



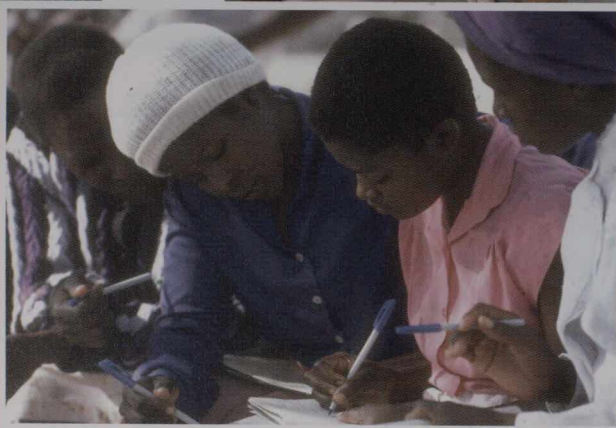
Members of the Kangemi Women Empowerment Centre in Nairobi, Kenya, dance and sing to express to municipal officials the need to provide their community with garbage collection.

Photo: ACIDI/CIDA: Pierre St. Jacques



A bakery owner in Accra, Ghana, trains nine girls between the ages of 15 and 22 in how to run a bakery business. This project is part of the Pilot Urban Poverty Partnership Program designed to help improve the living standards of the urban poor, particularly women, through skills development and training.

Photo: ACIDI/CIDA: David Barbour



Women participate in an AIDS information session run by the Southern Africa AIDS Training Program and the Canadian Public Health Association, with the support of CIDA. Local volunteers are given AIDS information, and trained in home care skills and counselling.

She worked with the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, a new position based in Togo. It was set up by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, an arm of the Organization of African Unity (as of July 2002 called the African Union). Ms. Joseph is drawing on her experience to help complete her doctorate.

"There was a lot of travelling, and it was very tiring, but it was one of the best experiences of my life," she says. "I have absolutely no regrets."

One of her most vivid experiences occurred during a human rights conference in Nigeria. For three days, she listened to the testimony of widows who had lost everything when their husbands died.

"Most of these women were accused of killing their husbands," she says. "Many were imprisoned. A woman's in-laws could take the car, the house and the children."

A new protocol to protect women's rights in Africa may be on the table at the African Union's July 2002 meetings, and Ms. Joseph is hopeful that it will finally be endorsed. "It will fill a judicial void," she says. "Once it's approved, a process needs to happen to make women more aware of their rights. I think it's already happening.

The new generation of African women is starting to speak up."

Hélène Dion, who recently retired as a social work professor, spent about a month in Senegal on behalf of the Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO). She helped a local NGO called DEVSOL prepare an organizational profile, a document that will improve its chances of attracting international support.

About a year ago, DEVSOL began a program to combat the exploitation of young girls aged 10 to 15 who abandon their education in the villages to work as domestics in the cities. The pay is low, and in some cases girls work 18 hours a day. Moreover, employers often sexually abuse the girls.

"It's a terrible dilemma for poor families," says Ms. Dion. "On the one hand, they need the money. On the other, they know the risks, especially the mothers who may have gone through the same experience."

DEVSOL is developing income-generating projects in four villages that aim to break this cycle of exploitation. Ultimately, if families can increase their income, girls can stay in school.