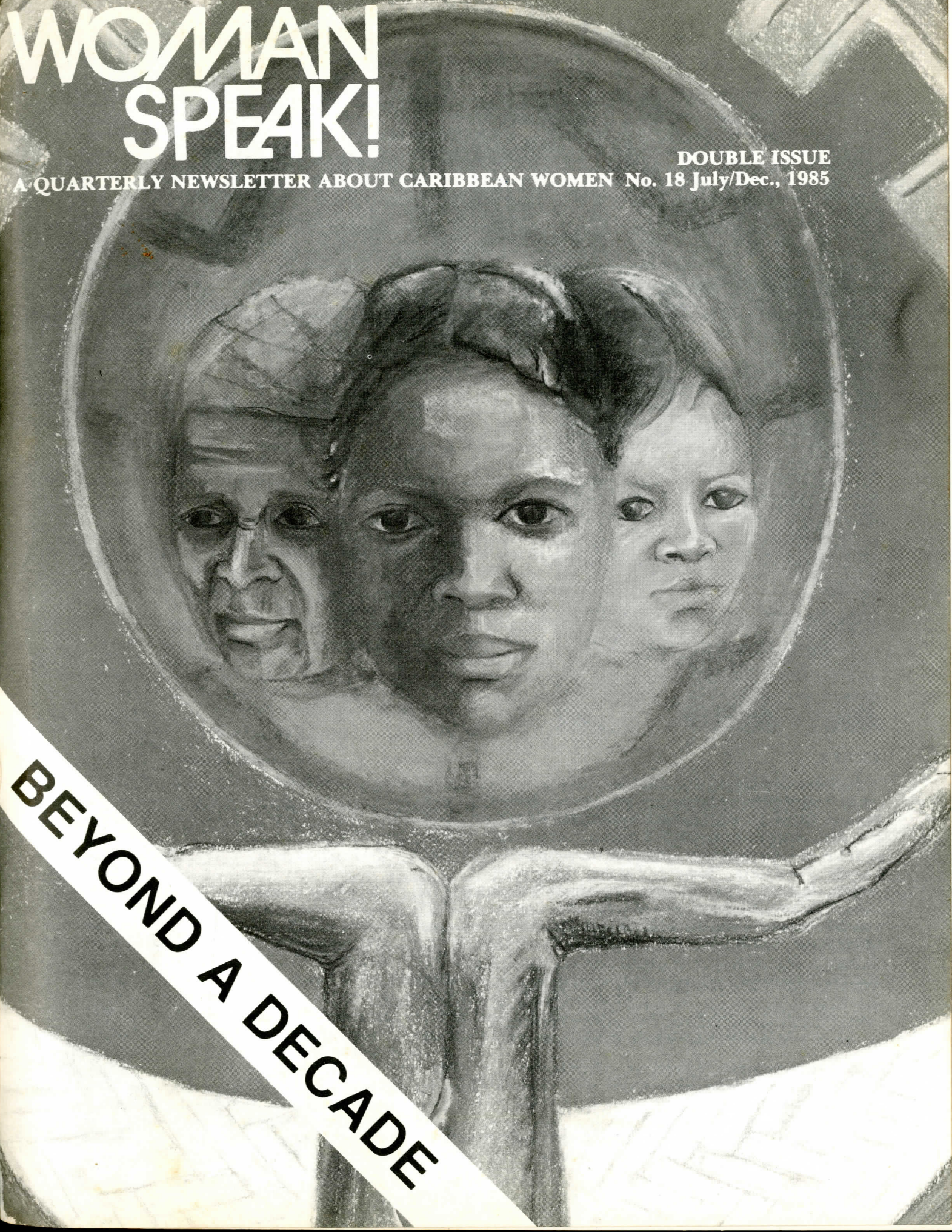


# WOMAN SPEAK!

DOUBLE ISSUE  
A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ABOUT CARIBBEAN WOMEN No. 18 July/Dec., 1985

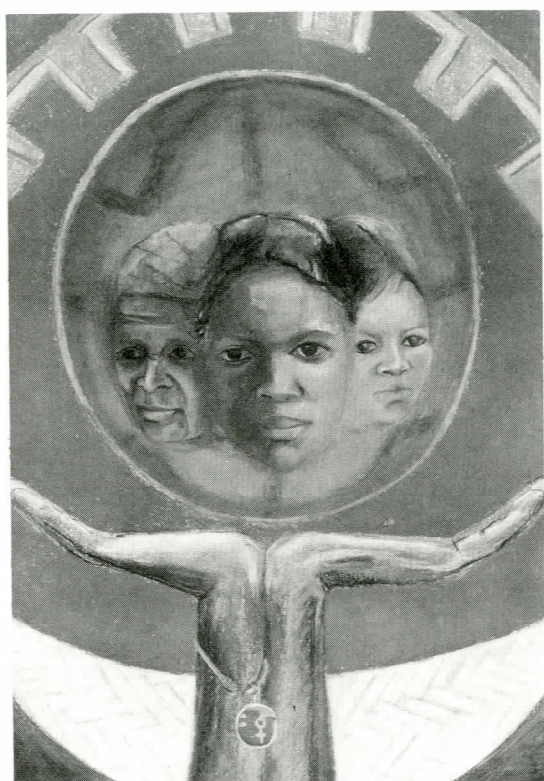


BEYOND A DECADE



# WOMAN SPEAK!

Editors: Sandra Edwards / Nan Peacocke  
Published by: The Women and Development Unit  
(WAND)



## COVER

A poster saluting the UN Decade for Women was designed by a group of Jamaican women artists, Judith Salmon, Rachel Faring, Sharon Chacko and June Bellew. This design was developed through discussions with a wide cross section of artists and the support of: Camille Parchment, Samere Tansley, Normadell Whittle, Beti Campbell, Margaret Bernal, the Frame Centre Gallery, Kingston, Jamaica and the Women and Development Unit, Extra Mural Dept., UWI, Barbados.

WOMAN SPEAK! is published every four months by the Women and Development Unit, (WAND) a division of the Extra-Mural Department of the University of the West Indies. Please address all enquiries to:

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*Sistren on stage in New York City*

# EDITORIAL

In this double issue, **Woman Speak!**, a child of the Decade for Women, commemorates the two major events involving Caribbean women: the **Caribbean Celebration** held in Bridgetown, Barbados (March, 1985), the United Nations **End of the Decade Conference** and the Non Governmental **Forum '85** in Nairobi, Kenya (July, 1985)

These events to a greater or lesser degree were symbolic for women of the most significant experience of the Decade – a deepening understanding of power, an altering consciousness about how the systems and methods through which power is manifest may be transformed at the very root of human experience.

Our history has made us to understand that power as we have known it may be maintained through coercion, apathy or sanction depending on the health of democratic institutions in the society. We have often seen power embodied in the individuals employed in those institutions while the humble and unglorious existence of the poor and “those who are not seen” persists unchanged.

Women are awakening to the knowledge and the hope that we carry with us a potential for changing the condition of powerlessness among those who experience it. Our great work is to determine what common lines of resistance can be articulated against entangled economic, social and psychological forms of oppression. We must insist this work be continued. Through it the experience of power, the meaning of history is being changed.

## THIS ISSUE

The editors thank the many contributors to this special issue and mention particularly Pat Mohammed who did the interviews for the section on the Caribbean Celebration, Sandra Baptiste who provided items on the Nairobi Conferences, and Victor Norville for the Caribbean Celebration photos.

## NEXT ISSUE

**Women Speak!** looks next at women in conflict and protest in Caribbean society and the region as a whole. In one arena Caribbean women are beginning to organise against violence against the person. A vigil commemorating the November 25 International Day Against Violence Against Women held in Port of Spain, Trinidad turned into a march supported by large numbers of men and women. The week before nurses from the General Hospital marched on parliament to demand better security. Meanwhile, women in St. Vincent, prompted by a series of rapes and murders of girls and women demonstrated through the streets of Kingstown and at a rally of over one thousand, mainly school girls on December 4, 1985.

In another arena, women are becoming aware of the institutionalised violence in South Africa, the war against Nicaragua and the problems posed for our own regional future by growing militarisation.

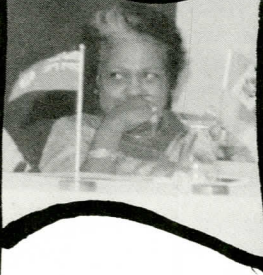
Contributions to this issue are welcome.

## EVALUATION FORMS

The Publications and Programme staff of WAND thank those readers who responded to our evaluation of WAND's publications and appeal to those questionnaires loitering in desk draws or snoozing on shelves to fill themselves out and mail themselves in to our office in the new year.



# The





# Caribbean Celebration



The "Caribbean Celebration of Women" held in Barbados, March 29 - 31, was sponsored by the Women and Development Unit, U.W.I.; The Caribbean Women's Association; The CARICOM Secretariat and the UN Economics Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

As the name implies the occasion was conceived as a coming together of Caribbean women who would use the opportunity of such a regional event to discuss and reflect on the insights and experience gained in the course of the United Nations Decade for Women, and to display some of the creative work produced by women.

To this end, the "Celebration" was structured around two activities, a Festival Exhibition and a Workshop Forum.

The following interviews with participants of the Workshops were conducted by Pat Mohammed.

Photographs of the event by Victor Norville.



# *Caribbean Celebration*

**Trinidadian writer, Merle Hodge is a member of the group Women Working for Social Change and the University of the West Indies Women's Studies Group, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad. Here she discusses some characteristics of Trinidadian society, their significance for the emergence of a women's movement in Trinidad and Tobago, and the effects on women of the dissolution of the extended family in the Caribbean.**

**WS: What developments are taking place in the women's movement in Trinidad?**

**Merle:** In the mid-eighties there is an encouraging upsurge of activity when I compare it with five or six years ago. There were those (women's organizations) attached to other organizations, but the women did not see themselves as banding together because they were women in order to focus on anything to do with women in particular. At that time the women's arm of the trade unions, for example, rapidly disintegrated into the catering arm.

A recent development is that a fair amount of feminism is appearing in the consciousness of women in Trinidad and Tobago. Though we don't have a large number of women who are organized, I have the impression that a lot of women are interested in the movement and want to support it. Trinidadians have not traditionally been big organization people, but more and more women are seeing the need to get into an organization that exists specifically for the exploration of issues that concern women and their relationship with the society.

**WS: If Trinidad is not the most fertile ground for organizations to take root for the next few years, why might that be so?**

**Merle:** I think it is already becoming fertile ground because conditions have already begun to change. Our attitude in the past has to do with two things which are related. One, because we have been relatively well off materially there has been the development of a certain individualism and also there's the fact that Trinidad has been a very fragmented society partly because of its racial composition (which of course is no reason for the society to be fragmented – that could work in an entirely different direction). It's a conglomeration of races who haven't finished coming to terms with their coexistence on the island. And it is a catchment area for immigration from the rest of the Caribbean. You always have a certain number of people who are first generation or who are in the process of integrating themselves, who remain on the fringe of the society.

**WS: But would you also say that the advent of the oil wells in the 70s which lent to the development of a large middle class, may have affected the consciousness of people generally, and of women, to bread and butter issues which other women in other societies have had to face at a more urgent pace?**

**Merle:** I agree, and this is why I think the scene is changing and we are going to develop a different mentality now. The development of a middle class and the sort of ideals that were foisted upon people through our access to American television – an individualistic life style – is a development of industrialised capitalist societies, and we have moulded ourselves accordingly.

One of my greatest concerns is the development of the family in Caribbean society. If you look at family patterns, even though they are people screaming about the breakdown of the family, they mean the nuclear family – that too many people are getting divorced, too many women choosing not to marry. But for me the serious breakdown is of the extended family which was alive and healthy in Trinidad and Tobago in both the Indian and African parts of the society, until a few years ago when affluence and Americanization really began to roll over us.

The extended family in the past was your immediate family, other relatives who might live with you, but also people on the street, your community and other relatives who didn't necessarily live in your house but who took an interest in what you were doing. But the new housing settlements are not conducive to this. First, is the way the houses are built and the settlements are isolated from longstanding communities. They are out in the wilds. All the people are new and they don't really build up relationships with each other. The whole lifestyle is as though we were living in the sealed off apartments we see on TV.

**Trinidadians have not been big organization people, but more and more women are seeing the need to get into an organization that exists specifically for the exploration of issues that concern women and their relationship with the society.**



# Caribbean Celebration

**WS:** *Within the extended family, women had a particular position in which, though assisted by relatives, they had a lower status as mothers, helpers. They had more domestic roles.*

**Merle:** Do you think the situation has improved in the nuclear family? Are you contrasting the status of a wife in a nuclear family with the status of a woman in an extended family? I think, if we extract generalizations, what you are analysing there is the status of the Indian woman in the Indian extended family, which is quite different from the African woman in the African extended family.

**The whole lifestyle is as though we were living in the sealed off apartments we see on TV**

**WS:** *What would you say are the differences?*

**Merle:** All this is changing. For example, we have evidence that the self image of the Indian woman is causing problems in the Indian family, an example is the high rate of suicide among Indian girls. However, the African family has been less tradition bound in terms of conventions and marriage. The sociologists can't decide themselves whether the position of women is due to the presence of matrifocality from

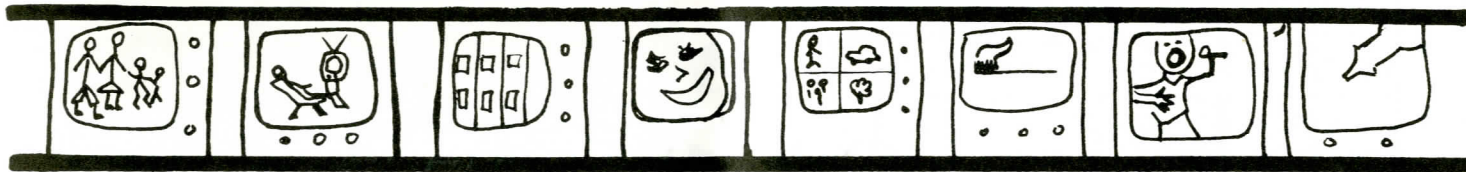
Africa or whether it's to do with the upstaging of men that happened during slavery.

The African extended family is very often what the western sociologists would call a "single parent family" embedded within a larger family. Living in the maternal house is a woman who is by now perhaps a grandmother, her children, some of her children's children, maybe her brothers and sisters. A large number of African families are headed by women both in the economic sense and the lines of authority.

So the extended family did not mean the diminution of the woman in the African family. Quite the contrary. But the diminution takes place when a generation of the African family gets into the western mode of restricting the nuclear family man and woman, because the prescription of wifely behaviour changes completely. The African woman in the extended family usually isn't a wife. In many cases it's a visiting relationship. On the other hand I think, for Indian women, being able to move out with your husband alone is a kind of promotion.

**WS:** *What do you think of the Celebration?*

**Merle:** I'm excited by the scope of it, especially when I realized that the majority of the women paid their own way to come. Women have come from islands in which the economic situation is such that one month's salary is the air fare to Barbados, but they found themselves here in the hundreds. That augurs well for the women's movement in the Caribbean.



**Marja Naarendorf is a representative of the National Women's Movement of Suriname. In this interview, she gives some idea of the political outlook of the Movement, its relationship to other organizations, and the collaborative efforts which produced a community health project for the early detection of uterine cancer.**

**Marja:** Our organization is not very old. We started it three years ago on a national level. We tried to make an analysis of the position of women in Suriname and of what needed to be done. We came to the conclusion that there were a lot of women's organizations, but lacking was a clear analysis of the real needs of women, working women and peasant women, and an anti-imperialist view of their position.

I think we succeeded in doing that because we formed different women's groups and we have different projects running in which women are taking part.

**WS:** *Is your organization linked in any way to the government?*

*(The government of Suriname is composed of civilians, appointed by the military leadership which took control of the country in 1980. The business community and trade unions have some representation.)*

**Marja:** The situation is that we have a military leadership of the revolutionary process. We have said in our analysis of the situation of women that only when deep social changes take place are there possibilities to change the position of women. So we try to link up the work we are doing with the aspects of change which are taking place.

As for now, we have made some steps toward changing social conditions for women. Housing and national insurance have changed in women's favour.



# Caribbean Celebration

**WS:** *How do you organize to achieve these gains?*

**Marja:** I think a good example is the health project we started recently. We do it together with the Family Planning Association and the Ministry of Health. By linking up with other women's organizations we were able to recruit and mobilize volunteers to be trained to go into different communities and encourage women to do the examination for the early detection of uterine cancer. We try to get women involved in doing something for other women and we work in communities where you have different ethnic groups.

We had done research (on the disease) and found a high incidence among lower income groups and we found a way to go into the community and get to the women.

In Suriname the black women are more open to activities while other women, for cultural and ethnical reasons, stay more at home. But through this project, we reach the women easily. They come out and take part. It's a way they can organize within their communities.

**WS:** *How much of a role do women play in the government?*

**Marja:** There are no female ministers. Lately the National Assembly has been installed and four women from the trade unions and the February 25 Movement

(the political body formed after the coup in 1980) are taking part.

**WS:** *How much impact do women's organizations have on women in Suriname and how do you see the women's struggle at this time?*

**Marja:** Women always played an important role. In the time of old policies (pre-1980) they did the work but it was never recognised. We think that during the last few years more and more women are aware of their position but they are not yet organized enough. So we think that is the biggest part of the work that we should do.

We see as our task to mobilise and organize women. We have a monthly newspaper through which we reach the women.

**WS:** *What links would you like to see develop with the rest of the Caribbean?*

**Marja:** I think for my organization's point of view it's necessary to be in direct contact with other sisters in the Caribbean. We have the same historical background, also the same present situation in which we are all working hard in an economic crisis. So it's very encouraging to see what steps women have been taking and what similar goals we have.



*The Woman's Construction Collective in Jamaica is a group of 30 women who came into a programme to be trained in basic construction skills. The collective secures jobs for its members as a condition of their joining, and provides a mutual support group for ongoing training. Ruth McCleod of the collective describes how, without models to follow, the collective maintains its survival by experimenting with new approaches to its structures and methods. In the process, she makes some uncompromising observations about the social and economic reality of women in Jamaica today.*

**Ruth:** Women are now effectively excluded from construction training in Jamaica. In theory they are eligible to go on a very limited basis to the training institutions, but in practice none of them do. There is a demand in the industry for women, because the contractors are finding that when they do employ women the violence goes down on site, work moves along faster – so there are a lot of pragmatic advantages.

The main function of the Collective is to get women in at trade level, because the problem isn't so severe at professional level. Women are there as architects and engineers. The big gap is at the trade level.

**WS:** *How do you organize the Collective?*

**Ruth:** It's very fluid in the sense that when it was initially organized there were only 10 women involved, and it's expanded but we still haven't got a set organization. It's very much still evolving. We're struggling with that problem. The women have gone through changes in ideas about how to do it. We used to have a formal gang leader of the collective, now we rotate



# Caribbean Celebration

the chairing of every meeting so that each woman can get a chance. We are exploring the possibility of an executive to plan meetings, but it's very loose at the moment.

## ***The contractors are finding that when they employ women violence goes down on site.***

**WS:** *Is your collective linked to any other kind of women's organization?*

**Ruth:** Yes. It is an integral part and arose out of the Working Group on Women's Low Income Households and Urban Services in Latin America and the Caribbean. We have one group in Jamaica, there's one in Peru and another in Mexico.

That's a very important linkage. Again it's a very flexible one. There are no formal memberships that we comply with, but it gives us a chance to meet with women who are running other projects that have come out of the Working Group and that's been extremely helpful because we discuss all sorts of technical problems in project management, funding, mobilization, dealing with international funding agencies and so on. Often we find our projects cross-fertilize each other, so different projects will link up when necessary. We also interlink with groups like Sistren and we have just started, on behalf of the Working Group, publishing a newsletter for non-government women's groups – a resource sharing and information sharing newsletter. We have found a great need for more linkages. There are a lot of things happening at grass roots level that people don't know about, so we spend a lot of time repeating mistakes. Project proposal writing is one example. The first time around it gets very messy, but if you get some assistance from groups that have had more experience it would cut out a lot of trouble earlier on.

**WS:** *What other projects are linked to the Working Group?*

**Ruth:** There are a number of them. Some are almost straight research. There has been a fairly major project looking at higglers in the downtown Kingston area, particularly those who deal with the Coronation Market. We've discovered that 90 per cent of the island's produce goes through this one market and is essentially controlled by women. That is being researched in some detail.

We have another project, again in Western Kingston, centred around the solar drying of fruits from the Coronation Market, which answers two needs: one is income generation for women concerned. The other is that the children don't have access to nutritious food and tend to eat 'junk'. That (project) is growing and is being tried out elsewhere on the island. We've also done research on women's repayment patterns and mortgaging systems.

**WS:** *What women have been attracted to these various projects and what response have you been getting in Jamaican society?*

**Ruth:** It's been difficult to gauge because we don't go in for any major publicity, and each project has been different. We work mainly in Western Kingston, the ghetto side of Kingston, so we've been dealing with women in a very low income category or women who are usually unemployed, and the impact of what we're doing is usually difficult to gauge. I think they have probably been quite powerful just in terms of role images.

**WS:** *But do these women then become self-supporting?*

**Ruth:** I can talk from the collective's point of view – once the women start earning, they in a sense become self-supporting, but they often do that within the context of going back to live with their mothers. As soon as they start earning an income, they then have a choice as to who they live with, and many choose to live with their mothers but are self-supporting in the sense that they can now provide income to the household whereas before they were totally dependent.

**WS:** *Is the change in a woman's economic status reflected in a changed view of her own life?*

**Ruth:** I'll give you an example. When Learle joined the collective, she was very quiet and shy. She did the training and got a job as an industrial painter, which meant she was earning ten times the national minimum wage.

As soon as she started earning that money the first thing she did was to pack her bags and leave her man, taking her two children with her, and she went to live with her sister. She had left home when she was about 14 because her mother couldn't afford to send her to school, moved in with a man, a "benefactor" who took up the cost of her education. But of course, by the time she was 16, she was pregnant by him; by the time she was 18 she had two children by him, and he was beating her.

She had no options within that situation. Neither her mother or sister could afford to support her, so getting a job really allowed her to make decisions about what she wanted to do with her own life and she took them very rapidly. She knew what she wanted. It was just a matter of having the wherewithall to do it.

**WS:** *How do women come to the collective?*

**Ruth:** We have a tremendous demand from women to join the collective, and we have to be really strict because we don't take women unless there are jobs available.

We recruit from three communities. One is Tivoli Gardens which is known as a predominantly JLP (Jamaica Labour Party) community. Another is Nannyville, which we chose purposely because of its association with the opposition party (Peoples National Party). It is very easy to be identified with tribal politics



# Caribbean Celebration

and the collective was concerned that could smash the project if we allowed it to happen.

The women from the original group developed their own selection procedures for the women coming in. They set tests which women from Nannyville and Glengough, which is a rural community, had to sit and they were selected on the basis of how they had done on that. They were set questions like "why I want to become a woman in construction."

But because we only recruit when there are jobs available we've had to stop because the industry is in serious trouble. The economy is contracting, and construction is a main line indicator of what is happening in the economy generally, and there is no building going on. That has presented us with a whole new situation. It's all very well training women to enter a male industry, but when that industry collapses the women go down with it.

So what we're now doing is looking at the need for repair and maintenance which has never been tackled seriously in the training of either men or women. We are starting an all-women's repair and maintenance business specializing in wooden houses, because we are also training people in both the rural and urban areas in simple and cheap techniques for improving the safety of wooden houses.

This new development is a challenge to the model the collective's based on. Like the organizational structure we were talking about earlier, everything is evolving and we don't have any blueprints. We are concentrating on upgrading the skills of the women who are already in the collective rather than spreading ourselves thinly, trying to bring more and more women in when we don't know what to do with them when we finish training. It's very difficult to train a woman in a non-traditional skill and then leave her out there on her own somehow miraculously to penetrate this male-dominated world, particularly if she hasn't even got tools. You cannot start work as a mason unless you have a trowel and a tape measure and preferably you need a decent pair of shoes. Most of the women started building walls wearing fashion shoes, because that was all they had. It wasn't till they started earning that they began to get more suitable clothing.

It would be nice to provide all those things for women, but the funding's just not there, and even if it were there is a danger of handing people things on a platter and when the platter's no longer there they don't know how to deal with the situation. So we are struggling with the long and tortuous process of encouraging the women to look for jobs themselves, and we will step in and help when they get into problems.

***As soon as she started earning that money, the first thing she did was pack her bags and leave her man.***

**WS:** *In what circumstances do you step in?*

**Ruth:** A woman may come in and say that something has gone wrong at work; that she's not being paid enough; that after she pays her busfare and buys her lunch there is nothing left, so why should she bother. It helps if we can tell her what her legal situation is. She needs to be aware of the labour management agreement that has set rates and jobs. Possibly she needs some help with how to deal with the boss, because one can be purist by saying 'go for your rights', but if, on the other hand, that employer can say, "Alright! Cool! Forget it!" (You know) "I've gone out of my way to give you a job as a woman," you're dealing with a different situation and you have to be pragmatic. So instead of rushing out to the employer we try and provide the information and sometimes even a chance to practise what the conversation with the employer might be like! Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes we do have to talk to the employer.

We intervene in the actual hiring. We maintain contact with the contractors so that we know what jobs are coming up. We may say to them, "You don't have to pay the women for the first two days. If they can't work at the level that you want, then you can just kick them out. If you don't we'll be fed up because it spoils the image of what women can do in construction". We've been very fortunate. Every woman who has gone out on that basis has been formally employed. It's a kind of investment procedure and foreign to people who believe that if you go out and work, you must be paid for everything you do rather than seeing it as a chance to almost "worm" your way in!

**WS:** *What is the economic situation for working-class women in Jamaica?*

**Ruth:** It is very depressing. In some of the communities we're dealing with there is an unemployment rate for women that is up in the 80 per cent range. The jobs aren't out there and people are surviving by hustling – different kinds of hustling that go from the legal to the illegal. Women have always hustled using prostitution, women are hustling by shoplifting and reselling. Traditionally, women have been higglers and the number of higglers is vast. They are endlessly creative and there is a lot to be learned there, but it's an area that hasn't been studied. We don't understand the so called 'informal economy', the extent and strength of it, and women have such an important role in it.

I think the economic pressures on women are becoming catastrophic. We're talking about health, about education.... about the most basic needs.

**WS:** *Are you saying the economic pressures are greater on women at this time than they are on men?*

**Ruth:** Yes, I think they are. In the communities we're talking about most of the households are female-headed. When people go out and hustle, they don't hustle for money to take to a betting shop, they don't



# Caribbean Celebration

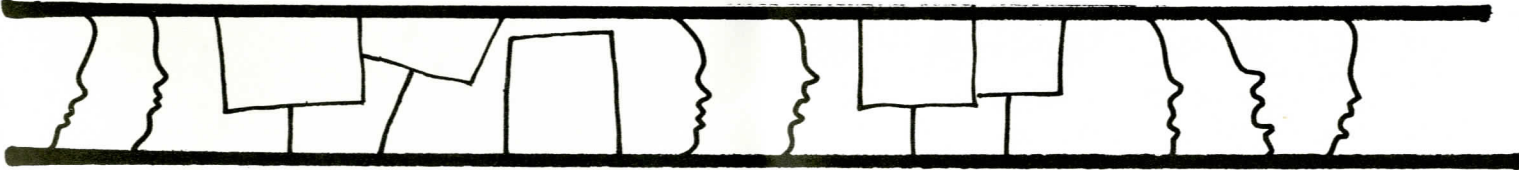
hustle for money to spend on white rum, or a 'spliff'. What they are hustling for is food for their children or uniforms or busfare for their children. The social effect of women's earnings is very different from that of men. It ends up being spent differently. And so, when women have to face the rate of unemployment we have at the moment, it's a serious indication of severe pressure on women and on children. Somebody in Jamaica recently quoted a figure of 50,000 malnourished children. Now that cannot be unrelated to the economic pressures on women.

***People don't hustle for money to spend on white rum. They are hustling for food for their children.***

**WS:** *What observations can you make about the women's movement in Jamaica, and about your links with the rest of the Caribbean?*

**Ruth:** I think a lot of very exciting things are taking place. They're not as visible as they were in the 70s and they're often not part of big programmes with big speeches about them and they're happening among rural and urban working class women. It is quite different from what happened in the 70s which was essentially the professional woman's time when the professional woman was coming into her own and having opportunities. There has been a lag for rural and working-class women and that's beginning to change.

The linkages are very important, that we link up with other women's groups who we may not totally agree with but that we have things to share with. The Caribbean linkages are very important and have not been as strong as they should be. We tend to get divided into the eastern and western Caribbean and we need far more linkages in information. The Celebration is exciting because it gives you a chance to talk to women about what is happening in Trinidad or Barbados or Martinique. Communication is difficult in the region and it's one of the things we are going to have to deal with.



***Liliane Marchal of Martinique represented her women's group in Martinique whose name translated from Kweyol means "Women Get Up! Woman Stand Up!". Liliane talks about the formation and interests of the group, its relationship with the rest of the society, and remarks on the importance of Caribbean links.***

**Liliane:** We are a group of women of various ideologies and backgrounds – although in the beginning we obviously knew each other – we were the same age and had been to school together. We decided spontaneously to create the group in 1978 after a series of rapes and assaults on women in Martinique.

That issue of assault, aggression, was the main one first, and what we are still trying is to make people aware that rape is a crime. It's not just a small robbery, or something very simple, it's a violent crime against

women. Our group has made pamphlets and leaflets to let people know, and ask them to think about it. We also give women information about what to do because frequently you are in a state of shock and you don't know.

We are interested in the relationship between men and women, between people, generally speaking. We don't exclude men from the group. We are a group of women – that's our group but men are also our concern and we have been glad to have men coming to see us for information after having their daughters or a friend raped.

**WS:** *Do you concentrate only on violence against women?*

**Liliane:** We started with that because at the moment it was the most outrageous, but right after that we gathered other topics like education and health. For instance, the orientation of the girls in a technical school. When they want to do mechanics there are barriers. They are told, 'O! That's not a traditional job for a woman. Why do you want to do that? Can't you do something else?' Or there's the topic of sexism in school books or in the relationship with teachers and schoolmates.



# Caribbean Celebration

**WS:** *What links do you have with other women's groups and political groups within the community?*

**Liliane:** As far as possible we try to remain autonomous because the women who are coming have various ideologies. Two other groups are affiliated to political parties but this doesn't prevent us from organizing united support. The third is a non-governmental group based in the southern part of the island.

We work with them when we organize festivals like International Women's Day. We work together on special matters like publishing leaflets where all groups think it is necessary.

***I consider my grandmother as a feminist because she didn't wait on someone else to start struggling.***

**WS:** *What is the status of the women's movement in Martinique?*

**Liliane:** I suppose that our case is not different from other countries. Women's groups are considered as obstacles to the everyday life. But little by little people have become aware that we are not working against them, that we are just trying to improve our relationships with others. We have noticed an improvement in the way people behave to us. Men are seeking information from us. Women of various ages come and that's very important. Sometimes you see women in their 50s who are so upset. They have lived a very bad situation and they feel they can find something just by talking with us. We are open to them, you see.

**WS:** *Would you say the women in your group are more feminist oriented?*

**Liliane:** Our concern remains the woman interacting with the man, interacting with society, with politics. We have created that group to help women who want to talk, who want to come and see us because they need information, because they think there is no place where they can go and talk. That's why in our group you may find some women who are more feminist, and other women who may not define themselves as feminist because they think they are just helping women, period. They may refuse to be labelled.

It seems to me the way people perceive the world of feminists is putting a kind of pressure on women, and it doesn't mean that because they won't stand up and say 'I am a feminist' that they don't have a feminist



behaviour. When I look around me, I consider my mother as a feminist, I consider my grandmother as a feminist because she didn't wait on somebody else to start struggling, to raise a family, and it seems to me that is already the first approach of feminism.

**WS:** *What do the women of Martinique think of the women in the English-speaking Caribbean?*

**Liliane:** We recognize it's very important to establish contact with other groups. There is the language barrier, but we've decided to go beyond that. Language must not prevent us from having contact with other women in the Caribbean. The women in our group, and I'm sure other women in Martinique, would like to share what they do with others and feel a sense of community. We share the same problems. We are closer to you than to women in Europe or somewhere else. Even though we also share their problems, we in the Caribbean are close geographically (and) historically. That's why if women from all the Caribbean – English, Spanish, Dutch, French-speaking – could join, it would strengthen our struggle.



# *Caribbean Celebration*

**Kathleen Drayton of the Faculty of Education, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, is also a member of the Women and Development Studies Group on that campus. She comments on the impression the Decade for Women has made on the awareness and activities of women in the region, and offers an explanation for the present weaknesses in the political development of a Caribbean women's movement.**

**WS:** *What do you think the Decade has done for women in the Caribbean and particularly in Barbados?*

**Kathleen:** Apart from any material changes that may have taken place, the Decade certainly made many of us much more conscious about the problems of women's lives and about exploitation and the oppression women suffer. I thought I knew a great deal about it before but the Decade has helped to focus more clearly on the problems and to recognise some of the strategies we can use to deal with them.

In Barbados, a National Commission on the Status of Women was set up in 1975. This made a number of recommendations in health, education, employment, etcetera. The big product of that is legislation affecting the family: recognition of common law relationships; legislation protecting the rights of children; changing the divorce laws – the old ones were pretty cruel but now divorce is by consent.

**WS:** *Was that a result of the pressure of the Decade or was that a development of material gains and the changing economic status of women?*

**Kathleen:** The people on the National Commission on the Status of Women, of course, live within the society and their thinking is influenced by what is going on, but the changes in the law came as a result of the recommendations of the Commission.

Another of the areas of change was in coeducation which the Commission recommended very strongly. All the major schools became coeducational. Now we don't know what the effects of coeducation are on girls yet. The work in Jamaica suggests that in the schools there that were made coeducational, girls' achievement has fallen and is lower than boys. So we don't know if this has been overall a good thing without changing other things.

But I would say that the Decade has brought an awareness of the need to give women equal rights and the understanding and acceptance of that concept as far as women are concerned. This has not given

women jobs or equality within the social structure which, of course is hierarchical and unequal. Yet what the Decade has done in Barbados and in the Caribbean is to make the idea of equal rights acceptable.

**WS:** *What has it done for women in politics?*

**Kathleen:** Not very much. We have the few token women who are ministers of government all over the Caribbean and one woman prime minister, but when you ask what effects they have made on the lives of women or on women wanting to enter politics one can say nothing at all; except in so far as they are role models which say to young women, 'it is possible for women to achieve this'. The political structures are still dominated by men. I think women get positions only when they are supported by men in the political structure.

In Barbados more women vote than men but I don't think women have understood the power of their vote as yet in wanting to return women to office or even thinking it desirable to have women representing them in politics.

**"We are concerned to introduce woman's studies because we recognise the gaps in knowledge and the need to analyse relationships".**

**WS:** *How would you describe the status of the women's movement in Barbados at the moment?*

**Kathleen:** That is difficult because you can't talk of any homogeneous group. There are a lot of groups and individual women working on projects. There is within the University a number of women not only putting a different emphasis on their teaching and research, but concerned to introduce women's studies because we recognise the gaps in knowledge and the need to begin investigating and analysing relationships and perhaps changing them.

Then there are the traditional women's groups like the Soroptimists who have built a village for senior citizens – convenient, modern small units that they can manage. There are a lot of women there, because women live longer. The Business and Professional Women are moving to start a rape crisis centre.

There is the National Organization of Women and CARIWA (Caribbean Women's Association) and the President, Carmita Fraser has for a long time been concerned with the lives and status of rural women and about employment for women. She has helped women meet their problems by using their skills in income generating projects.



# Caribbean Celebration

***There are a lot of young women who are articulate about their interests and can define what they want .***

The Women and Development Unit, based in the Extra Mural Department, is doing an interesting radio programme where young, unemployed people can call in and talk about what they want to do and find out how they can get the qualifications they need. This is making people aware that not only are there a lot of young women unemployed but who are articulate about their interests and who, given the chance, can define what they want and not have it defined for them.

So, it is difficult to describe the status of the women's movement. A great deal is happening. It is not happening in a planned or organized fashion, nor is it

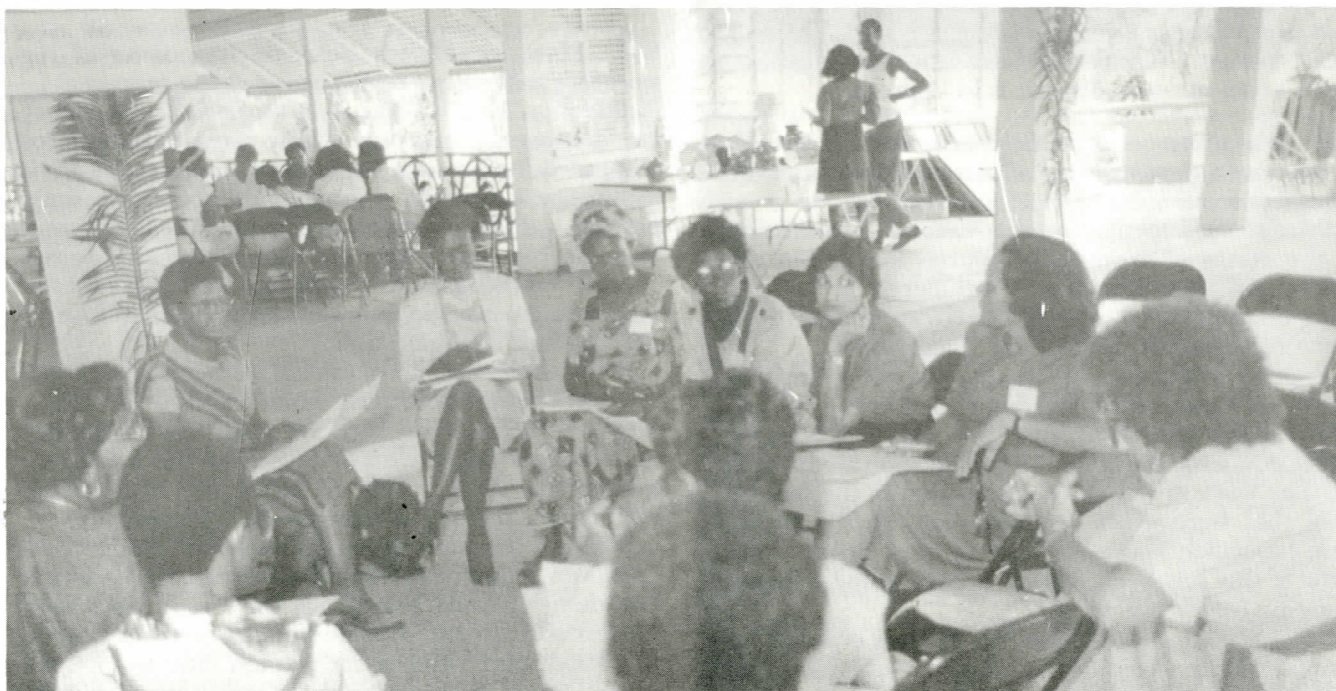
happening within one organization. I think these activities are raising consciousness, I don't know that they are improving the lives of women. The economic recession has created tremendous unemployment, and it is women who are the highest number of unemployed.

**WS:** *The women's movement though, is a politicised movement whether it be so along feminist or other political lines. Is there a notion of that kind of politicisation among women in Barbados?*

**Kathleen:** I wouldn't say so. You have women within the organized political groups but I think that women are still not analysing what they are doing or analysing the assumptions on which society is functioning. Women are politicised in a way, but what is constantly in the back of my mind is this lack of analysis about what you have done, where you are coming from, what you are going to do. You are not leaving something that can be carried forward. If a particular person in an organization falls down the activities stop because there isn't a continuity. Maybe that's a Caribbean problem!

**WS:** *It might be. Even though we speak a lot about our history, there isn't an element of taking our history into consideration and building on it.*

**Kathleen:** Naipaul says we have no history! Anyway, we do not have any serious impact. We are a society growing so rapidly we don't have time for yesterday because tomorrow is always more exciting. And tomorrow catches up. We are making the great mistake of not analysing our past, or not preserving it in some cases.



Education Workshop



# Caribbean Celebration

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**Nesta Patrick, winner of the first CARICOM Award for Women has described herself as "just a medium through which this award must pass. I accepted it in appreciation of the work other women have done."**

**Nesta gives WOMAN SPEAK a glimpse of the early formation of some women's organizations in the region and an insight into influences in her own childhood which formed her determined character.**

**WS: This is a Caribbean award, so your work must have extended (beyond Trinidad and Tobago) throughout the Caribbean.**

**Nesta:** Yes, in the late 50s, early 60s, I started working in (the field of) mental retardation in Trinidad, and then I had an opportunity to travel because we wanted to set up a Caribbean Association. I worked in the Islands, talking to people about mental retardation, giving the advice I could, teaching and training teachers. I had done that for some years when I became President of the organization (Caribbean Association for Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities).

Then we thought of revitalizing CARIWA (Caribbean Women's Association). It was here before. Ms. Jeffers had started a Caribbean Women's Association. (Audrey Jeffers, a borough counsellor and parliamentarian also established the Coterie of Social Workers. She died in 1968.) In the 1950s I remember when they travelled to one of the islands up north and started this movement. Eventually it died, and when in the late '60s the Guyana women felt it was something they would like to start, they wrote Trinidad and the other islands about meeting in 1970 in Guyana and we decided we would go down and see what this meeting was all about, and remind them an association had been in existence before and we were interested in reviving it.

**WS: What was the result of that meeting?**

**Nesta:** We decided that we would have a Caribbean Association and had a general meeting and elected officers. Ann Liburd from St. Kitts was made President, I was made Vice-President and Viola Burnham, Vice-President. Mrs. Libourne from Jamaica was the Treasurer, and Desiree Barnard the Secretary.

**WS: I want to go back to your early history, and see how this interest developed and has grown in strength. Where were you born?**

**Nesta:** In Grenada. I went to Church of England High School and did my Senior Cambridge (examinations) in Grenada. Then I came to Trinidad. My whole family settled in Trinidad. I would have been about 17.

**WS: Why did your family come to Trinidad?**

**Nesta:** Well, at that time my mother particularly was interested in higher education. I have no sisters and my brothers are all younger. She had put two of the boys in school (in Trinidad) and she felt we should move here. She bought a property, we settled here, and the boys went to school.

**WS: Was she interested in your education also?**

**Nesta:** Yes, but not to the extent of the sons. It was more important for them. But I went into Amow's Modern School of Commerce, worked for a while at the Cooperative Bank, and then got married at 21.

**WS: Your mother made the decision to move.**

**Nesta:** Yes, my father was a businessman and he had businesses in five parts of Grenada. I think he was very conscious of the fact that the boys needed a good education. Both my parents were very strong about the value of education. My mother herself had been to the same school I went to. She felt I had had what I should have, and would do music, needlecraft and cooking and that would be it. But the boys had to do well, had to do things so that they could earn their living. And when she got here we felt she herself was a person concerned about further education for herself, because I still remember her doing a lot of reading, going up and down to the library. So I was not surprised when three of the boys got to the States and they sent for her that she went to Howard (University). She did nursing at 60. Now when I look back, she was always very concerned about education.

**My mother thought I would do music, needlecraft and cooking and that would be it.**

**WS: But this concern was obviously more on your mother's part.**

**Nesta:** I would say so, because I think she pushed for everything and she really took the responsibility for everything. I remember when we lived at Stone Street, my father travelled up and down to Trinidad.



# Caribbean Celebration

He lived there for a while but never liked it very much, then he went to the States, but he didn't like it either. He died in Grenada.

After I got married, I wasn't working or anything but I continued to go to Extra Mural to do courses. I also continued domestic science classes.

**WS:** *Why did you decide to do economics?*

**Nesta:** I just liked it, and I wanted to know more about it.

**WS:** *Were there many women?*

**Nesta:** No. About three or four and about 40 or 50 men. I had problems because I used to take my children with me, and they used to be a nuisance. Many times I was asked to take them out of the class.

In those days it was difficult, but I used to go to the 'Y' regularly. I became a member in 1942 and I never stopped. I used to teach handicraft. Up to now I am a member of the Board. I have always been interested in what women can learn and can do. Women can be responsible for themselves and for their families. I think it must be something to do with your background, because I used to see my grandmother working very hard and my grandfather taking it so easy, and they had business places in Grenada. My mother always worked hard. She was a cashier in one of the business places. I always felt that she held the strings of everything. All through I've looked at women and seen that we have a lot of responsibility and should be getting ready for that, and I have allied myself since I was a teenager with anything to do with girls.

**WS:** *But do you think we contribute to strengthening women and weakening men?*

**Nesta:** Yes we have. In my parents' home I used to see that. There were many times the boys would get away without doing anything and you had to do it – the little things they felt boys shouldn't do. Today we still do that, and I realize now we make a lot of mistakes in bringing up our sons to feel that it is a woman to do this and not them. We do it for them and make them very comfortable and we have given them the feeling that we are supposed to be just there for their use – day and night. It's a pity, although your generation and the one after you I'm sure will not let that happen to them.

**WS:** *Tell me more about your work history, not only formal paid work, but activist or organizational work. After you married you began doing courses...*

**Nesta:** And being involved in organizations which I'd joined: The YWCA; the Coterie of Social Workers, with Audrey Jeffers; the League of Women Voters. I was Secretary of the Women's Corona Society for a long time. I was helping with the Girl Guides. Then in my area group of the PNM (People's National Movement) Women, I helped with that; The Day Nursery Association. I joined the Child Welfare League when my children were little and still am with that; the Union

of Women Citizens... anything in which I have felt I can make my little contribution.

**WS:** *Did you continue to be part of all these when you joined the labour force?*

**Nesta:** Yes, I began a lot of them before I joined the Service. I became a Social Welfare Officer, continued in my organizations and joined others I had an interest in. The children have been with me all through. People have been unkind about them being up and down at meetings with me and it wasn't good for them, but I don't know, I felt they were enjoying whatever it was I was doing and even if not, they recognised that this was something I felt I had to do.

**WS:** *What kind of work was each of these organizations involved in?*

**Nesta:** Well, the YWCA, for instance taught craft; they also had a lecture programme, a programme for young children, and a camp – sometimes two camps a year. The Coterie of Social workers set up a school feeding programme, which we didn't realize at the time would evolve into a School Nutrition Programme supported by Government.

And the 'Electrical Women' (the Electrical Association of Women) – they did a great job. I joined them, and learned so much from them.

**WS:** *Was it not revolutionary for that period to have an electrical women's organization? Who began it?*

**Nesta:** It started with Mrs. Buxo, who died. She was working here as one of the (public relations) people at the Electrical Commission. She went to England and saw (an electrical association of women) and came back very enthused with it.

**WS:** *Were they women electricians, or women who wanted to learn 'the skill'?*

**Nesta:** Women who wanted to know more about electricity, and the responsibility they had in their own homes with electrical equipment. Everybody was busy buying electrical stoves, but they didn't know anything about them. That was the time they started, and very valuable that organization is, because I can tell you, I learned so much.

**Men sell us the idea that we cannot do certain things.**



# Caribbean Celebration

So, those organizations came into the Union. (The Union of Women Citizens replaced the earlier umbrella organization, the Council of Women with affiliations in England. The Union of Women Citizens was started in the early 60s by the late Isabelle Teshea, member of the PNM, parliamentarian and diplomat.) They would educate us about their work.

**WS:** *So this co-ordinated and publicised the activities of all the groups?*

**Nesta:** Yes. It was a support system, because if one organization was raising funds for something we all were able to help with selling tickets and helping them with what they were doing.

**WS:** *You were a social welfare officer at that time?*

**Nesta:** I trained at the University of the West Indies in the 50s. And in our day, when the UWI started, all of us public servants had to give a covenant to form what is the UWI today. (Paid monthly from their salaries.)

**WS:** *Were all the people involved with social welfare, women?*

**Nesta:** No! Not at all! We were in the minority.

**WS:** *Yet it is usually regarded as a traditionally women's area. What was different at that time?*

**Nesta:** You see, they thought in terms of the responsibility of old age pensions and public assistance and they always felt that, where responsibility for finance was involved, 'a man can do that better than a woman.'

**WS:** *So again, you were a forerunner?*

**Nesta:** Yes. I was one of those and they were some stalwarts of the time whom I followed, but we weren't many. From there, I worked in several districts in the

country which was most informative. My last district was County Caroni.

When I was a social worker, I had asked permission to go to St. Ann's Hospital to help with teaching handicraft to the women. In Couva I had classes downstairs the Community Centre where I lived. I used to bring children together.

**WS:** *What led you to initiate that activity in Couva?*

**Nesta:** What moved me was a little girl in Charlie Village who was 12 years old. She was pint-sized, a dwarf, and she had never been to school. Every time I visited that home the child would answer all the questions of what was happening. She picked the rice for the meal, she would tell me all about what her brothers and sisters were doing yet she couldn't write her name. I was upset to think that there were children who, because they had one defect or other, weren't allowed in the school system. It didn't mean they couldn't learn. So, again, I asked the Ministry of Health and the Warden in Couva to give me permission to have classes – when I didn't know anything about it! – and to lend me the ambulance. Every Thursday I collected children from a different area in County Caroni and took them to this place. I used to collect eleven and twelve, then it went on to seventeen. I got help from Miss Parkinson, who is a school supervisor now; and some of the dear ladies around used to help me. I remember writing Mrs. Dorman, the wife of the acting governor, asking her for help for a Christmas party for the children. To my surprise she said she would come herself with toys and a treat for them. And she came down to Couva – it was a red letter day in Couva!



Grenadian display



# Caribbean Celebration

But I had always felt that there must be somewhere these children can learn and so when I went to England, I went to train in 'care of the mentally retarded'. It was the first time somebody from the Caribbean had done this training. I came back and was appointed to St. Ann's Hospital. I spent 28 years doing that and developed what is now the School for the Mentally Handicapped at St. Ann's and I did training programmes for primary school teachers. I encouraged them to have special classes within the school system, so a child who is a slow learner can be later absorbed into the class structure, and the curriculum can be the same but devised accordingly for the type of child. Then I worked at the Lady Hochoy Home for Retarded Children (founded in 1961). I worked throughout the island at psychiatric clinics.

The School was built and the teachers recruited. The children wear uniforms; they take part in all primary school functions. The School comes under the umbrella of the Special Education Unit in the Ministry of Education. Before I retired I went into (the Unit) which is responsible for curriculum and sees that these schools function properly.

**WS: Were you part of the initiation of that aspect of education?**

**Nesta:** Yes. I was one of the early doers.

**WS: Did you find that the support you were getting for all these activities you were spear-heading in Trinidad came mainly from women, or from women and men alike?**

**Nesta:** Women, because I think I looked for women's support.

**WS: Why was that?**

**Nesta:** I don't know. Long before I realized what it was to be a feminist, I was a feminist. I had always believed in women and I always felt women had so much strength. When I look back now, I see a lot of what has happened to me in my own life from my own grandmother and my mother. Sometimes I wonder if we are not born with more strength and we don't use it enough. How is it that we feel that we cannot do certain things, and men feel we can't, and men sell the idea to us that we can't and we believe them, and we give birth to them?

Women have a basic honesty that they can use for a lot of things... and the day you put one in charge of a lot of things you'll see what will happen.

**WS: What do you do now, since retirement in 1982?**

**Nesta:** I am president of the Day Nursery Association. So I found myself very busy after retirement, going to the nurseries and assisting where I can.

For me it's difficult to just look at the walls of the house. I'm not going to do that. Then I got this job to work with the University for the Ministry of Health's programme – a project of health development and management. So I'm on that now and we do programmes every month. (Nesta has since been appointed counsellor at the Rape Crisis Centre)

**WS: So you are not in fact retired?**

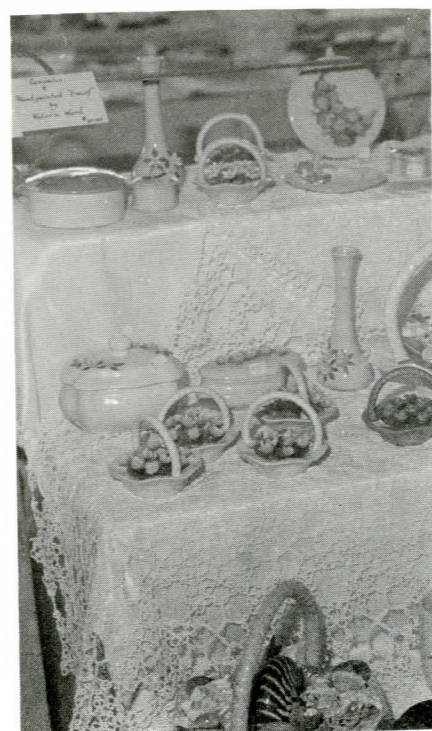
**Nesta:** No.

**WS: And I take it you do not plan to retire?**

**Nesta**



Needlecraft



Ceramics



# BOOK NOOK



**In the Name of Progress: The Underside of Foreign Aid** by Patricia Adams and Larry Solomon, 1985. This book is a double-barrelled blast at the foreign aid establishment, claiming that development assistance more often than not results in the financing of undemocratic national governments against local populations in "a latter day moral equivalent of the slave trade." The authors debunk a series of "myths" about population and resources, Third World needs and foreign aid. In addition to calling for national enquiries into the merits of foreign aid, Adams and Solomon recommend several other immediate measures for countering the absence of democracy in the foreign aid system. These include: Untying aid; increasing the role for privately funded charitable groups aiding the Third World; the adoption of neutral policies regarding technologies the West should promote to the Third World; and the refusal of funding to any government, company or project that violates the International Bill of Human Rights. The authors are staff researchers at Energy Probe, a Canadian environmental non-governmental organization that has become increasingly concerned about international development issues. **Available at US\$12.95 from Energy Probe, 100 College Street, Toronto, Canada M5G 1L5.**

**Women...A World Survey** by Ruth Leger Sivard, 1985. A 44-page handbook filled with statistics and graphs illustrating changes in the global status of women since 1950. Documents women's inequality in health, education, the workplace, in the law and in society. Sivard concludes, "Women's shared sense of inequality has triggered a movement for change which is now emerging everywhere; it differs from earlier drives for equality in being worldwide and focusing on broad issues." **Available at US\$7.50, including postage, from International Centre for Research on Women, 1717 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA. (See also p. 35)**



*Shirley Yarborough and Rhonda Holder perform at the Caribbean Celebration*



*Joan Husbands & Sandra Timothy*



# FEMINIST ACTIVISTS FORM NETWORK

*The Caribbean sleeps in a "culture of silence" as Freire called muted dependent societies where people are not awake to the knowledge that we participate in an historical process and that we can act upon the world to change it. This can be said despite the loud ineffective noises we make about self determination.*

*As Caribbean peoples emerge from direct colonial rule, the dialogue in which we must engage to unmask the contradictions which inhabit us is barely heard. Yet, conscious and articulate individuals and groups within Caribbean society speak to us through drama, dance, the spoken and the printed word, exciting us with the thought and action of claiming our humanity.*

One of the more significant happenings for women in the Caribbean beyond the Decade was the formation on April 2, 1985 of the **Association for Feminist Research and Action in the Caribbean**. The idea of the CAFRA network emerged at a meeting in Puerto Rico in 1980. Women from several Caribbean territories wanted to strengthen regionalism by establishing links between research and action programmes. Members of CAFRA share the belief that a feminist perspective, presently absent from many political organizations will respond to the needs of the developing Caribbean women's movement. CAFRA defines feminists as "those who recognise the exploitation/oppression of women and its relationship to other forms of exploitation and oppression in the society, and who work actively to change it. Hence feminism is not simply a matter of consciousness, but also of translating this into active participation with others to change the situation".

CAFRA intends broadening the research process through participatory methods including the use of drama and oral history. At the same time there is a need to reinterpret already existing research from a feminist perspective that the specific forms of women's oppression in Caribbean society be better understood the better to reveal the intricate relationship between sex, class and race as forms of oppression.

The history of the Caribbean presents unusual conditions for women and for the relations between men and women. These need to be examined against the assumptions generally made about gender relations in the society. For example, during Caribbean slavery, women and men did the same work, side by side in the field, and there is evidence that women, having assessed existing conditions, resisted having children. This suggests that women are not the 'natural' martyrs or madonnas of forces beyond their control but may consciously challenge those forces acting in what they determine as their own best interests.

The extent to which these actions have been success-

ful can best be determined by a new kind of research, gradually being developed by women themselves in the ongoing struggles of all peoples toward the total emancipation of humanity. On one hand women are everywhere the subordinated sex, on the other the fine art of many women's courage and daily survival in the face of inhumanity is the source of more than mere survival.

CAFRA's initial activities address two areas of concern: sexual violence against women in the Caribbean; and the effects on women of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI). Thirdly, part of the work of the Association is to service the needs of the women's movement in the Caribbean by building a base of information and documentation on women as well as a directory of technical, cultural, academic and artistic skills which can be made available to women in the region.

*The CAFRA secretariat is based in Trinidad and Tobago. Enquiries can be directed to Rawwida Baksh-Soodean, Co-ordinator, c/o Dept. of Languages/Linguistics, UWI, St. Augustine, Trinidad.*

## Trinidad — Rape Crisis Centre

A Rape Crisis Centre has recently been established in Trinidad, offering counselling services for survivors of rape, incest, buggery and other forms of sexual abuse.

The Centre's activities are carried out by a Rape Crisis Committee of persons drawn from the social services, the legal profession and women's organizations. A seven-member executive committee is chaired by medical social worker, Eunice Gittens, while sociologist, Patricia Mohammed, is full-time co-ordinator responsible for the overall, day-to-day co-ordination of the work of the Committee and the Centre. Tina Johnson is assistant co-ordinator, Nesta Patrick full time counsellor and Teresa Jack full time volunteer worker.

Housed in Room 3 of the Catholic Presbytery, Independence Square, Port of Spain, the Centre is open during the day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday.

The Centre's Rape Hotline service (tel. 62-36060) which began in November 1984 operates on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m.

The Centre is partly funded by the Caribbean Conference of Churches but is also dependent on the donations of businesses and private individuals.





## Striking A Blow For South Africa

On September 10, 1985 the Women Working For Social Progress (Workingwomen) an organisation based in East Trinidad held an "Evening of Solidarity with Southern Africa" at the Public Library, Knox Street, Port of Spain.

The Chairperson for the evening, Rhoda Reddock gave a brief outline of the history of the group and set the stage for discussion on South Africa by drawing out some startling facts on international business support for the South African regime. The audience was treated to readings of poems written by a range of Southern African writers read by Eunice McDonald. The evening's highlight was an address by sociologist Dr. Marcus Balinlulo, himself a South African in exile, on the history and development of the apartheid system, the form of struggle undertaken by black South Africa with special reference to African women, and what influenced the various strategies and modes of revolt used by struggling blacks.

Dr. Balinlulo's comments on the involvement of women in the on-going South African Revolution were borne out by the showing of the authentic footage which comprised the film "You've Struck a Rock." The film gave an account of the involvement of women in the overall struggle against apartheid from the 1940s to the present time and featured commentary by freedom fighters such as Lilian Ngoyi, Frances Ba and Helen Joseph.

There were literature displays on Southern Africa by Omega Bookshop and the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC).

At the Evening of Solidarity the 'Workingwomen' seized the opportunity to launch its South Africa bumper sticker campaign which is designed to sensitize the nation's population on the Southern Africa struggle and the need to focus attention and learn lessons from the events which continue to unfold there. The Bumper stickers are available from any member of the Women Working For Social Progress and at Omega Bookshop, Evans Street, Curepe.

## Cochrane "begins" Decade with 4-day Salute

Women of Cochrane Village, Dominica undertook a series of commemorative activities between July 10 and 14 this year. Attended by well over a hundred men and women, the event marked the end of the UN Decade for Women. However, to quote the women of Cochrane, "Our Decade is now beginning".

Activities included a slide presentation of the Mexico conference (in 1975); the showing of a video, "Debbie's Plight", which depicts the problems of a pregnant teenager. A talk on the concept of equality between the sexes was well received by the audience and generated an emotionally charged discussion.

Facilitators for the occasion were Rosie Brown, Co-ordinator of the Women's Bureau, Eyra Blondell, a teacher now studying in England and Lucia Blaize, Director of Dominica Planned Parenthood Association. Dominik Save coordinated the programme.

## "Sister Vision" Looking Out

The first black women and women of colour press to be established in Canada wants to forge links with the Caribbean by providing a forum for women who are writing or who want to write.

**Sister Vision** was founded in 1984 and launched a book of poetry, *Speshal Rikwes* by Ahdri Zhina in June 1985. In process is the publication of *The Coloured Pictures*, a story of young people by Himani Bannerji.

The **Sister Vision** Collective came together "because as black women and women of colour we feel strongly that more of our works must be published and read". The publishers are committed to material from sources without ready access to the medium. They see a press connecting us all and strengthening the global network.

One area of interest for the young press is the growing wealth of material found in women's oral history. **Sister Vision** means to contribute to the establishment of a written record of these popular biographies.

Secondly, the press encourages short story writers, novelists, playwrights and poets and the publication of books for children and young people. And, intending to "challenge the absence of our voices in Canadian feminist theory and research," the press will provide a forum for theoretical analysis of the political and social lives of black and Third World women from a feminist perspective.



## DECLARATION AND CALL OF THE FIRST CARIBBEAN POPULAR THEATRE EXCHANGE.

*The first Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange was held in Jamaica August 25 to October 6, 1985. The Exchange was facilitated by Graduate Theatre Company, Sistren, Jamaica Schools of Dance and Drama. Below is CPTE's declaration from that meeting.*

WE THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FIRST CARIBBEAN POPULAR THEATRE EXCHANGE, HAVING MET IN JAMAICA FROM AUGUST 25 TO OCTOBER 6, 1985, AND REPRESENTING 9 COUNTRIES OF THE CARIBBEAN – St. Lucia, Belize, St. Vincent, Dominica, Trinidad, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Cuba and Jamaica – HEREBY MAKE THE FOLLOWING DECLARATION:

The Cultural Expression of the Caribbean peoples in Popular Theatre has enabled us to survive the experiences of slavery, Colonialism and Imperialism. Historically opposed to this has been the dominant status and power of an elitist European theatrical tradition. The present wide and constant influence of foreign, particularly North American, mass media is now eroding our national cultures. There is thus a greater need for vigilant conservation and development in union with the people, of Caribbean Popular Theatrical traditions as a living alternative to any negative alien cultural influences. Given the need to bring theatre closer to the people, we the participants in the first Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange, representing 9 countries of the Caribbean, hereby declare our commitment to:

- 1) The affirmation of the Caribbean identity through the use and development of popular theatre.
- 2) The development of a people's theatre reflecting the people's historical experiences and day-to-day concerns, and using their traditional forms of cultural expression.
- 3) The promotion of the necessary research on the people's history and culture to enable popular theatre artists and workers to utilise to the fullest the richness and breadth of the people's history and culture in the development of their work.
- 4) The paying of particular attention to the specific concerns of women and youth in the process of this work.
- 5) The expansion of popular theatre organisations among the people, to develop the role of popular theatre as a vehicle for the cultural expression of the people and the communication of their concerns.
- 6) The development of a regular Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange through which Caribbean popular theatre artists and workers can come to-



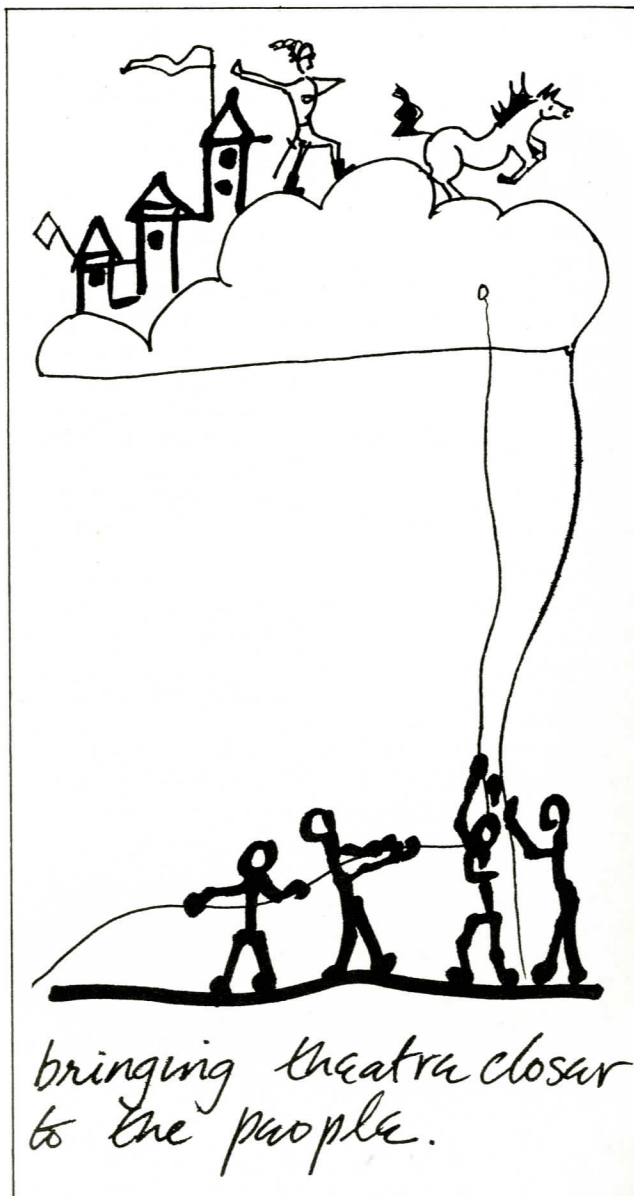
*Camille and Colleen Phillips of the International School Inc., Jamaica at the Caribbean Celebration*

gether to confront our common problems and build regional unity and strength in our efforts to promote a people's theatre.

### WE THEREFORE:

- 1) Call upon the Organising Committee of the Caribbean Popular Theatre Exchange to examine the possibility of institutionalising this exchange as a regular event which takes place once per year or every two years.
- 2) CALL UPON THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE REGION TO FACILITATE IN EVERY POSSIBLE WAY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THIS EXCHANGE AS A REGULAR EVENT AS A PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF THEIR CONCERN FOR THE PRESERVATION OF CARIBBEAN CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THEIR INTEREST IN THE PROMOTION OF THE PEOPLE'S CULTURE.





## Commonwealth Ministers Meet

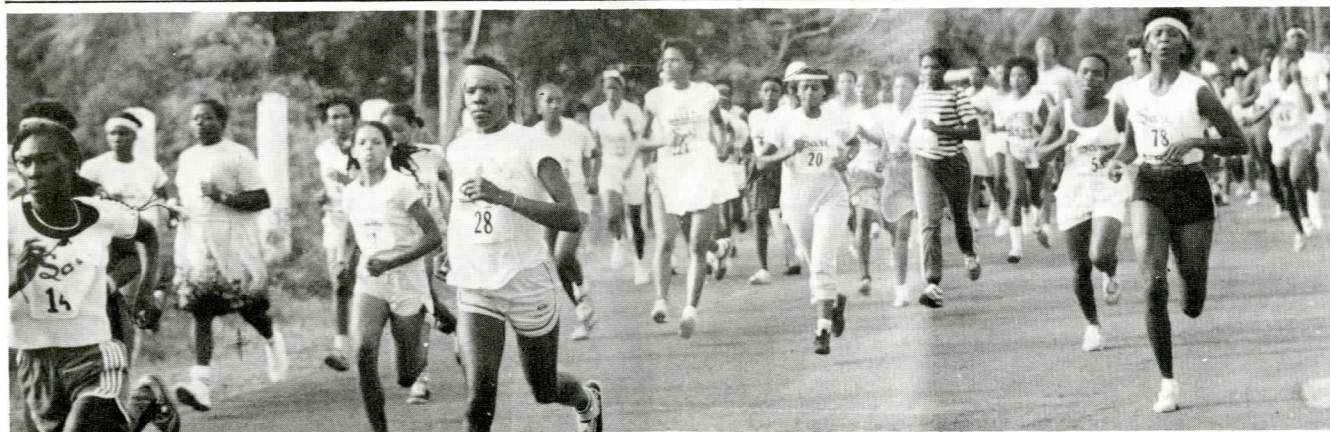
The Commonwealth Secretariat planned a regional workshop in Belize in November for heads of women's bureaus in the region. The workshop focused on how to enhance the capabilities of the national machinery to implement and address the forward looking strategies adopted by the UN Conference in Nairobi.

The proposed workshop formed part of the Secretariat's support for programmes for national machinery. Such programmes were among matters discussed at the meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs which took place in Nairobi prior to the UN Conference.

Director of the Secretariat's Women and Development Programme, Dorianne Wilson-Smillie, said the meeting looked at three broad areas:

1. The ministers underlined the need for more high level support for women's issues and emphasized the importance of inter-ministry collaboration;
2. Priorities for action were identified. The ministers emphasized the need for a move away from the welfare approach to women's issues, towards a commitment to the important economic issues, and they mandated the Secretariat to conduct a study on the impact of structural adjustment on women, in collaboration with the CARICOM Secretariat's Women's Desk;
3. The ministers also mandated the Secretariat to take further action on the issue of violence against women, on which much legal work has already been done.

Wilson-Smillie said the Secretariat's Women's Programme would continue to provide technical and other assistance, but the emphasis for the future would be on educational issues.



The OECS "Women in Action" 5 K race series held in St. Lucia recently was opened to women in categories of Under 15, Under 20, Under 30, Under 40 and over. The races catered to the serious runner, while also attracting women interested in jogging and keeping fit. Entries came from schools, netball clubs, working women and housewives and new talent was discovered.

This event is expected to be held again in 1986 in Grenada, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Dominica, Antigua, St. Christopher and Nevis, Montserrat and the BVI. (*Sports Co-ordinator Organization of East Caribbean States*)



# DAWN MANIFESTO

*Development Alternatives with women for a New Era (DAWN) is an international network of activists, researchers and policy makers. Having established contact during the Decade, they came together in Bangalore, India in August, 1984. They have produced a document Development, Crisis and Alternative Visions, Third World Women's Perspectives and the Manifesto reprinted here. At Forum '85, DAWN presented a number of panels which focussed on the efforts of growth oriented development. (See pages 27, 30 also in this issue). The Institute of Social*

*The following Manifesto was adopted in Nairobi at Forum '85, July 1985:*

DAWN expresses the vision of a better world for women and men alike. It attempts also to advance strategies for realizing that vision.

DAWN envisages a future in which relationships between nations and within nations are free from those gross inequities of gender, race and class which tarnish today's world. DAWN recognises the important advancements obtained in those countries which underwent radical changes in social, economic and political structures. In most countries, these inequities converge and intensify within the structural imbalance of the international economy which serves to diminish if not destroy vital resources of developing nations.

The result is a widespread syndrome of economic depression and political repression, a crisis of unprecedented complexity and danger.

It manifests itself in massive poverty, food insecurity, famine, monetary disarray, environmental decline, demographic pressures, mounting militarism and conflict.

Women, customarily excluded from key processes of decision-making, have been powerless to avert this crisis. Nevertheless, it is their condition, above all that of poor women in developing countries, which most graphically reflects its gravity. DAWN supports the struggle of women to build a just and equitable society through their wars of national liberation.

*Studies Trust, a non-profit research and advocacy organization located in New Delhi initiated the DAWN project and presently houses the Secretariat. The Women and Development Unit of the Extra Mural Department of the University of the West Indies (WAND) is one of the collaborating institutions along with the African Association of Women for Research and Development (AAWORD), Dakar, Senegal; the Asian and Pacific Development Centre (APDC), Malasia; and the Christian Michelsen Institute (CMI), Norway.*

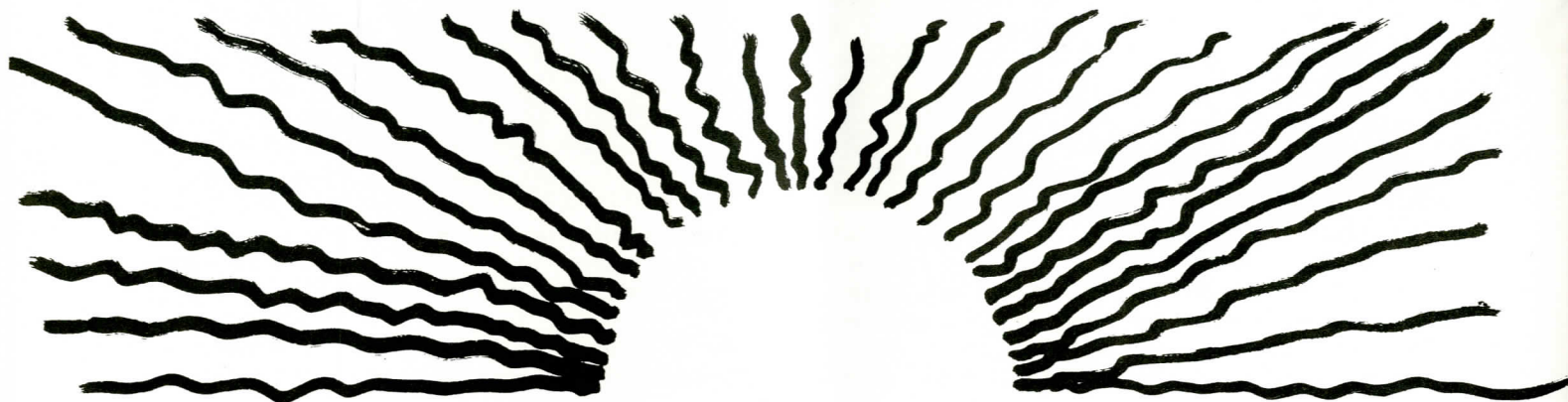
And the lives of the majority of women of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, as a consequence, present a profound challenge to dominant assumptions and policies emanating from a Decade of Women and three Decades of International Development Strategies.

But if women have become the most needy, they are also the most needed. For providing as they do crucial links in human reproduction and production, they offer vital leverage for meeting the crisis of survival.

DAWN calculates the potential of that leverage, drawing on the knowledge and assurance which women have extracted from the feminist experience of recent years.

They now understand more clearly than ever before the dynamic, diverse nature of feminism and find in its vision and methods endless, untapped sources of power.

It is this awareness which drives women today to seek other paths, and to project the dawn of a new era: one in which there is no place for poverty or violence; one in which basic needs become basic rights; one in which engines of destruction transform themselves into instruments of development; one in which power structures gain new humanism and hence new force from non-hierarchical participatory processes to which women bring fresh, energizing qualities.





## Impressions of The Forum A Report from Rose Hall

Chaddis Stapleton of Rose Hall, St. Vincent and the Grenadines journeyed to Kenya to attend the non governmental 'Forum 85' where she made a presentation at one of the DAWN (Development Alternatives for a New Era) panels.

Chaddis' presentation at 'Alternate Visions' related the experience of the Rose Hall village community engaged in a grass roots organised integrated rural development project. The information was presented by a member of the community itself, bringing the meaning of 'research' into the actual process created by the people involved.

One participant described this as one of the most powerful presentations of the session in which Chaddis invited the women to join with her in singing the song sung by the Rose Hall Community Group when they open their meetings. Chaddis addressed the session of about two hundred people on the methods used to mobilise women, involve the men and get the wider community discussing their needs and acting for the whole community, not just one or two individuals.

Chaddis described Rose Hall before 1980, when the project began, as "just a collection of hardworking individuals; people who would get up on mornings, go to the farm and come back on evenings; but we were never able to harness our potential for the good of the community as a single unit". She continued, "It took the efforts of these women to transform this situation to what it is today. When I talk about development, I'm not talking about just one area, I'm talking about development for the whole man".

In the following sketch of her trip, Chaddis touches on her personal reactions to being in Africa and on meeting women from South Africa engaged in the struggle against apartheid.

The trip to Nairobi was exciting, to travel so far from home and then, as people say, we came from Africa, to know I was going back home! When I actually touched down on African soil I wanted to cry, I wanted to laugh. I can't describe my feelings.

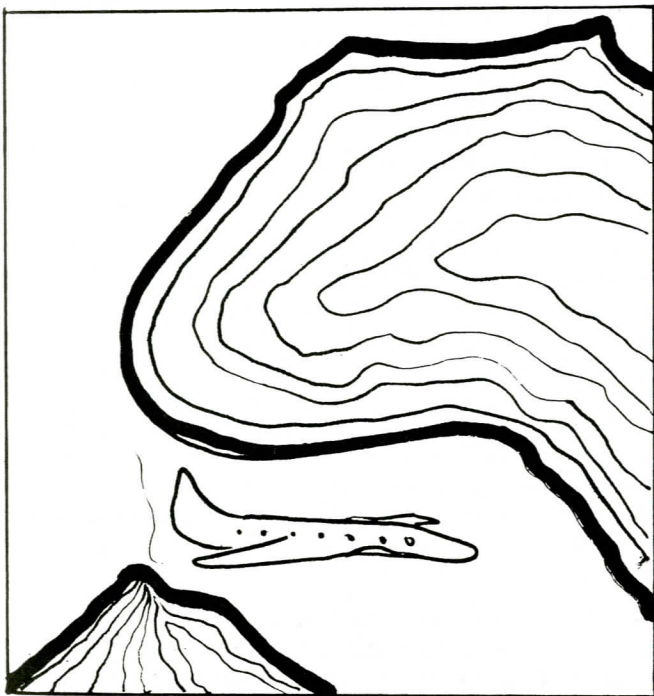
The Africans are friendly people, although some of them, when I told them I come from the Caribbean, said, 'People from the Caribbean are slaves'. I said, 'Yes, that is true we were really slaves, but you are the ones who sold us as slaves'. But then they weren't vexed, they were glad we were back in Africa to see what they were doing.

The people there are the same as us, only their way of life is different especially in parts of the countryside where they have no water or electricity. Out there is where you find the patched clothes, the dirty clothes, nakedness, poverty. What appealed to me was that

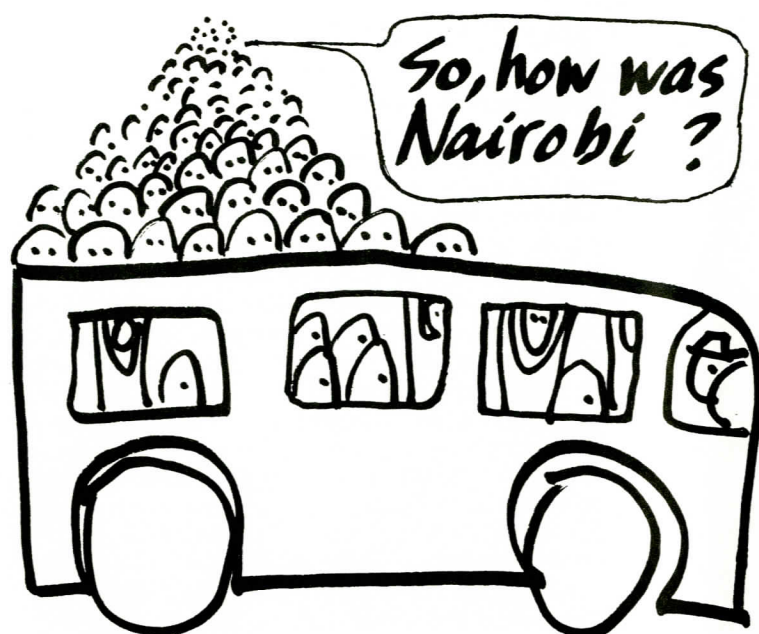
they still looked happy. And what I really enjoyed was the way they keep up their cultural heritage. We were greeted with singing and dancing and the beating of the drums. I joined them, because I love to dance too. When I came back, I told our people here that we must keep up our culture. We have the quadrille but only the old people are still interested. Young people prefer to jump up but we are trying to get them in so we will keep that with us.

Then with women's projects it was encouraging to see that, as in Rose Hall, in Africa there are women at the forefront. At one project we visited, where there was no water in the village, the women are trying to establish tanks for every home. In another tree planting project the women are giving three hours of their time every day for the planting and caring of the trees. What I felt bad about was that the men in the project are being paid for their time and not the women.

At the workshops I attended, it was encouraging to meet other women who are in the struggle for development, for peace. I participated in, among others, sessions on family planning and women in agriculture. I met sisters from South Africa. I had heard about the suffering of people and the treatment blacks are getting, but when one sister talked it seemed as if I were there, seeing them punishing. I tried to think of a way to be part of that kind of struggle. I think it is really time for us to get up and do something instead of nothing at all. People in the Caribbean are not aware enough of what it is to suffer these conditions.







## Recollections on Forum '85

by Rhoda Reddock (Trinidad)

How was Nairobi? This is a question that the fortunate few of us who were able to attend the N.G.O Forum-85 and/or the United Nations End of Decade Conference, have been asked on many occasions since our return.

Most of us have usually been unable to respond completely at the times and places where these questions have popped up. Places such as walking on Henry Street, standing in the line waiting for the bus on the Priority Bus Route or among the crowd at the Tunapuna Market.

There have been some public reports. For example, a two hour call in programme on Radio Trinidad in August and a programme entitled, "Women for Justice" with Ken Cadette on Religious Unity, while in the **Trinidad Guardian** of September 2nd, an article focussing on the official Conference, written by Velma Jardine appeared.

Both conferences, particularly the Non-Governmental Forum '85 occurred on a mass scale and their effects should be felt for a long time.

The conferences were declared largely through the efforts of women working within the U.N. system. These women, international bureaucrats though they were and clear to separate themselves from the 'radical' feminist movement, were nevertheless moved to question their own position within the U.N. system as well as the effects on women of the social and economic policies advocated by member governments and U.N. agencies themselves.

### Past Conferences and the Press

In 1975 - International Women's Year, the 1st International Women's Conference was held in Mexico

City. The international press at that time publicised the apparent rifts between European and North American feminists and 'poor' Third World women whose main concern was said to be exclusively with food and daily survival.

In 1980, the mid-decade conference held in Copenhagen, Denmark, was again reported as an event of mass confusion, division and squabbles. It was only the women who had attended who were able to gauge quietly just how far the movement had developed.

By 1985 however, attempts by the international press to shroud the activities in a net of confusion could not succeed. For one, more feminists were involved in the actual process of reporting and even the traditionally antagonistic news magazines were forced to admit the strength, power and unity of the international women's movement as evidenced by the success of these meetings.

### Many Themes at Forum '85

Between the 10th and 19th July, an estimated 14,000 women from virtually every country in the world attended the NGO Forum at the University of Nairobi. Participants included women from organizations of every type ranging from the Y.W.C.A., to Women's Progressive Organization of Guyana, the Wages for Housework Campaign, the P.L.O. Women's Organization, Soroptimists International to Amnesty International. Around 100 workshops were held each day, hosted by participant organizations on themes such as: Women and World Hunger, Violence Against Women, Women's Reproductive Rights, Working Women, Migrant Women, Women's Studies and



Women's Cultural Expression. In addition to this, an ongoing film forum, screened films and videos made by women throughout the world.

## **The Peace Tent**

Throughout the Forum, the Peace Tent became a central, focal point of all activity. In this tent (an unofficial part of the Forum structure) all women were afforded the opportunity to air their views using any media available, song, speech, video, drama, displays, to put forward their points of view. Side by side stood displays of the Mongolian Women's Organization, announcements for the Great Peace Journey, planned for 1986 and an upside-down map of the world which placed the Third World south above, and the First World north below.

In general attempts at dialogue were characteristic of the entire Forum. At the tent is where dialogue took place between women of the United States and the Soviet Union on the issue of peace. Other attempts, however, for example between Israeli and Palestinian women were less successful.

## **The Women's Movement is International**

One of the important achievements of the meeting was the easy manner in which so-called 'women's issues' found their rightful place within the overall exploitative structures of the present world economic order. The divisions between 'First World' and 'Third World' women were much less apparent. In fact the approximately 2,000 strong U.S. delegation learnt just how little they knew about what was taking place in the now truly internationalized women's movement, in spite of their 'Free Press'. Everyday they pleaded – let us know what you are doing, we had no idea... It is no wonder then that close to two-thirds of them signed a declaration critical of the official U.S. delegation to the U.N. Conference – its non-representative composition; its position on apartheid and on nuclear war.

In my opinion the other great learners at this event were the hundreds of Kenyan women who came from distant villages. They could be seen in workshops on every subject. Many were moved by events to become vocal about problems they faced daily but were never supposed to admit.

Another constant feature of the Forum was a daily newspaper entitled – Forum 85, which became a prized memorial of that momentous happening.

## **Caribbean Participation**

Barbadian Dame Nita Barrow did Caribbean women proud as the Convenor of Forum '85. She is also a leading member of the world YWCA, World Health Organization and the International Association of Adult Education. Many may not know that Sister Nita (as I prefer to refer to her) fought to improve the position of the nursing profession in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Lucille Mair, Convenor of the mid-Decade conference in Copenhagen in 1980 was also a member of

the N.G.O. Forum Planning Committee. Numerous Caribbean N.G.O.'s were represented. The Trinidad and Tobago NGO network held a workshop on 'Organization building' and Clotil Walcott of the National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE) conducted a workshop along with a representative of a Domestic Servants Union of South Africa.

Both Peggy Antrobus of the Women and Development Unit in Barbados (WAND) and Lucille Mair, were members of the international DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) group who had worked on issues related to Women and Development over the Decade. The DAWN panels criticized 'growth oriented' development policies and the accompanying militarization which affected the poor and women most.

## **Workshop on War**

Cheryl Byron and Shirley Small (now of Canada) participated in the on-going cultural programmes in poetry-reading, story-telling and 'jamming'. Joan French and Lana Finikin of SISTREN in Jamaica brought the house down at a DAWN Workshop, with a skit on the effects of the IMF policies on ordinary women's lives. The WPO of Guyana and Committee of Women for Progress of Jamaica jointly hosted a workshop on the threat of nuclear war to the Caribbean.

I myself participated in workshop panels on Women's Studies, the Feminist Movement and Feminist Theory in Latin America and the Caribbean and on Alternatives in Women's Research.

I have mentioned only a few of the activities involving Caribbean participation. If there was a problem at the Forum, it was that no single person's experience of an event of this scope was in any way complete.

## **Caribbean Statements Condemn Militarization**

Some Caribbean organisations prepared a joint statement which among other things denounced the increasing militarization of the region. In addition they joined with women of Latin American organisations to prepare an historical joint statement which recognised the dual or sometimes triple oppression of women in the region by both sex/patriarchal structures as well as the unjust dominant socio-economic imperialist system. (See also p. 28)

For virtually all women who participated in the Forum the feeling we left with was one of being energized and strengthened for the long struggle ahead. We knew that for every one woman in Nairobi there were hundreds of others who would have liked to come. We learnt that most women are slowly coming to a similar understanding of the direction our struggle has to take.

We are now aware of the potential power of the women's movement internationally as a force in the future direction of the world. We know also that those who fear justice, peace and true human liberation also now know these things. But ... the struggle continues.



# “Our struggle continues”

Caribbean and Latin American women attending the Forum issued a strongly worded statement in which they harshly criticised the region's governments, especially their economic policies, and called for an end to escalating military spending and dictatorial regimes.

The four-page declaration, titled “Our Struggle Continues”, was submitted to the U.N. governmental conference where delegates hammered out forward looking strategies for the advancement of women, up to the year 2000.

“The majority of recommendations approved in Mexico and Copenhagen have not been achieved. We are still facing various mechanisms of subordination and exploitation. We continue to be subjected to patriarchal relations which place obstacles in the path of our own liberation,” the statement said.

The Caribbean and Latin American women declared that they were not willing to pay for the effects of the economic crisis with greater suffering and humiliations, noting that the world economic crisis of capitalism has had a greater effect on the most vulner-

able sector – in particular, women in the public and private spheres.

The statement said every dollar that went out of the region by way of debt or interest payments was a dollar wrenched from development and from the solution to pressing problems such as hunger, health, employment, education and housing.

The women also demanded peace for Nicaragua, El Salvador, the whole of Central America and the Caribbean and called for the region to be free of military bases.

They called upon governments and democratic organizations to intensify and deepen the principles of the Decade which aim at eradicating all forms of discrimination which relegate millions of women to the status of second-class citizens.

The women also called for the United Nations resolutions on the establishment of a new international economic order to be implemented, and expressed their willingness to face the crisis in a serious and responsible manner and to contribute positively and creatively to its solution.

## Status of Caribbean Women

All 12 of the CARICOM member states represented in Nairobi reported progress in improving the status of women during the Decade, but they also pointed to critical obstacles which still need to be removed.

Barbados' Education Minister, Billie Miller, who was also a vice-president on one of the main conference committees, reminded delegates that the Decade for Women had also been a decade of world-wide recession.

She reported, however, that in the face of this Barbadian women demonstrated flexibility and imagination, with many of them being self-employed in a variety of small enterprises and cottage industries.

Miller said that during the Decade Barbadian women captured an increasing share of the labour market, rising from just above 50 per cent in 1976 to just over 56 per cent for the first quarter of 1985.

She identified as achievements during the Decade, the setting up and work of the National Commission on the Status of Women and improved legislation for maternity leave and environmental protection, among other areas.

The Barbados minister sees the need for more women to be put in senior positions in the public service, and she called for an end to all abuses against women.

Jamaica, like Barbados, reported improvement in legislation in a wide range of areas affecting women, especially the Employment Act which requires equal pay for men and women and the Maternity Leave Act.

President of Jamaica's Senate, Jeanette Grant-Woodham said the Jamaica Women's Bureau had done much during the Decade in the area of public education and in setting up income-generating projects.

But she admitted that the economic situation in Jamaica has had a negative effect, and she pointed to the area of education where financial constraints have forced the Seaga Government to redefine its priorities.

The Jamaica delegate reported, though, that there were impressive achievements in the health sector, including improved accessibility to health care and a higher life expectancy for women. But, she said that

(Continued p. 29)



## Mary Charles of Montserrat Honoured

Mary Charles, a 64-year old seamstress from Montserrat has received an award from the United Nations Development Fund for Women for a novel garment project in the tiny British colony.

The garment project was launched in 1981 by the Social League of Women, headed by Margaret Dyer-Howe who is now Minister Responsible for Women's Affairs.

With funds to the tune of US\$34,000 for the purchase of equipment and material, the project aimed at providing school uniforms for Montserratian children.

"The idea was to encourage self-sufficiency and raise incomes among rural and urban women," explained Dyer-Howe.

The project has grown from six women and one sewing machine to 25 women and 12 machines, enabling it to produce – in addition to uniforms – linen for hospitals and material for commercial enterprises.

"It was a difficult task to train the women to use industrial machines, but we managed," Dyer-Howe recalled. "One of the good things has been the acceptance of the material by the merchants, which meant that the government did not have to introduce strict import regulations."

The garment project has been generating funds since 1983 to support itself. Expansion plans include

updating some of the finishing machines for which funding from the UN and other agencies is being sought.

A mix of young women and some over 35 years old – who were unable to get jobs in the traditional sectors – run the project which is accessible during the summer to school-leavers to learn sewing skills.

The programme has not only provided the women with technical skills, which some of them have since passed on to other garment concerns, but has also equipped them with the experience to run a small business.

Mary Charles, who has been a seamstress since her teens, said she was proud to be part of the garment project. The mother of four added that she was overwhelmed at the opportunity to participate in the workshops at the Forum in Nairobi.

"I feel very good to be here, it is something exceptional", she said beaming, shortly after receiving the award which she will share with her co-workers in Montserrat.

Charles was one of eight women from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, who received plaques in recognition of innovative schemes which contributed to their countries national development objectives during the Decade for Women.

The Fund was established in 1976 and has supported 400 programmes world-wide.

much still needs to be done in areas such as agriculture and industry.

The Trinidad and Tobago delegate, Senator Elmina Clarke-Allen said the downturn in the Trinidadian economy, while impacting on the society as a whole, had a more telling effect on women.

She announced plans by the government to give women a better deal in agriculture and to introduce them to new sources of income.

Clarke-Allen said much had been done in the area of health, with 102 health centres established since 1979. She also revealed plans to improve day-care facilities, which private enterprise had begun doing.

Trinidad, too, recorded an improvement in the legal status of women, but Clarke-Allen expressed concern at the absence of minimum representation of women at the bargaining table of trade unions.

The seven-nation Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) identified common problems, chief among them a lack of finance and trained personnel to implement programmes, especially through national machinery.

Delegates from the OECS said they still face the problems of access to education and non-traditional

jobs, low pay for work in agriculture, and inadequate health and working conditions.

They agreed that women make up the largest sector of the growing corps of the unemployed in the sub-region.

In addition, they have to cope with the increasing number of teenage pregnancies which only one country, St. Kitts – Nevis, said it had been able to tackle successfully through a teenage family life education project.

Most of the OECS countries reported some improvement in the number of women holding responsible positions in government, but there were calls for a larger percentage of management positions to be accessible to women.

Sexism was identified as an iron curtain standing in the way of progress in the area of education, particularly in Dominica where male-female roles are being clearly defined by the stereotypes of the past.

The disturbing trend of increasing violence against women was also highlighted, as well as the situation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines where teachers do not receive maternity leave.



SISTREN

## WE NEED A SOLUTION

One of the most impressive performances at Forum '85 was the presentation by the Jamaican theatre group, SISTREN, who – through song, dance and drama – presented a graphic picture of the effects of the International Monetary Fund's policies on Jamaican women.

Two members of the 19-member collective, stage manager, Lana Finikin, and teacher, Joan French, vividly portrayed scenes of who are victims of what they dubbed "The IMF Racket."

"Lay-offs, high prices, maintenance and child abuse," they chanted to the more than 500 women gathered at the Nairobi University for a session on the global, political, economic and cultural crisis.

Women from the audience participated in a skit which expressed concern about the American and British Governments' attitude to Caribbean countries, through a clever imitation of US President, Ronald Reagan, and British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.

The two Sistren members also dramatised a skit which they said portrayed a typical scene at the public hospital in Jamaica.

Here, the actors were again joined by other participants at the Forum to bring home a picture of a shortage of medical personnel, drugs, and congestion at the hospital.

Yet another skit showed scenes of the Jamaican woman, without a job, without enough money to prepare a proper meal for the family, hampered by a lack of water, and short of cash to give the children bus fare.

"We need a solution to the IMF pollution. No mek we bawl, no mek we fret, but struggle to resist the confusion that exists," Sistren sang repeatedly, as the crowd cheered them on.

"Women in Jamaica are depressed. Only a few are fighting and many of them are turning to prostitution," Joan said in an interview, following the presentation.

She charged that the goal of the UN Decade for Women, as far as equality of the sexes is concerned, cannot have any meaning in Jamaica because women have to depend on men for their economic survival.

Sistren was created in 1977 during the previous Michael Manley government, which at the time ran a special employment programme for many of the poorly-paid women who made up the group.

The collective which comprises women who are regarded as unskilled, including street sweepers, is committed to focusing on grass roots and poor women in the society.



A shortage of funds prevented the entire Sistren group from performing at the Forum. But, the lack of numbers in no way hampered their ability to get their meaning across to sisters from around the world.

"A who go do it fa we? can you answer? a we haffe do it fa we." The message was loud and clear, and women from all walks of life put their hands together and repeated the chant over and over.

## Third World Women Time

Tutor Co-ordinator of the Women and Development Unit (WAND) of the University of the West Indies, Peggy Antrobus, described Forum '85 as "A wonderful experience."

She said that unlike the previous gatherings of women, Third World women played a large role in the planning of the Nairobi exercise, (the WAND official presented a paper on development at the pre-conference consultation for the UN Conference, in Vienna last October.) in particular the Third World group, DAWN (Development Alternatives With Women for a New Era), in which the Caribbean is involved.

Antrobus said she felt there was a tremendous change from Mexico to Nairobi, in that equality, development and peace – the themes of the Decade – were regarded as separate issues in 1975, but, in Nairobi, it was recognised that they were inter-related.

"Mexico was new and theoretical. In Copenhagen, it was a sharing of experience, while in Nairobi we saw a sharing of commitment. There was tremendous confidence displayed in Nairobi by women, some of whose efforts represented 10 years of work on all sorts of projects," she said.

According to Antrobus, there was greater seriousness in Nairobi and the issues were dealt with in a more responsible way, although she had serious reservations about the impact of the governmental conference.

She pointed out that while the NGO's had improved their contribution to women as the Decade evolved, it had become harder to secure commitments from governments.



## No Cause For Jubilation

Secretary-General of the last United Nations women's conference, Dr. Lucille Mair, has said there is not much to be jubilant about at the end of the Decade for Women, given the effects on women of the harsh austerity measures adopted by governments.

The noted Jamaican historian and former diplomat said governments have had to work with enormous constraints because of the economic crisis, and this has inhibited the allocation of resources for developmental programmes which would benefit women.

"One could of course attach a considerable amount of blame to the policies, in the light of the overwhelming debt which all our countries are carrying today," said Dr. Mair.

She noted that women have had to employ survival techniques to cope with growing unemployment and the general economic crisis which has led to a cutback in services and facilities for women.

Referring to the Caribbean, she pointed to the social and human conditions of families, especially the poorest families.

The past 10 years had been full of achievements for Caribbean women she noted, citing in particular the establishment of national machinery to aid their development. She also drew attention to important legislation in areas such as the status of children, equal pay, divorce, child maintenance, minimum wage, and citizenship.

"We've begun to influence and sensitize ministries of agriculture, health and education in planning and only just begun to make them aware of what needs to be done in these programmes for women," she said.

Antrobus disclosed that WAND plans to do an in-depth study on the impact of structural adjustment of Caribbean economies on women, moving away from the previous general approach to what she considers a crucial issue.

"It's certainly going to lead to greater hardships for women. First of all there is going to be an increase in unemployment among women because of cutbacks in those sectors which employ women," she said.

The WAND official stated that while the original thrust of the organisation was to help with the setting up of national machinery and the provision of training and technical assistance, its focus had now shifted to "consciousness raising" and it plans to continue this through a women's studies programme at UWI.

"Our approach to women's studies is to bring a consciousness of women's issues into every area of university study," she stressed. We are not setting up a separate course called women's studies, but we are hoping that people who are teaching English, history, economics and political science will address some of these issues within the framework of their programmes."

"One has to look at all the services that are just not there – health services, shelters, housing and means of educating children – because of cuts in education budgets which affect the least affluent in the society," she said.

She shared the view expressed by some delegates and participants at the Forum that though governments have been sensitised to the issues affecting women, not much concrete action has been taken despite the establishment of national machinery for women's affairs. "The real test of course is what this machinery is equipped to do," she said. "I'm afraid that we have to admit that the national machinery has been without resources and lacks political support."

On the question of equality, Dr. Mair said some headway had been made through the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. But, she noted that only half of the governments have ratified the convention, which she referred to as a comprehensive manifesto containing the basic elements of the state of equality for women.

About the issue of peace, another theme of the Decade, Dr. Mair said it was no surprise that women moved in increasing numbers into peace movements in just about every region of the world. She said women had been activated to do a number of things, especially Third World women whose economies are threatened by conflict in Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

"I think that over the years, because of the realities of the conflicts, the need for peace has assumed a new urgency and more immediacy in women's lives", she noted. "We have seen development and social budgets diminish through this women's decade and the corollary to this has been the astronomical rise in arms budgets."

Dr. Mair, who met with women from all parts of the world during her tenure as Secretary-General for the last conference, said the Decade had led to women's consciousness of their own sense of equality.

Unlike her status as a delegate at the first conference in Mexico and her commitment to the governmental conference in Copenhagen, Dr. Mair free-lanced between the Forum and the UN Conference in Nairobi. She admitted that she was more attracted to the NGO gathering at Nairobi University, "I have found enormous dynamism, creativity and openness to discuss the issues. I didn't find any distinction at the Forum between political and non-political issues. I found it refreshing and relevant and it accords with my own view over the Decade of how women see themselves and see the world."

Dr. Mair supports the call for another gathering of women in five years time, noting that a lot of ground had been covered since Mexico in 1975, "Everytime women get together to share experiences, it has a multiplying effect and has strengthened what they are doing. Another meeting would help to spread that multiplying effect and women could do some great things."



## Women Haven't Influenced Governments Enough

Women's Affairs Officer of the CARICOM Secretariat, Magda Pollard says that Caribbean women have not succeeded much in influencing policy makers and governments to take concrete action to improve the status of women in a meaningful way.

Undoubtedly, she says, there has been a high level of awareness of the issues concerning women over the last decade, and she cites as the main achievement the setting up of national machinery in all 13 CARICOM member states.

Pollard however expresses concern about the functioning of such machinery.

"Perhaps in some cases the setting up of national machinery was no more than a token gesture, because there are not enough persons to do the tasks of the broad-based programmes of women's desks and bureaux, which are not provided with enough money," she says.

Recognizing that the serious economic crisis besetting the region is responsible for the curtailment of some of the governments' programmes, she argues that for women to make a contribution to the process of structural adjustment, certain facilities must be in place.

"The fact is that in times of economic stress, social programmes go first and it is the women that are affected", she points out. Women need support systems such as child care centres, if they are to get involved, for example in food production to which the CARICOM heads of government have given priority."

Pollard notes that the Meeting of CARICOM Ministers Responsible for the Integration of Women in Development, in Antigua, last May, identified as one of its priorities the strengthening of national machinery.

"There is need for national machinery for women's affairs to have formalised links with other ministries of government," she says. "For example, if we want to improve the health or economic status of women, we have to be sure that there are persons in those ministries who understand what is required and that they have the means to implement the necessary action."

Reflecting on the sub-themes of the Decade for Women – employment, education and health – the CARICOM official says women are more affected than men in the current trend of high unemployment in the region.

She calls for the curricula for primary school education to be re-designed to help women train for the job market in a wide range of areas, and for more sports facilities.

The CARICOM Women's Affairs Officer also underscores the need for women to be trained as managers of the health service in the region to enable primary health care to be more effective. "Women are

in a better position to identify their own health problems and needs within the community."

Pollard says the Caribbean has recorded significant progress in some areas although there have been some disappointments.

She refers to the "Women in the Caribbean" project, organized by the Institute of Social and Economic Research, which broadly examined the status of women through interviews with women at all levels.

Pollard also singled out as important the programme at Rose Hall, St. Vincent, conducted by the Women and Development Unit (WAND) of the UWI. That programme focused on participatory methodology, thereby allowing women – in this case, farmers – to assess their own strength and contribution to the development of a small community.

"The whole question of improving the status of women is a very big one and takes time. There has been consciousness-raising, and what we need to do after Nairobi is to implement forward-looking strategies which would not make us lose the impetus which we have gained," says the CARICOM officer.

Looking specifically at the role of the CARICOM Secretariat in improving the status of Caribbean women, Pollard pointed to a series of analyses in areas like education, agriculture, and health through links with other officers in the regional institution.

But, like many other organizations, a lack of funds has resulted in a shortage of professional staff and, in the case of the CARICOM Women's Desk, has prevented its growth.

Pollard suggested that, with financing, the Women's Desk could hire short-term consultants to do some of the analysis which she considers vital to her programmes. She is looking to the Commonwealth Secretariat in particular for technical and financial resources to strengthen the Women's Bureaus.

## Women-Owned Business

This is the view of President of the Caribbean Women's Association (CARIWA), Carmeta Fraser. Forum '85 brought out the creativity in women and taught Caribbean women that they can be their own entrepreneurs and depend less on government or the private sector for a job.

Fraser, who is also the President of the National Organisation of Women in Barbados said Kenyan women demonstrated through their displays of art and craft that women can be their own business people.

She was loud in her praise for the quality and quantity of work on show in Nairobi and reiterated her long-mooted appeal for permanent display at the United Nations for women's work in craft and agro-industry.



She was of the opinion that, given the world economic crisis, Caribbean women should not be relying on jobs in factories, but trying to utilize the resources in their countries to produce work from which they would derive an income.

She also underlined the need for women to have a better sense of the value of their work and to stop underselling their products.

CARIWA plans to assist craftswomen in training and marketing, which Fraser described as the real bugbears.

The CARIWA president is particularly happy with one resolution from the Nairobi conference which calls for the observation of International Women's Day to be a week long, with the emphasis on making women conscious of their economic worth.

Reflecting on the discussions on rural women, she said it was clear that some governments have not adhered to calls for better facilities for women in agriculture, particularly toilet facilities and transportation. Caribbean women made an impressive contribution to the Forum and at the same time it was an invaluable learning experience for them, Fraser noted.

She added that many delegations were impressed with the way the Caribbean women organized themselves and the fact that many of them volunteered their services to further the interests of women. In contrast, Fraser said, only some Caribbean governments had taken action generally during the Decade to improve the status of women. According to her, others had been lukewarm, while some seemed to have no interest in women's affairs.

But, she asserted that if women's interests have not received the serious attention they deserve, the women themselves were to blame, as they were a large part of the electorate which votes the politicians into office.

## CIM WANTS MORE WOMEN IN POLITICS

The President of the Inter-American Commission of Women, (CIM), Princess Lawes has appealed to governments to earmark a portion of their meagre financial resources for the development of women to enable them to reach their full potential.

She told a plenary session of the U.N. conference on women that the development of half of the world's human resources must be seen as paramount, and she called for strategies to eradicate the remaining traces of legal discrimination.

Lawes, a former minister responsible for women's affairs in Jamaica, stressed the need for programmes to diversify education and training options to gain access to non-traditional job opportunities.

The CIM president also underlined the need for steps to be taken to give women easier access to credit, make political participation at the decision-making level more accessible, and remove obstacles to women's mobility.

She recalled that over the last 10 years, CIM assisted the governments of member states of the Organisation of American States (of which CIM is an arm) – through direct funding for projects, research, training and technical assistance – to adopt the CIM Regional Plan of Action which was adapted from the U.N. World Plan of Action. CIM's priorities for the next few years will be the continued strengthening of national machinery that functions of research, monitoring and evaluating as well as inter-ministerial and inter-agency co-ordination, may be fully developed.

"CIM has identified the critical areas of education and training, nutrition and food, housing, employment, political participation and legal reform for continuing emphasis and on which strategies must be developed so that we can make rapid progress and reach our goals before the year 2000," said Lawes.

The Jamaican parliamentarian feels that the decade for women has heightened awareness in Jamaica that women are a disadvantaged group. She pointed out that legal reform had been carried out in many areas and the Jamaica Women's Bureau had implemented several successful programmes, notably the project which allows pregnant teenagers to continue their education after their pregnancy.

But, Lawes is not happy with the number of women in decision-making positions. "I would like to see more women in politics, especially in parliament and at policy-making levels in all ministries. There are qualified women who should be allowed upward mobility in both the public and private sector," she said.

She is particularly concerned about the effects of the cutbacks in Jamaica's health services which she said affected already low-paid nurses and primary health care workers.

Lawes said lay-offs in Jamaica as a result of the economic crisis had affected both men and women, but in her view women were feeling the pinch more because of their domestic responsibilities.

"One of the issues we need to face squarely is that of male-female responsibilities in the home. Men continue to be concerned only with their career while women have to work, look after the home and children," she said.





# FORWARD LOOKING STRATEGIES

The uncertain economic recovery in the developing countries will have "serious repercussions for the status of women, particularly underprivileged women and for human resource development, both key elements in the advancement of women," according to the final document adopted by the UN End of Decade Conference.

The document, entitled Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000, points out that women, subject to compound discrimination on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity, national origin, and sex, could be even more adversely affected by deteriorating economic conditions.

The document explains that the forward looking strategies are intended to provide a practical and effective guide for long-term global action.

To promote equality of women and men, governments are being urged to ensure equality before the law, to provide facilities for the equality of educational opportunities and training and equality in conditions of employment, including remuneration and adequate social security.

The strategies also highlight the following:

- \* The obstacles to the equality of women created by stereotypes, perceptions or attitudes towards women should be totally removed. Elimination of these obstacles will require, in addition to legislation, education of the population at large through formal and informal channels, including the media, non-governmental organizations, political party platforms and executive action.
- \* Employment legislation should ensure equity and provide benefits for women not only in the conventional and formal labour force, but also in the informal sector, particularly with regards to migrant and service workers, by providing minimum wage standards, insurance benefits, safe working conditions and the right to organize.
- \* Special attention should be given in criminology training to the particular situation of women as victims of violent crimes, including crimes that violate women's bodies and result in serious physical and psychological damage.

- \* Governments should intensify efforts to ensure equality of participation of women in all national, regional and local legislative bodies and to achieve equity in the appointment and promotion of women to high posts in executive, legislative and judicial branches.

- \* Women should be an integral part of the process of defining the objectives and modes of development, as well as developing strategies and measures for their implementation

- \* The gender bias evident in most development programmes should be eliminated and the prejudices hindering the solution of women's problems removed.

- \* Particular attention should be given to the restructuring of employment, health and education systems and to ensuring equal access to land, capital and other productive resources.

- \* Emphasis should be placed on strategies to assist women in generating and keeping income, including measures designed to improve women's access to credit.

- \* It is vital that the link between the advancement of women and socio-economic and political development be emphasized for the effective mobilisation of resources for women.

- \* Appropriate national machinery should be established and should be utilised to integrate women effectively in the development process. To be effective, this machinery should be provided with adequate resources, commitment and authority to encourage and enhance development efforts.

- \* Women are an important part of the agricultural work force; therefore there should be special interest in the promotion of the technical training of women in this particular field.

- \* Women's equal role in decision-making with respect to peace and related issues should be seen as one of their basic human rights and as such should be enhanced and encouraged at the national, regional and international levels.

- \* The situation of violence and destabilisation that exists in Central America constitutes the most serious obstacle to the achievement of peace in the region and thus hinders the fulfillment of the strategies to the year 2000 vital to the development of women.





## World Survey On Women

A United Nations survey on the role of women in development says women's contribution to national production activities has been increasing steadily since 1950 and is projected to increase even further to the year 2000.

The report of the UN Secretary-General on the world survey, which was presented at the Nairobi conference, says that, judging from available data, women are presently more than a quarter of the industrial labour force and almost two fifths of the agricultural labour force and of services.

It points out that there are regional variations. For example, in Africa and South Asia, male participation rates are expected to increase at the same speed as those of women up to the year 2000. The survey says that in all of the other areas, especially in Western Europe and North America, female participation rates will increase faster than males.

The UN document reports that the contribution of women to economic development is underestimated in national and international statistics.

"In agriculture, active women are sometimes counted as inactive and when counted as active are often included in the category of unpaid family labour even though they are performing managerial tasks that should assign them to the category of independent farmers," the survey states.

The survey also concludes that in industry women are involved more often than men in the informal economy, hence neither their work nor their production is fully recorded in national statistics.

It also finds that the sectoral distribution of women's labour is different from men's: "Women are disproportionately active in services because employment in services responds to supply pressures more than that of other sectors of the economy and because the skills women learn in the household can be transferred to the services sector more readily than to industry."

According to the survey, women benefit on average less than men from their contribution to national production: "In industry, women still belong by and large to the secondary labour force taking jobs for which men are either unavailable or which they are unwilling to take. As a result, their average hourly wages are lower than men's."

There is also evidence to show that women are protected by social legislation less than men, even in countries that have enacted such legislation.

## Tech And Tools

Imagine a special cluster of thatched roofed buildings within five minutes walking distance of the main Nairobi Forum venue! where women could not only **talk** about what they are doing but could display and demonstrate technologies.

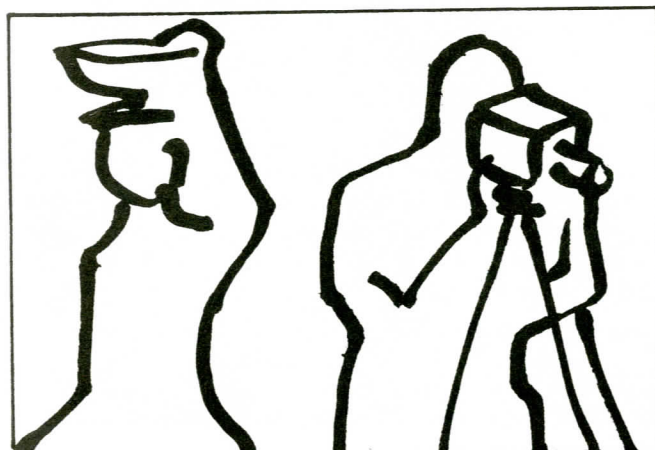
This was the opportunity provided by "Tech and Tools", one of the special events at the Nairobi Forum. It was a hands-on experience co-sponsored by the International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and the Appropriate Technology Council of Kenya (ATAC).

Displays on food processing and storage, agriculture, income generating and appropriate technology addressed themselves to easing the burden of rural women. Women were also introduced to the technologies of the modern world – satellite communication, electronic and computer systems.

Guyana's presentation on food related technologies and Trinidad and Tobago's on health technologies provided the main Caribbean contribution to the event.

Special lunch time activities allowed participants the flexibility for impromptu demonstrations, audio-visual and dramatic presentations.

"Tech and Tools" was an inspiration to many women / and it provided an alternative means of dynamic communication through doing instead of just talking.







*Lana Finikin of SISTREN and Leila Gonzales of Brazil (DAWN)*



*Joyce Harris of WAND (DAWN)*



*Caren Grown and Devaki Jain (DAWN)*



*Global groundings at Forum '85*



## FEED BACK

Saroj Verma  
Director  
Gujarat State Crime Prevention Trust  
India

You are in the right direction in tackling the issue of Women and the Law. The topics included by you have universal relevance and I wish to get a sample copy of this issue for our reference.

Elaine Ferguson (Mrs.)  
Resource Co-ordinator  
Joint Trade Unions Research Development Centre  
Jamaica

I had the pleasure of reading a copy of the Newsletter and found it very interesting. Please put us on your mailing list for new copies, and send any back issues.

### NEWS FROM WAND

## SEVENTH REVIEW

The Seventh Annual Meeting of the Advisory Committee of the Women and Development Unit, University of the West Indies (WAND) took place at the Windsor Hotel, Barbados, on October 3 and 4, 1985.

The committee reviewed WAND's field and communication programmes for the preceeding year and looked at the Unit's future beyond the Decade.

WAND's Mission Statement, which had been reviewed in the course of the year was circulated among the eighteen participants. It states that: "WAND is committed to supporting and stimulating programmes aimed at the total development of all Caribbean women, thus contributing to the achievement of a more just and humane society."

Highlighting the Unit's future focus, the committee heard presentations on "The People of Tomorrow" radio programme currently popular in Barbados (designed to reach unemployed youth); and the proposed Women and Development Studies being undertaken through the Extra Mural Department in the coming year.

The meeting discussed topic areas and made recommendations through the convening of three sub-groups.

The Committee viewed the film "Ten Years Is Not Enough" by Starr Productions, a collaborative effort by UNICEF, United Nations Development Fund, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and WAND.

# MILESTONES

### Dame Nita Barrow

Dame Nita Barrow has been named among a group of six Commonwealth citizens who will travel to South Africa on a peace seeking mission. The visit was proposed during the Nassau Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting held in October this year.

Commonwealth Secretary General, Shridath Ramphal named the group which includes former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser; former Nigerian Head of State General Olusegun Obasanjo; former British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lord Barber; John Malecela, ex-Tanzanian Foreign Minister; former Indian External Affairs Minister, Swaran Singh; and Anglican Archbishop of Canada, the Most Revd. Edward Scott.

Dame Nita was Convenor of the Forum for Non governmental Organizations in Nairobi in July.

### Yvonne Francis Gibson

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has appointed a Co-ordinator of Women's Affairs, Yvonne Francis Gibson. A former Vice President of the National Council of Women, Ms Francis Gibson is also President of the St. Vincent Union of Teachers.

### Margaret Hope

Margaret Hope, formerly Information Officer at the Barbados Tourist Board, is now Chief Information Officer in the Government Information Service in Barbados. Her appointment became effective on October 1.



# ***Sex Discrimination in Education and Training: A Continuing Abuse***

Two notices appeared in the Trinidad and Tobago press days after the U.N. Decade for Women Conference came to an end in Nairobi. They were advertisements put out by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago (Ministry of Sport, Culture and Youth Affairs) for places at vocational training centres – called youth camps.

One advertisement, headed Scholarships at the National Youth Camp, invited applications from “young men between the ages of 17 and 21 years.” There are three National Youth Camps for young men, representing a total of 525 places. The skills offered to the young men were: agriculture, electrical installation, welding, carpentry, masonry, cabinet-making, auto mechanics, plumbing, and tailoring.

The other advertisement was under the heading Scholarships at El Dorado Girls Camp – clearly a different kettle of fish. Here the applicants had to be “teenage girls between the ages of 14 and 19 years.” There is only one girls’ camp, at which there are 220 places. And what skills were offered to the “teenage girls”? book binding, commercial subjects (i.e. shorthand, typing...), cookery and catering, garment construction, hairdressing and beauty culture.

The thinking behind this system is not too different from that which holds up the system of apartheid. In South Africa, blacks are told they are equal but must develop separately and differently from whites. Therefore, blacks can’t make so bold as to think they can get the same educational opportunities as whites – nor can young girls in Trinidad and Tobago aspire to the same choices as their brothers.

The same discrimination exists in the mainstream secondary education system of Trinidad and Tobago – the two-tiered comprehensive system which caters for the majority of the secondary school population. When it comes to skills-training – preparation for the world of work – the timetable is structured in such a way, from junior secondary level, that girls and boys have to do different programmes. There is not much room for choice.

A tiny handful of brave girls and boys do cross the line and take courses not considered suitable for their sex. They may get some encouragement from progressive teachers, but most of the people around them think they are a little bit odd. The majority of young people therefore toe the sex-role line – the girl accepts that she has no business in the auto mechanics shed, and the boy knows that wanting to learn typing or cooking is “unmanly.”

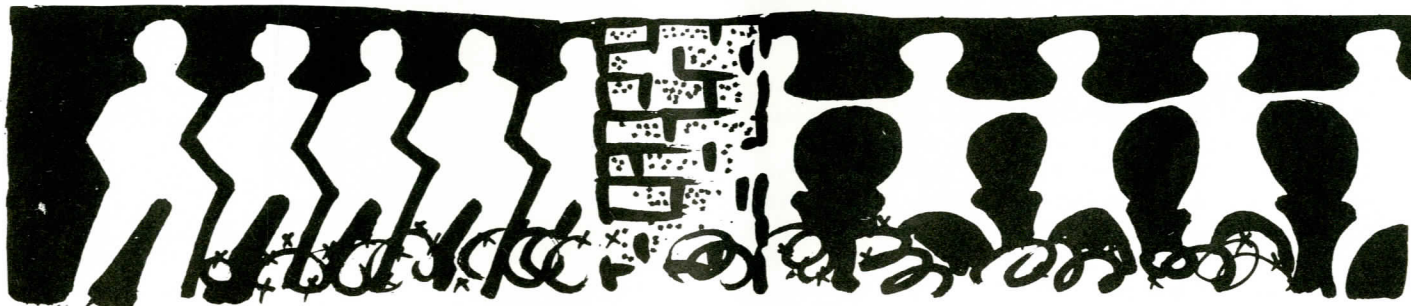
We shall never know how much talent has been wasted already by this system of debarring human beings from certain opportunities on the grounds of their sex. It is just as wicked as debarring people on the grounds of their race.

There is another serious side to this story. The skills that are offered to girls in the youth camps, the comprehensive schools, and the other state institutions for technical/vocational education, are skills which are less marketable and lower paid than those offered to the boys. That is to say, the boys will get work more readily and will get more money for their work than the girls coming out of this system. So, our education system assumes that girls don’t seriously need to be equipped to enter the competitive world of work – only the boys will have families to support, etc.

This is obviously foolish planning in a society and a world where women are bread-winners too.

Discrimination against women in education and training is one of the abuses which the governments of the world (including ours) agreed to rectify during the U.N. Decade for Women, 1975-1985. It is obvious that some governments have no intention of doing any such thing, now or at any other time – unless women demand it.

*This feature is the third in the series, Workingwomen Public Awareness Features issued by Women Working for Social Progress, 28 St. Cecilia Street, Tunapuna. Trinidad and Tobago.*





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# What's it all about? -Feminism

by Margaret R. Hinkson.

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The thing about feminism is that there is no definition – no single definition which keeps it free for everyone interested or involved in it to give it a personal meaning. That is feminism's major strength and, at the same time, its major weakness. Every woman who is a feminist has her own personal identification by which feminism is real for her. But for the multitude of people outside looking on the situation is incomprehensible.

Feminism is the only really revolutionary political belief that has come out of the 20th century. And like the steelband, the only new musical instrument of the century, it is experiencing rapid evolution which, nevertheless, is painful because of its newness.

I call feminism a revolutionary political belief because it aims to bring about change. However, if one looks at the women as individuals who are involved in varying degrees in feminist activity, one will find that a large number of them do not look like the revolutionary stereotype – wild and ragged, starving and/or with gun in hand. As these women perceive it, feminism and their feminist activities are not based on any established, recognized political dogma, nor is their activity within the revolutionary stereotype – overthrow of governments, bloodshed, murder, bombings and so on.

The Feminist Revolution is elusive as long as we think of revolution in the traditional way. It is the subtle revolution, and in its subtlety we have the hallmark of its difference as a political dogma. For millenia, as long as men wrote the rules, invented the religions and provoked their wars, the machismo proved itself by fighting, killing, looting, rape, and the conquest of others by violence. This is what male revolutions are about, but feminism is the woman's revolution where sisterhood is powerful. It is completely different from the male revolution because it is the women's war and we are fighting it with women's tools in women's way.

The first way is the rejection of violence. This is why so many people outside (both men and women) tend to underrate the feminist cause, to belittle its beliefs, and to dismiss us as 'those feminists.'

The truth is that 'those feminists' are to be found in every woman's heart which has woken up one morning and said to the woman's brain, "I'm not putting up with this any longer..... (you can list the things

yourself). For revolution is really a spirit, a feeling, and there is no difference in the determination of a macho man who sets out to murder a political enemy by making and throwing a Molotov Cocktail at the house where he lies sleeping, from the woman who says to herself: "Right, I've had enough of this battering" or, "I will not tolerate sexual harassment on the job any more" or, "I will choose to remain single and make my own independence" or, "I will boo a smutty calypsonian." The list of examples is endless because the forms of oppression are endless in their own subtlety. What is important is the spirit of determination that sets in to a woman's heart and changes her forever. That is what the Feminist Revolution is all about. That is why it is so easy to overlook it and belittle it and misunderstand it.

That is also why feminism is very personal ideology, it almost defies definition! There are women who, in trying to struggle against the elusive quality of the movement, try to 'concretise' it by drawing up definitions and dogma, and basing it in political stances taken up from the macho world.

Arising out of this situation you find the women's movement comprising such groupings as the radical feminists, the liberal feminists, the radical lesbian feminists, etc. These groupings serve their purposes as themes which unite the members of the group, but the truth is they are all valid, all part of the movement, and the movement is neither restricted to their definition nor exclusive to it. Feminism, the women's movement, is not one of these, but all of these. It is not only the activist in a group with heightened awareness, but also the isolated single woman who woke up this morning and said – "Enough!"

So what if she, at first, blanches at the word 'feminist' and thinks it is something sinister? That is only because she is newly awakened and still a bit afraid. Her time will come. Even if she never admits that she is one of 'those feminists' until the day she dies, the truth is that once her thinking changes she too is part of the most insidious revolution the world has ever known. The revolution which cannot have a roll call, nor a border line. The one which can still have a multitude of political and religious and sexual ideologies, because what matters in this revolution is the spirit.





## **ISER/UWI CALYPSO RESEARCH PROJECT**

UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES  
ST. AUGUSTINE  
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

### **SEMINAR ON THE CALYPSO**

January 6 - 10, 1986

The Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) of the University of the West Indies at St. Augustine is hosting a Conference on 'The Calypso' as part of its wider Research Project entitled:

The Promotion of a Trinidad and  
Tobago Cultural Identity: A Pro-  
gramme of Research into the Calypso  
and the Establishment of Calypso  
Archives.

Papers will be presented by a wide range of experts and practitioners on themes such as: Calypso and the Law, the Economics of Calypso, Calypso or Oral History, Calypso and Institutions and Calypso outside of Trinidad and Tobago.

For further information contact: Mr. Sydney Hill, I.S.E.R., University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago. Telephone: 1(809) 663-1364/1359.