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DISCUSSION ABOUT COPENHAGEN
for Report to Congress

by

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A. Comments Based on Copenhagen Events and Documents

1. Technology

Technology is essential to development in that it makes human labor more efficient, allowing for greater productivity and income in less time. A major reason women work two-thirds of all the hours spent working but receive only one-tenth of the income for these hours is the nature of their work which is concentrated in least technologically sophisticated sectors: traditional household support activities and first-phase industries such as textiles and food processing. The theme that women need training to improve their ability to utilize technologies ran throughout both the Programme of Action and discussions at the NGO Forum. No longer should technology be seen as a preserve for men only. If this attitude is maintained, women will continue to be the most exploited laboring group whether in the home or the factory.

Modern Industry

While some participants saw the introduction of modern industrial plants in the less developed countries as an important source of new jobs for women, others saw this only as further exploitation. There was great concern that as rapidly modernizing countries moved into higher technological industries, women in the labor force would become obsolete. Thus, better general education as well as skills training becomes essential in countries at this stage of development. Occupational segregation and limited adjustments to women's double-day responsibilities combine to keep women in the least desirable and lowest paid jobs. More responsive labor unions as well as improved national regulations were seen as strategies for relieving the situation of working women. Yet here again there are disagreements over special benefits such as daycare and maternity leave. To the extent that individual factories must bear the costs, such requirements may reduce female employment. Further, the impact on women employed in the country from which the industry sought to escape high costs was also discussed with great

ambivalence. Women in the US and Europe are losing jobs to women in Asia. Although it is good that high labor standards exist in the more developed countries, and that there are new jobs for women in less developed countries, it is bad that women in the MDCs are losing their jobs and that women in the LDCs are exploited.

Possible interventions in this problem area are few. AID support of trade unions should include emphasis on organizing women and responding to their double-day responsibilities. Education and training for poor working women should be a major priority.

Traditional Household Responsibilities

Technology aimed at reducing the drudgery of traditional household activities has largely been ignored on the grounds that the sooner the economy becomes modern, the better it will be for everyone. Fuel powered grinding mills are meant to replace hand pounding, rural electrification is introduced to replace firewood, or electric pumps to replace hauling of water. However, the perception that traditional activities are free has been ignored. The fact remains: where will money come from to pay for these new technological services? As the cost of energy rises, so will the cost of services, causing reverse development for the marginal people who were only beginning to utilize these technologies.

Mechanical technology to reduce the drudgery of subsistence among the poor is a major need today. Secondly, women should be trained to use and repair these technologies. The technology should be controlled as much as possible by the users through cooperative or village ownership. Alternative energy sources ought to focus on household as well as industrial needs.

New technologies will continue to displace women from traditional income-producing, or income-substituting activities. Alternative income sources should be

part of the planning, as should the training of women to participate in such new income-generating activities.

Technology is needed for development and employment; education is needed if women are to use and benefit from technology. It is difficult to separate the problems; rather they should be integrated into a single development approach which might then use the most appropriate intervention for a given situation but would acknowledge the interrelated nature of the other sectors.

2. Young women

While implicitly young women and girls are included in all programs and resolutions concerning women, the recognition of special needs surfaced for the first time in Resolution 27. The vagueness of the resolution and the first directive to "identify the needs of the new generations of women" indicates an area needing greater attention. Since the UN has declared 1985 as the International Youth Year: Participation, Development and Peace, it is imperative that girls' special needs be incorporated into these debates. This is particularly true if the suggested 1985 women's conference is combined with a youth conference.

National governments are called upon to improve the access of young women to education and to encourage young women to organize for their own rights. Most interesting is the perception that young women can best become aware of their own potential as equal human beings by participating in the decision-making process. Only through organizing articulate educated young women would such participation be possible.

3. Media

Basic to women being ignored and left out of development planning are the perceptions of women's worth, roles, and responsibilities. There has been insufficient emphasis on utilizing the vast power of television, radio, and the printed media to change such stereotypes, particularly in the many developing countries with authoritarian governments. Language nuances, forms of address, clothing, occupations,

all signal respect on status. Funds for indigenous groups to undertake research on media images should be given high priority. Regional meetings should be funded to discuss findings and strategies for addressing change.

B. Comments on NGO activity in the U.S.

Women's organizations throughout the country held special sessions devoted to international and development issues. Major groups such as Church Women United, The League of Women Voters, American Association for University Women, and the United Nations Association sent out background material to their members. The Public Information section of the UN sponsored several state-wide conferences, in Washington State, Iowa, Georgia, and California where women's issues were featured. UNESCO held a long-postponed conference on Mass Media and Women in New York in May. Women's groups also sponsored state conferences in Seattle, Boston, Minneapolis, Kansas City, and Atlanta, which paralleled the agency-sponsored conferences in Denver, Dallas, San Francisco, Philadelphia and New York City. All these conferences reviewed the goals of American women in light of the World Plan of Action and the draft World Programme of Action.

Three coalitions of women's groups met during the year in Washington. The oldest group is the Coalition for Women in Development staffed since 1977 by the Overseas Education Fund of the League of Women Voters. Monthly meetings brought together some fifty women from a wide variety of groups concerned with women, women and men from government agencies, and lobby groups on the Hill. The Washington Inter-Religious Staff Council (WISC) has organized a WISC Task Force on Public Policy Issues Affecting Women. The Sub-Committee on Women and Development sponsored a series of pre-Copenhagen meetings to discuss substantive issues, held a post-Copenhagen de-briefing, and will conduct a panel on Women in Development to discuss Copenhagen issues at the annual legislative Impact Briefing scheduled for March 1981. The Equity Policy Center organized a small group of women going to Copenhagen to discuss how best to work together both there and back in Washington.

Several people volunteered to take notes while at the NGO Forum for a later report. The group continues to meet and discuss how best to support the various goals of Copenhagen, especially the inclusion of women's issues in other UN and national fora.

EPOC also convened an International Symposium on Women and Their Health outside Washington in June. Results of this symposium were presented in panels at the National Council for International Health, AID, PAHO, and the NGO Forum in Copenhagen. WHO has invited EPOC to consult on a planned study concerning women as health providers.

Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press organized a Women's Communication Network which reported via satellite from Copenhagen and taped a variety of interviews now available for use in the U.S. To bring Third World women to the U.S. after Copenhagen, the International Communications Agency (ICA) provided funds to several U.S. groups: the Secretariat for Women in Development of Transcendental and the YWCA. Transcendental sponsored four women who were in the U.S. from July 25 to August 5, 1980. Two women from Indonesia visited West Virginia with the cooperation of Rural American Women (RAW). Their activities there included radio interviews and a reception by Sharon Rockefeller at the Governor's Mansion. The other two women, both from Morocco, visited Hartford, Connecticut, New York City and Washington, D.C. After an unexpected delay, the YWCA will begin its project in 1981. The plan originally called for six to eight participants at Copenhagen from the Third World to spend four days at each of three U.S. locations. Select groups are to host this Copenhagen follow-up which is to be organized according to themes. Two theme teams, each with three of the foreign participants, will tour the three pre-selected locations and finish in Washington with a collective meeting.