

URBAN LIVING GROUP: HIGHLIGHTS OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Impact of development. Does development help or hinder women? The question is a controversial one: under some conditions, social and economic development has appeared to improve the levels of living of women on a broad scale; under other conditions, women have apparently been undermined in their traditional economic activities with little attention being paid to the adverse effects of development on their economic, social and political position in the family and in society.

2. Political rights. Economic and political issues are closely linked; without the full political participation of women at all levels, women cannot become full participants in, or beneficiaries of, social and economic development.

The urban living group strongly reaffirms the principle that women in all nations have the right to free franchise and to be elected and appointed to all levels of political office. The concept of political rights includes not only suffrage and the right to hold office, but also the right to a nationality, to free speech, to free political association, and the right to work. These rights must be firmly established in formal constitutions and in appropriate legislation. Most important, these rights must be fully implemented in practice ~~so that women are~~ ~~able to exercise their political rights~~ so that their actual exercise is guaranteed. Illiteracy forms a major obstacle to women's political participation. To this end, illiteracy must be abolished, and ~~illiteracy~~ ^{should be eliminated} the requirement of literacy as a prerequisite to exercising franchise, ~~eliminated~~.

3. Unemployment. High levels of male unemployment and under-employment in cities, combined with rapid rates of rural to urban migration, are typical of many developing countries. Where male unemployment prevails, women are likely to face particularly severe obstacles blocking their gainful employment. In

addition, technological advances and the substitution of imported goods for locally produced products displace large numbers of women from their formerly productive role in urban economies, offering little in their place.

It must be recognized that in most countries, a large proportion of women, both married and unmarried, are directly responsible in full or in part for their own economic support and that of their children and other family members. The assumption that males are the breadwinners and should be given preference over women for scarce jobs must be forcefully challenged. The urban living group recommends that women with family responsibilities be assured priority for jobs on an equal basis with males with family responsibilities.

4. Women in the informal economy. Women contribute to the economy in a number of ways, through wage employment in the formal sector, as unpaid helpers in family businesses, as producers of handicrafts or other products for sale, as traders on their own account, as unpaid housekeepers and childrearers, and in other ways. Yet the extent of women's participation in the informal sector of the economy remains largely unreported in national accounts and largely unprotected by social security and labor legislation.

In recognition of the economic value of women's work in the informal sectors, and in recognition of the need for protection of all women workers, the urban living group recommends that all persons performing domestic services (including housewives) and other unpaid work in the informal sector should be brought within the national labor and social security laws, and the monetary value of their contribution added to the statistics of national accounting systems.

5. Migration of women into cities and sexual exploitation. Rapid and unplanned urbanization in many countries has had negative effects on the life conditions of the family in general and on the woman in particular. Problems are particularly severe for single young women who migrate to the cities in search of gainful employment. The urban living group recommends that special efforts be made to prevent the sexual traffic of women, particularly the sexual exploitation of young female migrants coming into urban areas. Specifically, their sexual exploitation should be prevented by

- a) providing hostels and other living arrangements for new migrants;
- b) providing industrial and service employment as alternative income-producing activities; and
- c) providing counselling and advice to young female migrants to make them aware of housing, services and occupational opportunities available in the city.

6. National commissions. National commissions on the status of women, national committees set up for International Women's Year, or other government agencies should be responsible for continuous monitoring of the impact of recommended policies and programs on rural and urban women. To this end, and in order to pressure governments to carry through all recommendations deriving from International Women's Year, national commissions on the status of women should be created where they do not now exist, or greatly strengthened by granting them major decision-making and monitoring powers.

To sensitize planners and politicians to the place of women in the economy and in society, a series of social indicators must be developed to measure the current condition of women and to monitor the specific effects of current and proposed policies on women's social, economic, political and cultural roles.