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ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY AT COPENHAGEN

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Information from Documents of the World Conference  
of the United Nations Decade for Women, July 1980

This is a report about the subjects of energy and technology as discussed in the Resolutions and Programme of Action resulting from the Copenhagen Conference. It is a survey of those portions of the documents which characterize the Conference's conclusions of interest to AID; it is not a critical assessment.

This summary contains four sections, each outlining different aspects of the relations between energy/technology and development with regard to women. The majority of material, however, falls into two categories: the influence of energy/technology on time burdens/workloads connected to household drudgery, and the role of technology in the present and potential employment of women.

Generally, issues of energy supplies, distribution, or costs are not addressed directly in the Conference material; energy needs as fuel are mentioned in conjunction with other household requirements such as water, food, sanitation, etc. Technology, on the other hand, is discussed often in terms of transnational corporations as employers, the impact of technology transfer on traditional and new employment of women, and the demand for technical skills and training.

### Development and Women

The argument for inclusion of women in development made by this Conference is not unique. Nevertheless, it does emphasize

the contribution of women which has been ignored because of discrimination and the potential contribution women can make if they are included in planning, projects, and programs.

This argument begins with the point that the issue of women's inequality worldwide is closely related to the problem of underdevelopment, a consequence of "unjust international economic relations." (PA 3).\* The effects of cumulative discrimination which is part of underdevelopment are reflected in the world profile of women. It reveals that women:

- represent 50 percent of the world's adult population
- compose 1/3 of the official labour force
- perform about 2/3 of all working hours activities
- receive only 1/10 of the world income
- own less than 1 percent of world property. (PA 16)

Problems which seriously perpetuate these imbalances include inadequate financial allocation and the lack of skilled personnel. To a considerable extent, this situation is due to general economic problems such as the scarcity of resources and the underutilization of existing resources. Human as well as natural resources are included here.

The economic contribution of rural women to agricultural and national development is being recognized increasingly, although slowly by development plans and policies. Lessons for the future indicate that any measures for women which are isolated

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\*Parenthetical notations indicate the source document and section. For example, PA is the acronym for Programme of Action; 3 denotes the numbered section in the Programme.

from major priorities, strategies and sectors of development cannot be substantially successful. As a matter of urgency, national strategies for the New International Economic Order should integrate women by enabling them to participate in the transfer of technology in order to achieve positive results in the areas of health, employment, and working conditions. National strategies should also provide the most disadvantaged women with increased access to infrastructure, basic services, and appropriate technology to reduce their extremely heavy daily workload. In addition to new skills and job opportunities, these strategies should adopt measures whereby women in rural and urban areas alike could control mechanisms for the transfer of resources from one sector to another. Effective institutional links should be established among the national machinery, national planning units, and national women's organizations. These links would increase technical, financial, and personnel resources, assist in the design of national programs for women in priority sectors, and intensify the implementation of technical cooperation. Through effective programs, women would participate in and benefit from the implementation of recommendations resulting from other major conferences such as those concerned about employment, agrarian reform and rural development, science and technology. Both the interests and potential contributions of women should be protected in development planning to increase productivity and to guard against any adverse result of the transfer of technology and the redeploy-

ment of industry.

Household and Agricultural Activities

The rapid changes and related displacements of women in traditional, basic activities are often combined with a lack of appropriate compensation. Women are usually not integrated with rural development which in turn is not integrated with other types of national development. In particular, the lack of access to land, credit, financial, and technological resources seriously aggravates the negative impact of these rapid changes and displacements. Non-integrated rural development, and the reduced productivity of food and other agricultural commodities are examples of the adverse effects of technology transfer. To reverse this trend, efforts are needed to improve women's wages, their conditions of employment and training, as well as their access to credit, property, and technology. Access to these improvements could be enhanced by grass-roots organizations. These groups would develop self-reliance and provide women with the capabilities necessary to secure resources and power, and to handle commensurate socio-economic and political responsibilities (PA 105).

Technology which will improve the productivity of women while reducing their work time and, therefore, their drudgery is needed in order to guarantee that women workers are real bene-

ficiaries of these improvements. Policies regarding the transfer of technology should ensure a safe working environment for women both at home and in the work place. Necessary skills and appropriate technology to improve subsistence food production and other agricultural activities should be made available to women as they are to men. Access to appropriate technology will enhance the effective contribution of rural women to national development.

Donor countries and recipient governments together can involve local women at the village level in planning and implementation. This would include consultation with women about needed task improvements as well as technological training and employment. Development programs can approach this by providing women with the appropriate technology and related training to improve and promote traditional cottage industries, to create or strengthen the infrastructure necessary to lighten their workload while not causing unemployment. Employment opportunities for rural women in agricultural and non-agricultural jobs will be improved through training and the assurance of adequate material, technical, and financial resources.

The decentralization of certain activities is another method for relieving the current workload of rural women while securing their participation in development. Strengthening regional programs can be particularly beneficial in the areas of economic and technical cooperation and in advisory services, training, and

research. Cooperative movements could be an extremely appropriate method for poor women to develop technological enterprises as well as communitiy self-reliance in energy and other areas of basic needs. Locally available expertise should be fully utilized for project design and implementation as well as high quality results through flexible procedures. These projects could include a focus on alternative technology, covering the research and application of renewable energy.

### Employment

The distribution of tasks and responsibilities among men and women has meant the restriction of women mainly to the domestic sphere. In addition to women being regarded as inferior and unequal in activities outside this sphere, the traditional behaviors and attitudes have usually limited their access to resources and participation in other spheres, notably decision-making and technically related work. The Copenhagen conference's appraisal of progress during the past five years indicates that the situation of women in less developed sectors of many countries has actually worsened. Women in rural and marginal urban areas have suffered the most with particular relation to the conditions of their employment and education (PA 24). Often the employment and health of women has been worsened by the transfer of inappropriate technology. Accompanying this transfer is also labor displacement and the imitation of foreign models of consumption. New discrimi-

natory labor practices have appeared on certain large industries, some operated by transnational corporations. Increases in the urban employment of women have resulted significantly in increased exploitation of cheap, semi-skilled labor by young and unmarried women (PA 25). Recent studies about the impact of international economic problems on employment and working conditions of women indicate adverse effects on wage levels and job stability in relation to men (PA 35).

Recent expansion of capital intensive technology and large-scale agriculture, again often operated by transnational corporations, have had a negative effect on the traditional, basic tertiary activities of women. As already noted, these activities include small-scale urban and semi-rural and agricultural trade, all crucial income-generating activities essential for survival and community self-reliance. The impact on employment of future trends in expert-oriented industries has raised some concern in developing countries. Host country governments often view these enterprises as short-term solutions to problems of job creation. For long-term development, host governments prefer industries that employ highly skilled workers. If these long-term preferences are realized, the employment of women in manufacturing is likely to be a temporary component of industrialization. This issue relates to the planned introduction of appropriate technology or technology which improves productivity while not displacing jobs for women.

Employment and educational opportunities for women reflect the extent to which societies encourage the full potential of women which in turn maximizes indigenous technical and economic resources. Among the variables that one can use to evaluate these opportunities are: if women and men receive equal pay for equal work, and if education and training is equally accessible in rural and urban areas. Training in areas such as science and technology necessarily includes facilities as well as enrollment opportunities. Governments should be encouraged to enroll women in all their technical courses. Special attention should be paid to the industries where the overwhelming majority of employees are female; analyses would cover the creation, development, and changes due to technological patterns.

Furthermore, development involving technology should be planned to ensure that economic returns from work done by women accrue directly to them. The unpaid work done in the households and fields primarily by women should be recognized and reflected in official labor statistics. When transfers of technology occur, measures should be adopted which would:

- avoid labor disruptions
- promote research on appropriate indigenous technology
- develop new programs and appropriate policies to maximize benefits and prevent adverse effects
- institute safety standards.

Additional Remarks

The accumulation and dissemination of information is either a hinderance or an asset for improvements in the opportunities and situations of women. Therefore, information gathered through research and information transmitted by the media should receive careful and serious attention by people concerned with the issues of development for women. Priority should be given to research about those women who have been neglected by social research, namely rural agricultural workers and working women from the poorest sectors of society. Special attention to the role of women in economic development should be drawn by the UN at its special session of the General Assembly on Economic Development as well as in forthcoming UN programs, e.g., Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy, events for the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. The UN can also prepare and distribute statistics on women which would contain current data, time-trend analyses, and international as well as national measures. The UN network should be certain that women's issues are an integral part of international information systems and data banks.

Independent organizations should evaluate how mass communications, including news media and advertising, treat women and women's issues. Although this has been recently done in some developed countries, developing countries have been essentially ignored. As mass communications becomes increasingly widespread

and popular, its influence will grow simultaneously, making it significant to efforts toward change of traditionally discriminatory attitudes. Special work should be done to ensure women are portrayed as self-determining individuals and women's issues reflect women's rights and interests, e.g., sensitivity training for media personnel. The UN radio in particular should include women in its programming on major political, economic and social issues.