

PROJECT:

Marketable Skills Training for Female Arts Graduates in Sri Lanka

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MID-PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION . . . . .  | 1  |
| PART I. PHASE I: FROM PLANS TO THEIR IMPLEMENTATION . . . . . | 3  |
| Preliminary Survey of Women Arts Graduates                    |    |
| Follow-Up Survey of Women Arts Graduates                      |    |
| The questionnaire   |    |
| Response rate   |    |
| Data monitoring and tabulation                                |    |
| Preparation of the report                                     |    |
| Case Studies of Women Arts Graduates                          |    |
| Interviews with Potential Employers                           |    |
| English Usage Survey  |    |
| Workshop with Prospective Employers                           |    |
| Conclusions   |    |
| PART II. IMPLICATIONS OF PHASE I RESULTS FOR PHASE II         |    |
| ACTION PROGRAMS . . . . .                                     | 22 |
| APPENDIX A . . . . .  | 26 |
| Schedule for Site Visit                                       |    |
| Partial List of Project Documents Reviewed                    |    |
| APPENDIX B . . . . .  | 31 |
| Sri Lankan Newspaper Article on SLFUW Workshop                |    |

## INTRODUCTION

This report is divided into two parts:

Part I.--An analysis of the extent to which activities undertaken during Phase I of the project (March 1, 1979 through May, 1980) met objectives specified for Phase I in "Proposal for Marketable Skill Training to Increase Employability of Low Income Rural and Urban Young Women in Sri Lanka" (June, 1978) [hereafter cited as Proposal]. Activities planned for this phase included:

1. A preliminary mail questionnaire survey of women who had graduated with a Liberal Arts degree from four campuses of the University of Sri Lanka between the years 1972 and 1977 "to obtain information relating to employment since graduation" (Proposal: 6).

2. A follow-up mail questionnaire survey of a sample of respondents to the preliminary questionnaire "to study factors affecting the employment of women Arts graduates" (Proposal: 6).

3. Case studies of 36 follow-up respondents "to obtain further insights into the problems faced by graduates in finding suitable employment" (Proposal: 7).

4. Personal interviews with 20 public and private sector employers from varying fields of activities "to ascertain the potential for employment of women Liberal Arts graduates" (Proposal: 7).

5. An on-site study of written and oral English usage in a least 10 organizations and government departments as a supplement to an on-going private study of English usage to secure information "vital in planning training courses during Phase II" of the project (Proposal: 7).

6. A workshop with prospective employers (public and private sectors) "to exchange information on survey results and appropriate training skills for young women graduates" (Proposal: Phase I Implementation Schedule).

Part II.--A brief analysis of implications of Phase I results for Phase II action programs outlined in the June, 1978, proposal. As noted in that proposal, the results of Phase I were to provide the basis for "detailed planning for action programs" (Proposal: 7).

These two analyses are based on (1) several working sessions with the Project Chairman, the Project Director, and members of the Project Steering Committee in Colombo, Sri Lanka, between May 13 and May 20, 1980, and (2) careful review of project documents. The schedule for my eight-day site visit and a list of the major documents reviewed are included in Appendix A.

## PART I. PHASE I: FROM PLANS TO THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

My general conclusion is that the ambitious objectives specified for Phase I in the 1978 proposal have been met to a high degree. This is an extraordinary accomplishment in view of the time and resource limitations faced by those responsible for implementing Phase I activities.

### Preliminary Survey of Women Arts Graduates

Data collection, processing, and preliminary analysis for this survey of an estimated 10,000 women Arts graduates were scheduled for completion in April and May of 1979--a very optimistic time schedule. The survey actually required four months to complete and the size of the target population proved to be considerably smaller than the estimate (approximately 5,000 vs. 10,000). Neither of these discrepancies seriously interfered with realization of Phase I objectives although the first contributed to the severe time pressures experienced throughout Phase I and the second occasioned revision in plans for the follow-up survey.

The delay in completion data was due almost entirely to difficulties encountered in securing a reasonably complete list of 1972-77 women graduates. These difficulties are fully described in the Project Director's quarterly report for the period beginning March 1 and ending May 31, 1979. The major obstacle was that "the required information was not available in any single register or unit" (1st Progress Report: 3). As a result, "scrutiny of personal files obtained from the Records rooms of the Universities was necessary, for which process the assistance of staff and officials [who were on vacation throughout April and the first two weeks of May]

was required" (1st Project Report: 3-4). The population listing was therefore completed in late May rather than in April as initially planned--a very modest delay in view of the unanticipated difficulties.

The discrepancy between estimated and actual size of the survey population appears to be due primarily to the fact that the estimate of 10,000 was based on figures for all graduates and not for female graduates only. Procedures used to obtain the population listing were well designed and executed. There is therefore no reason to assume that the list excludes more than a small proportion of the population of interest.

During the last week of May, 1979, questionnaires were mailed to each of the 5,021 Arts graduates listed and a reminder was sent to approximately 1,000 respondents in early June. By the June 15 closing date, 2,977 graduates had responded.

At this point, disparities between the year of graduation as reported by the respondents and as indicated in University records were noted. After seeking clarification from the Universities, the project staff redefined the survey population to include only women Arts graduates who had obtained their degrees between June 1, 1972 and May 31, 1978 (for details, see the final report on the preliminary survey). This redefinition, which reduced the size of the target population from 5,021 to 4,320, was, in my view, entirely appropriate.

Relating the 2,977 responses to the redefined population of 4,320 yields a response rate of 68%--an excellent rate for a mail survey. The response rate for the 1977/78 graduates was 81%; those for less recent graduates ranged from a low of 62% (for 1973/74) to a high of

68% (for 1976/77).

Tabulations of responses to the nine questions included in the questionnaire were completed by August 31, 1979. The final report is now under review by the Project Steering Committee and is scheduled for publication as part of the Phase I report within the next few months.

The report on the survey is thorough and clearly written. Analysis and interpretation of the data are appropriately cautious. Conclusions regarding the gravity of the unemployment and underemployment problem, the impact of the government's special programs on unemployment rates of 1972 through 1976 graduates, and the failure of changes in University curriculum to make graduates employable are well documented. My only reservation relates to the definition of "employed" and "unemployed" used in the analysis. All graduates who had held a permanent job since graduation, regardless of their employment status at the time of the survey, were classified as "employed;" graduates who had not held any job or had held only temporary jobs since graduation were classified as "unemployed." Apparently information on employment history elicited by question 9 of the preliminary questionnaire was too limited to permit classification in terms of employment status at the time of the survey. Ms. Lakshmi Perera, Project Director, and Ms. Thana Shanmugan, the member of the Steering Committee who was most closely involved in analysis of the preliminary survey data, suggest that use of this classification in analysis would have yielded essentially the same conclusions as the analysis based on the ever vs. never employed in a permanent job since graduation. I am convinced that this would indeed be the case and therefore have no reason to question the soundness of conclusions reported.

### Follow-Up Survey of Women Arts Graduates

In the June, 1978, proposal, follow-up questionnaires to secure detailed information about factors affecting the employment of women Arts graduates were scheduled for mailing to a stratified sample of approximately 2,000 of the preliminary survey respondents in July and August, 1979. This plan was based on the assumption that the number of respondents to the preliminary inquiry would be well over 5,000, a reasonable assumption given the estimated size of the target population. As noted above, the size of the preliminary survey population was considerably less than the estimated 10,000; hence, the number of respondents to the survey, despite the very respectable response rate of 69%, was 2,977 rather than the anticipated 5,000 or more. It was therefore decided to mail follow-up questionnaires to all respondents to the first survey. Due to the two-month delay in completing the first inquiry and the fact that printing of the second questionnaire took longer than expected (August 15 to September 26), mailing of the questionnaires commenced in late September and was completed on October 10, 1979.

#### The questionnaire

The follow-up questionnaire, comprising 40 questions (many with subparts), was developed with the assistance of the project's research assistants (themselves Arts graduates) and was pre-tested on a purposively selected sample (stratified by employment status and year of graduation) of 77 of the 2,977 preliminary survey respondents.

The response rate for the pre-test (39%) was quite low--a fact that probably merited closer scrutiny than it received. At this point, however, the very optimistic time schedule set for completion of Phase I activities had clearly become a matter of considerable concern; an additional delay to investigate pre-test results more thoroughly was probably felt to be unjustified.

The format the the final questionnaire is generally clear. There is, however, one unfortunate gap in instructions to respondents. This may be a typographical error which was not caught in proofreading. It is not an obvious error; in fact, I noticed it only after my return from Sri Lanka in the process of searching for an explanation for the very high non-response rates to questions 26 and 27 which relate to job preference and respondents' views on reasons preventing them from getting the kind of work they prefer. These two questions apply to two categories of respondents: (1) those not currently employed and (2) those currently employed who responded yes to question 25 ("Would you change your current job if you had a choice?"). There is no instruction to this effect on the questionnaire. The instruction that seems to relate to these two questions (and to question 28 on acceptance of work in specified circumstances as well) is the note "For those currently employed" which precedes question 24. It seems likely therefore that the fact that some 40% of the unemployed respondents did not answer questions 26 and 27 may be due to this error in questionnaire format. If closer scrutiny of the completed questionnaires suggests that this is the case, revision in the data analysis presented in the draft report of the follow-up survey may

be needed. The high non-response rate to questions 26b through 27b among the currently employed may also be due to this error; it is possible that many of the 366 employed respondents who said they would not change their current job if they had a choice skipped these questions as not applicable to them. The non-response rate for question 28 also merits a close look; if it is high, the possibility that this is due to the same format error should be investigated.

#### Response rate

The overall response rate for the follow-up survey was 47%. This rather low rate is probably due in part to the length of the questionnaire and to the fact that this was the second questionnaire each respondent was asked to complete. It was also due in part to the October 30 cut-off date, just 20 days after the mail out was completed; if the 270 questionnaires returned after this date had been included in the final completion count along with the 1,369 returned by October 30, the response rate would have been 55%. However, extension of the cut-off date beyond October 30 was not considered feasible in view of the late November deadline for completion of data tabulation and analysis set in the proposal's implementation schedule. The pressures imposed on the project staff by this overly-optimistic schedule are clearly evident in the Project Director's third progress report covering the period beginning September 1 and ending November 30, 1979. She notes (3rd Progress Report: 4): "Time available for preparation of questionnaire schedules, translations, data transfer . . . and analysis is grossly inadequate. Additional hands cannot be recruited due to lack of space in the small room available to the project and also budgetary provisions."

Response rates for graduates classified as "unemployed" and "employed" on the basis of their responses to the first questionnaire differed markedly. For the unemployed, it was a respectable 66%; for the employed, it was 39%.

The high rate for the unemployed is encouraging. It suggests that conclusions about characteristics of unemployed women Arts graduates in Sri Lanka and the kinds of action programs likely to be most effective in increasing their employability, based on responses of this segment of the follow-up respondents, are not likely to be distorted greatly by bias due to nonresponse.

The low response rate for the employed is less encouraging. It suggests the need for caution in analysis and interpretation of data relating to characteristics of the employed. It is possible, for example, that graduates dissatisfied with their current jobs are overrepresented among the employed segment of the follow-up respondents if, as seems likely, interest in the study was higher among dissatisfied than among satisfied employees. Unfortunately, data needed to check the validity of this assumption is not readily available.

#### Data monitoring and tabulation

Procedures for data monitoring of the follow-up survey, like those for the preliminary inquiry, were carefully planned and executed. Administrative records are therefore in excellent shape and include both a Master Control Register and index cards for easy reference.

Procedures for data tabulation were also well planned. There is every indication that the original research assistants assigned to the tabulation task were thoroughly trained and that the data

tabulation process was closely supervised throughout.

Tabulation commenced on November 1, 1979. Most of the data tables were finished by the end of February, 1980 -- a commendable accomplishment in view of (a) the loss of several experienced research assistants to permanent jobs, marriage, and illness, (b) difficulties encountered in finding suitable replacements for them, (c) the inadequacy of space available for the complex tabulation task in the small, one-room project office, and (d) the fact that tabulation and analysis of follow-up data was only one of several research activities in process during this four-month period. These problems are noted by the Project Director in her third progress report. Although her remarks are candid and quite strong (see 3rd Progress Report: 2 and 4), they do not convey adequately the extraordinary effort required to maintain high standards in the face of severe limitations of time, staff, space, and financial resources.

#### Preparation of the report

Ms. Thana Shanmugan, research consultant and member of the Project Steering Committee, had primary responsibility for data analysis and preparation of the final report on the follow-up survey. Dr. (Mrs.) Swarna Jayaweera also made major contributions to this effort. Both are experienced researchers and the draft report made available to me during my on-site visit in May is very competent indeed. Preparation of the final report was still in process at the time I left Sri Lanka. Close attention was being given to the analytical difficulties posed by the low response rate for employed graduates, the high nonresponse rate to selected questions, and the profound

impact of the government's special programs on the employment situation of 1972 through 1976 graduates and of the Bachelor of Education degree on the employment rate of 1977 graduates (initially observed in the preliminary survey data). I am confident that the final report, scheduled for publication within the next few months as part of the final report for Phase I, will provide a straightforward and fruitful approach to these difficulties.

Analysis of data on characteristics of the unemployed graduates who responded to the follow-up survey--the data most relevant to development of detailed plans for Phase II action programs--has been completed. It is possible, however, that interpretation of findings relating to unemployed graduates' job preferences, views on obstacles to finding the kind of work they desire, and willingness to accept employment under certain circumstances may need revision if it is determined, as suggested above, that the high rate of nonresponse to questions 26, 27, and 28 which probe these dimensions was due to an error in questionnaire format.

The following characteristics of the 538 unemployed graduates who returned follow-up responses by the October 30 cut-off date were being given careful consideration by members of the Project Steering Committee at the time I left Sri Lanka:

1. An overwhelming majority of these graduates were from the rural sector of Sri Lanka and were children of parents whose educational and occupational status do not reflect even moderately high socio-economic status.

2. Most were economically disadvantaged; 70% reported a total family income of less than 600 rupees per month.

3. Approximately 7 in every 10 of these graduates lack the level of proficiency in English required for clerical and lower-administrative positions in the private sector and for career advancement in the public sector.

4. A still larger proportion lack the technical and vocational skills most in demand in the current job market.

#### Case Studies of Women Arts Graduates

The June, 1978, proposal specified that in-depth case studies, based on unstructured personal interviews, of 36 respondents to the follow-up questionnaire would be completed by the last week in January, 1980. Criteria for selection of these 36 respondents were to be "six factors -- employed, unemployed, rural, urban, Sinhala, Tamil -- plus the criterion that all graduates will be from families whose total income is no more than \$30 [i.e., less than 500 rupees] per month (average family size of five)" (Proposal: 7). It was anticipated that these case studies would provide "further insight into the problems faced by graduates in finding suitable employment" (Proposal: 7).

~~Preparations~~ for the case studies were completed by November 30, 1979. A very detailed questionnaire -- "for reference only when necessary" -- was prepared by the Project Director as a guideline for the five researchers selected to conduct the interviews. Four of these five were research assistants (all Arts graduates) for the mail surveys; the other (assigned to the Jaffna district) was an SLFUW member with prior field experience.

Early in December, the five researchers participated in a brief training period in "role-playing situations, necessary for field interviews based on participant/observation methods of

investigation" (4th Progress Report: 1). Each was then provided with a list of seven follow-up respondents residing in the district to which she had been assigned. These respondents (and alternates) were selected on the following criteria: unemployed/employed, married/unmarried, rural/urban, and ethnic representation. The family income criterion was apparently not considered.

By the end of February, 1980 -- only one month later than the due date set in the implementation schedule --, 35 interviews (7 in each of 5 districts) had been completed and a summary of the researchers' report on the interviews, prepared by the Project Director, had been submitted to members of the Project Steering Committee for their review.

That the delay in delivery of preliminary results was only one month off the designated deadline is extraordinary. My impression is that this was due in very large part to the acumen and extra effort of the Project Director. Recognizing that the time schedule permitted no more than a very brief training period for researchers with limited experience with unstructured, in-depth interviewing, she prepared a detailed "guideline" (in essence, a structured interview schedule) to assist these researchers in completing their case studies. She also provided alternate respondents to replace those on the original list not available for an interview. Finally, she prepared a cogent precis of interviews completed in each district.

The limited time available for the case studies and the strategies designed to cope with this situation had costs. The data from these studies appear to be less "rich" than originally anticipated. Nonetheless, they do provide, as intended, additional

insights into problems faced by graduates. In particular, three problems, suggested by follow-up survey findings as factors meriting consideration in Phase II planning, are compellingly portrayed in the summary of the interviews. They are (1) the straitened financial situation of unemployed graduates, (2) their limited knowledge of the job market and job search strategies, and (3) their preferences for positions traditionally filled by degree recipients and their tendency to reject as unsuitable the kinds of jobs most likely to be available to them in the current job market.

#### Interviews with Potential Employers

Personal interviews with 20 public and private sector employers were scheduled for completion by mid-October, 1979. These interviews were to yield information on types of job skills needed, present strength of employees (males and females) and expansion projections, institutional regulations governing employment of women, policies affecting women employees, and personal opinions regarding employment of women (Proposal: 7).

There was some delay in completing these interviews. In her fourth progress report covering the period beginning December 1, 1979, and ending February 29, 1980, the Project Director notes (page 3):

A few interviews with Employers have been completed by SLFUW senior membership who were assigned this task for impact at high levels. The final report will be completed when all interview reports have been submitted.

By the time of the May, 1980, Workshop, however, all interviews had been conducted and a draft report on findings had been prepared by the Project Director.

This component of Phase I research activities was closely linked to the English Usage Survey. This was an excellent strategy for it furnished more comprehensive information about employment conditions in establishments with present and future potential employment of liberal arts graduates than separate studies would have provided.

Reports on interviews completed in each of the five districts indicate that the objectives of the employer survey were achieved. The SLFUW members established good rapport with many of the employers they interviewed, thereby preparing the way for future cooperation. The interviews also provided information useful for detailed planning of Phase II action programs. In the summary of findings prepared for the May Workshop, the following points are highlighted (Report on Interviews with Employers . . . : Summary of Findings: 7):

1. The Junior Executive Level appears to be the entry point for arts graduates, but with training in special skills and particularly English.
2. Clerical posts in the Government Sector and Semi-Government are open to and largely filled by graduates. But the general consensus is that the status, salary, and . . . job satisfaction . . . [are] not what would be aspired to by a graduate and lead to frustration. These grades are best avoided unless quick promotion is possible.
3. A prerequisite for promotion even in the Government Sector appears to be a knowledge of English -- and training in special skills additionally to a degree.
4. Re-conditioning of graduate aspirations, and job adaptability rank high in the content of training needs of arts graduates.
5. Integrated rural community development schemes offer best hopes for immediate absorption in the Government Sector.

English Usage Survey

In the June, 1978, proposal (page 7), it was anticipated that project researchers would be assigned to (1) analysis of information on English usage available from government studies taken in rural development areas and (2) on-site studies of both written and oral English usage in at least ten organizations and government departments after initial Employer Interviews had been completed. The data assembled by these researchers were to supplement findings from "an on-going private study of the level of English of employed university graduates." A final report on English usage was to be completed by the end of December, 1979.

It is apparent from the Project Director's quarterly progress reports that these plans were modified in the course of the project's first year. During the third quarter (September 1 through November 30, 1979), a decision to extend the on-site study of English usage to include all 20 organizations selected for the potential employers study was made. It was also decided to assign responsibility for both the employer interviews and administration of English usage questionnaires in each of the five districts to senior, professionally qualified members of SLFUW on a remunerative basis. In my view, these modifications were appropriate.

During this same period, a training and orientation workshop for the SLFUW members assigned to the Kandy, Jaffna, Kurunegala, and Matara districts (the Project Director completed the Colombo study) was held (September 26-28). It was apparently very successful. The third quarterly report includes the following description (page 3):

After discussions the Researchers visited selected establishments for trial interviews, accompanied by Miss Wickramasuriya and members of the Steering Committee. This proved to be a very satisfactory arrangement. Apart from their general ability, their easy access to key employers of each region has also promoted personal goodwill and link ups with those establishments for future action programmes as well as committed interest and involvement of those Researchers themselves to the project in general.

A review meeting of the regional researchers was held in Colombo in mid-October. At that meeting, it was decided that each researcher would collect 50 interviews, ranging from 5-10 in each establishment, and that the report on use of English and Employer Study would be in two sections: (a) findings from exploratory interviews with employers and (b) findings from the questionnaires of the content of the actual use of English in selected job categories in these establishments (3rd Progress Report: 3). Questionnaires used in this study had been developed during the second quarter of the project and were patterned after data collection instruments used by Professor Wickramasuriya in her private study of 20 public agencies in Colombo.

By November 30, 1979, findings from the Colombo study and two regional studies had been submitted. Tabulation and analysis of these data and those from the other two regional studies was scheduled for December. By the end of the fourth quarter (December 1, 1979 through February 29, 1980), first draft reports on questionnaire findings had been completed and were under review by Professor Wickramasuria, member of the Steering Committee and in overall charge of the English training component of the project. However, as noted above, interviews with employers were still in progress.

A summary of results of this two-part study was presented at the May Workshop. Highlights from the employer interviews are outlined in the previous section. The major conclusions suggested by the questionnaire data are:

1. Entry at clerical levels in the Public Sector is possible with little English but promotion thereafter would largely depend on mastering adequate English language skills.
2. Entry at clerical levels in the Private Sector requires a better command of English than most unemployed graduates responding to the follow-up survey possess.
3. Executive-level positions in both the Public and Private Sectors require very high levels of all English skills.

At the time of my site visit in May, revision of what appears to me to be a thorough and professional analysis of the questionnaire data was in process. My brief perusal of the draft report suggests that the initial intention to draw substantially on data from Professor Wickramasuria's earlier study and to incorporate information on English usage from government studies in rural development areas had been abandoned.

#### Workshop with Prospective Employers

The Workshop on Unemployment and Underemployment: The Problem of the Woman Arts Graduate, co-sponsored by the Sri Lanka Federation of University Women and the Overseas Education Foundation and held May 8-9, 1980 in Colombo, was clearly successful. During my site visit, it was still receiving widespread press coverage; a case in point is the report on the conference in the May 18 issue of The Sunday Observer (included in Appendix B).

The workshop, in which policy makers, employers, and trainers from the public and private sectors participated ; was viewed as "a sequel to Phase I and a vital preliminary step for Phase III" (from a draft report on the workshop prepared by Ms. Malsiri Dias, page 3). It was designed to enlist public and private support for eliminating obstacles to the employment of women Arts graduates, to establish close linkages with potential employers, and to "exchange information on survey results and appropriate training skills for young graduates" (Proposal: Implementation Schedule for Phase I). Although assessment of the enduring results of the Workshop is impossible at this point, it appeared to me during the site visit that the Workshop had accomplished the objectives it was designed to achieve.

An unanticipated factor contributing to the Workshop's success and to the media coverage it has received was the presence of over 50 unemployed Arts graduates who learned about the meeting through the media. The decision of Workshop coordinators to encourage the graduates' participation in the two-day proceedings was a commendable one. As Dr. (Mrs.) Wimala de Silva, Project Chairman, noted in her closing remarks at the conference, the presence of the women gave "a reality to the discussion and an understanding of their problems as unemployed female liberal arts graduates" (draft report: 5).

The wide media coverage of the Workshop may have negative as well as positive consequences. It is possible that this publicity will encourage the development of unrealistic expectations among employed and unemployed graduates of the project's impact on the unemployment and underemployment problems they face. At the time I left Colombo,

members of the Project Steering Committee were giving careful consideration to this possibility and to ways to avoid its becoming a reality. I am confident that they will develop appropriate strategies to address this potential problem.

### Conclusions

This analysis of Phase I activities points to two major conclusions:

1. Those responsible for implementing the ambitious plans for Phase I had to cope with:

- A much-too-optimistic implementation schedule.
- Inadequate staffing for the range of projects envisioned. For example, provision for an experienced project assistant was made only toward the end of the project's first year. This staffing problem was rendered even more serious by loss of experienced research assistants to permanent jobs at crucial stages of Phase I and by difficulties encountered in locating suitable replacements due to the low remuneration budgeted for these positions.
- Inadequate office space and facilities. For example, the one-room project office was much too small for the complex data tabulations required and was not equipped with a telephone.
- Related to all of the above, a very limited budget. Due to increasing costs of postage, petrol, and other essential goods and services, this problem became particularly critical during later stages of Phase I.

2. Despite the limited resources allocated for Phase I, objectives of Phase I were achieved. Both the research projects and the Workshop have provided, as intended, a sound basis for detailed planning of Phase II action programs. Further, the high standards set for each Phase I project in the original proposal were met. The final report on Phase I, to be published within the next few months, will, I am sure, provide more-than-adequate support

for this assessment.

These accomplishments required considerable personal sacrifice on the part of the Project Chairman, Project Director, and members of the Steering Committee and are a tribute to the dedication and expertise of these individuals. However, to expect the same high level of personal sacrifice throughout Phase II is unreasonable. Phase II plans outlined in the original project proposal should be reviewed very carefully in the light of Phase I experiences. A closer match between activities and resources than that characterizing Phase I is essential to successful completion of Phase II.

## PART II. IMPLICATIONS OF PHASE I RESULTS FOR PHASE II ACTION PROGRAMS

In the June, 1978, proposal (pages 8-10), five major objectives were specified for Phase II:

1. Training women graduates in identified marketable skills, e.g., conversational English, basic management skills, office procedures, general economics.
2. Training women graduates in job adaptation skills.
3. Communicating to prospective employers the specialized training and skills of women and creating public awareness of the need to absorb women in the national economy at all levels.
4. Assisting women graduates in contacting potential employers.
5. Affecting changes in the educational system and the hiring practices of employers.

Results of Phase I research projects and Workshop indicate that achievement of each of these objectives is crucial to resolution of the problems of unemployment and underemployment faced by women Arts graduates in Sri Lanka. However, they also suggest that activities related to objectives 1, 2, and 4 outlined in the proposal may be too ambitious in view of resources available for their implementation and may not meet the needs of unemployed graduates and their potential employers identified in Phase I as effectively as other approaches.

In the 1978 proposal (pages 8-9), it was suggested that activities related to objectives 1, 2, and 4 might include:

1. Regularly scheduled class and practice sessions in English for approximately 350 graduates at three training centers.
2. Regularly scheduled classes providing training in job-related skills for these graduates.

3. A variety of activities--short courses, field trips, and seminars involving students, teachers and members of government service ministries as well as management organizations--aimed at providing these graduates with job adaptability skills.

Field trips to a variety of work establishments plus provision of part-time employment counselling services at each of the three training sites to assist the 350 graduates in contacting potential employers.

On the basis of Phase I experiences, it seems clear that provision of such services to as many as 350 graduates and close monitoring of their effect would require far more administrative resources than are allocated in the current budget for Phase II. Indeed, the Project Director estimates that these budget allocations would provide adequate administration and monitoring for approximately 50 of the proposed 350 participants.

Equally important, findings from research on unemployed graduates and potential employers as well as contributions of several Workshop participants suggest that the proposed activities may not be as effective as alternative approaches. Specifically, they suggest:

(1) Few unemployed graduates are in a position to support themselves during training; many have not been able to pay off the loan they received from the government to finance their University education. Hence, the assumption, implicit in the 1978 proposal for Phase II, that participants in activities specified under objectives 1, 2, and 4 could support themselves during the projected 40 weeks of training is unrealistic. Provision of loans or stipends to those selected for training may be essential to the success of the program.

(2) The combination of classroom training with placement of each participant in training positions with selected employers may be a more effective approach to providing unemployed Arts graduates with the language, vocational, and job adaptability skills they need and with contacts with potential employers than the proposed activities.

Further, this approach, if carefully planned and monitored, might demonstrate to potential employers, many of whom have a negative image of the ability and motivation of Arts graduates, that their image is erroneous--a possibility relevant to objective 3 as well as objective 4.

(3) Potential employers of women Arts graduates in both the public and private sectors are prepared to cooperate with the SLFUW in providing trainee positions for unemployed graduates selected for participation in a full-service training component of Phase II.

(4) Potential employers and the National Apprenticeship Board, which is charged by the Sri Lanka government with helping unemployed university graduates find employment, are prepared to cooperate with SLFUW in its Phase II efforts to provide opportunities for employment to unemployed graduates not selected for the full-service component of Phase II.

At the time of my departure from Sri Lanka, the Project Steering Committee was considering revisions in Phase II activities in the light of insights gained during Phase I. Under review at that time were the following possibilities:

1. Reaffirmation of the five objectives for Phase II noted in the 1978 proposal and of activities proposed for objectives 3 and 5.
2. Restructuring of activities proposed for objectives 1, 2, and 4 to include placement of participants in trainee positions with employers and provision of loans or stipends to those selected for training.
3. A sharp reduction in the number of unemployed graduates selected for the training program. The number selected would depend on (a) the number of trainee placements available (to be negotiated by members of the Project Steering Committee), (b) funds available for loans or stipends to meet participants' living expenses during training, (c) funds available for providing participants with

training in language, vocational, and job adaptability skills, and (d) resources allocated in the Phase II budget for administrative support and monitoring of the training program.

4. A substantial increase in the number of unemployed graduates who receive assistance in contacting potential employers. All unemployed respondents to the follow-up survey not selected for the training program will be provided with information about job opportunities and job search strategies. This will be accomplished in cooperation with potential employers and the National Apprenticeship Board. A series of regional workshops for the graduates might also be useful.
5. To facilitate evaluation of the full-service training component of Phase II, random selection of an experimental and a control group from the unemployed graduates eligible for training. This approach will not be used if it proves to be inconsistent with the service objectives of Phase II.

I fully support revisions of Phase II action programs along the lines indicated. Although they will require modification of the Phase II time schedule and budget; they follow directly from Phase I results, are clearly consistent with the objectives for Phase II outlined in the 1978 proposal, and, in my view, increase the likelihood that these objectives will be achieved.

APPENDIX A

--Schedule for Site Visit

--Partial List of Project Documents Reviewed

Schedule for Site Visit

|        |                    |  |
|--------|--------------------|--|
| May 13 | 6 a.m.             | Arrival  |
|        | 3-5 p.m.           | Review of project documents  |
|        | 5-7 p.m.           | Working session with Project Chairman (Dr. Wimala de Silva) and Project Director (Ms. Lakshmi Perera)  |
|        | 7-10 p.m.          | Dinner with Ms. Sujatha Jayawardene, SLFUW member  |
| 14     | 9-11:30 a.m.       | Working session with Project Chairman and Project Director   |
|        | 11:30 -<br>2 p.m.  | Lunch with Project Steering Committee members (Dr. Wimala de Silva, Dr. Swarna Jayaweera, Ms. Malsiri Dias, Ms. Thana Shanmugan, Professor Chitra Wickramasuriya) and Project Director |
|        | 2-5 p.m.           | Review of project documents  |
|        | Evening            | Dinner with Ms. Malsiri Dias, member of Steering Committee   |
| 15     | 9 a.m.<br>- noon   | Working session with Project Chairman and Project Director   |
|        | 2:30 -<br>4 p.m.   | Meeting with Ms. Betsy Selbaratnan, SLFUW member and former project assistant  |
|        | Evening            | Dinner with Dr. Wimala de Silva  |
| 16     | 9 a.m.<br>- noon   | Working session with Project Director  |
|        | 1-2 p.m.           | Working lunch with Dr. Jayaweera, Ms. Shanmugan, and Ms. Perera  |
|        | 4-5:30 p.m.        | Gave informal presentation on social research methods, Department of Education, University of Colombo  |
| 17     | 5 a.m.<br>- 8 p.m. | Trip to Kandy with Dr. de Silva, Dr. Jayaweera, and Ms. Perera. Met with Vice-Chancellor of Peradeniya University and also with members of the Kandy branch of SLFUW.                  |

|        |                  |  |
|--------|------------------|--|
| May 18 | 9 a.m.<br>- noon | Prepared memorandum to Project Steering Committee re: revisions of Phase II action programs      |
| 19     | 9 a.m.<br>- noon | Working session with Project Chairman and Project Director                                       |
|        | 1-2 p.m.         | Lunch with Ms. Perera  |
|        | 3-4:30 p.m.      | Gave informal talk on triangulation in social research, Agrarian Research and Training Institute |
|        | 5-6 p.m.         | Meeting with SLFUW Council members   |
| 20     | 9 a.m.<br>- noon | Working session with Project Steering Committee  |
|        | 12:30<br>2 p.m.  | Lunch with Dr. de Silva and Ms. Perera   |
|        | Evening          | Departure  |

Partial List of Project Documents Reviewed

1. Proposal for Marketable Skill Training to Increase Employability of Low Income Rural and Urban Young Women in Sri Lanka. Washington, D.C.: Overseas Education Fund, June, 1978.
2. 1st Progress Report for the period beginning March 1 and ending May 31, 1979.
3. 2nd Progress Report for the period beginning June 1 and ending August 31, 1979.
4. 3rd Progress Report for the period beginning September 1 and ending November 30, 1979.
5. 4th Progress Report for the period beginning December 1, 1979 and ending February 29, 1980.
6. Draft of Chapter 2 ("The Preliminary Survey of Women Arts Graduates") of the final Phase I report.
7. Questionnaire for the preliminary survey.
8. Draft of Chapter 3 ("Follow-Up Survey of the Respondents to the Preliminary Survey of Female Arts Graduates") of the final Phase I report.
9. Questionnaire for the follow-up survey.
10. Draft Report on 35 Case Studies
11. Schedule of Questions for Case Studies
12. Draft of Chapter 5 ("Views of Employers of Public and Private Agencies on the Scope and Potential for Current and Future Employment of Women Arts Graduates") of the final Phase I report.
13. Guideline for Potential Employers' Interviews
14. The Report on the Use of English in the District of Colombo: Findings from Exploratory Interviews
15. Report on the Exploratory Interviews in Selected Establishments in the Kurunegala District
16. Report on the Use of English in the District of Kandy
17. Report on the Exploratory Interviews in Selected Establishments in the Jaffna District

18. Draft report on the English Usage Survey (questionnaire data) -- This I briefly perused in Colombo; I do not have a copy.
19. Workshop Report: Unemployment and Underemployment of the Female Liberal Arts Graduates
20. Printed program for the Workshop.
21. Selected Workshop papers
22. Summary of findings from the study of use of English in employment
23. Summary of findings from interviews with employers

APPENDIX B

--Sri Lankan Newspaper Article on SLFUW Workshop

# The SLFUW Workshop on the 'Problems of Unemployed Arts Graduates'

## Arts Graduates and English

by Rajitha Weerakoon

IT was a poignant moment at last week's Workshop of the Sri Lanka Federation of University Women when an unsophisticated, unemployed woman Arts graduate asked: "After three years of University studies, are we to get only a clerical post?"

She was commenting on a statement that 247 women graduates who had applied to the Job Bank would be given employment soon.

This woman Arts graduate's remark illustrates the tragic plight of our graduates, for it came amidst the two-day talkathon of top bureaucrats, employers, academics and members of the Federation of women graduates, where the consensus was that the Arts graduate could not be fitted into jobs, both in the State as well as Private Sectors.

It is indeed a paradox, that the cream of the country's intelligentsia should be treated as "rejects" in the field of employment. As Dr. Wimala de Silva, Project Chairman of the Workshop, asked: Can we write off the new Arts graduates (the rural graduate, who studied in the national languages and cannot communicate in English) as a 'dead loss' or 'dead weight' in any organisation.....? These girls, suffering many handicaps enter the Universities, after a highly competitive examination. Such an achievement demands intellectual abilities and personality qualities of a high order. The SLFUW survey showed that they held positions of leadership in schools?

"How could they metamorphose during the three-year stay at the University to be labelled as "rejects"?"

"Were there cultural factors, which operated against these Arts graduates?"

The consensus of the Workshop was that women Arts graduates did not possess the necessary skills for employment in the Private Sector and for most jobs in the State Sector.

It was also an immense and burgeoning problem-8000 Arts graduates passing out from the four campuses each year and half of them being women.

The practise of recruiting women Arts graduates as teachers has come to a halt since 1977 because the supply far exceeded the demand.

As Dr. Stanley Kalpage pointed out we are producing many more than our economy can absorb. We cannot have an excess of any particular group. Therefore we must be careful not to have more Arts faculties than we can have.

### Income

According to the first survey of women graduates of the period 1972-1978 conducted by the SLFUW, the family income of parents of half those surveyed were below the subsistence level of Rs. 500 per month. To most of these graduates, their sole sustenance had been the University bank loan (ranging from Rs. 5,880 to Rs. 7000) made available to them, where compounding interest begins to accumulate, from the month they passed out.

How will we be able to repay a conscience-stricken woman who graduated three years ago asked me.

A very relevant fact brought out at the SLFUW Survey was that 92.5 per cent had studied in the Sinhala medium and 6.7 per cent in the Tamil medium.

These statistics bring out the most important fact, stressed during the discus-

sions; lack of a knowledge of English, which is said to be absolutely necessary for employment of graduates especially in the Private Sector.

Possibilities for jobs were vast for the woman Arts graduate in the Private Sector.

According to Mrs. Lakshmi Perera, Project Director of the workshop the views of employers collected by the SLFUW indicated that in the Private Sector, the Arts degree was not generally regarded as a criterion for female ability.

"A degree appears to be a disadvantage. A general avoidance of the arts graduate is evident," she said.

The SLFUW survey besides indicated that the Private Sector preferences were for GCE O Level holders with a good pass in English and also mathematics.

A good command of English, poise, confidence, leadership, sports, team spirit, good schools, personal recommendations, ability to start from the bottom, a dynamic personality, innovative thinking are the other qualities the Private Sector is interested in.

Mr. C. P. de Silva, Chairman and Managing Director Aitken Spence and Co Ltd speaking on behalf of the limited liability companies blandly pointed out that the primary objective of companies was to make profits and not solve unemployment problems. Without profits, they could not survive and that called for efficiency.

In private companies a good command of the English language was essential as 90 per cent of their business was conducted in English. In this context, the aspirations of Arts graduates to be Executives would prove impossible.

He blamed the educationists for the present situation. The Government should go ahead with a crash programme to teach English, he suggested.

But, as Dr. Wimala de Silva pointed out were there cultural factors which operate against the employment of Arts graduates?

A rather candid woman from the audience asked the Private Sector bosses whether it was the so-called lack of skills and knowledge of women graduates or the marked preference for unqualified "rigger-playing types" that made them reject women arts graduates.

(Contd. on P 14)

## The SLFUW Workshop

The Sri Lankan Federation of University Women which has recognised the Problem of Unemployability of Women Arts Graduates, has launched a project assisted by the Overseas Education Fund of the League of Women Voters of America, with the intention of bringing relief to those affected.

Phase I of the Project was confined to collecting relevant data and last week's Workshop was a part of action, stipulated by Phase II of the Project.

Recommendations of the Workshop included the re-

construction of teaching of English in schools and in Universities, which would improve the Arts graduates knowledge of English, oral and written, and enhance her personality.

Emphasis was laid on the importance of Vocational Training Programmes which would be taken up by the Steering Committee of the SLFUW and a committee drawn from the Government and Private Sector.

The Australian High Commission donated Rs. 40,000 to start a fund for the payment of a stipend for trainees. The SLFUW also hopes to make available a Register with jobs available in the Government and the Private Sector required qualifications etc., to the unemployed Arts graduates.

# Women Arts Graduates & English

(Contd. from P. 12)

"My son has passed only the GCE (O) L, but he is employed in the private sector as an Executive. He is given a motor cycle an air-conditioned room and a four-figure salary. He does not have the knowledge of a graduate. His only qualification is playing rugby, which the Private Sector seems to value. This is fostering a kind of western culture where excellence in sports and the English are pre-requisites," she said.

Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Bradman Weerakoon, who chaired the first day's discussions, reminded the Workshop that the Private Sector was a kind of club, where they stuck together as a group having the same interests. A graduate would be treated as an intruder.

Another pointed out that women were discriminated in their advertisements itself calling for jobs. For often the opening sentence was "Wanted an energetic young man ....."

Men were prejudiced against women. Therefore a woman should be on every Selection Board, a member from the audience stressed.

## PUBLIC SECTOR

Dr. Wickrama Weerasooriya, Secretary, Ministry of Plan Implementation who inaugurated the Workshop assured the audience that the Government's policy was not discrimination against women but to integrate women into the development programmes of the country.

But Arts graduates were handicapped because of their lack of knowledge of English. For, employers in the new Government ventures, a working knowledge of English is necessary. For they have to deal with foreign investors.

However, the rural back-

ground was no drawback. For today most Government bureaucrats come from the rural areas he pointed out.

There were jobs for specialised skills for Secretaries, typists, technical assistants ..... so the Arts degree must be treated as a basic education and graduates would have to be trained in vocations for which they have an aptitude.

This, in fact, is one of the targets of the workshop, to set up vocational training Centres and expand programmes of the teaching of English now being carried out by the SLFOU.

The Arts graduates seem to be stumped even in new areas such as the FITZ and certain categories of jobs in the Mahavelli Development Scheme

According to Mr. S. P. Wijenayake, Personnel Manager of GCEC Arts graduates could only be considered in one category of employment in the GCEC: in the supervisory and administrative areas. The other two categories — Senior Executives and Operatives were out. Senior executives were mainly Company Shareholders or Production Managers while operatives were those engaged in the operation of machines. Even in the administrative and clerical areas a good knowledge of English was called for for the commission primarily deals with foreign investors.

In the Mahavelli, too, areas that came into contact with foreign consultants were closed to arts graduates. But once the settlement programmes begin there is scope for rural-based Arts graduates.

Arts graduates would be needed in the pre-settlement work, which includes provision of certain services and for socio-economic surveys and land acquisition. For areas that open up with the settlements there is work for community development, and also in the general administration

and regular services. And these jobs do not require a knowledge of English.

There is besides a wide scope for employment of graduates in tourism — in the airlines and travel agencies, as transport operators, tourist shops, guide lecturers, tour guides, interpreters etc. But here, too the Arts graduates come up against what they call the "Kaduwa" (sword) — the need to know English.

The basic English taught at the Universities, called the Proficiency Course was designed for students to understand their subjects and help them with the reference work needed for studies. This does not help them at employment.

A pertinent question asked by an unemployed graduate was: if English is so important, why is it not made a compulsory subject for the degree. If that was so, students would have made a determined effort to master the language.

The lack of a knowledge of English language is not the only drawback, it appeared. The rural graduate's lack of poise, being inarticulate sitting at the edge of the chair and fidgeting at interviews are held against them and the sophisticated charm of the urban girl with the GCE (O) L is preferred especially in the Private Sector.

While one could debate whether such qualities could be called qualifications rural graduates, too, have their share of faults: lack of enterprise, and inability to take up a challenge.

A good example for them to follow was cited at the workshop:

A woman graduate started work as a room-maid in a tourist hotel. She proved to be good. The Management recognised her qualifications as well as talent, and she is being promoted. Today she receives a salary of over Rs. 1000.