

Proposals for UNESCO's programme
on women in the social sciences

The present Unesco programme on equality of rights for women has been principally concerned with education and with literacy or indirectly through population programmes. Beside this, during and after the International Women's Year the Secretariat cooperated closely with many non-governmental organisations concerned with the rights of women. These activities were important. However, it has become obvious that legal or de facto discrimination against women constitutes a structural social pattern and that therefore important work has to be done in analysing and in identifying the social mechanisms which allocate to women certain social roles assuming that women are disadvantaged in society as a whole. Some of these social mechanisms are legal ones and therefore amenable to change in the law and in the administration of the law. By far the greater number are however informal and are buttressed less by explicit law than by customary "normal" procedures and by "common" knowledge.

It would seem that given this, Unesco, for the same reasons that it developed a programme on race, should develop within the social sciences a coherent programme on the structural reasons for discrimination against women and the requisites for the social change that is necessary if women are to participate fully and equally in the life of society. The arguments for Unesco's doing this are:

- (a) The particular role to be played by Unesco's Sector for Social Sciences and their Applications within the UN system.
- (b) The specific problem faced in assuring non-discrimination in major social institutions: Education, Science, Culture and the Mass Media.
- (c) The experience gained in working on methods of exclusion, classification and dominance in Unesco's social sciences programme on race and ethnicity.

*cl. Edgar
Morin
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*vs. UN Div.
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Fundação Cuidar o Futuro



The following are proposals for research projects, certain of which will be undertaken by Unesco in 1977-78; others are foreseen within the framework of Unesco's Medium-Term Plan (1979-1982).

A. The Socio-economic Structure

(i) A comparative analysis of the de facto and de jure rules of descent, ownership and inheritance in a selected number of countries. Each analysis will include the analysis of identifiable segments of the population: ethnic groups, rural-urban areas, social stratification.

(ii) A series of studies on the sociological determinants for the method of the insertion of women as a segment in the economic life of society. This would include the feminisation of certain sectors of the economy, the shift from work at home to wage labour and at what level, the effect of the introduction of handicrafts in rural areas of a developing economy, the position of women in the semi-subsistence sector of the economy, the use of feminine labour at certain levels of a particular profession e.g., primary school teaching, the purpose, function and changing nature of housework, the retention of under-capitalised sectors of the economy - the use within these of feminine labour.

(iii) In a selected number of countries the analysis of the social mechanisms by which women are selected out for specific roles and for specific categories of labour including housework. This will include an analysis of the school system, reasons for drop-out rates among girls at every level, vocational advice, the articulation of university training with secondary school selection, method of selection for certain professions within the universities, methods of out-of-school training, selectivity for promotions at every level of labour, the structure of professional organisations, the structure of control in the public and the private sector.

B. The Family

(i) A comparative analysis of the structure of power within the family. This will include differential parental decisions as regards the programming

for the future of boys and girls, differing parental expectations, division of labour within the family, differing accents in religious behaviour, obedience, etc., differing expectations as to cultural participation, methods of choosing a marital partner, the economic relations between husband and wife, the allocations of the family budget, types of decisions taken by the husband and by the wife, relations with the community and with the family outside of the nuclear unit.

(ii) Social sanctions and the maintenance of female roles. This will include the social function of gossip, neighbourhood expectations, the function of entertainment and leisure, the effect of consumer advertisements, patterns of religious control, membership in voluntary organisations.

(iii) An analysis of the one parent family including the woman in a matri-focal family e.g., the plantation family of the Americas, patterns of separation, divorce, illegitimacy and remarriage, widowhood and the effect of these on categories of women.

(iv) The definition of, and the social function of femininity in various societies. Language and the allocation of feminine and masculine terms to objects, functions, etc..

C. Stereotypes

(i) A comparative analysis of the use made of real and supposed biological differences between men and women in various societies.

(ii) A series of studies of the feminine press in different countries including women's pages in national newspapers, social announcements, magazines and women's periodicals, radio and television programmes for women. The analysis will include news frameworks, the use of language, content analysis, an investigation of readership audience, the structure of control, methods of distribution.

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All of these proposals have been framed to cover the sociological analysis proper to a Sector of Social Sciences. They represent together a long term programme for which considerable funds would be needed, supplementary to those at present allocated to the programme. The level of analysis would depend on the funds available. While women are disadvantaged the type of exclusion and selectivity if it is to be properly studied would imply the use of complex social sciences to isolate the complications introduced by level of economic development, patterns of technology, social stratification, ethnicity, religion and religiosity, the structure of political power, rural-urban differences, levels of schooling. Obviously it would be impossible to do this for every single Member State. It is however possible, as has been done for the programme on ethnicity and race, to choose areas and key subjects which illustrate the way in which discrimination against women works in various societies. As in the case of the programme on race, this programme could be both relevant to achieving equality of status for women and to evolving a body of social science theory applicable to other situations of social exclusion.

