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International Women's Year

International Women's Year (IWY) is nearly over, having had little serious notice from the world press. Even its centerpiece, the United Nations conference held in Mexico City in June, has come and gone with little recognition of what was a remarkable triumph of women over political self-interest. Like many U.N. meetings, the IWY conference was dominated by the world split over the new international economic order. Originally, Mexico and like-minded countries were arguing that no change could be granted to women until new structures for the world economy were in place. The United States and its supporters were arguing that any mention of the new economic order might require the U.S. delegation to vote against any World Plan of Action for women. Neither position was popular with the women conferees, among whom there was impressive unanimity concerning the import of the World Plan.

The 45-page plan is designed to supply guidelines for governmental and international actions to provide equality for women in education and employment. High among the goals for the Women's Decade 1975-85 is the reduction of illiteracy; 40 percent of all women are now illiterate, compared to 28 percent of all men. The right of women to have access to birth control information and methods was seen as an essential ingredient for equality. A concern that development programs tend to focus on men and ignore women's contribution to economic activity led to adoption of a special resolution recommending that all development programs contain a statement of the impact they would have on women. A call for improved statistics on women's work, especially in agriculture and in the informal sector, is also part of the plan.

A beginning at accumulating the necessary data for reappraising development programs was made at the AAAS-sponsored Seminar on Women in Development, which preceded the official conference. The seminar concluded that women generally find their economic position undermined as development proceeds: in subsistence economies they are left in primitive agriculture or pushed out of the market; in more developed economies the expansion of education creates heightened competition for jobs and pushes women back into the home. In all societies, households headed by women are the poorest of the poor; studies now suggest that one of every three households is headed by a woman, a fact ignored by world planners.*

In Mexico City, while political issues threatened to bog down the 2-week conference, delegates introduced 889 amendments to the plan. Working groups had time only to go through the amendments to the introduction and first section. Spontaneously, several delegations suggested that the draft Plan of Action for the remainder of the sections be accepted as it stood. Thus, on the closing days of the conference, countries accepted the World Plan of Action by consensus. It is unique for governments to accept a world plan without thorough discussion and consideration of amendments. It would appear that the women forced the hand of their countries in this regard.

The U.N. General Assembly is now considering an omnibus resolution, which includes the World Plan; the Declaration of Mexico, in which political positions were stated; and the 35 resolutions adopted in Mexico City. A significant paragraph calls for the creation of an international institution of research and training for the advancement of women, expected to be established in Iran in recognition of its financial support to the IWY. A Nigerian resolution recommends special financial assistance to women, another issue that many felt needed particular emphasis.

The women of the world have stated their needs. It is now up to individual nations to consider the impact of their development plans on women, the better to understand the consequences and to ameliorate women's position during the International Women's Decade. —IRENE TINKER, *Program Head, Office of International Science, American Association for the Advancement of Science*

*Two volumes will shortly appear as a result of the AAAS seminar. They will be published by the Overseas Development Council, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036. Volume 1 will contain an overview of the results of the workshops, and 12 background papers. Volume 2 will be an annotated bibliography of works in the field, with emphasis on unpublished sources.