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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR TRIBUNE
June 23-27, Mexico City

Attended by Mary Ann Riegelman

Introduction

The United Nations International Women's Year Conference, which convened in Mexico City from June 19 to July 2, was in fact two conferences: one the official United Nations governmental meeting (at which several AID officials were present) and the other the International Women's Year Tribune, the non-governmental organization gathering. I attended the Tribune as a representative of Development Alternatives, Inc.; my specific task was threefold: first, I was to cover those panels at the Tribune dealing with rural women's role in agricultural production, cooperatives, credit systems, self-help projects, nutrition and non-formal education. I was also charged with attempting to locate information on development projects in the Third World, which might be ripe for insertion of a women's component. Finally, I was to compile a bibliography of research reports and materials presented at the Tribune, along with copies if

available, which related to women in rural development. I should point out that although the conference opened June 19 and finished July 2, it was decided that I should attend only for the week of June 23-29, the time period of most direct interest to DAI and TA/DA. Panel sessions the following week were unscheduled at the time my trip was planned, while seminars planned for the two days prior to my arrival in Mexico City were largely ceremonial and/or unrelated to the specific topic of women in agricultural development.¹

The Setting

As was amply reported in the American press, the conference setting was often disorganized, to say the least. With 5,000 women in attendance, orderly proceedings were few and far between, although by the third day, panel chairmen had ironed out the procedure for addressing questions to speakers following their presentations (participants were required to submit their names on slips of paper, as opposed to racing down the aisles en masse to grab for the microphone). Unfortunately, "questions" per se were at a premium; most participants had no intention of asking questions of the panelists, choosing instead to deliver lengthy manifestos on this or that subject.

¹ This report will not discuss the official UN Conference proceedings -- such as the hammering out of the World Plan of Action -- nor Tribune activities unrelated to TA/DA concerns, e.g., speeches by American feminists Bella Abzug, Betty Friedan, etc. These women impressed the Tribune with their ability to analyze specific women's problems, but they dealt only peripherally with development, my chief concern.

While such attendees undoubtedly had the right to make their views known, this practice served to deprive the audience of valuable opportunities to elicit specialized information from panelists, many of whom were experts in their fields.

In such an atmosphere, I found contacting individuals to be largely a hit-or-miss affair. Buttonholing individual panelists following their presentations proved virtually impossible, as they would be engulfed by other participants or else hurried off to their hotels. Nevertheless, I did manage to meet (often completely by chance) a number of well-informed women, several of them academics, but also a few development specialists and donor agency representatives. I also renewed acquaintances with several women whom I had encountered during the course of research for the *Seven Country Survey on the Roles of Women in Rural Development*. I would say in general, that most of the "big names" in the women in development field¹ were in attendance at the Tribune, either as panelists or participants.

However, it should be additionally noted that due to the glaring lack of male participants, I met very few people in positions of responsibility; it seems obvious that although women may and should strive for equality -- both in decisionmaking and participation -- it is still very much a man's world, as concerns the power to make official decisions and dispense

¹ E.g., Ester Boserup, Nadia Youssef, Irene Tinker, etc.

development funds. If I may offer one general suggestion/ observation, it would be that any conference dealing with the topic of women's development must include a sizable number of men; otherwise world leaders, international donors, decision-makers, and the press at large will perforce not take such a conference seriously, not to mention the likelihood that commitment of funds to women's causes or projects will remain at a minimum.¹

Panels Attended, Issues Raised, Insights Gleaned

Most sessions consisted of 15-minute speeches by three to five panelists; the quality of presentations ranged from awful to excellent, with the average panel offering perhaps one, perhaps two respectable speakers. Unfortunately, seminars were scheduled in twos -- i.e., two panels would meet simultaneously in different auditoriums, a situation requiring me to make a daily choice (in fact two choices, as two panels would meet in the morning, and two more in the afternoon) and preventing me from attending two or three sessions which appeared from the program to be relevant to our activities.² Rather than

¹ As regards the UN Conference itself, press reports varied as to the number of men in attendance. I read figures ranging from 33 percent to 20 percent to none less. But at the Tribune, which attracted many more of the experts in the women in development field, virtually the only men visible were members of the press and TV crews, husbands of participants and an occasional male panelist. All of these could be counted on the fingers of both hands.

² I should mention here that I was unable to attend any of the health and nutrition panels, as they conflicted directly with the agriculture and rural development sessions.

give a detailed description of each panel attended, here I will offer a summary of issues raised and insights gleaned on topics which could assist AID in future planning for projects with women's involvement.

Increasing Women's Productivity in Agricultural Activities

Along with the need for more formal education, this was the top priority cited by panelists addressing the question of rural women's needs. Martha Bulengo, a Tanzanian with the Community Development Trust Fund, was particularly eloquent in her call for:

- Modernization of agricultural techniques and the increased availability of extension training to rural women so as to maximize their already large farm contribution to GNP. She stressed that rural women do not question the inequality of their lives, a situation which often requires outsiders to make known their plight.
- A linkage between formal and nonformal education. Too often, the few opportunities which exist for girls in rural areas have no relevance to their daily activities. This was a frequently voiced complaint in Mexico City among persons discussing rural education; Mrs. Bulengo in particular criticized the continued emphasis on training in embroidery, sewing and cooking. Developing a literacy/basic education program, combined with non-formal educational techniques designed to help young women with their daily tasks might well be an area for future AID research.
- Training for rural women in small-scale industries. This was a need articulated in DAI's *Seven Country Survey*, as illustrated by the Uboma Project in Nigeria, which successfully trained women in oil palm pressing and other rural industrial activities.

Role of Handicrafts

Although the *Seven Country Survey* did not focus on women's handicraft production in rural areas, this was clearly an area of great interest to many African and Latin women in Mexico City. One entire panel session was devoted to crafts; unfortunately, it was scheduled for the day before my arrival in Mexico. I was particularly struck by an excellent film, shown later in the week, which treated handicraft production as a primary source of income for certain rural women in Kenya. The film demonstrated how with careful planning and a small amount of seed money, tribeswomen from a district outside Nairobi were able to turn their roadside sales operation into a thriving crafts store. Eventually they amassed sufficient profits to build permanent quarters, thus obviating the need to move their wares indoors every night.¹ It seems logical that a handicraft production and marketing scheme could be successfully appended to the women's component of rural development projects in certain areas; it seems obvious such an approach would increase the appeal of the overall project to local women.

Small Technology

This subject was treated in depth by Elizabeth O'Kelly, a British private consultant with field experience in the Cameroons

¹ A similar set-up is described in the *Seven Country Survey* for Kenya's Maasai Rural Training Centre, pp. A-40-41.

(11 years), Sarawak and Vietnam. She delivered an excellent speech on self-help and small technology as a member of the panel on agriculture and rural development. I cite some of her ideas and suggestions here, because they may have direct relevance to future women's work, and also because they were quite specific in nature.

She pointed out that women are de facto controllers of the land in many developing countries, countries with no shortage of manpower. Nonetheless, the fact that underemployment may exist does not obviate the need for drudgery-saving devices -- or small technology. Small, or intermediate technology can provide simple tools or machinery which can save much back-breaking labor, while still being inexpensive and utilitarian.

Miss O'Kelly specified two ways in which small technology has already helped women:

Food processing -- grinding mills for processing of millet, rice, etc. have been set up and operated by cooperatives of local women joining together. (One superb example of this approach was illustrated in a film shown to the Tribune, in which peasant women of Estimé, a small, remote Honduran village, were taught to use a corn grinder to produce the little corn cakes which constitute the village's chief source of income. Seed money for the grinder came from the Community Development Foundation, and eventually the village was able to purchase additional grinders, thanks to money earned from increased output of the cookies. Local women enjoyed a higher living standard as a result of the project, and had far more leisure time than before.)

- Water purification and supply. Miss O'Kelly mentioned several technical possibilities, among them catching rainwater in specially constructed roofs; building pipes of bamboo, a construction material easily obtainable in most tropical countries.
- Energy production. Miss O'Kelly spoke of electricity and gasoline, both expensive forms of fuel which have the effect of drying up the demand for hand-run machines which still have a definite place in the economics of rural areas. Small technology such as windmills, could help modernize the lives of rural women at minimal cost.

Exclusion of Women from GNP

A serious problem, brought out at the Tribune and highlighted in the *Seven Country Survey*, is the exclusion of women from the GNP and the concomitant lack of census data on their contribution to national income. Unremunerated labor performed by women -- which often takes the form of subsistence farming -- is rarely included as goods and services in GNP, and this phenomenon leads to the economic exploitation of women. Beyond the questions of securing more economic protection for women, such as social security benefits, better family legislation, etc., research is needed on ways to gather more and better census statistics on the kinds of work women are carrying out. Only with proper data can development projects be planned with sensitivity and accuracy.

Issues Not Discussed by the Tribune

The key findings of the *Seven Country Survey* were:

- Integration of women into the rural economy will proceed more quickly if that integration takes place within the context of a development project rather than by means of a women-only projects; and
- Major behavior changes by women occurred significantly faster through activities dealing with agricultural production than through family care projects.

It is noteworthy that I, at least, did not hear either of these conclusions formally articulated at Mexico City during panel sessions, although in individual discussions with experts in women in development, both in Mexico and elsewhere, our findings have been approvingly received and supported. From all we have learned, both from research for the *Seven Country Survey* and for the *Strategies for Small Farmer Development* study, integrated rural development still appears to be the most effective way to tap women's potential economic contribution, with a strong emphasis on production rather than home care activities.

Persons Contacted

Following is a list of several individuals with whom I talked at length in Mexico City at the Tribune. The list is not comprehensive and includes only those persons from whom I could extract information relevant to DAI's and TA/DA's future course of work.

Mary Elmendorf

Dr. Elmendorf, an American, is a well-known anthropologist who has carried out the bulk of her work in Mexico. She had heard of but not seen the *Seven Country Survey*, and was

most interested in our work carried out so far. I questioned her at length on the Puebla project, with a view to discerning whether or not she saw potential for insertion of a women's component. She expressed the belief that women were active in most phases of corn production at Puebla (contrary to the opinion of Dr. Edris Roushan Rice-Wray, a female physician residing at Puebla and founder of the area's first family planning clinic; Dr. Rice-Wray said that to her knowledge, women participated only in harvesting -- perhaps John Hatch could elucidate this question for us). In any event, Dr. Elmendorf was enthusiastic about the idea of more research into a women's component at Puebla, and promised to write me more details re her suggestions. She has also worked at length on the PIDER project, the World Bank-funded effort in Mexico.

Sylvia Bolanos

Sylvia Bolanos, of Filipino nationality and consultant to the UNDP/ILO in Ghana, was the data collector in Ghana for the *Seven Country Survey*. As a representative of the UNDP in Mexico City, she had access to both the Conference and the Tribune, and promptly demanded 15 copies of the report for circulation among the "right people." She completely understood our need to locate suitable projects for insertion of a women's component, and in fact offered her own project in the Tarkwa district of Ghana, which Charles Sweet of our office is currently analyzing for possibilities. Apparently, this project, an integrated rural development effort, has been underway for about nine months, and has some AID funding. Sylvia Bolanos has as much energy as any one human being I have ever encountered, and can be counted upon to discuss our situation with people she meets, and in particular, with the UN/AID/UNESCO/ILO community in Accra, most of whom she knows well.

Elizabeth O'Kelly

As mentioned above, I was most impressed by Miss O'Kelly, and promised to send her a copy of our report. She is clearly an expert in the small technology field and one to whom I would have no qualms about writing to elicit further suggestions for research on women in development. She also seems well plugged into the Economic Commission for Africa contingent (Margaret Snyder, Jean Ritchie), who may one day have some money to dispense -- possibly in conjunction with AID -- on our kinds of projects.

Margaret Hagen

Margaret Hagen is the only female loan officer at the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington, D.C. She had heard of me, of DAI and of the *Seven Country Survey*, a copy of which I provided her. We talked at length about what the IDB is doing in the way of work on women (not much); she is hopeful that some funds may eventually be earmarked for women's development, although she doesn't see it as an imminent possibility. I spoke with her more in terms of project suggestions, vis-a-vis inserting a women's component, and she promised to ponder the question. I plan to have lunch with her in Washington in the very near future to follow up on our Mexico City conversation.

Isabel C. Caserta

Dr. Caserta, a Venezuelan lawyer, is about to assume her new duties as Executive Secretary of the Commission of Women at the Organization of American States. I spoke with Dr. Caserta about our work, and she was extremely interested in our rural development efforts involving women, in particular. I plan to see her when she returns to Washington, and she may prove to be a good source of project information, as the OAS is becoming more active in women and rural development.

Catherine Mboya

Catherine Mboya is a Kenyan accountant based in Nairobi, who was in Mexico City as a representative of the Ba'hai faith. Mrs. Mboya knows Achola Pala personally; Achola Pala did the Kenyan data collection for the *Seven Country Survey* and both she and Mrs. Mboya are affiliated with the University of Nairobi's Institute for Development Studies. I informed Mrs. Mboya that DAI has a staff man, Peter Weigel, resident in Nairobi and attached to the Kenyan Ministry of Finance and Planning, whereupon she exclaimed that that particular ministry does nothing but hold back development progress (an opinion echoed by Peter, I believe). In any event, she said that she would investigate possible projects in Kenya, and keep in touch with me.

Rachel Nason

Rachel Nason is a retired former consultant to AID on population issues. It was clear that she was highly regarded by other AID and U.S. delegation members in Mexico City, and may turn out to be a useful source of project information. She was most interested in the *Seven Country Survey*, and promised to read carefully the copy I provided her. She presently resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico, but seemed eager to keep in touch with us.

Frances McClintock

Mrs. McClintock represented the Pan American Development Foundation in Mexico City, and appears to know or know of vast numbers of people in Latin American development. I am doubtful that she herself is much of an expert in anything, but she liked me, and may turn out to be a useful source of project information.

Jyoti Munsiff

Jyoti Munsiff, another member of the Ba'hai delegation, is a lawyer for Shell International in London. Shell has interests in the development field (witness our Uboma project in Nigeria), and although Miss Munsiff does not handle development concerns directly, she promised to investigate possibilities for DAI activity.

Suggestions for Future TA/DA Activity in Women in Development

The formal and informal discussions I had in Mexico suggest several needs which TA/DA may wish to pursue:

1. *Design of a women's component for agricultural production in integrated rural development projects.* Specific projects might include Tarkwa in Ghana, Puebla in Mexico. Research is needed on decisionmaking and participation roles of rural women (see upfront summary in the *Seven Country Survey* for DAI's recommendations on kinds of data necessary).
2. *Small technology and small-scale rural industry.* This is clearly an area which TA/DA might wish to explore in the women's context.
3. *Handicrafts.* In conjunction with an agricultural production focus, the systematizing of craft production and marketing may well merit further research.
4. *Education: formal and nonformal.* TA/DA might look into ways to make literacy training and basic education more relevant to the rural woman's needs, concentrating in particular on linkages between basic education and nonformal techniques.
5. *Census data.* Because so often the design of development projects is based on existing census statistics, a program to improve data collection on women -- and in particular on rural women -- might be worth investigating by TA/DA.

Bibliography

Regrettably, the Tribune was able to reproduce none of the reports presented by panelists; one or two papers were made available by panelists themselves, and I tried to obtain copies of these. I did collect a batch of official UN documents, but these were put out by the UN Conference and not the Tribune, and thus are not listed here (I would assume that AID personnel in Mexico brought back these documents). I also picked up random pamphlets and reports distributed by representatives of various organizations, and I list a few of the more interesting ones.

1. American Association for the Advancement of Science, "The Workshop on Food Production and Small Technology of the AAAS Seminar in Mexico D.F., June 16-18, 1975." (This paper summarizes the findings and recommendations of one workshop of the AAAS Seminar in Mexico City which preceded the opening of the Tribune. A stellar group of women attended, and the workshop's recommendations should be closely examined.)
2. Boserup, Ester and Liljencrantz, Christina, "Integration of Women in Development, Why, When, How," UNDP, May 1975.
3. CIDAL (Coordinacion de Iniciativas Para el Desarrollo Humano de America Latina), "An Anthology on Women in Latin America," Cuernavaca, Mexico, October 1974.
4. Stedman, R. B., "Integration of Women in Development," paper delivered by the UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Representative in Addis Ababa to the International Women's Year Conference, June 20, 1975.
5. Olin, Ulla, "A Case for Women as Co-Managers: The Family as a General Model of Human Social Organization and its Implications for Women's Role in Public Life," paper presented to the AAAS Seminar in Mexico City, June 16-18, 1975.
6. Olin, Ulla, "Society as a Public Family with a Missing Parent," paper delivered to the IWY Tribune's panel on the Family, June 27, 1975.

7. UNESCO Features, "1975, International Women's Year," an anthology of short articles about women's issues in nine countries, Paris, 1975.
8. UNICEF, "NGO/UNICEF Newsletter," May 1975 (issue dealing with International Women's Year) United Nations, New York.
9. "Xilonen," the daily newspaper of the IWY Tribune, issues of June 23-27, 1975. (This small, printed newspaper provided summaries in English and Spanish of both Conference and Tribune proceedings.)