outlook, therefore, is for women's organizations and women to acquire a more influential role which could also reflect, among other things, on the determination of budgetary priorities at the local level. In this context, women could focus more attention on human resources and human capital, health, training, investments in intangible assets which are necessary for development, all of which they seem to support, today.

d. **A women's project of urban upgrading and health promotion**
One of the greatest challenges the local institutions find themselves facing in the province of Benguela, as in other urban areas, is creating healthy living conditions in the urban settlements, particularly in suburban areas. Hopefully, in the future, the women, who have already shown that a lot can be done in this field, will be able to go from occasionally working on a clean-up campaign or health education to leading more complex projects regarding urban recovery in partnership with the government and public health professionals.

e. **Female leadership to improve higher education**
Some programmes have already been put into effect to increase the opportunities for a university education in the cities of Benguela and Lobito. Without any doubt, women could help in leading this process

towards quality objectives, thus providing an extra chance for a larger number of women to obtain first-rate qualifications in sectors other than education. Furthermore, women could contribute to strengthening the link between university and territory, so that knowledge would be placed at the disposal of local development.

f. Women and economic growth: a new socially responsible entrepreneurship
Like others, this sector is witnessing an increase in the number of initiatives in the province to train new entrepreneurs and more and more women are taking part in them. In the future, women will be able to contribute not only to an increase in the number of small and medium enterprises, but will also make sure that they practice social and environmental responsibility by promoting, for example, the introduction of social and educational services that have been non-existent up to now, the employment of people belonging to vulnerable groups, the use of technologies and industrial processes that respect the environment and the workers' health.