

Fundação Cuidar o Futuro

PART II

women and decision-making

PART II: WOMEN AND DECISION-MAKING

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PART II: WOMEN AND DECISION-MAKING

1. INTRODUCTION

What seem to be the most important decisions in the world - deciding on international trade tariffs, deciding what will be today's newspaper headlines, deciding how governments will be run and who will run them, or even deciding what crop will be grown where and who will receive education and how - are overwhelmingly made by men. Women do make decisions too, of course, such as deciding what to have for supper tonight, deciding when and how to wash and dress their children, perhaps even deciding to get training as a nurse, schoolteacher, secretary or hairdresser. On the whole, however, these decisions seem to be "less important" than the former, or at least have less overall impact.

The examples are almost endless, and apply to nearly all countries in the world: company directors, newspaper editors, judges, members of governments, teaching staff in higher education establishments, engineers, scientists, mathematicians, lawyers, and any high-level position, are all predominantly male, with the power which goes with such jobs.

To be sure, the past decade has seen the glimmerings of change - a woman prime minister here and there, a handful of women scientists, members of governments, lawyers and professors. The effect is to make women more acceptable, to be in public view as capable, trained people. But this barely has an effect on the majority of women, who are still confronted with enormous obstacles.

One of the major obstacles which women have to confront is that of simply being overlooked, or not properly accounted for. In a world which is predominantly male in decision-making terms, it is easy to see how women have been overlooked. The results of non-women-oriented decisions, however, are fairly devastating, for women and consequently for the world as a whole. The concerns of militarists in the arms race as against those of women who give birth and nurture life, provide one important example of this. On a more practical level, development programmes which have ignored women's concerns, have left them impoverished:

In the Gujarat State of India, women of the poorer castes used to graze the buffalo, milk them, market the butter in nearby towns and retain the skimmed milk for their families' diet. Now their marketing activity has largely been displaced and the dairies run by men. The meagre independent earnings they used to receive have in some cases nearly disappeared (there are very few women employed

by the dairies), the family no longer has the nutritional benefits of butter milk, cash is needed to buy the milk (or is foregone if whole milk is retained), and no alternative employment or income is available. In Kaira district, where the milk producers are women, they form only 10% of the cooperatives' membership and thereby do not receive a fair share of the payments. ^{1/}

Government planning elsewhere can be equally non-women-oriented:

In a large city of a European country, a woman-run lying-in hospital is threatened with closing, target of budgetary "cut-backs". The hospital's closing will spell an end to woman-delivered, low-technology obstetrical and gynecological care. Indeed, for many women - especially the area's Asian women - it will mean an end to ante-natal care altogether as the hospital to which women will be referred is distant and not easily accessible, as well as being unable to provide the female health personnel required by women whose religion does not permit them to be examined by male doctors.

It seems vital, therefore, to bring into decision-making positions the people whose concerns are affected by this state of affairs: women. It must be stressed that the mere presence of women (especially only a few women) is not sufficient to ensure women-oriented decisions. The approach of both women and men in all positions must take into account the crucial contribution of all women to maintaining the economy.

^{1/} *Rural Development and Women in Asia*, (Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 1982, p.2).

2. WOMEN HOLD UP THE SKY: THE PROBLEM

In all societies of the world, women have a function of central importance: childbearing. Childbearing almost always means that women are associated with child-rearing and the responsibilities of the home. This is true whatever the size and type of the family, which may range from the extended family to the nuclear one, from polygamy to collective or female-headed households.

In some cases the family is seen as primary, and the woman's needs are taken care of by the man - father, brother or husband - on whom she depends. In this case the woman will be totally dependent on a man, both morally and economically. In female-headed families (which reach 40 or 50% in some Caribbean and Central American countries) women are not dependent on men, but then they must assume the entire economic responsibility of parenthood and household, as well as the physical and moral ones.

Whatever the family structure, women have the responsibilities of both child-rearing and housework. Just to elaborate briefly, these include: cleaning, getting food, preparing and cooking it, washing up, making and mending clothes, cleaning the children, educating children into society, caring for sick children and adults, providing love and warmth, and often money, for everyone, even in times of unemployment and ill-health. The enormity of these tasks, not to mention the skills involved, has been so downplayed that the importance of these tasks and skills are frequently glossed over even by women, let alone men.

In traditional pre-industrial societies, the work of keeping the house and bringing up the children was regarded as "stewardship" and contributing to the survival of the community as a whole. Men, women and children alike had their contribution to make, and this was not measured in the kind of "economic" terms we think of today.

Industrialization in countries of the West (and elsewhere) has had the effect of "privatizing" all these domestic tasks. They became invisible, because they were hidden away inside the home, while the "work" (in economic terms) was carried out in public places such as factories and mills.



Gradually, the notion of "work" came to mean "remunerated work". Because housework did not fit into the prevailing notions of work, it mysteriously became not work at all. The result of this has been that "women's work" has become downgraded and even despised, if not ignored, because invisible, and the status of women has correspondingly declined. It has been said that the more closely work resembles housework, the less it has the status of work. Cleaning is a clear example of this, and domestic workers (servants) are notoriously the lowest paid and overworked people.

Economic crises resulting in unemployment, famine, war, migration, separation and ill-health, mean that women have to find paid employment to support themselves and their dependents. This they do alongside their domestic work. They frequently join what is called the "informal sector" which means they work intermittently or on an irregular basis, frequently from their own homes. They may do sewing, basket-making, domestic work, petty production, and cooking. Sometimes they have to resort to prostitution. By their nature, these jobs are "secondary", "irregular", "marginal" and even seen as earning "pin-money", in spite of the fact that whole families may depend on the earnings.

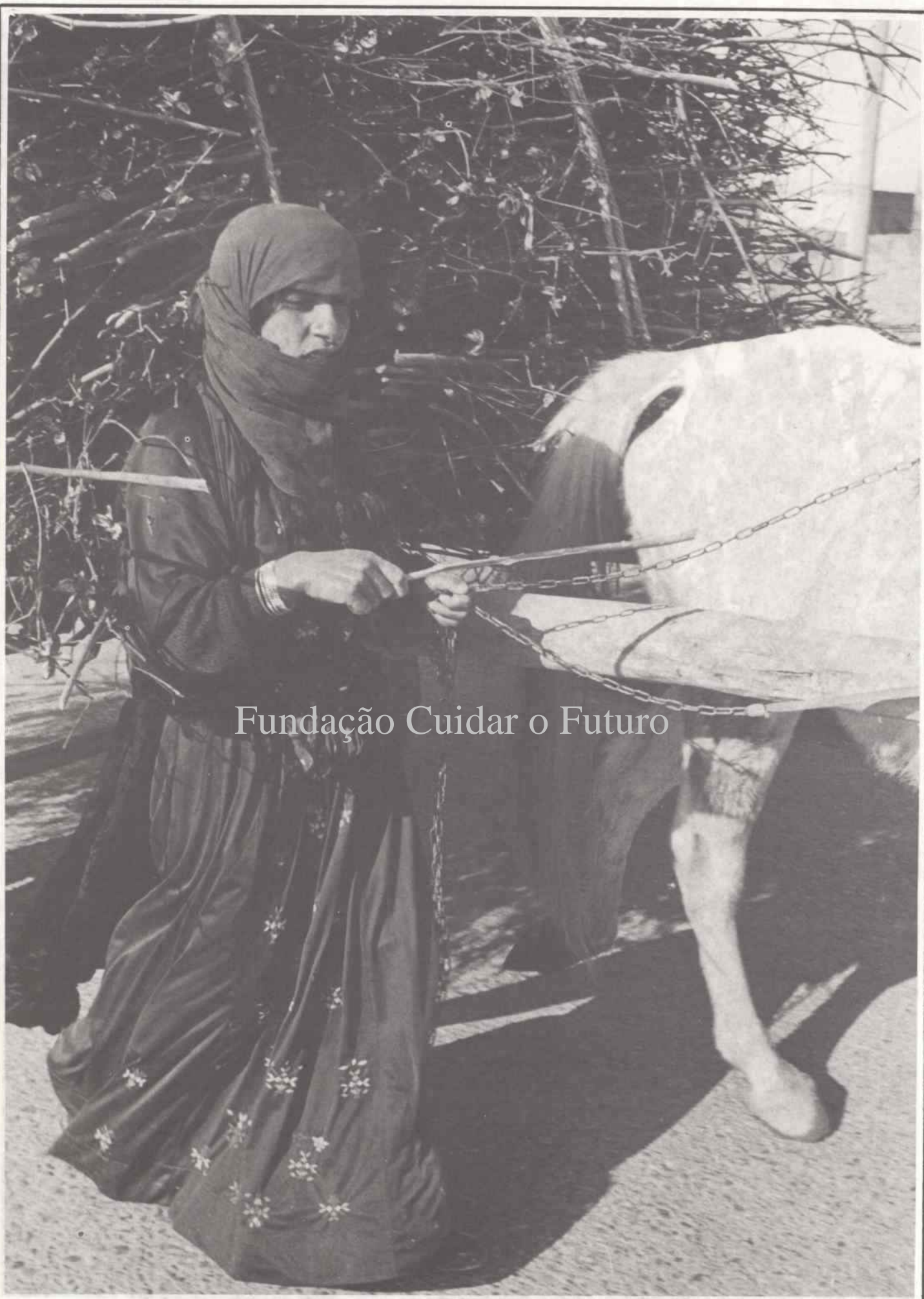
Women also work in agriculture (see Part III) and industry (Part IV) where they must again confront the double-bind of home and employment responsibilities. Even in the higher paid professions (where, as we know, there are far fewer women than men) women are still confronted with these dual responsibilities, although with a higher income they are more likely to be able to pay for help with domestic and child-rearing duties.

What is essential to emphasize in all this is women's work. Without what women do every day, all day, in all places of the world, the human species would not continue.



A black and white photograph of a person, likely a woman, in a cornfield. She is carrying a large, dark, rounded pot balanced on her head. Her right arm is raised, holding the rim of another large pot. She is looking down and to the right. The background is filled with tall corn plants. The text "Fundação Cuidar o Futuro" is overlaid in the center of the image.

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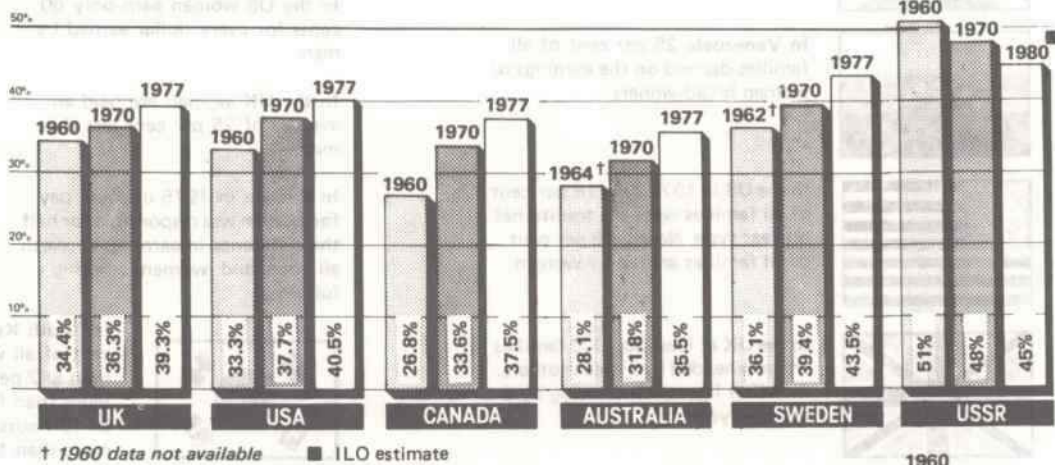
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Women's work - the facts

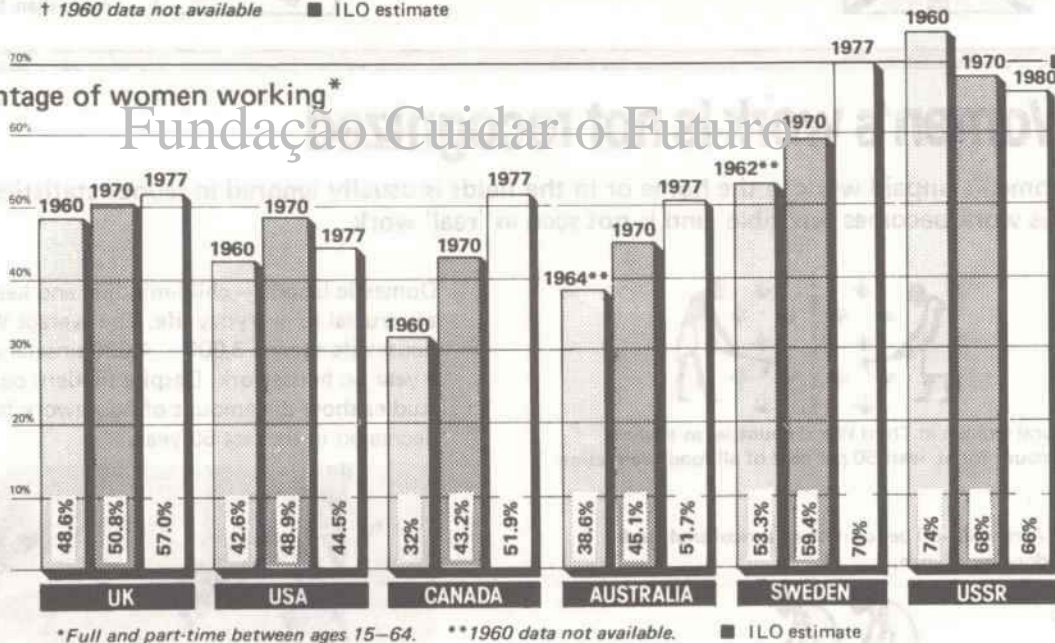
Over the last 30 years women have joined the paid work force in ever increasing numbers. And despite claims to the contrary most women work because they have to — to provide for their families. Still, almost everywhere women are paid less than men for equal work. In addition work in the household continues and women must shoulder most of this burden. The New Internationalist illustrates some of the facts behind women's work.

More women working

Women as percentage of total labour force



Percentage of women working*



THERE HAS been an explosion of women into the labour force since the early 60s in nearly all developed countries. While only four out of ten American women worked outside the home in 1960, by 1977 nearly six out of ten did. In Sweden 70 per cent of all women are salaried workers. As a result the overall picture is slowly changing. Women now comprise around 40 per cent of the total labour force in most Western nations. As women assume a more central place in the workforce traditional barriers to equal pay and a wider choice of jobs will face increasing challenge. For the Third World statistics are less reliable and less complete. However, according to International Labour Office figures the picture is strikingly different. The percentage of women in the 'formal' job market has actually decreased since 1950. The gradual shift from subsistence to cash economy appears to be at the expense of women. For example 32 per cent of African women were considered part of the labour force in 1950, only 24 per cent will qualify in 1980.



Photo: WHO

Women need to work ... but they still get less pay

For a variety of reasons — marital breakdown, death of husband or husband's migration to work — more and more women are now chief provider for themselves and their families.



In the English-speaking Caribbean one-third of all families are headed by women.



In Venezuela 25 per cent of all families depend on the earnings of women breadwinners.



In the US in 1977 only 16 per cent of all families were the traditional nuclear type. Nearly 15 per cent of all families are led by women.



In the UK at least 600,000 families are now headed by single mothers. And that figure is increasing by 6 per cent yearly.



On a world wide average women earn only 40–60 per cent of the income of men.



In the US women earn only 60 cents for every dollar earned by men.

In the UK women are paid an average of 25 per cent less than men.

In Canada in 1975 unequal pay for women was responsible for half the difference in earnings between all men and women working full-time.



In South Korea in 1977 80 per cent of all workers making less than \$42 per month were women. More than half of them worked 8–10 hours a day and one-third more than 15 hours a day.

Women's work is not recognized

Women's unpaid work in the home or in the fields is usually ignored in labour statistics. As a result this work becomes 'invisible' and is not seen as 'real' work.



Rural women in Third World countries as a whole account for at least 50 per cent of all food production.

In Africa 60–80 per cent of all agricultural work is done by women.



In the Himalayan region 70 per cent of agricultural work is done by women.



Domestic labour — child-minding and keeping house are crucial to everyday life. The average Western housewife spends 3,000 – 4,000 unsalaried hours a year on housework. Despite modern conveniences, studies show the amount of housework has not decreased in the last 50 years.



Photo : Sally Greenhill

Sources — ILO Yearbooks of Labour Statistics.
OECD Labour Force Statistics.

UN State of the World's Women Report 1979
Housewife by Anne Oakley.

3. OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

This non-recognition of the importance of household work and child-rearing together with the loss of power and prerogatives which accompanies it, is one of the major problems behind women's access to decision-making power.

There are no easy solutions. One researcher suggests that "only when private, domestic work becomes socially valued public work; only when production, consumption, child-rearing and economic decision-making all take place in a single sphere, will women become the full equals of men." ^{1/}

Clearly a major step forward would be for "women's work" to become partly "men's work" and vice-versa. When men become true partners in the domestic responsibilities, then housework will be given the importance it should have within society.

There are other factors which hinder women from developing the competence (or from demonstrating their competence) to participate effectively in decision-making processes. Many of these factors interact to reinforce traditional social attitudes towards women, as incompetent or inappropriate participants in decision-making. These areas are precisely ones where positive action can and has been taken. Below, we outline the factors and possible actions.

(a) EDUCATION

Formal education

In terms of accessibility and content, formal education discriminates against many sections of society, including the rural masses, the lower classes, and above all, women and girls.

An estimated 60% of the world's illiterates are women. Women and girls are less likely to enter school in the first place, and more likely to drop out because of social and economic pressures, including marriage and pregnancy.

^{1/} Michelle Zimbalis Rosaldo & Louise Lamphere, eds. *Women, Culture and Society*. Stanford University Press, 1974. p.3.



In the developing world, women do not have equal access to formal education at any level from primary school on. Girls attend school from one-half to one-tenth as frequently as males of similar ages. In both developing and industrial countries, females are under-represented in vocational and technical educational programmes. Moreover, girls are usually enrolled at the non-supervisory worker training level, rather than at the managerial technician one; consequently, they are trapped in low-skilled jobs and are not candidates for advanced training for positions requiring higher levels of education and expertise.

Access to schooling is just the beginning - drop out rates and educator expectations concerning both performance and subject interests also represent problems for female students. The drop out rates are usually three to four times as high for girls as for boys. Girls are the first to be asked to leave school if there is a financial squeeze in the family. They usually achieve lower grades than boys as well. In most cultures, they are not spared their household chores because of school attendance; they are usually physically tired. Teachers expect them to achieve less than boys and they then internalize this expectation and do indeed perform below capacity. Finally, most girls are channeled into liberal arts, commercial and clerical skills courses and discouraged from enrolling in courses in hard sciences or industrial training. This tracking of women away from the better-paying, decision-making-level jobs is reinforced by the portrayal of women in school textbooks at all levels of the education system as wives and mothers or occupying subordinate positions in employment.

As one moves up the education ladder, female enrollments decrease. In one Asian country, for example, females comprise 49% of primary enrollments but, by post-secondary level, females are only 25% of enrollments. Conversely, male enrollments move from 51% at the primary school level to 75% of post-secondary enrollments. This represents not just a loss of educational opportunity for women. The university is often the place where critical development decisions are made. University students are tapped as researchers, field assistants and teaching assistants in the development and execution of in-country research projects. Females who dropped out after primary school have lost twice: first, the opportunity to acquire sophisticated cognitive skills, and second, the opportunity to expand their employment and social options as well as to provide a woman's perspective on development.



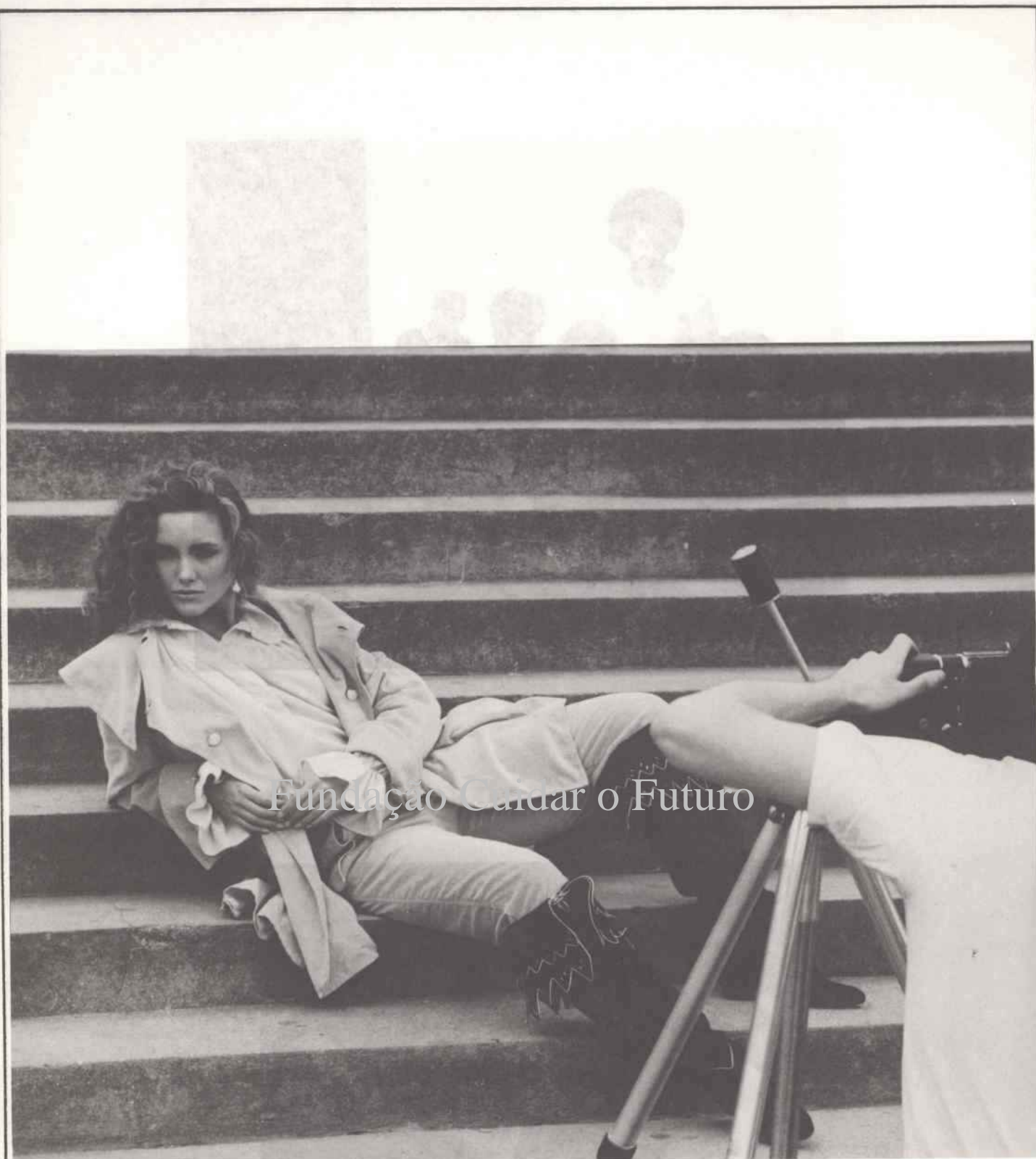


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- Some solutions: Recent efforts

There have been a number of recent efforts to alter this situation. Attempts have been made to increase enrollments of school age girls. There have been changes in textbooks and other written materials to present examples of women in non-stereotypic roles. In addition, there are increasing numbers of courses - even degrees - in women's studies being offered. Women's studies courses typically examine such subjects as women's writing, women's role in history, or women and health: women's lives and the world from women's point of view.

- Non-formal education

Non-formal education - which includes all organized efforts to help people learn outside the formal education system - arose out of the need to compensate for the inability or failure of formal education systems to reach the majority of the people. Since women have been discriminated against in the formal education system, one would have hoped that the non-formal programmes for women would help to correct this imbalance. But they have, for the most part, helped to strengthen the social oppression and marginalization of women.

Because of the male-bias of decision-makers, planners have seen women as playing a supportive and subordinate role in social and economic development. Consequently, women are offered education in so-called "female" occupations such as cooking, sewing, and childcare - skills which, while useful, do not empower women to gain real control over their lives. Thus non-formal education has served, with rare exception, to further exacerbate existing inequalities of opportunities and access for women. Women are tracked into home-oriented training courses which do not offer them competitive market economy job skills, while men learn market economy skills and enjoy attendant higher incomes and earning power. Perhaps the most flagrant example occurs in rural agricultural training programmes to which women's meager access in no way reflects the overwhelming percentage of time they spend in agricultural labour. (See Part III on Women and Food.)

- Some solutions: Women-oriented initiatives

The majority of women-oriented educational initiatives have been located in the non-formal sector of education. In many countries now there are literacy programmes aimed

at girls and women, often using the approach of Paulo Freire where course contents are determined by the needs and interests of the participants. The "free universities" of some countries consciously offer women courses such as auto mechanics, carpentry, accounting, cattle-raising, and more which break out of the stereotypic female mould and which are important and useful skills for women to know.

More widespread are the self-help groups - groups of women in both industrial and developing countries who come together to learn about their bodies, how they function, and how to keep them healthy. Similarly, there are neighbourhood discussion groups, frequently initiated by an outsider but continued after she has left, who meet to talk about issues touching their lives.

Informal education

All of an individual's life is a process of learning. In the course of everyday living, in relationships with members of one's family and society, we acquire the values, attitudes and norms of our culture and society. Religion, the family and community and the media can be identified as the chief agents of informal education. Of these, media will be discussed in a separate section.

Religion has been and continues to be used to justify demands of women and the definition of women as inferior. Prevailing interpretations of world religions command women to bear children, look after the needs of the family, obey the wishes of men - whether fathers, husbands, or brothers. Although the role of wife and mother is one meriting much respect, in reality, a woman's reproductive capacity - indeed her body itself - is regarded with suspicion and disgust, and women are often not permitted to decide for themselves whether or whom they will marry.

The family and community provide the environment within which socialization occurs. It is here that a woman internalizes social and religious values and attitudes. It is here too where from babyhood on she learns an entire set of sex-stereotyped behaviours ranging from dress and language to personality characteristics (emotional, timid, passive, etc.). She learns as well that the superior characteristics are male ones and that the more important activities are male activities.

● Some solutions: Non-sexist child-rearing

Some parents have now begun to make conscious attempts to avoid such gender based socialization. Instead they seek to encourage a development of their children based on character and personality traits which vary according to the individual, and which they affirm as equally appropriate in girls or boys. Equally important is for children to see men dealing with domestic chores such as laundry, cleaning and child care. Some countries have enacted legislation such as paternity leave, which permits men to take on a fairer share of child-care responsibility and to develop closer relationships with their children.

(b) MEDIA 1/

The mass media as represented by the press, television, radio and films have become one of the most powerful instruments for the transmission of culture in the West, and increasingly in developing countries as well. The role of the media is crucial in the development of attitudes and values and in the perpetuation of social aspirations.

It is not an exaggeration to say that there are no neutral media. Editorial decisions on what constitutes "news" and how information shall be presented reflect the interests and values of the dominant culture, which is western to a large extent (given that most news and information in the world is owned and controlled by western transnational news agencies), and which is male-dominated everywhere.

Research into the role and participation of women in the media have shown again and again certain structures and practices of the media which present basic problems for women.

First, the media are responsible for perpetuating stereotypes of women. Women are presented either as housewives, or as sex objects and commodities. Particularly dangerous and offensive is the increasing use of images of women as the willing objects of male (sexual) violence. Women as presented by the media rarely work outside the home and never in "male" jobs. Women as presented in the media are either not intelligent or incompetent, or, in an attempt to turn business world's advantage, are presented as exaggeratedly so.

1/ Material for descriptions of Media and Education was taken from *Women in Development: a resource guide for organizing and action*, ISIS, 1983 (See General Reading List, Part I).



Second, women are virtually absent from the "important" news of the world. Very little media coverage is given to women's work, achievements, situations, or needs. When women are involved in organizing and action - and especially when they step out of their traditional roles - the media often distort and ridicule. The transnational news agencies have succeeded in portraying the women's movement in the industrial countries as a lunatic fringe of middle-class "bra-burners", and as non-existent in other parts of the world.

Alternating derision with a "curtain of silence" around what women really think or do, and adding this to the stereotypic images of women which are presented, the media clearly attempt to dictate the role women should play.

There are two other important aspects of women and media. One is women's lack of access to the media. While in part this is a reflection of women's economic status since women have limited resources with which to buy television or radio time, or to produce films, it is also a reflection of the extent to which women have been kept out of decision-making level jobs in the media. Research has shown that there are proportionally few women working in the media, and the vast majority of these are in low-paying, less creative jobs.

Finally, it must be noted that the media also withhold, or present partial or falsified, information - information which women need in order to answer questions affecting their daily lives, problems, or needs. Two examples of this are the advertising of infant formula as the best thing a woman can feed her baby, or the selling of certain contraceptives without informing women of potential (or actual) dangerous side effects.

- Some solutions: Women's media

In the face of unresponsive mass media, women have developed their own media networks, locally, nationally, and internationally. In industrial countries the past 15 years have seen an enormous multiplication of journals, newspapers, and newsletters produced by women, for women. In developing countries, too, the number of women-oriented or women-produced publications has mushroomed over the past five years. Women's press agencies like "Fempres" in Chile or "Hersay" in the United States are finding increasing markets. Other media are now also being appropriated by women in different parts of the world:



radio, film, and (especially) video. Training courses for using these media are beginning to be an important target for conscious development agencies.

(c) LAW

Although there are many legal systems in the world, they all have one thing in common - an effect of keeping women in subordinate positions vis-à-vis men.

In many countries, it is true, the national constitutions guarantee equality or forbid discrimination on the basis of sex. Yet even in those countries where this commitment to equality has resulted in the revision of laws oppressive to women, the legal status of women remains a serious obstacle to women's full and equal participation in economic and social life. On the one hand, there is a lack of rigorous enforcement of laws conferring rights on women; on the other, there are still laws which perpetuate the marginalization of women.

Such laws may be seen as depriving women of three crucial advantages: land ownership or proprietary rights to land; inheritance rights to land and other major valuable resources; and full legal status.

Virtual exclusion from land ownership

In many societies women hold rights to land use, while ownership or proprietary rights remain vested in a husband, father, or brother. Since a woman's claims are maintained through her relationship with a male, however, she stands to lose even this lien on land cultivation, should she be widowed or divorced. Furthermore, her contributions to the productivity of the land go unrecognized as property under marriage is not held in joint estate, but is considered the property of the husband alone. This is true even if she is the chief cultivator. Women whose marriages under traditional law have been dissolved by death or divorce are often forced to return to their families, penniless. In one African country, a new law makes joint ownership mandatory, automatically entitling a woman to one-half of the marital estate. However, the marital estate is for the most part under the sole administration of the husband during the marriage.

Often law may not specifically exclude women, but the conditions exacted in fact discriminate against them, since as a group they are prevented from meeting these conditions. For example, while land reform has occurred in many countries as part of an effort to redress social grievances, men rather than women have been its chief beneficiaries. Because individual titles go to heads of households - overwhelmingly men by legal definition - women are effectively excluded. Classified and unpaid family workers, women are turned into second class citizens. Ramifications emerge in their consequent inability to obtain credit or the special privileges awarded to the holders of land reform titles or certificates. Without titles to present as collateral, women are denied access to an important part of rural development schemes - agricultural credit.

This same problem of access holds true with respect to cooperative organizations. Since most of them limit membership to landowners or heads of households - and women qualify as neither - women cannot obtain credit, training, or fertilizer subsidies through collective associations.

Inheritance rights

Inheritance rights (or the lack thereof) contribute to a weaker position in the economic sphere. Land and other major resources such as cattle, camel herds, or fishing boats go to men, while women inherit low-value livestock, kitchen gardens, or personal effects.

Denial of full legal status

The status of legal minor further alienates many women in developing countries from development schemes in both rural and urban areas. Because they cannot enter into contracts for personal services such as farm labour or for the purchase of material goods as production inputs, few formal lending institutions are willing to provide them credit, supplies, or equipment. A woman entrepreneur must then turn to usurers or mortgage her crop in advance to money lenders at disadvantageous rates. ^{1/}

^{1/} Material for this section was drawn from *Legal Status of Rural Women*, FAO, Rome.

Similarly there are laws which prohibit a woman from working without her husband's consent. Regardless of whether a husband willingly gives such consent or otherwise facilitates his wife's access to credit or materials, the legal necessity for him to do so demonstrates, and perpetuates, a woman's dependent status.

There are other aspects of marriage which have the same effect, including:

- laws permitting divorce which differ for men and women, or do not permit women divorce at all. Most notable of course is repudiation where the full extent of divorce proceedings is for the husband to repeat "I divorce thee" three times;
- minimum age laws, meant to ensure consent to marriage (and not incidentally, to lower fertility rates), which are often lower for women than for men;
- consent itself is also an issue as a woman's consent is not always required for her to be married, and indeed even in countries which require her consent, this requirement may be waived for such reasons as "the family fears she may engage in pre-marital sex";
- dowries. Although technically illegal in a number of countries, the dowry system still exists, and in India has given rise to "dowry burnings". Men and their families, dissatisfied with the size of a woman's dowry, arrange for her death, leaving the way clear for another marriage and another dowry.

Yet another reflection of women's status under the law is their lack of control over their childbearing capacities. Numerous countries have laws prohibiting or severely restricting the dissemination of information regarding contraception. Other countries allow the distribution of contraceptives to married couples only. Adolescent women in particular face many difficulties in obtaining such information. Although about two-thirds of the world's population lives in countries where abortion is legally available on request (at least during the earliest stage of pregnancy) for a wide variety of socio-economic or socio-medical reasons, there is a distinction to be made between availability in law and availability in fact. For many women the cost of abortion - often not included in national or private insurances - is prohibitively high. Moreover, in a number of other countries, abortion remains illegal.

In addition to problems of legal access, women also face resistance from men over contraception. Many men believe women would become adulterous if they had access to birth control. In addition, they see pregnancy as a proof of their manhood.

It must be mentioned too that women - especially those in developing countries or poor women in industrial countries - are vulnerable to the opposite problem as well - they have been sterilized or given contraceptives without their knowledge or consent. In either case, it is rarely the women themselves who decide when or how many children they will bear.

- Some solutions: Changing women's legal status

Recent years have witnessed numerous changes in women's legal status. Under pressure from women's groups, more and more legislators and judges are re-writing or re-interpreting law to recognize a woman's economic contribution to the family (in the division of marital property in cases of divorce); recognize rape within marriage; recognize a woman's right to control her fertility through contraception or abortion; or protect a woman from marital violence.

These changes have not come easily, however, and it is only the persistent actions of women and women's groups in drawing attention to discriminatory laws that force these changes to be made.

International networking in this respect is very important. Women in countries where laws on, say, employment or divorce are still restrictive, can gain enormous strength from the support of women in other countries where these laws might recently have been revised.

(d) PAID EMPLOYMENT 1/

Women in paid employment are for the most part restricted to menial, low-paying jobs. Often they do not have the

1/ Issues confronting women in paid employment are treated at length in the "Women in Industry" Part of this kit. Presented here is but a brief overview of issues as they relate to decision-making.

training or education required for higher level, decision-making jobs. Often there are conflicts between paid employment and responsibilities of home and family. Often, too, there is discrimination against women in both hiring and promotion, even when they possess the necessary qualifications.

Regardless of job level, hostile or condescending attitudes of male co-workers, subordinates, or supervisors often pose an additional problem. Such attitudes may take different forms of sexual harrassment, ranging from leers and improper "jokes" to outright sexual blackmail.

An additional obstacle in paid employment is the pressure put on the few women in high positions to conform to male standards. Without the support of their constituencies, people in decision-making positions may find it difficult to risk loss of job, credibility, or further promotion in making women-oriented decisions.

These elements operate in the same manner to limit women's role in trade unions as well.

Nonetheless, women are increasingly active in the trade union movement. In addition to becoming more vocal members of existing unions, women are organizing to form their own unions. One example is SEWA (see Annex) in India, an organization of self-employed women. In the United States, through the organization 9 to 5, office workers are organizing around such issues as sex harrassment, wages, and office health hazards. Other examples abound: from domestic workers in India and Colombia to textile and electronic workers in South-East Asia.



4. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the factors involved in women's limited participation in decision-making processes are several and range from a lack of education and information to discrimination in employment and legal status to women's double work load. Inherent in all of these, however, is the assumption that women perform strictly domestic functions, while it is the men who play the responsible roles in the economic and political life of both family and community. Thus, the marginalization of women lies in the systematic undervaluing of women's work.

At the same time, however, the struggle against women's oppression cannot be separated from the struggles of the poor and the powerless. Many problems of women in developing countries are also problems of dependent economies. What is called for is a new political, social, and economic order - "the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services in the most equitable manner possible, with maximum participation of all people." ^{1/}

Obviously, these kinds of changes cannot be effected from the "top down". They can only come about through a concerted effort by the people concerned - it is they who must decide what must be changed and how. Further, it will be possible to effect these changes only when those involved - in this case, women - operate from a power base of organization and solidarity.

With this in mind, the following section offers some suggestions for areas within which grassroots groups can organize for change.

^{1/} *Women in Development: a resource guide for organizing and action*, ISIS, 1983, p.11.



5. PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

The *World Programme of Action for the UN Decade for Women* makes an overall statement about the importance of women in decision-making: "The ultimate aim of the Decade for Women must be to make women a force which permeates every political decision taken nationally and internationally. Progress will be dependent initially on the attitudes of women themselves, their perception of their needs and potential roles, and their activism in working to change systems and societies to enable women to gain equal say in decision-making." ^{1/} It goes on to suggest numerous strategies aimed at international agencies, funders, regional commissions, and national governments and includes:

- the development of compensatory mechanisms aimed at achieving equality of opportunity in education, employment, and health for women;
- giving women equal rights in areas such as land ownership, access to credit, inheritance, etc. Laws discriminating against women need to be repealed;
- the carrying out of studies on the ways the mass media treat the status of women and women's issues;
- access to family planning information and services;
- programmes to sensitize media personnel on all levels;
- recognition on the part of governments of the importance of the role of women's organizations. Governments should encourage and provide financial and other forms of assistance to such groups;
- facilitating networks.

While giving important impetus and guidelines for programmes to combat women's oppression, groups working on the grassroots level are able to take more direct action. The suggestions below are designed for these groups.

^{1/} See General Reading List in Part I for full reference.

Proposals for Action by Women's and Other Groups on the
Grassroots Level

- Become involved in setting up girls' and women's schools (either formal or non-formal education) or monitor existing programmes in order to ensure a curriculum based on student interest and need, and not on sex-role stereotypes. Attention should be paid that the education offered is one of critical consciousness, and not acceptance of the status quo. Along these lines, a setting should be provided for girls and women to discuss their lives, to reflect on the socialization of women to be passive, to examine the political meaning of social institutions, and to gain the self-confidence necessary for women to begin to act on their concerns.
- Enlist the help of women and men teachers to participate in the above.
- Encourage trade unions to address problems facing women workers such as maternity leave and sexual harrasment. Trade unions can be urged to campaign for the hiring and training of women, as well as for the creation of part-time jobs in upper echelon positions - jobs which would be aimed at men as well as women since men too should be responsible for domestic tasks.
- Monitor the media for portrayals of women - protesting images of women as sex objects or objects of violence, and protesting too the absence of coverage on women's achievements, activities, and issues. The media should accurately portray the vital and multi-faceted role women play in society, and should serve the information needs of women.

Protest serves two purposes: it challenges the media to perform in a responsible manner, and it raises the awareness of people in general who might not otherwise think to examine their assumptions and attitudes toward women.

- Campaign for the hiring of women into decision-making positions in the media and other policy making institutions of society.
- Advocate changes in laws oppressive to women. Groups can also monitor the courts to ensure equitable interpretation of the laws as well as to ferret out problems in the law with respect to women.
- Explore how to facilitate the establishment of cooperatives and collectives - either in the context of income generating projects or in terms of such tasks as food preparation and child care.
- Continue to develop international networks, in order to develop an understanding of the global character of women's oppression, and to discuss ways in which women can support one another across national boundaries, not only in areas where women are affected as women, but also with respect to the economic, political, and social relationship between industrial and developing countries.
- Continue to develop and work within women-run institutions - whether in publishing books or magazines, setting up health care centres, or initiating income-generating cooperatives.

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6. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Are there differences between the educational opportunities offered to girls and those offered to boys in your country?
- What are the images of women presented in the media in your country?
- What is the legal status of women in your country?
 - What kind of property rights do women have in the event of divorce?
 - Can a woman file complaint against her husband for battery? For rape?
 - What are the inheritance rights of women?
 - Do women have the same access to credit as men?
 - What kind of access do women have to fertility control technology?
 - Do women have a right to equal pay?
 - What are a woman's legal options in cases of sexual harrassment? Rape? Incest?
- What are the problems women face in paid employment in your country?
 - Unequal pay? Sexual harrassment? Unsafe working conditions?
- What do, or could, trade unions do?
- What are some of the problems which arise in trying to raise children free of sex-role stereotypes?
- How might a more equitable share of domestic duties be placed on men's shoulders?

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- What are the problems of women who are unmarried or otherwise not a part of an economic unit with men? How do these problems differ from those of married women or women who are to some extent economically dependent on a man? What impact does economic dependence on men have on the status of women?

- What would an economic structure which gives full recognition to the "invisible" work of women look like? How might this structure be developed?

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...the aim of the program is to provide a structure of work on the self-employed and freedom from the program taken up was related directly to the needs of the women.

...the program was designed for the women to be able to work on their own terms and to be able to control their own destiny. The program was designed to be a model for other women's groups.

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WOMEN ORGANIZING

Self-Employed Women's Association, Ahmedabad, India

SEWA, Self-Employed Women's Association, was born in 1972 in Ahmedabad, India as a registered trade union. Although the women of SEWA came from such different occupational groups as headloading, handcart pulling, garment making, vegetable-fruit-eggs vending, used garment dealing, junksmithing, milk producing, they had a number of problems in common: indebtedness, unsure income, non-ownership of the tools of their trade, non-recognition by local authorities as legitimate traders, poor health, constant poverty, and helplessness before exploitation.

The aim of SEWA was to secure legislative protection, security of work for the self-employed, and freedom from exploitation through collective work. The programmes taken up were related directly to the urgent needs of the women.

- Credit was the first priority for the women of SEWA, in order to free themselves of the exploitative hold of the moneylenders and big traders. Since they were extremely poor, and a majority of them illiterate, getting credit from banks was virtually impossible. Thus, the women started their own SEWA bank to act as an intermediary with the commercial banks, and to provide the SEWA members with services such as purchasing raw materials, equipment, and tools. The SEWA bank encourages members to save. It also provides accounting services to individual members and to local women's groups.
- Social security is another programme of SEWA. Under this programme, each SEWA member contributes small sums of money and is provided with minimal coverage under schemes including maternity health care, widowhood and death relief, general health problems, and child care and housing.
- Defence and organizing to overcome discriminatory rules which deny protection to workers in the informal sector is another part of SEWA's work. Through repeated representations, lobbying efforts, protests and demonstrations, SEWA was successful in obtaining for its members the right to occupy the markets and certain

pavements to ply their trade. Although members are still denied licences, they are free from further harassment from police and other authorities if they can identify themselves as SEWA members by wearing a SEWA badge. SEWA also provides legal aid to its members.

- Training. Although 90% of SEWA members are illiterate, the women consider literacy classes a waste of time. A ten-day course for vendors, on the Structure and Behaviour of the Modern Market Economy and run by the Adult Education Centre of the University of Gujarat, however, was a resounding success. The course has been repeated with seven groups and has led to an economic venture, to be started in the near future, to have SEWA present in the whole-sale vegetable market, so as to link the vendors directly with the vegetable growers.

A change in status

There have been other tangible benefits for SEWA members. Wifebeating has declined. A SEWA member commands respect in the family. Recognition of SEWA by banks, university, the press, the government, has raised these women's status in their own eyes and those of their families and neighbours. The Association enables each member to feel more confident to deal with an environment which had battled them earlier, making them feel helpless or overpowered. The Association unleashes the latent energy of the members, bring qualitative changes in their attitudes, behaviour, and perception of their problems.

READING/RESOURCE LIST

ASSIGNMENT CHILDREN / LES CARNETS DE L'ENFANCE:

"The Condition of Women and Children's Well-being"
No.49/50 (Spring 1980). Published by UNICEF, this particular issue contains a number of articles of special interest, including a discussion on women's legal status around the world and reports on several women and development projects.

FILLE OU GARÇON, LA MEME EDUCATION ?

Written by Béatrice Dupont, this study on school programmes at the secondary school level was published by UNESCO in 1980.

ISIS INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN

No.18. A compilation of resources and articles describing how the media form one of the most important tools in the subordination and oppression of women and how the international women's movement is organizing to counter this. Published in 1981, it is available from Isis-WICCE, C.P. 2471, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE. EQUAL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN IN THE 21ST CENTURY. Published by the Women, Public Policy and Development Project of the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota (909 Social Sciences, 267-19th Avenue S., Minneapolis MN 55455 USA), this booklet sets forth the chronology of the two world Conferences for the UN Decade for Women and presents information on what changes women have accomplished on local, national and international levels since the beginning of the Decade.

PEOPLE:

"Women and the Law", Vol.7, No.3, 1980. A broad range of articles covering women's legal status in such diverse countries as Mexico, Sri Lanka, Ivory Coast, and others. Available in English, French, and Spanish from IPPF, 18-20 Lower Regent Street, London SW1 Y4PW England.

POSSIBLE INCONSISTENCIES BETWEEN IMPLICATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE SECOND HALF OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN.

Prepared by the Advancement of Women Branch, Vienna, 1982.

REPORT OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE FOR WOMEN:

"Equality, Development and Peace". United Nations, New York, 1980. Includes the Programme of Action for the Second Half of the United Nations Decade for Women, as well as the resolutions adopted by the Conference.

RIGHTS OF WOMEN, A WORKBOOK OF INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS RELATING TO WOMEN'S ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

Available in English, French and Spanish from the International Women's Tribune Centre (777 UN Plaza, New York N.Y. 10017 USA). Published in 1983.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN IN ASIA

Proceedings and conclusions of the ILO Tripartite Asian Regional Seminar held in India in April of 1981. This monograph discusses the impact of prevailing models of development upon women and concludes that a re-examination of approaches to rural development, taking account of the expressed perceptions of rural women workers, could begin to reverse the pauperization process.

THE MISSING HALF

Published by the FAO in 1975 as part of the United Nations International Women's Year, this publication is an overview of the issues involved in women and development.

WOMAN AND THE MEDIA

The report of an Expert Group Meeting held in Vienna, Austria in November of 1981. Published by the United Nations, New York, 1982.

WOMAN'S WORTH, SEXUAL ECONOMIC AND THE WORLD OF WOMEN

Lisa Leghorn and Katherine Parker, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston and London, 1981. Explores the premise that economic systems are founded upon women's unpaid work. Examines the lives of women around the world: from the USA to South America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia to discover the economic functions of "women's work".

WOMEN AND POWER

The report of a meeting on Women and Power organized by the Ad Hoc Group for Equal Rights for Women at the Vienna International Centre and held in Vienna on International Women's Day, 8 March 1983.

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT, A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR ORGANIZING AND ACTION
Isis, 1983. Includes an overview of issues involved in women and multinationals, rural development, health, communication, education, and prostitution and tourism, as well as resource listings for further reading and groups for action.

WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

Published by UNESCO in 1980, this publication deals with the media process and its relationships to the objective of the promotion of equality of women in society. It examines both the participation of women in the media (access and working conditions) and the images of women in the media.

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