A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ABOUT CARIBBEAN WOMEN  No. 4
1981

DECASE FOR WOMEN

WOMAN SPEAK!

SPECIAL ISSUE: MID-DECADE CONFERENCE
WOMAN SPEAK!

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OVERVIEW OF COPENHAGEN

Two international meetings marked the mid-point of the UN Decade for Women: the UN World Conference and the Non-Governmental Forum. The following overview attempts to capture the essence of both.

1980

THE U.N. MID-DECADE CONFERENCE FOR WOMEN

at the Bella Centre in the Danish capital, Copenhagen, has left women wiser in the workings of world politics and more committed to the task of advancing the economic position of their sisters in the Caribbean.

So says Caribbean writer Claudette Earle. This is how she assesses the conference:

If nothing else, the United Nations World Conference sensitised women to the importance of international issues and sharpened their political awareness of the economic forces that work to shape the destiny of their nations and women as a whole.

(cont'd on p. 4)
When, in the last hours of the 16-day deliberations, the Conference "gagged" on the word "Zionism," many women became more conscious of the fact that the Conference had been politicised to the extent that women's issues and the proposals for their advancement took second place in the international debate, as representatives of countries carried out their mandate and voted in accordance with their countries' position on controversial issues.

These actions confirmed the worst fears of many delegates unschooled in the machinations of international politics. The Conference to them had lost its focus on the concerns of women and was out there somewhere making statements on the Palestinian question, the New International Economic Order and the North-South dialogue.

The hidden agenda of the Copenhagen Conference was really the tussle between those delegates who felt that women's problems must be discussed within the framework of the major political and economic issues of the world and those who contend that women's problems were women's problems.

**Impressions of the World**

"I think the Conference has been successful. It has given women a chance to look at the world politics in depth. On this occasion, the women were forced to take part in politics which was just what some of the developed countries did not like. That is why four of them voted against the World Plan of Action."

*Phyllis Coard, leader of the Grenada delegation*

"We cannot continue to feel that women's issues are a thing apart from politics and economic realities. What has been demonstrated here in Copenhagen is that women are not afraid to deal with the issues of world politics and its effects on their lives as people."

*Lenore Dorsett, Trinidad and Tobago's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN*

"This is the kind of orientation that all of our women in the Caribbean region need if they are to function more skilfully and more effectively in the future. One of our focuses during the next five years should be to ensure that women who will be leaders of delegations would be able to develop the kind of expertise which is needed at such international meetings."

*Magda Pollard, Women's Affairs Officer at the Caricom Secretariat*
THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL MID-DECADE FORUM

attracted participants from 187 countries. Women participated in a welter of workshops, panels and discussions covering hundreds of concerns—both general and specific—in every part of the world.

Two hundred and twenty-two (222) delegates came from Africa, 312 from Latin America, 830 from North America, 41 from the Caribbean, 132 from the Middle East, 1,377 from Europe, 491 from Asia and the Pacific, and 2,815 from Denmark.

No less than 150 to 175 workshops, panels and group meetings were held every day at the Forum.

Work on the Forum began early in 1979 when 25 groups in the Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations formed a committee to plan what the NGO activities might be at the UN Conference.

At the request of this committee the International Women’s Tribune Centre coordinated and staffed VIVENCIA! (a Spanish word that means: “an experience that becomes part of life”). It was designed to provide an on-going support and information service for individuals and groups to create instant workshops or activities emphasizing practical approaches to major issues, and to explore human and material resources. During the nine-day period, VIVENCIA! hosted over 370 separate activities, more than 130 films and slide shows, and daily noontime cultural events featuring performers from around the world.

The EXCHANGE, which ran sessions focusing on women and development in the Third World, was another major group of workshops at the Forum.

The Forum was the venue where women shared experiences, discussed developments during the first half of the Decade, made interesting and useful contacts and planned a course of action for the second half of the Decade. Among the major topics were: women and health; women and income-generating projects; the trade union movement; rural women; and education. Women and the New International Economic Order and Technical Assistance were special areas of interest.

A wide range of resolutions and recommendations were forwarded to the Secretary-General of the UN Mid-Decade Conference, Dr. Lucille Mair, by the Action “Plenary” Issue Committee which accepted proposals from persons or groups at the Forum, without alteration or censorship.

Several of the resolutions dealt with economic matters, including pleas for more financial assistance for women in developing countries and an appeal to multi-national corporations to cease using women as a source of cheap labour. Others touched on rural women, prostitution, violence and nuclear power.

This edition of WOMAN SPEAK! attempts to summarise some of the issues and concerns which received attention at these meetings. They come through the voices of some of the Caribbean women who were in Copenhagen. Although we were few in number, our contribution to both events were such that all Caribbean peoples can feel a sense of pride—starting with Lucille Mair of Jamaica who was Secretary-General for the UN Conference, and acknowledging the special contributions of Peggy Antrobus, Chairperson of the Advisory Committee for the EXCHANGE workshops; Urmia Johnson of the WSRM who conducted daily workshops on appropriate technology at VIVENCIA!; and Olive Lewin of the Jamaica Folksingers who led the Caribbean women at the Forum in cultural events which created a special feeling of sisterhood among all participants.
THE UN CONFERENCE

Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference for Women, Lucille Mair, saw the Mid-Decade Conference as a forum allowing all kinds of interaction and communication which could mobilise the sort of collective political will which can make things happen.

Since the last world conference in Mexico, in 1975, Dr. Mair noted, women were better equipped to analyse and to share information about what has happened to them.

The Jamaican-born former diplomat argues that women have made contacts and the spinoff has been dynamic and tremendous.

"Women are exposing the links between their economic activity and what is happening at a global level. They are pointing out the relevance of the educational level of women who are involved in agricultural activity and the export process.

"Governments are being made to realise that the health and educational status of woman is directly related to her becoming an effective producer."

Dr. Mair feels Copenhagen offered an opportunity for the mobilisation of women to become increasingly active in their societies and international politics.

However, she feels there is still a very intractable layer of attitudes inhibiting the thinking in policies and programmes which really pull women equally into the mainstream of national life.

"We still see girls taking up the options of what one might call the soft disciplines which also happen to be those which lead them into the status occupations with the low-wage implications."

Another major problem, according to Dr. Mair, is the imbalance in world economic forces and the world recession whose casualties have been women—regarded as the unskilled and dispensable part of the labour force.

On the subject of refugees, which featured prominently on the conference agenda, she points to the fact that women made up the bulk of refugees and were particularly vulnerable in political conflicts.

"We are determined to confront the fundamental assumption that these are not women’s issues. Women no longer accept the compartmentalization of issues."

She says women of the world must develop confidence in dealing with men and with each other if the United Nations Women’s Decade of equality, development and peace are to be achieved.

On the political front she refers to apartheid, another area which generated discussion at the governmental conference. "You cannot divorce what is happening to women in South Africa from what is happening to men in South Africa. No, they’re interwoven."

She remarks that the priorities of UN agencies in relation to women are very high. . . . "And we look to see a reaffirmation, if not the strengthening, of those priorities which will be translated into the commitment of resources."

On Caribbean women, the Secretary-General for the Decade says they are great; wherever they are they project very fine qualities and she was proud to be one of them.

She observes that there were variations in the Caribbean countries’ meeting the objectives of the UN Decade.

"We know that there are some of the islands which are not yet developed, whose educational situation of women is not as good as some other countries. But we’re not the worst in a global situation. Educationally we have big problems of women who cannot read and write, but if you are going to put it on a comparative basis, we are ahead of our sisters in some rather developed areas of the continent and that is interesting."
The slow pace at which the New International Economic Order is moving is of great concern to many governments, particularly those in developing countries.

The stalemate of this proposed change in the world economic system is of tremendous concern too to millions of women who make up half of the world's population.

Women from all parts of the globe called at the Copenhagen Conference for special efforts to ensure that they gain an equal share of the benefits a new order promises.

"If the decade of the 70's proved but one point, it would be that a basic deterrent to the greater enjoyment of human rights of all people—but particularly women, and even more particularly the women of the developing world—is the very serious economic disabilities to which the countries of the Third World have been subjected," said Billie Miller, Health Minister and leader of the Barbados delegation to the Conference.

According to Ms. Miller, talk of a new economic order was not just a matter of paying lip service to the rhetoric of the global community, but was a plea for survival.

The Barbadian minister spoke of the need for improved utilisation of human resources throughout the world and pointed out that the most under-utilised resource was women.
Peggy Antrobus assesses where we are in 1980.... and where we might go.

Tutor/Coordinator of the Women and Development Unit of the University of the West Indies, Peggy Antrobus, says the Caribbean has come a long way since 1975 in terms of what has happened and, more significantly, in terms of consciousness.

She characterised 1975 as a watershed.... “We’ve had women’s organisations for many years doing mostly traditional things, social welfare programmes. As a result of 1975, people started thinking and focusing on the fact that women were not only beneficiaries, not only subjects for social welfare programmes but in fact had a very important and significant contribution to make to the social and economic development of their countries, as producers and decision-makers.”

According to Peggy, there was a growing awareness of the fact that there were many constraints to that contribution and that there were attitudes and practices in society which really prevented women giving fully of themselves, their talents and experiences. She acknowledges a change in perception over the past five years.

“I felt comfortable in 1975 about subscribing to the goals of the Decade—equality between the sexes and the integration of women in the process of development. They seemed very straightforward goals. The goal of integrating women in development included more vocational opportunities, opportunities for employment, better levels of salary, getting women into a wider range of skills, allowing them to climb the promotional ladder, even opportunities for women to get into decision-making positions like more female permanent secretaries, more judges and more women in politics.

“Five years later I’m really beginning to question some of these goals. I’m much more aware now, particularly in the last year, of the complexity of the whole issue. I’m certainly aware that many of the present structures, including the structure of economics, don’t suit women at all.”

Peggy argued that women under the present system have to make choices that men don’t have to and are exposed to the kind of tension, anxiety and conflict that men don’t experience.

“What we really should be talking about and beginning to think about, is how we can transform those structures. But we’re not going to begin to do this until we develop that kind of perspective which I call a feminist perspective.”

Elaborating on her definition of feminism, the WAND Tutor/Coordinator pointed out that one thing that is clear is that at a fundamental level there is a commonality of experiences among women which transcends differences in ideology, class and culture.

“For me feminism is first of all consciousness of women’s situation of subordination and secondly, a commitment to work for change.”
EXCHANGE WORKSHOPS

There were two broad clusters of EXCHANGE workshops. One had to do with development issues like income-generating activities, women’s bureaux, women and NGO’s. The second group dealt with communications, e.g. video workshops, and workshops on group dynamics.

The workshops were attended by a good mixture of women from developed and developing countries.

An example of one of the workshops on women’s bureaux and NGO’s follows.

WOMEN’S BUREAUS AND NGO’S

Since 1975 many governments have moved to establish special governmental machinery to promote the removal of inequality between men and women and to increase the participation of women in development.

What have these governmental units to do with the real concerns and priorities of women? And what is their relationship to the women’s organisations which have led the struggle for equal opportunities for women?

This was the focus of an EXCHANGE workshop entitled ‘Women’s Bureaus and Private Organisations: Government and Non-Government Work Together’, attended by participants from both governments and NGO’s drawn from the Caribbean, Africa and Europe.

The convenors of the workshop were Peggy Antrobus—who established the first women’s bureau in the Caribbean, in Jamaica in 1975—and Gayla Cooke of the African-American Institute.

Women underlined the urgent need to change legislation in many countries. It was pointed out that although only governments can do this, NGO’s had an important role to play in lobbying for change and in educating women about the laws affecting them. Workshop participants agreed that research was a number one priority and concurred unanimously that government should support the funding of research even if it was carried out by NGO’s. Peggy Antrobus contended that without the facts, people would continue to generalise. She said it was necessary for machinery to be implemented to collect data and suggested that perhaps this could be one of the functions of the women’s bureaus, the governmental units for women’s affairs.

There was also consensus that both governments and NGO’s should be involved in programmes for education and training.

Another area identified was the need to sensitise women, a vital role for women’s organisations. Here, participants saw the NGO’s informing and educating women about themselves and the contribution they could make to development.

There was agreement that both governments and world organisations had important roles to play in promoting changes which would benefit women and enhance their contribution to development. Participants felt that one of the tasks for the future was to build a close relationship between the two in the movement for change.
APPRIOPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

The subject of appropriate technology was one which attracted much discussion at the Forum.

One of the developing countries taking the lead in this area was Guyana, whose delegation shared their experiences in Copenhagen.

Delegates were told of the workshop held by the Women’s Revolutionary Socialist Movement, in conjunction with the National Research Council in Guyana and UNICEF, in the country of Berbice.

Participants came from Latin America, the Caribbean and Suriname.

According to National Secretary of the WRSN, Urmia Johnson, who was in charge of the project, it was designed to decrease women’s workload and at the same time create income-earning opportunities.

Ms. Johnson said appropriate technology was approached from two levels: energy conservation and conserving the energy of women in various tasks. She referred to the use of solar dryers, which dried crops faster than traditional methods, saving time and energy and allowing such crops to be marketed for income.

There was also mention of the unique pedal-powered chicken plucker, the construction of local stoves from mud and the use of nibby brooms made from grass. Coupled with the practical demonstrations which the women were exposed to over a two week period, were a series of related lectures.

Ms. Johnson said that following the workshop the progress of the participants had been monitored.

Another speaker on appropriate technology was Elizabeth O’Kelly, an Englishwoman who is experienced in this area, particularly in Africa, and has written several books on the subject.

Ms. O’Kelly remarked that people have realised that the West has become too advanced in its technology and is having now to go back to simple methods which are not so dependent on oil.

She cautioned that before anyone embarked on an appropriate technology programme, the background into which it was being introduced must be studied.

‘Ideally, requests for appropriate technology should come from the country itself but sometimes they require a little guidance because they ask for more advanced technology than is practical, because they do not have the technical knowledge.’

She warned that appropriate technology should not be introduced as the panacea for all ills.
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<td>Ms. Betty Russell</td>
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<td>Ms. Marva Alleyne</td>
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<td>Ms. Carmeta Fraser</td>
<td>President/National Organisation of Women</td>
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<td>GRENADA</td>
<td>Ms. Phyllis Coard</td>
<td>Deputy Secretary for Information</td>
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<td>Ms. Rita Joseph</td>
<td>International Secretary for New Jewel Movement</td>
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<td>GUYANA</td>
<td>Ms. Viola Burnham</td>
<td>Chairman/Women’s Revolutionary Socialist Movement (WRSM)</td>
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<td>Ms. Shirley Field-Ridley</td>
<td>President/Council on the Affairs &amp; Status of Women in Guyana</td>
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<td>Ms. Carmen Jarvis</td>
<td>Executive Committee member/CASWIG</td>
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<td>Ms. Agnes Bend-Kirton</td>
<td>National Executive Committee member/Guyana Trades Union Congress</td>
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<td>Ms. Maureen Bacchus (alternate representative)</td>
<td>Secretary to Chairman/WRSM</td>
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<td>Mr. Tyrone Fergusson (Advisor)</td>
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<td>JAMAICA</td>
<td>Dr. Phyllis Macpherson-Russell</td>
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<td>Ms. Hazel Blake-Nelson</td>
<td>Director/Women's Bureau</td>
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<td>Ms. Evadene Coye</td>
<td>1st Secretary/Permanent Mission of Jamaica to the U.N.</td>
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<td>ST. LUCIA</td>
<td>Sen. Frances Michel</td>
<td>President/St. Lucia Farmers and Farm Workers</td>
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<td>TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO</td>
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<td>Deputy Permanent Representative to the U.N.</td>
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<td>ANTIGUA</td>
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<td>Director, Women’s Desk</td>
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<td>Helen Burton</td>
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<td>Millicent Percival</td>
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<td>Allison Lewis</td>
<td>Consultant—Family Planning</td>
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<td>BARBADOS</td>
<td>Joycelin Massiah</td>
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<td>Peggy Antrobus</td>
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<td>Nita Barrow</td>
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<td>President, World YWCA</td>
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<td>GUYANA</td>
<td>Desiree Bernard</td>
<td>Legal Advisor on Status of Women</td>
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<td>JAMAICA</td>
<td>Molly James</td>
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<td>Elaine Rainford</td>
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<td>Journalist/Broadcaster</td>
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<td>MONTSETRAT</td>
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<td>Sheila Douyon</td>
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<td>Claudette Cupid</td>
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<td>Velma Jardine</td>
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CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT,
ST. VINCENT, ORGANISES SEMINAR ON WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

A challenge has been thrown out to communities in St. Vincent to produce a plan of action for follow-up to a seminar on women and development.

Issuing this challenge, WAND's Tutor/Coordinator, Peggy Antrobus, offered to assist whichever community first produced such a plan. Ms. Antrobus' offer came after participants at a seminar on 'Women in a Developing Society' in St. Vincent had expressed a wish for a follow-up seminar to deal more fully with the topic of 'Women, appropriate technology and development'.

The seminar was arranged by the Community Development Department and organised by Chief Community Development Officer Clem Ballah. It ran from September 14-15.

Its aims were to motivate women, identify needs and stimulate activity in the various communities. Topics discussed included the role of women in a developing society; women, appropriate technology and development; and women's participation in policy making.

Attending the seminar, which was opened by St. Vincent's Minister of Community Development, were 35 participants from as far as Barrouallie on the Leeward and Biabou on the Windward side of the island. Resource persons included Peggy Antrobus and WAND's Programme Officer Pat Ellis, who assisted by mounting a display on women in the Caribbean and conducting some of the sessions.

An action committee, comprising one representative from each area, was formed during the seminar to co-ordinate with the National Council of Women of St. Vincent. This committee will clarify the Council's role and plan strategy for future action at the community and national levels.

Discussions have already been held between the two groups. As a result, a sub-committee has been formed to plan two follow-up seminars on 'Women in a Developing Society'. These took place on November 15 and 16 and November 22 and 23.

In three communities—Layou, Brighten and Barrouallie—groups have also begun to work on specific projects coming out of the September seminar.

CARIWA EXECUTIVE MEETING IN TRINIDAD

The Caribbean Women's Association (CARIWA) is to set up a secretariat. This was one of the recommendations of CARIWA's executive at its meeting in Trinidad from September 12-14.

The proposed secretariat will administer the organisation's funds, help members to develop and get funding for specific projects, and allow the executive to take immediate decisions and act on them. It is also expected to ease communication and travel and provide easy access to regional institutions.

CARIWA is also planning to set up a documentation centre to deal with problems of Caribbean women. Other issues coming up at the meeting were: sexual exploitation on the job; a better deal for women in agriculture, and the practice by some industries of preventing women from joining trade unions.

The meeting also noted that Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Saba and Montserrat had indicated their willingness to join CARIWA, and a special general conference of the organisation will be held early next year to deal with the matter.

WOMEN'S WORLD BANKING CONFERENCE IN AMSTERDAM, HOLLAND

Two Caribbean women, Senator Valencia Ashe of St. Vincent and Gloria Knight of Jamaica, attended a conference organised by Women's World Banking in Amsterdam, Holland, from March 12-15.

Women's World Banking is an independent, international financial organisation which encourages women to directly participate in the money economies of their countries—particularly those women who have not had access to established banking and financial services.

The Amsterdam conference was split into six workshops to discuss the following:

- identify commercial opportunities;
- women as entrepreneurs;
- sources of assistance available to people going into business;
- priorities for assisting women in enterprises;
- practical means of supplying capital to women's enterprises;
- sources of raising funds.

The conference ended by issuing a statement to be presented at the recently-concluded UN Mid-Decade Conference on Women.

Among other things, it urged governments and international and national financial institutions to re-affirm their commitment to new efforts and policies which would ensure that opportunities were open for enterprising women to develop their own income-producing ventures.

It also stressed the need for full support of the efforts of private and non-government organisations which were promoting access to credit.
Newly-appointed Caribbean Area Co-ordinator for the Worldwide YWCA, Joyce Holder is familiar to most of us as she worked as YWCA Communications Secretary for the Caribbean from 1973, before she left on study leave.

Joyce says she wants to spend the next few years in her new position working intensively with individual ‘Y’s in the region. She will have ample opportunity for this, because her job entails working with young women to develop plans to meet their employment, educational and social needs.

She also wants to help the ‘Y’s discover their own communities, create employment and mobilize their resources.

Joyce is based within the Barbados headquarters of the Caribbean Conference of Churches.

"I am concerned with helping people to realize their potential and capabilities, and to focus on the positive things they can accomplish, instead of on their shortcomings."

These words from Pat Ellis, WAND’s new Programme Officer, are indicative of how she approaches whatever post she occupies. Pat comes to WAND after spending five years with SERVOL in Trinidad. For three of those years she was Co-ordinator of SERVOL’s Integrated Education for Development programme.

She was responsible for co-ordinating programmes in nursery education, nursery-teacher training, adult education and community development.

Her priorities at WAND will be to help develop programmes in St. Lucia and St. Vincent. She has already completed her first assignment: an assessment of the situation in St. Vincent to see where WAND could assist.

WAND also welcomed Susan Odle to its staff as Administrative Assistant with responsibility for communications.

A former Secretary of the Year in Barbados, Susan was secretary to the Senior Assistant Registrar of the Cave Hill campus of the University of the West Indies for six years.

She takes up a newly-created post at WAND, and will be responsible for setting up a communications system for the Unit and increasing public awareness of its work.

From Trinidad comes the good news that the desk of the Caribbean Church Women’s Co-ordinator for the Trinidad sub-region has been filled.

Now occupying the post, which has been vacant for the past two years, is Lorna Rigby, former acting deputy director for social welfare in Trinidad’s Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Co-operatives.

Lorna sees the CCW as a catalyst for women to effect change in their particular communities. She hopes to use her post to sensitise women to those areas of concern which affect them.

The new Co-ordinator will be responsible for Grenada, Guyana, Cayenne (French Guiana), Suriname and Barbados.
Do you wish to become a resource person in the Caribbean sharing your skills, experiences and energy with other women? If the answer is yes, fill this form out and be added to the list of other resource persons in the region.

**RESOURCE PERSONS**

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1976-85

Typeset by CEDAR Press/Printed by Modern Printing & Graphics Ltd., Barbados