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Higher Education
and the
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WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

REPORT

The Women and Development Conference was inspired by International Women's Year and by the growing perception among scholars and policy-makers that development activities have had a differential impact on women and men. The United Nations has established a Commission on the Status of Women to monitor the progress of member governments in upgrading the status of women. Scholars have begun to urge revision of prior conceptions of development in order to encompass new data being revealed about women's roles in developing countries. Both of these efforts, to collect systematic data and to deepen understanding of socio-economic change, have been hampered, however, by the lack of exchange between persons of different regions. The compartmentalized nature of American academic life and the continued orientation of scholars in former colonies toward intellectual life in the metropole have largely prevented scholars from discussion and collaboration across regions.

The Wellesley conference initiated this exchange. Nowhere before have scholars of and from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East come together for comparative discussions on development and women. These scholars had been asking critical questions about the nature of what has been called development and whom it has benefitted. Most had found development to be highly uneven, and in many respects constrictive of women's participation in significant areas of their society. Without systematic comparison, however,

it had been difficult to test widely espoused generalizations which claim attention in this new field of inquiry against empirical data from varying contexts. Exchange would also foster the spread of new methodologies to study the distinctive aspects of women's participation in society. These will enable the development of the new social indicators required for international monitoring of the impact of development on women.

These intellectual concerns were part of a larger commitment to enhancing the lives of women and men in developing countries. Through the event of a conference, the conference organizers hoped to call the attention of policy-makers to the fine work that has already been done on women and development. One of the most important discoveries of the Wellesley conference was the large number of scholars who have already carried out empirical investigations on women in developing countries. No longer can program planners plead that lack of knowledge or research personnel prevent their evaluating development programs for their impact on women.

At the same time the conference organizers hoped to impress on scholars, particularly women scholars, the responsibility of generating data and bringing it to the attention of policy makers. Much discussion at the conference focussed on needs for national data bases to monitor changes in women's labor force participation, health and nutrition, etc. This will require continuing work on research methods, recruiting more scholars into the field, and securing resources to support research. A large constituency is needed to back these efforts. The five hundred persons who attended the conference will help to build this constituency.

Program

The intellectual orientation of the conference was to view development in two ways. Development was seen as a series of system-wide changes moving

societies generally in the direction of greater industrialization, urbanization, and involvement in world trade. Scholars were concerned with tracing the particular forms of development in different societies, and how these forms affected women. Secondly, the conference treated development as a series of policies seeking to direct change toward goals established by societal leaders. Scholars brought forward data on the impact of past development policies on women, stimulating thinking about new sources of data which could enable more effective monitoring of policy. Both perspectives demanded that women's roles be examined in a larger socio-economic context. A single-minded concern with women, no matter how deeply it might probe their motivations and ideologies, could not illuminate the relationships between individuals and structures which is at the core of the concern with women and development. Both perspectives also demanded that scholars document changes in these relationships. Without prejudging the mechanisms and benefits of change, or the metaphors appropriate to describe them, the notion of development rests on an assessment that change is significant and explicable.

The formal conference program consisted of 20 panels held during 6 sessions. The panels were concerned with women's participation in three major areas: labor force, politics and government, and social institutions. Panels on labor force considered such subjects as women in the overall structure of production, economic roles of rural women, informal labor markets, the impact of migration, and women in urban occupations. Those on politics and government included discussions of regime strategies toward women's concerns, political participation, rural women in community politics, women elites, formal associations, and two discussions of law as an instrument of change. The sessions on social institutions treated religion, changing family structures, fertility, education and informal associ-

iations. These sessions were preceded by an opening plenary on general perspectives and a final session summarizing the findings of each panel.

The conference schedule was planned to allow considerable time for informal exchange and small meetings among participants. All panels were held during the day, followed by a free wine and cheese reception before dinner every-day. For informal meetings in the evening, the conference provided a mechanism for small groups to reserve a room and announce themselves to interested persons. A number of such sessions were held, though most of the participants attended two large plenaries convened at the request of the conference participants to discuss issues regarding international cooperation among scholars and the organization of international conferences. Documentary films were also shown each evening.

Conference Planning

The conference plans were generated by a group of American scholars who had been concerned with raising the status of women and of research on women in three U.S.-based professional associations concerned with the third world: African Studies Association, Association for Asian Studies and Latin American Studies Association.* Women who served on the Executive Councils or the Status of Women committees of these associations, or were nominated by them, formed the conference program committee. Staff work was provided by the Center for Research on Women in Higher Education and the Professions at Wellesley College

*Several persons approached from the counterpart association concerned with the Middle East declined to participate, nor did the association agree to co-sponsor the conference. At the time of the conference planning, that association did not have a Committee on the Status of Women.

under the direction of Carolyn Elliott, Director of the Center, who served as convener of the program committee. Wellesley College contributed its facilities for the conference, including the offices of the Center.

Planning the program was complex. Due to the manner in which area studies programs have developed in the United States, few scholars working on one area know colleagues working on others, and almost none know scholars from abroad outside their own regional speciality. The program committee discovered early in its deliberations that the traditions of scholarship, the infrastructure of research, and the meanings attached to such words as "development" and "modernization" differ widely in the various scholarly communities. A great deal of attention was given to selecting panel conveners who could provide intellectual guidance to a panel of scholars coming from different area studies' backgrounds, in order to make a scholarly dialogue possible. Because these conveners were themselves from one area studies background, however, they needed help in identifying persons studying other areas who would be appropriate for the panel. Therefore members of the program committee took on the task of locating researchers from their regions to suggest for the various panels. The choice of panelists was made by the panel conveners.

To generate suggestions for paper-givers the program committee drew upon the rosters of women scholars which the regional associations have prepared in the last few years. In addition, notices of the conference were placed in the journals or newsletters of the major professional associations whose members normally do field research abroad. These notices elicited a large number of names not previously known to the committee. Altogether more than 200 scholars who have or are doing research on women in developing countries were located. The card file of researchers which was prepared during this search

is an ongoing resource available to persons working in the field.

In seeking paper-givers, the program committee looked especially for scholars who had done empirical research and could speak from their own data. This followed the conception of the conference as an opportunity to test the early generalizations about women and development against the growing body of data available. The scholars were asked to make careful distinctions among women of different classes, income levels and rural-urban configurations within national contexts. Probably the most fruitful analysis emerged from these internal comparisons.

The conference plans aroused an escalating interest. In March, 1975, when planning began, the organizers conceived of a meeting of two hundred persons. By February, 1976, the program committee had already been in touch with this number of persons regarding possible participation on the program. Therefore the committee began somewhat reluctantly to plan for a larger conference. Though the size of sessions would expand and make panel discussions more formal, they decided that the purpose of developing a new field of study would be better served by an open gathering. This would enable previously unknown scholars to come forward, and researchers working on specialized topics in different regions to identify each other. Because the meeting was for professionals in the field, rather than public information, however, general publicity and walk-in registrations were discouraged. Most of the 505 persons who attended were scholars and program planners working in universities or agencies professionally concerned with development programs.

Participation of Overseas Scholars

From the beginning of conference organization, the committee planned to have substantial participation by scholars from abroad. They drew up lists

of potential participants, based on their attendance at previous international conferences, including the Mexico City meetings. Letters were sent to colleagues abroad soliciting additional suggestions. As funding became available, overseas scholars were invited to attend and present papers. In several cases, the pressures of work at their home institutions precluded their writing papers. These persons were invited to act as formal discussants and included in the conference program. All overseas participants invited by the program committee were on the program.

The complexity of planning a comparative conference precluded, however, inviting overseas scholars to convene panels. In order for panel conveners to work closely with paper-givers in molding papers to common themes, it appeared necessary to draw on persons located in the United States. This concern was born out by the experience of the one convenor who was resident abroad. She found it difficult to identify and communicate with potential paper-givers in countries outside the Arab region where she was located.

Uncertainty of funding was a major obstacle in arranging for overseas participation. Throughout the planning period, the committee was engaged in a dynamic process of writing proposals, negotiating for funding, and committing travel funds to overseas participants. In the fall several agencies agreed to consider proposals for travel funds later in the year. But by mid-winter when it was necessary to issue firm invitations to overseas participants so they would have time to prepare papers, less than half of the eventual conference funding was in hand. Without the Wellesley Center's willingness to back up these commitments, it would not have been possible to invite many of the persons who came from abroad. Subsequently the conference plans began to arouse great interest among funding agencies, making it possible to invite 35 participants from abroad on conference funds. Had the organizers anticipated at the beginning

that the funds which would be available at the end would enable a truly international conference, instead of an American one with a few international visitors, they would have included more overseas persons on the program committee.

The eventual number of overseas participants was augmented by persons sent by their home institutions or other funding agencies. Many of these persons were in charge of development programs, rather than scholars. For both of these reasons, it was not possible to place them on the conference program. It was hoped, however, that the substantial time allotted for open discussion in panel sessions would enable them to make a full contribution to the conference.

Contributions of the Conference

The substantive discussions during both the planning period and the conference itself were extremely valuable. The panel format suggested by the program committee gave conveners a strong guiding role in the shaping of papers. Many conveners carried on extensive communication with their panelists before the conference, and stimulated much new thinking. Paper-givers for the Castelnuevo panel on law, for instance, reported this to have been a particularly valuable experience.

The conference sessions themselves generated several significant intellectual events. The floor discussion on female sexuality which was stimulated by the Papanek panel on informal associations opened the way for a new direction of research on fertility behavior, while the criticisms of models presented in the informal labor market panel showed the need for a new conceptualization of this important methodological problem, i.e. measuring participation in this largely unreported sector. Finally, there was much carry-over from one session to another as the significant issues in the field

began to emerge. Much of the discussion in the informal labor market panel, for example, drew on the discussion of changing structures of production on the previous day.

The papers presented make a significant contribution to the literature of the field. Eighty-three were presented, most of which are now available on Xerox at the Wellesley Center for Research on Women. More than two hundred and fifty requests for papers have been received. Selected papers will be published in Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, a University of Chicago Press publication, in September 1977. An editorial committee composed of members of the program committee and persons nominated by the conference participants is editing the volume. Other papers will appear in two other volumes devoted specifically to them, one in English and another in Spanish, and individual papers are appearing in a number of journals.

Networking is one of the major purposes of a scholarly gathering. Informal exchanges were especially productive in this conference because it brought together scholarly communities which had not met before. Over the course of the conference, one could witness the gradual melting of regional groups and see an increasing number of conversations between persons of different regions. Follow-up activities have tried to preserve these networks by circulating the list of participants. One Latin American scholar found this roster so useful that she has since developed an additional roster of Latin American scholars concerned with women which is now available.

The conference served also to recruit new participation in the field. Several established scholars who had not previously worked on these issues agreed to convene panels or give papers. The conference provided them with an opportunity to reexamine previously collected data for material on women.

It also drew in persons who have worked on women in industrialized countries and enabled them to see parallels with the developing world. Making stronger connections with the academic disciplines and with scholars of other regions will enrich the field.

The outreach goals were well met. Representatives from several major program agencies attended, including U.S.A.I.D., the Agricultural Development Council, the Population Council, the United Nations and the World Bank. On a more popular level, the conference aroused considerable interest from the press. Articles were published in the New York Times, the International Herald Tribune, the Christian Science Monitor, the Toronto Globe and Mail and a number of papers around the U.S. which syndicate these papers.

The conference dialogue about scholarly exchange between persons of differing perspectives and from countries in different positions in international affairs was very constructive and useful. Many of the overseas participants criticized the lack of papers on women's problems in the United States, and the low representation of third world scholars on the program committee. Persons from some regions thought their governments also should be represented since the conference was concerned with social change and policy. A third major concern was that many papers did not contain a general exposition of the theoretical and political issues which underly the concern with women and development, and focussed too closely on empirical data.

Several of these are issues which could be addressed directly in future gatherings. There is no doubt that more overseas scholars can and should be included on program committees to participate in shaping the intellectual issues and recruiting participants. This is especially important because of the experience of social science research in many countries abroad, where outsiders have determined research agendas with little consideration of local

issues. The conference organizers learned also how papers on U.S. issues might be included in an intellectually coherent way. Their reluctance to do so at Wellesley arose out of a concern brought from Mexico City that U.S. problems not dominate the conference proceedings, as was criticized there. In retrospect this was false modesty, which appeared to exclude American women as participants in the social and economic problems of women.

The debates also provided important insights into the organization and character of scholarship abroad. When the conference organizers decided to focus on policy-oriented research, they were speaking from an American academic tradition, which provides a place for policy studies in a university setting. They asked that the conference papers identify basic patterns and bring forward data which would inform policy deliberations, but not generate immediate policy results. At the conference, however, it became apparent that in many countries abroad, discussion of policy rests primarily in government. Hence the concern of several overseas participants that governments be represented in policy discussions.

Among the scholars from different regions of the third world there were also varying conceptions. It was clear that factors springing from different developmental and theoretical traditions, together with differing relations to government, affect the roles of intellectuals. In some countries, scholars stand in a hermetic position in opposition to government, while in others they work in cooperation with government leaders. The stance of intellectuals has an important influence on definitions and analysis of problems in different states.

The benefits of these discussions were immediately evident at a follow-up workshop held at the Wingspread conference center in Racine, Wisconsin.

About sixty Wellesley participants, mostly from overseas, met at Wingspread for informal consideration of the organization of future research and data collection. Having shared in the intellectual and political events at Wellesley, they were able to move quickly into very concrete and fruitful discussions. Four small groups identified research needs in the areas of health, labor force participation, family structure, and the impact of the world economy on women's roles, particularly in cash-crop agriculture. These groups drew heavily on the substantive material presented at Wellesley. At the conclusion of the two day meeting, the participants commended this type of meeting as a way of maximizing the results of a large formal conference.

Other follow-up activities have already begun. In addition to the circulation of rosters, several meetings are being planned. A conference on Women and Public Policy in South Asia will be held in Dacca in March, 1977. In 1978, the Latin American Studies and African Studies Associations will hold a joint annual meeting. Several comparative panels on women will be presented by scholars who began working together at the Wellesley conference. Finally, we have heard that African women are planning to meet in Lusaka to discuss issues raised at Wellesley, but do not have more details. At Wingspread many other follow-up activities were discussed. There are, of course, many individual activities as well. As an example, three members of the Program Committee are now teaching courses on Women and Development, as are many conference participants with whom they have exchanged syllabi.

For The Future

Further growth of both U. S. and international expertise on women and development is critical. Development programs must be monitored to assess

their impact on women, and procedures constructed to include women in decision-making. More pervasive processes of socio-economic change must be examined to see how they are affecting women's capacities to play productive roles in national development. These are required both to enhance the lives of the majority of the world's population that are women, and the children who are dependent on them, and to increase the effectiveness of programs directed toward food, health, population, and other areas in which women play leading roles.

Three concerns require specific attention by governmental and private funding agencies:

1. Systematic collection and utilization of data to monitor development policies for their impact on women. Data on women's labor force participation are particularly needed to support monitoring of member governments by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

2. Development of research institutions and training of scholars in the United States and abroad. Attention must be given to the building up of basic research skills and to the development of theoretical analyses are an interpretative framework for empirical studies.

3. Provision of opportunities for exchange between scholars of and from different regions. Facilities and skills in the United States should continue to be used, but with close collaboration on projects of joint design with scholars in developing countries.