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THE ROLE AND STATUS  
OF  
WOMEN  
IN  
NATIONAL ECONOMIES

By

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Madam Chairman, and other distinguished participants in this meeting today, before opening my remarks about the role and status of women in national economies, I want to take this opportunity to express my grateful thanks to the Committee on Women of the American Psychological Association for honoring me with this invitation to speak at your Annual Convention. It is indeed a privilege and I am delighted to be with you here today.

When Dr. Tena Cummings called me last February about the possibility of participating in this program, I was still in the U. S. Department of Labor, serving as Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary of Labor Bernard E. DeLury for programs related to discrimination in employment on grounds of sex and age. Shortly before then, I had been approached about the possibility of moving to the Agency for International Development in the Department of State, into a new post as Women's Activities Advisor to the Director of the Office of Labor Affairs, Mr. Dale E. Good. This is where I am now, on loan from the Labor Department for a two-year period. I am finding the experience an enormously interesting and challenging one.

The job change meant, though, that I had to leave my work with the Equal Pay Act and other anti-discrimination measures on the national scene for a much wider, but not altogether unrelated, area in the world of international affairs. Tena Cummings assured me, however, that a topic concerning the role of women in other nations would be

quite appropriate today since the American Psychological Association was considering the addition of an international department or division -- a proposal to be considered at this Convention in New Orleans.

If an outsider such as myself may be permitted a comment, I would only say it is my earnest hope that your Association will take positive action on such a proposal. Your very special wisdom and insights are greatly needed in the broader forum.

Since it will only be possible to skim the surface of my subject today, I decided to concentrate on the status or role of women in the economies of developing nations. This is because women in these countries have become a principal focus in the Agency for International Development following enactment of the so-called Percy Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1973, because they have until now been largely invisible, and because we professional women in North America and other industrialized nations of the world are no longer in much doubt about our own status, albeit it is still limited and circumscribed by traditional attitudes and social mores that are enormously difficult to surmount.

The Percy Amendment of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1973 is Section 113 of the statute. Named for its sponsor, Senator Percy of Illinois, it requires that U.S. bilateral development assistance

programs called for in the Act's major provisions "shall be administered so as to give particular attention to those programs, projects, and activities which tend to integrate women into the national economies of foreign countries, thus improving their status and assisting the total development effort."

The major provisions of the law to which Senator Percy referred are those requiring concentration of Agency resources on critical development programs, particularly in functional sectors that affect the lives of the majority of the people. These sectors are entitled: Food and Nutrition; Population Planning and Health; and Education and Human Resources Development. Among other areas, the Percy Amendment also covers A.I.D. support provided for development programs conducted by international and private organizations, and assistance made available in support of the general economy of selected recipient countries.

In introducing his Amendment last October, Senator Percy said:

"It is well known that in many of the lesser developed countries, traditional practices, cultural mores, and inadequate resources tend to block women and girls from access to educational and economic opportunities.

"In developed countries as well, including the United States, women and girls suffer similar - if less severe - discrimination. I am very conscious of this, and I continue to support every reasonable effort to give women and girls full equality in our society.

. . . . .

"At the same time as we seek to achieve the equal rights

of women in our own country, let us adopt this amendment to promote the achievement of equal rights for women in the aid-recipient countries."

The Amendment was agreed to.

Subsequently, the Senator amplified what he had in mind in introducing the amendment by suggesting:

- the establishment of organizations that would teach baby care, home nursing, basic nutrition, family planning, options for women, and the importance of education;
- the encouragement of measures to increase respect and justice for working women, including equal education and employment opportunities, as well as equal pay for equal work;
- establishment of day-care centers for children of working mothers;
- more job-oriented training programs for women;
- greater emphasis on literacy programs for girls and women;
- courses for planners on how to integrate women into national development programs.

Last March, a Percy Amendment Working Committee or Task Force was named by A.I.D. Administrator Parker to formulate a comprehensive Agency plan for carrying out the Amendment. Mr. Parker designated Mrs. Nira H. Long, Equal Opportunity Program Director for A.I.D. to serve as the Committee's Coordinator.

On joining A.I.D.'s Office of Labor Affairs in April, I was at once invited to serve on the Working Committee and also to work with the four technical subcommittees set up by Mrs. Long to consider the

status of women with respect to A.I.D. involvement in the critical areas of Education; Health, Population and Family Planning; Agriculture, Rural Development and Nutrition; and Employment and National Planning.

It was during this period of concentrated research at the technical subcommittee level that I and other committee members began to realize that women and girls in aid-recipient nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America are, in large measure, currently all but invisible in the development process.

Women have little status in lesser-developed or developing nations because their contribution to society is not counted as part of the development process.

Current economic and social indicators are insufficiently detailed. Statistical and other data are, in general, not broken out by sex. And this is despite the fact that women constitute at least 50 percent and more of the human resources available for development.

Such data as are available are the result of a very few special studies and not of any general statistical compilations. For example, a special report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa reveals that African women may be producing up to 50 percent of the food, providing 60-80 percent of the agricultural labor, and control

about 40 percent of the marketing systems.

It is apparently a fact that millions of women in developing countries toil from morning to night as unpaid subsistence or domestic workers, but their work is not recognized as employment or included in employment statistics.

High fertility limits education and job opportunities for men as well as women in less developed nations, but the vicious circle of low educational and employment status and high fertility is particularly harmful to women.

Women teach the children, yet women comprise the major percentage of international illiteracy rates. Among adult women in developing countries, it is estimated that 27.3 percent in Latin America are illiterate, 56.2 percent in Asia, and over 80 percent in Africa.

Needless to say, the lack of equal access and equal opportunity with men to formal and non-formal training or education is a formidable barrier to the integration of women in the development process.

It is true that as members of voluntary and professional organizations, a few women in aid-recipient nations are already making a contribution to their nations' economies. Women who have so-called "elite" status may have some influence on national planning. But in most developing countries such "elite" women are few in number and, unfortunately, do not always themselves fully understand the difficulties faced by other women in their own countries.

The maternity function of women appears to be the major reason for acceptance of the generally associated roles of women as food producers, child rearers, keepers of family health and welfare, and concentration in subordinate positions in the labor market in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs such as domestic service in Latin America and construction work in Asia. Of course, this condition is also the outcome of inferior training and lack of education but, even when women are qualified for higher-level work they are often discouraged from applying for better jobs and are not given equal consideration in the hiring process. (This situation is one with which we are not unfamiliar in our own country.)

The Agency for International Development has a mandate from the Congress to concern itself with the poorest majority of the population in the developing countries and is therefore focusing its effort on the rural poor.

It is estimated that there are well over 500 million rural women in developing countries today (excluding mainland China). Rural women comprise about 38 percent of Asia's total population, 34 percent of Africa's, and 21 percent of Latin America's. But in predominantly rural countries women are often left behind in subsistence agriculture, while men are trained in factories or taught to grow export crops. Because of widespread poverty in rural areas, however, it will be difficult to advance the status of rural women unless the standard of living can be raised for the family as a whole.

Problems connected with substantial population increases in most developing countries are too well known to require mention here. A.I.D.'s family planning programs have so far had time and opportunity to reach only a small proportion of women, and those chiefly in cities where large families are not practicable. Many more women must become involved if the programs are to be effective in villages and rural areas where traditional attitudes prevail and where there is honor and economic value attached to a large family. Goals to reduce fertility and improve health must be inter-related with incentives for education, training (non-formal), employment opportunity, and old-age security, if they are to succeed. Discussions now taking place in the World Population Conference in Bucharest make it abundantly clear that it will be necessary to take a new look at existing programs related to family planning and population control. Women in developed and developing nations are clamoring for a voice in policy decisions in these areas, as they are in other matters of vital importance to them where they have not been heard -- indeed, where they have been largely invisible.

The United Nations established a Commission on the Status of Women in its earliest days as a recognition that women must be treated equally, and supplemented this subsequently by means of a number of Conventions and Recommendations through various specialized agencies.

Despite all of these instruments, there continues to be a wide gap between principle and reality in every nation, including our own.

Few women participate at high levels in national governments or in the formation of national, regional, or international policies related to the development process as a whole. In general, women have no input in the development planning process or in the selection of priority projects that may or may not be of benefit to them.

Circumstances vary from country to country and from region to region. There are nevertheless a number of basic common factors and common problems. We live in a world in which girls and women are still seriously disadvantaged by reason of their sex, where their contribution to the societies in which they live has been far too long ignored. Aside from ethical and moral considerations, a waste of more than 50 percent of human resources can only retard development and negate the concept of wide popular participation in the development process.

It is not the intent of the Percy Amendment Working Committee to recommend or even suggest programs exclusively for women and girls. It is the intent of the Committee to recommend and emphasize the need to stress activities that will include participation by both sexes and be of benefit to both sexes.

It is obvious that women in developing nations are already playing a major role in their national economies, even though relegated to unskilled, menial labor, and with their production going largely unrecognized.

Girls and women must be given the same opportunity as boys and men for equal education and training, and for equal opportunity in employment.

Given these equal rights, there should be no difficulty in making sure that women assume their proper roles along with men in decision-making processes affecting economic and social development. This is a significant goal that remains to be achieved.

This is the intent of the Percy Amendment.

The United Nations has proclaimed 1975 as International Women's Year to promote equality between men and women. It has asked all countries and all interested organizations to join in working to advance the status of women throughout the world. The year 1975 has been proclaimed as International Women's Year in the United States by presidential proclamation. Many special programs are being developed throughout the nation to mark the occasion. If the Committee on Women of the American Psychological Association has not yet taken formal action in this regard, I hope you will want to do so by whatever means are at your disposal.

Your support and assistance are needed more than ever in our joint efforts to improve the role and status of women in national economies. Please help.

Thank you.