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Women's Issues in Development Cooperation:

A Call for Action

February 19, 1993

International Center for Research on Women

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ICRW

February 17, 1993

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The enclosed position paper on "Women's Issues in Development Cooperation: A Call for Action" reflects the deliberations, under the auspices of the International Center for Research on Women (Washington, D.C.), of a wide array of organizations and individuals with substantial expertise in development cooperation. The signatories of this paper advocate attention to women's issues in international development based on the strong conviction that effective, sustainable development will be achieved only with the full participation of women. We urge you to consider and act upon our recommendations. At this critical juncture in the history of development assistance, the time has come to replace rhetoric regarding integrating women in development policy with decisive action.

We stand ready to assist you and your Administration in reshaping U.S. development assistance and the Agency for International Development in order to implement these recommendations.

On behalf of the signatories of the position paper,



Mayra Buvinić
President



Margaret A. Lycette
Vice President

Enclosure

WOMEN'S ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: A CALL FOR ACTION

Women in the developing world play critical roles in their national economies. They grow the majority of food for family consumption and constitute over one-third of the agricultural labor force, up to 75 percent of informal sector workers, and a growing proportion of formal sector workers. While their earnings are vital for household welfare, especially in the 20 to 40 percent of households that are supported by women alone, women also provide roughly three-quarters of their families' primary health care, and manage the household's sanitation and use of natural resources. Yet women are still among the poorest, least educated, and unhealthiest population in the world. While they earn significantly less than men, women work 25 percent longer hours. The female literacy rate for the developing countries is three-fourths the male rate. Maternal mortality rates are unconscionably high: half a million women die in childbirth each year, 99% of them in developing countries.

A central goal of development assistance must be the empowerment of women through improvements in their economic, health, social, and legal status. We must broaden women's economic opportunities and support them in balancing their economic and familial responsibilities. We must address issues of women's health throughout their lives, not merely during their reproductive years. We must support women's sustainable use of natural resources. We must equate women's rights with human rights.

To promote sustainable and equitable development, the International Center for Research on Women, and colleagues in the women in development and international development communities, urge President Clinton, the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Congress, to support these goals and consider the following critical actions as priorities for development assistance and foreign aid legislation.

Develop the economic opportunities available to women not only in private enterprise but also in agriculture and all sectors of formal employment.

- Improve women's access to financial services, both credit and savings. This is critical for the large number of women who are self-employed.
- Expand support for basic education and vocational skills training, linked to market demand, in order to improve women's formal sector employment opportunities.
- Improve the returns to women in agriculture, where the majority of women in developing countries are employed, by such measures as improving their access to land, tenure rights, effective agricultural extension, and new agricultural technologies.
- Assess and ameliorate the impact on women, and their children, of structural adjustment, policy reform, and changes in trade regimes. Their precarious position in the economies of most developing countries makes women more vulnerable to the negative effects, and less able to capture the resulting benefits of market rationalization.

Close the gender gap in literacy and education.

Investment in girls' education yields high returns. Literacy and education are linked to improvements in women's employment, the adoption of innovations in agriculture, better health and nutrition in children, and lower fertility rates.

- Allocate greater funding to literacy programs and primary and secondary education where the returns to girls' education are high.¹
- Build more small schools, rather than fewer large schools, especially in rural areas. Provide greater scheduling flexibility so that girls, whose travel and time are more constrained than those of boys, have better access.

¹ The World Bank has estimated the cost of closing the gender gap in secondary school education at \$3.5 billion/year. U.S.AID should fund 10 percent of this cost.

- Generate community involvement to raise the demand for girls' education and provide support to female teachers who are needed, in some countries, to educate girls in sex-segregated schools.
- Examine the role of fees in limiting girls' enrollment and provide scholarships to meet out-of-pocket costs for low-income girls.

Reduce morbidity and mortality among women and increase their reproductive choices by providing more accessible, integrated, and high quality health and family planning services.

- Improve women's health throughout their lives, rather than just in the reproductive years, by taking a life-cycle approach that addresses women's health and nutrition needs in their multiple roles as income earners, mothers, and nurturers.
- Integrate family planning services with health services for women. Wherever possible, integrate the provision of health services for women with the provision of health services for children. This will encourage women's use of health services despite their time and mobility constraints.
- Improve the quality of comprehensive reproductive health and family planning services by offering greater contraceptive choices, access to safe abortion, and improving the sensitivity of care givers. Expand services to the very poor, migrants, refugees, unmarried women, and adolescents.
- Promote joint biomedical and social science research on diseases and social practices that especially affect women such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), reproductive tract infections (RTIs), domestic violence, and unsafe abortions.²

² In order to obtain maximum and immediate impact in the area of collaborative biomedical and social science research U.S.AID should provide funding of \$3 million annually for the World Health Organization's Human Reproduction Programme.

Ensure that environment and development programs support both the long-term sustainability of the environment and women's diverse subsistence and economic needs from natural resources.

Women, and the families they support, depend heavily upon the environment for food, water, fuel, medicines, and other products necessary for their economic livelihoods. Improving women's access to and control over resources will contribute to truly sustainable environment and development efforts.

- Integrate women's roles, needs and perspectives into the design, implementation and monitoring of environment programs at all phases.
- Support more research on the gender aspects of natural resource use and management, including the contribution of women to maintaining biodiversity; sustainable agroforestry systems; and the economic and health impacts of environmental deterioration. Improve dissemination and application of what is known about the linkages between gender, environment, and development.
- Adopt indicators that fully and accurately assess the true social and economic benefits of natural resource use and costs of degradation. Current indicators focus on financial costs and benefits, and fail to appropriately value women's unpaid labor.

Ensure that emergency and development assistance programs take account of women's roles, needs, and human rights in situations of conflict, famine, disease epidemics, and rapidly changing economic and political systems.

- Famine relief efforts should make special provisions for ensuring that food reaches women and their children, who have difficulty gaining access to food in the aggressive and coercive environment created by limited supplies.
- In conflict situations, high priority must be given to the protection of women and children, who are particularly vulnerable to devastating physical and sexual abuse.

- Focus a greater proportion of AIDS-related assistance on reducing the risk of HIV infection for women, whose rates of infection are rapidly rising. Provide support to them in their role as primary care givers for household members with AIDS.
- Promote employment opportunities, and alternatives for child care and health care, for women who are being disproportionately affected as economies are restructured in the developing world, Central and Eastern Europe, and the CIS.

In each of these areas, assistance efforts should build upon the emergency strategies that women have developed for maintaining markets, establishing relief systems, and organizing support for conflict resolution.

What this Means for the U.S. Agency for International Development³

To carry out these critical actions, the U.S. Agency for International Development needs to strengthen its capacity to address gender issues and regain international leadership in this area. The Administrator of U.S.AID must fully support and carefully guide the Agency's women in development efforts, as well as enhance and create institutional mechanisms to more effectively mainstream gender issues within U.S.AID.

Institutional Strategies

- Upgrade the Office of Women in Development. Ensure that the Office is well staffed with a critical mass of direct hires who have credentials and technical expertise to carry out the mission, and improve the role, of the Office.
- Strengthen the position and status of the Women in Development Officer in USAID missions and allocate a discretionary budget for Officers' use in complementing mission sectoral women in development efforts.
- Ensure that all U.S.AID staff are reasonably conversant with and supportive of, women in development issues -- as with other overarching development issues. Develop staff incentives and career rewards for success in addressing women in development issues.
- To garner broad support and guidance for its women in development efforts, require that U.S.AID develop formal channels for regular dialogue with the women in development community regarding research, policy, and program priorities.

³ While these recommendations refer to the existing structure of U.S.AID, their substance should be applied as well under any organizational reform.

Programmatic Strategies

- Require that U.S.AID staff and contractors routinely generate and analyze gender-disaggregated data, develop indicators of the effect of projects on beneficiaries, and use these data and indicators to assess women in development impact and improve programming.
- Lengthen U.S.AID funding cycles and give priority to the development of long-term collaborative relationships with local organizations, including women's organizations. U.S.AID should strengthen the ability of the former to address women's issues; and strengthen the ability of the latter to address economic development issues.

The Role of Other Development Agencies

These priorities need to be pursued with equal vigor through organizations such as the multilateral development banks, the U.N. development agencies, the Inter-American Foundation, and the African Development Foundation.

- Call upon these organizations to reflect commitment to women in development issues in their mission statements; ensure that their staff are conversant with women in development issues; develop or strengthen technical expertise and institutional mechanisms; and allocate funds to ensure that women in development issues are effectively addressed in their programs.
- At the multilaterals, instruct the U.S. Executive Directors to review all proposed loans for attention to women in development issues, and review progress in attainment of women in development goals when replenishment of U.S. funding is under consideration.

The signatories of this document pledge to support enthusiastically the Administration's efforts to these ends.

Organizational Endorsements

The Alan Guttmacher Institute

American Association of University Women

American Public Health Association

Ananda Marga Universal Relief Team

Association for Women in Development

B'nai B'rith Women

Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, University of Arizona, Tucson

Catholics for A Free Choice

Center for Communication Programs, The Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

The Center for Population Options

Center for Women Policy Studies

Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University

The Centre for Development and Population Activities

Collaborative for Development Action, Inc.

Commission on the Advancement of Women, InterAction

Creative Associates International, Inc.

Education Development Center

Equity Policy Center

Family Care International

International Center for Research on Women

Institute of Cultural Affairs

International Planned Parenthood Federation

International Women's Health Coalition

Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation

Office of Women in International Development, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Panos Institute

Population Action International

The Population Council

Program for Introduction and Adaptation of Contraceptive Technology (PIACT)

Program for the Study of Sustainable Change and Development, Tufts University

Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights

Trickle Up Program

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, Washington Office

United States Council for INSTRAW

Weidemann Associates, Inc.

Wellstart International

Winrock International

*Women and International Development
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*Women's Environment and Development
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Women's Legal Defense Fund

World Learning, Inc.

Worldwatch Institute

Zero Population Growth

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