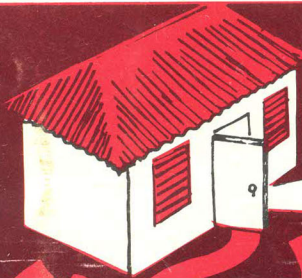


HO?

SIREN

VOL II NO. 1 1989

\$8.00



DEVELOPING COOPS HOUSING PARTNER
LOBBYING
IDENTIFYING LAND AND ABANDONED HOUSING

NO SINGLE MOTHER

FAR FROM SCHOOLS, SHOPS

NO MAINTENANCE

HIGH HIGH RENT

HIGH RENT

HIGH RENT

NO RUNNING WATER

NO CHILDREN



- **Housing Woes: Women Seek Solutions**
- **Rope Inna Dis Portia!**
An open letter to our new Minister
- **Women on Women:**
Viewpoints on feminism in the Caribbean.
- **Don't Put Yuh Hand On Mi Property!**
Conscious Calypsos Defend Women's Rights

SISTREN OUT DEH!

Time come and we gaan again! It's been years since Sistren did a Caribbean tour, so to make up for it, we've bitten off a huge chunk - nine countries in ten weeks beginning April 19 and going through to the end of June! So, yuh can imagine the planning and the preparation; the hustle and the bustle, that has marked the office for the past few weeks. And what with the new play, *Buss Out!* (see review on p. 21), we have been very busy indeed.

Now when Sistren tour, dem caan jus' tour so. In 'nuff meetings, apart from re-

hearsals and the normal day-to-day ones that keep the business going, all involved in the tour have been learning about the history and geography of the region and the specific countries to be visited. They've also been preparing themselves for any cultural differences they may encounter, and familiarising themselves with the background and work of the various host groups.

It's a particularly significant tour coming as it does in a period of great activity among women in the individual countries as well as regionally. We shall all be learning a great deal from it. The schedule for

this hectic "one-stop" tour looks like this:

Antigua	April 19	April 24
Dominica	April 25	May 1
Barbados	May 1	May 8
St Vincent	May 8	May 15
St Lucia	May 15	May 22
Grenada	May 22	May 29
Trinidad & Tobago	May 29	June 12
Guyana	June 12	June 20
Suriname	June 20	June 27

Wherever you are keep your eyes and ears on the media for further details:

We'll be seeing you.

ARTWORKS INSPIRED BY LIONHEART GAL

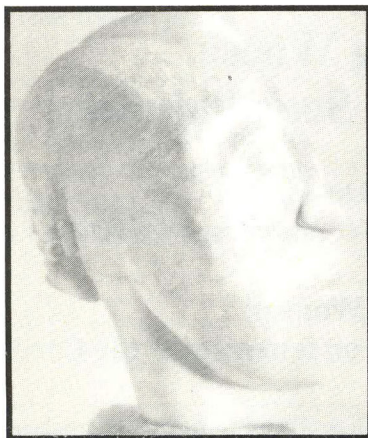
Barbra Walker is a Jamaican painter, sculptor and printmaker living and working in Cologne, West Germany for the past 11 years. She is one of a group of women artists who run a small art gallery in the old part of the city.

In 1987 she read Sistren's book, *Lionheart Gal*, and was inspired to produce two pieces of work; a small stone head she called *Lionheart Gal*, and a mixed-media painting called *Sistren*.

Says Barbra, "What fascinated me was these women coming from the lives they

have had; the problems and the suffering they have been through - and how they came out at the other end. I found a lot of strength in their life histories. A lot of other women can learn from what they have done."

'Lionheart Gal' (L), 'Sistren' (below)



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Wardrobe Mistress - Jerline Todd

SISTREN PROFILE

Introducing Jerline Todd, Sistren founding member and Wardrobe Mistress, who's not afraid to kick a leg or two in workshops, readings and major plays. She's also a vibrant member of the Sistren Editorial Team.

'Toddy', as she's known with great affection is an Aquarian born in 1930, which makes her the most mature member of the troupe. Hailing from Linton Park in St Ann, Toddy was a waitress before she became involved with Sistren. In her spare time she

loves movie-going and getting wrapped around a good book.

She says, "The years with Sistren have taught me a lot about women and our work, and how men have power over us — as if we can't think for wese! I know better now!"

Toddy's greatest personal ambition is to own her own home. "I would feel more comfortable to have a member of my family look after me when I get old, as I don't have any children of my own."

PERSONAL NOTES

ON THE HORIZON: Bev Hanson is expecting in August, so she'll be missing the Caribbean Tour. But the girl look nice yuh see!

WELCOME: Jean Kelly who'll be taking over Bev's multi-male roles for the Tour.

MARRIED: Viris 'Val' Gordon of Sistren Textiles is now Gordon-Hewitt. Our best wishes Val.

UP AND ABOUT: Peta-Anne Baker, ADA Coordinator, after lying about on her back for weeks resting a slipped disc. Good to see you back on your feet girl, but take it easy!

PROGRESS: Groundwork Theatre Company has moved to larger offices at 3 Oxford Terrace (5) and got a new transport and got a full-time Public Relations Officer, Fame Flower, Rosamond Brown. Nice!

BORN: To Maxine Henry-Wilson and husband Gladstone, a daughter, Seya. Congratulations.

LOOKING GOOD: Latest issue of Bankra, bi-monthly publication from the Urban Development Corporation and Metropolitan Parks and Markets.

THE THINGS THEY SAY . . .

The doctor engaged in family planning programmes in India, was chatting with the head man of a village in which one was about to start.

"How many children do you have?" the doctor asked.

"Three," replied his host.

"That's a good size for a family," said the doctor with approval, having expected the villager to say six or seven.

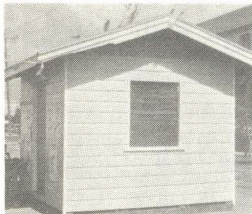
"But you haven't asked me how many daughters I have," said the villager.

(World Development Forum, vol 7 #3)

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ROPE INNA DIS PORTIA!

An Open Letter To Our New Minister, Honourable Portia Simpson

Dear Sister Portia,

First of all we want to sincerely congratulate you on your new position as 'Super' Minister in the 'Super' Ministry of Labour, Welfare, and Sports. All Jamaica knows where you are coming from and our hearts feel warm to know that grassroots can reach somewhere - especially grassroots woman!

Mind you, Portia, we did feel a way that even though your 'Super' Ministry has responsibility for women, dat nuh inna di title. Labour and Welfare and Sports are important, yes. But Woman important to!

And, we noted your comments at the Women's Bureau Consultation during International Women's Week celebrations that you'll be representing women in Parliament; that you are definitely a part of the movement, and that we, the women of Jamaica have to keep you informed about what's going on. That is all good to hear. But while we can see that you're really getting stuck into Labour and Welfare and Sports practically every day on the TV news and in the newspapers, so far we've only seen you talk at Women's Bureau forums about anything to do with us.

Now we don't have a problem with that. The Bureau has come a long way in terms of relating to we women. Under Pat Sinclair, groups like ours are included in the process to ensure implementation of the National Policy Statement on Women. But remember, the Bureau is not a channel for women's voices. It has no power or

mandate to represent the women of Jamaica despite the good work Pat and her staff are doing.

We have no 'lines' to you Portia, so we women in our groups and as individuals can't really 'keep you in touch' in any significant way with what we are all doing in our various corners.

We would like to suggest that as soon as possible you organise to meet with us - to bring together representatives from our groups, so we can tell you how we feel and what we want in terms of lasting structures that will bring about our true emancipation. As a woman yourself, you know that contrary to the propaganda, we women like to talk through our problems together, not to 'bitch' or to waste time, but to pool our creativity and give each other confidence to move forward. The Association of Women's Organisations, of which we are a part, has compiled a list of over one hundred women's organisations in the country. There are probably more, but that should certainly be a start. And, what is more you can be sure you'd get nuff help from all of us in setting up such a forum.

All of us know the importance of building a strong and independent women's movement. We can all support our own party, our own class, our own religion or whatever, but none of us is going to achieve true liberation and equality unless we sink our differences and pool our skills, our creativity and our voices on the issues that objectively bind us as women.

Portia, is a whole heap a tings deh pon wi mind. Lack of housing and property rights, poor social services for we and our children, low wages and high unemployment, bias at the workplace and sexual violence.

Why must our Free Zone women continue to be paid such low wages unskilled workers when in fact they are actually skilled persons. Why should they have to work way into the night, in order to earn enough to survive? And what is happening to their children in the meantime? Why aren't the children born out of the bellies of our sisters who have foreign husbands, granted automatic Jamaican status? Why is there no law or code against the offence of sexual harassment at the workplace? And when is some government going to take put more teeth in the law to protect women against the violence of men, and make it less traumatic to report cases of rape and sexual violence?

And, Portia, since you're going to represent us in the Parliament, we presume you'll do so at Cabinet level also. So can we ask another favour? Do - try yuh best and lobby for even one 'Wise Woman' to be included on the team of Special Advisers to the Prime Minister. These gentlemen are no doubt wise as wise can be by many standards, but we don't have any confidence that they have a clue about women's needs - especially grassroots women's needs.

Anyway, you take care of yourself and we'll keep in touch at this level.

All the best,

Sistren

FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW:

WOMEN SEEK SOLUTIONS TO HOUSING WOES

by Jennifer Jones

"A woman's place is in the home" translated means, "Woman is the handservant of man, her protector". This description of existing social relations is nothing short of a fairy story - a myth that is central to women's lack of access to housing and property.

Women hardly ever inherit property. It is left to the sons. The justification is that they (the sons) have responsibility for wives and children. In a case where property is left to sons and daughters and there is no peaceful settlement, more often than not, male physical strength and bullying wins out. This can't be right when in the majority of cases, it is woman's wages that provide her needs and the needs of her children.

MALE ATTACHMENT NEEDED

Even in cases where we struggle and work and save until we have our deposit to buy a house, mortgage institutions don't want to make loans to single women. If we are married and wish to purchase property, they insist on using our husbands as guarantors. If we are separated, they want some other man to back us. We are expected to have a male attached somewhere.

Women who work in the informal sector have trouble getting credit



CREDIT & LOAN CORPORATION

So you want credit do you? Where do you work? Who do you work for? What is your monthly wage? Do you have the down payment?

The truth is that many of us (over a third) head our own households and have responsibility not only for our children but the elderly as well. Yet even the most economical shelter, squatting on captured land, frequently involves too much violence for us

to cope with. So we are forced, for security reasons, into a rental market which tightly restricts our capacity to save the capital for private home ownership.

The end result is an enormous burden of poverty and social suffering for many of our women.

How many women are now in relationships where they are physically and/or mentally and emotionally abused; relationships they want to end but are forced to live with because they have nowhere for themselves and their children to go? How many mothers are today looking the other way as their daughters suffer sexual harassment, because they are imprisoned by the lack of a place to escape to? What is the cost of survival for a young, single woman when rentals are like any other scarce commodity on the open market; when even if she has the qualifications or the cash, she may have to give other favours to edge out the competition? Usually she doesn't have the cash and has to kotch with relatives or friends - another problematic situation. (Enter the Boops!)

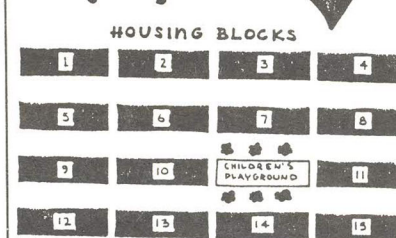
FINDING SOLUTIONS

As handicapped runners with the odds against us, we have quite an uphill struggle. This is especially so when you consider that the National Shelter Strategy Report (a government document produced in 1987) assessed that Jamaica needs approximately 15,000 new units, and 10,000 upgraded units per year for the next 20 years to fill current needs. And, reflect further on the fact that the government over the past eight years has barely produced one year's requirement. But as this issue of Sistren shows, we are struggling to find creative solutions.

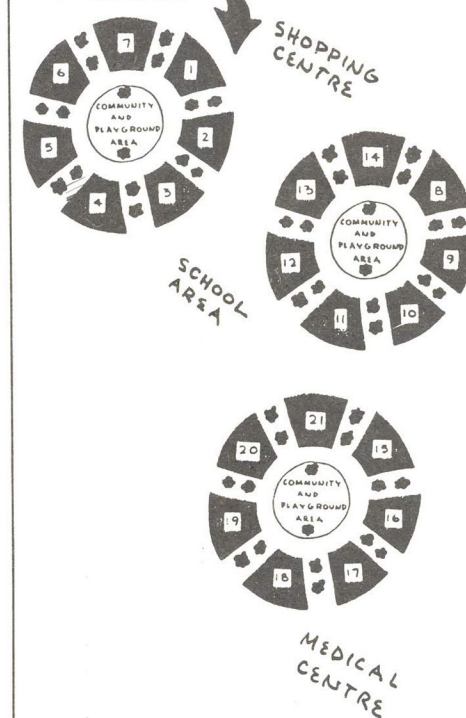
DESIGN HELPS COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The St Peter Claver project (see p. 8) is making efforts to secure adequate housing for some Free Zone women.

Project planners tend to ignore the needs of women and children, designing this...



instead of something like this...



Adequate housing means not only acquiring the physical space but taking women's needs into account in the design of that space. The design of shelter affects community relations. The grid system of planning, places house in even rows. This system often overlooks social needs like play areas for small children that can easily be seen from the house, and the need for easy communication with neighbours for security and other reasons. It is in our interest to lobby to have our needs taken

into consideration from the earliest planning stages.

NEW FORMS OF OWNERSHIP

We are also looking at forms of ownership and at how to expand the low income housing stock, while preventing market forces taking over and pushing prices beyond our reach once again.

One answer is a co-operative like the St Peter Claver scheme, where housing charges are affordable and residents have security of tenure as long as they abide by the rules, which they themselves have made. Other ownership questions relate to who controls the property. The St Peter Claver group, using the experience of some Canadian co-operatives, ensure women retain control by ruling that while men can live in the properties they cannot be co-op members.

In a co-operative in Mexico City, the constitution calls for land titles to be registered in the names of the women to protect the family if the male partner abandons them. Rules of conduct also specify that violence or force cannot be used against women and children. Co-op rules, of course, are not cast in iron. They can be changed over the years by a majority, to take into consideration changed conditions.

NEW LAW

Last year a new Jamaican law was passed which does strengthen women's property rights. If a woman has been in a common-law relationship for five years or more, she now has a claim on the property of her husband if he dies without making a will. However, men still have overwhelming control over property. Whether you are a wife by registration or by common-law, your partner can still will all property registered in his name to whomever he pleases. The law is blind to the contribution of the wife, financial or otherwise, which made it possible for him to acquire those assets.

COLLECTIVE PRESSURE NEEDED

There are several answers to this problem:

- * We need to be more conscious about safeguarding our rights by insisting on joint property titles.
- * Collective pressure to change laws which weaken our rights. Join a group



that has housing on its agenda and help to strengthen the lobby. There is power in unity.

- * A determination to build up our own assets. Most of us are coming from a position of economic weakness, but we also know that "One one coco full basket". Many individuals can fill many baskets. For example one women's group is examining the possibility of starting a huge partner. One half of each person's draw down would still be available for short-term cash flow needs. The other half would be invested with a financial institution from which each member of the partner could receive loans for housing, for income generation, for education, or whatever. Imagine the possibilities of such a full basket put together by thousands of Jamaican women! As a member of the Zimbabwe Women's Bureau put it: "Without money-making skills, all talk of emancipation for women is a legal nicety..." (Kate McCalman).

- * We also need clear understandable information on what is available now - simple fact sheets on Tenant's Rights, where loans are available and how we can get them, what types of housing are available and so on.

- * There is also an immediate need for refuge for severely abused women over and above the limited service being offered, albeit commendably, by the Women's Crisis Centre.

- * We must continue to lobby government and other institutions. The Bureau of Women's Affairs, after consultation with women's organisations, has placed housing as one of the priorities for the 1989 Plan of Action towards implementation of the National Policy Statement on Women. The new government has committed itself to listen to the views of the people, so we expect that when the proposed National Advisory Council is set up, not only trade unions and the private sector will be represented, but also the non-governmental development sector generally and women's organisations in particular.

(Jennifer Jones is a freelance journalist and resource person working in the development sector.)

SIREN

CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING: A WAY FORWARD FOR WOMEN



The St Peter Claver Women's Housing Co-operative is not just about improving the housing conditions of its members - although this objective alone is reason for it to exist. It is also about building cooperation and strengthening community; about combining adequate private space and shared facilities.

The housing co-op grew out of the St Peter Claver Free Trade Zone Women's Group in answer to the inadequate living conditions of its members. Most of the women involved live in tenement yard conditions - renting one room and sharing bathroom and kitchen with five or six other families. Right now the group is in the process of purchasing a number of those old-time properties (the ones with big houses and large, well-fruited land space). All the properties targeted are in the community of Waltham Park which surrounds the St Peter Claver Church. And, they are all within walking distance of each other - a deliberate move based on the desire of the group to build community spirit among members.

The properties will be renovated

and upgraded to ensure that each member has two rooms and shares a kitchen and a bathroom with one other. In the case of the first property to be purchased, two rooms will be added to the existing ten rooms, three bathrooms and three kitchens. The property will then be ready to house six members and their families.

A female architect is assisting in planning the space sensitively in keeping with the needs of the women and their children. Areas where small children can be seen at play by mothers as they work in the house; easy communication between units for security and efficient placing of cupboards, wash areas and so on, are just some of the ways of easing women's day-to-day chores.

The project hopes to house some 45 women and their families. Each member living in the units will pay a monthly 'housing charge' of between \$120.00 and \$150.00, which will be used for maintenance, water bills and all the other costs of operating and maintaining the properties. It's called a 'housing charge' as opposed to rent be-

cause each woman is a co-op member and not a tenant.

Members are welcome to move in with their men, but only they (the women) can actually have occupancy rights: in other words, the occupancy agreement, which is like a lease, is in their name. In this way the women are guaranteed the right to stay in the unit even if she and her man split up. This move is deliberately designed to strengthen the traditionally weak control women have had in the area of property rights.

Funding for the project was sought in the form of grants from non-governmental agencies. This was then matched at a rate of 4-1 by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The co-op, as a result started out with \$2 million for the project.

In the long-term, the group would like to expand its activities. So far, discussion on this possibility has centred on seeking further grants to enable other properties to be purchased and renovated. The feasibility of generating further funds from the housing charge surplus will also be examined.



The first property purchased by the co-op awaits renovation (top). Typical shelter conditions for many of the co-op members (above).

STRUCTURE AND RULES

STRUCTURE

The structure of the St Peter Claver Women's Housing Co-operative is designed so that decision-making is kept in the hands of each individual member. Each member has one vote at the general members meetings - one way in which co-ops seek to ensure democratic control of their organisations.

MEMBERS (*meet monthly*)

ELECTED EXECUTIVE

VOLUNTEER COMMITTEES

(Membership, Maintenance, Social, Finance-amount and type flexible depending on needs at any given time)

This housing co-operative is registered as a Cooperative Corporation, but it's not just about business. It's about people getting together to provide for themselves.

RULES GOVERNING THE UNITS

(devised by the co-op members)

***Housing Charge:** This must be paid on time each month. Each member pays four months in advance, a device aimed at giving each woman time to recover if she should lose her job. If a member moves from her unit, this deposit is refunded. In the case of late payments, the co-op gives notice and starts proceedings through the Registrar of Co-operatives. The onus is on the individual to inform the executive that payment will be late, and why, in order for an arrangement to be worked out.

***Membership Dues:** Each member pays a \$1.00 membership fee and buys a minimum of five shares at \$2.00 each. There is no interest on the fee or the shares but both are refunded if a member leaves.

***House Rules :** Each individual is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of her own unit and has collective responsibility for the communal areas including the yard. Each person is expected to own her own stove, but shares the electricity bills with the person with whom she shares kitchen and bathroom. It is expected that the members of each property will make other rules in keeping with their specific collective needs.

REAPING THE BENEFITS

St Peter Claver Housing Co-op members are looking forward to their new homes.



Rita Vassel, 24 year old Garment Factory Supervisor. Two children, aged eight and six.

"I'll benefit from this housing change by moving back into this area. My children go to school here, I go to church here and it'll be much easier for me to go to work. I used to live in this community and my parents live here. Right now I'm living in a housing scheme, but it's not really mine. I rent it for \$150.00 a month. The problem is that the owner does not maintain it. It's a self-help project where (government) builds one room and a bathroom and kitchen and you finish it, but this person who I rent it from, she hasn't done anything to it..."



Lisetta White, 35 year old Garment Factory Machine Operator. Six children, aged 19, 18, 16, 15, 11, and six.

"I joined the housing co-operative because I really wanted somewhere to live. Right now I'm only living in one room with four of my children and it can barely hold us. Then again I don't like to move all over the place. I know that if I live in this housing co-op, and from I'm paying my housing charge and from I'm keeping the rules, I can live there as long as I want.



Cherry looks forward to two rooms and running water inside the house

Right now I wouldn't be able to purchase anywhere because the money that I'm working wouldn't able buy a house, so the housing co-op suits me best..."



Sylvia Cunningham, 27 year old Garment Factory Machine Operator. No children.

"I'm living with a friend since the hurricane, when I was practically kicked out of where I was living. It's his family's place and I really don't like the situation. It's just temporary until I get through with the co-op. His family is O.K. to me on a whole but I really don't like living dependent. I'm looking forward to living on my own. Then again I won't have the landlord situation. In the co-op we get on well together and are learning to live as one. We hope we'll continue living the same way, and that we won't have the same fuss or fight as normal out there in the tenement yard routine..."

Cherry Turner, 29 year old Garment Factory Production Worker. One child, aged four years.

"I think I can agree with people and I'll have a better living condition. Where I'm living now, I have to go outside for water because there's hardly any water in the tap even up to 10 o'clock at night. We have one room and it's leaking badly since the hurricane. They have no inten-

tion of fixing it right now. I think we will have more privacy because at least I can lock myself in as I'll have two rooms. My son will be happy to have his own room too. And, it's cheaper. If I were to rent two rooms in this same area it would cost over \$200.00."

RENTALS- KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Like the price of chicken, best dressed or otherwise, the price of renting the most basic housing has long since flown through the door.

All you have to do is look at the Gleaner classifieds each Sunday to be witness to the fact - although fewer landlords are actually putting the prices in the ads nowadays. But for a one-room and shared bath and kitchen, you're facing anything from \$200.00 upwards. Don't even talk about a basic two-bedroom in a half-decent area. That'll be in the thousands! Chronic New York prices, on low, low Jamaica wages!

Everyone's got a friend, relative or co-worker who is looking somewhere to hang dem hat. But it's we the women, with our children, who suffer the most. No children, no pets (even the guard dog you keep for security), no boyfriends, not too many visitors, overcharging, security deposits and harassment. In this situation, you need to know what your rights are in order to protect yourself. Not that just by knowing your rights, the situation is going to drastically improve. The simple fact is that rentals are going up because housing is short and in great demand. But at least you should be going into the situation with your eyes wide open.

Here are some basics:

RENT RESTRICTION ACT

Last amended in 1983, it provides for the assessment and control of rentals. The act contains provisions for both landlords and

tenants. In the final analysis though, it favours the landlord. When push comes to shove and they want you the tenant out, the law gives them the right merely to say they need the property for their own personal use. The tenant can take the landlord to court if the landlord does not use the property as he/she claimed they would, but generally people don't bother to do so because it's such a costly hassle.

RENT ASSESSMENT BOARD

Guided by the Rent Restriction Act, the Board has the impossible task of trying to satisfy both parties, i.e landlord and tenant.

CONTRACTS

It is advisable for the tenant to ask the landlord to draw up a contract. The tenant should take the contract to the Rent Board to make sure there are no breaches of the law before signing. Make sure the contract includes all services which are part of the rental being asked, i.e. light, water, upkeep etc.

BREACHES OF THE LAW

These include stipulations against dogs and other pets, restrictions on number of visitors or family members and security deposits. If for example, a woman rents a place and the landlord refuses her the right to allow her boyfriend to stay - that is a breach of the law. The most common breaches of the law in cases brought before the Rent Board are overcharging by landlords and the failure of tenants to pay rent.

NOTICE TO QUIT

The landlord must give a minimum of one

month notice on residential property and one year for business places or land.

INCREASED RENTAL

The only legal way a landlord can increase your rent is through the Rent Assessment Board. Landlords make an application after which they wait for the Rent Board to measure the house and land, value the property and set the rate for rental. The Rent Assessment Board only assesses rent and not services.

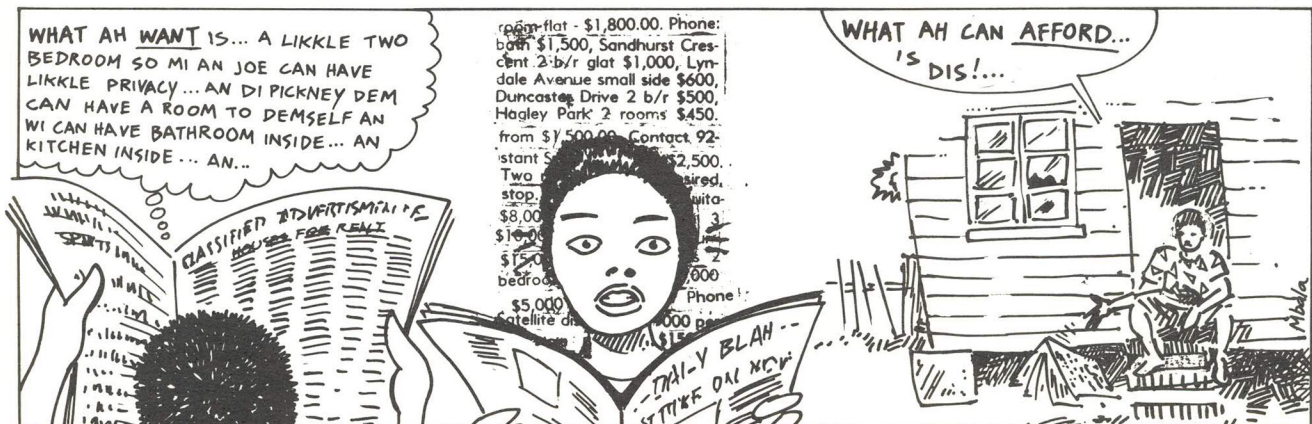
RENT ASSESSMENT INSPECTORS

According to a spokesperson for the Rent Board, "Tenants and landlords need someone firm and fair". That person is the Rent Assessment Inspector, who is employed to the Rent Board. They inspect properties, check alleged breaches of the law, and where there are breaches have the power to start court proceedings against the offender.

HARASSMENT

According to the law, this is any action by a landlord towards a tenant that disturbs that tenant's quiet enjoyment of the rented property. Examples of harassment brought before the Rent Board include taking off doors and windows, locking off water and light, pulling down or attempting to destroy the property and even the placing of faeces in the tenant's room.

*For further information contact:
Rent Assessment Board
62 Duke Street
Tel: 92-22316/92854.*



ADA'S SHELTER PROGRAMME

As part of its Hurricane Reconstruction Programme the Association of Development Agencies has been having some noteworthy results in the area of shelter.

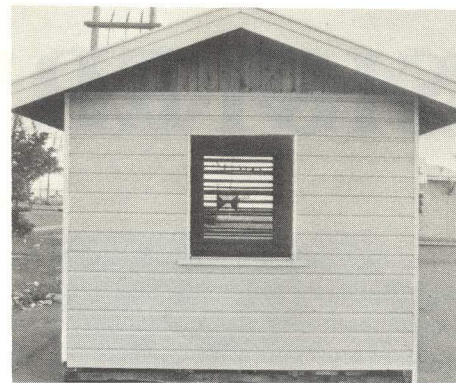
THE ADA HOUSING COMMITTEE has worked out a scheme to channel ADA's shelter relief funds in a way that will avoid deepening the dependence syndrome so common in community life, and build the community as a whole. The scheme involves revolving loans to be operated through community organisa-

tions in association with development agencies.

SHELTER CLINICS which provide practical instructions on how to build simple hurricane and earthquake resistant houses have been held.

A MODEL HOUSE built at the first shelter clinic attracted much attention and praise at a Housing Fair organised by the Urban Development Corporation last December.

PROPOSALS are now being examined for the establishment of a factory to manufacture pre-fabricated panels for the inexpensive, quick and easy construction of wooden houses.



BUILDING ALLIANCES for mutual corporation with the Jamaica Institute of Architects and various community groups in the continuing effort to find solutions to the current housing crisis.

Women's Housing Group:

A Think Tank That's Moving to Action



The Women's Housing Group was initiated in 1987 by Sistren Theatre Collective and CUSO out of concern that the current lack of adequate shelter would badly affect

women's struggle for equity and empowerment.

These two groups have since been joined by the Women's Construction Collective, the St. Peter Claver Housing Cooperative, the Women's Working Group and an individual, Marcia Thwaites, who had several years experience working with government's Sites and Services Programme in the 1970s. The sub-group on Housing, which came out of the Bureau of Women's Affairs Consultation with non-governmental organisations around the National Policy Statement on Women has also become involved. This group includes the CVSS Women's Sector, the Women's Resource and Outreach Centre, the Organisation of Women for Progress and an individual, Sonia Harris.

This growing network is already hammering out ideas to advance the cause. Ideas to do with renovation; integrated schemes to include commercial, recreational and day-care facilities; the development of a local capital base such as a women's bank based on the popular partner scheme and preferential options under the NHT for young women just starting in jobs, female single parents and disabled women. The formation of a lobby group to inform women about available resources and benefits, research goals and the need for full participation of women occupiers from the early planning stages in future housing schemes, are other ideas being examined.

Contact: Jennifer Jones, CUSO
14 South Avenue, Kingston 10
or
Sheila Nicholson
CVSS Women's Sector
321/2 Duke Street, Kingston

LOBBYING THE CHURCHES FOR LAND

The CVSS Women's Sector having identified housing as a critical need of women has been concentrating on finding solutions to the problems since January last year.

Research has been done through a series of round table talks and workshops involving the Jamaica Institute of Architects, the Ministry of Construction, the Mustard Seed Community Project, the Combined Disabilities Association and the Construction Resource and Development Centre. Together those involved have examined cheap, alternative methods of housing for countries like Jamaica including the use of pre-fabricated and wooden units as well as special condominiums for the elderly and



the disabled. A useful clippings file on housing is another on-going aspect of the group's work.

One very interesting aspect is the group's decision to lobby the churches to get involved by using their resources to effect positive changes in the housing situation. Many of the women involved in the CVSS are also active church goers. They're going all out to bring their idea to the attention of leading church women in order to initiate discussion in church groups, identify idle

lands owned by the churches and examine the possibility of using these lands to fill housing needs.

The head of the CVSS Women's Sector, Sheila Nicholson, sums up with this view. "The churches should not just be saving souls but bodies too! It's time for people to be practical."

Join the lobby.

Contact: Sheila Nicholson
CVSS Women's Sector,
321/2 Duke Street. Tel: 92-29365.

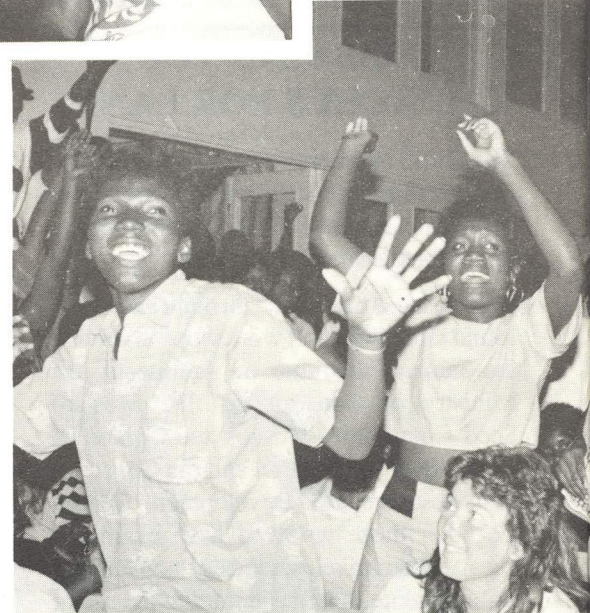
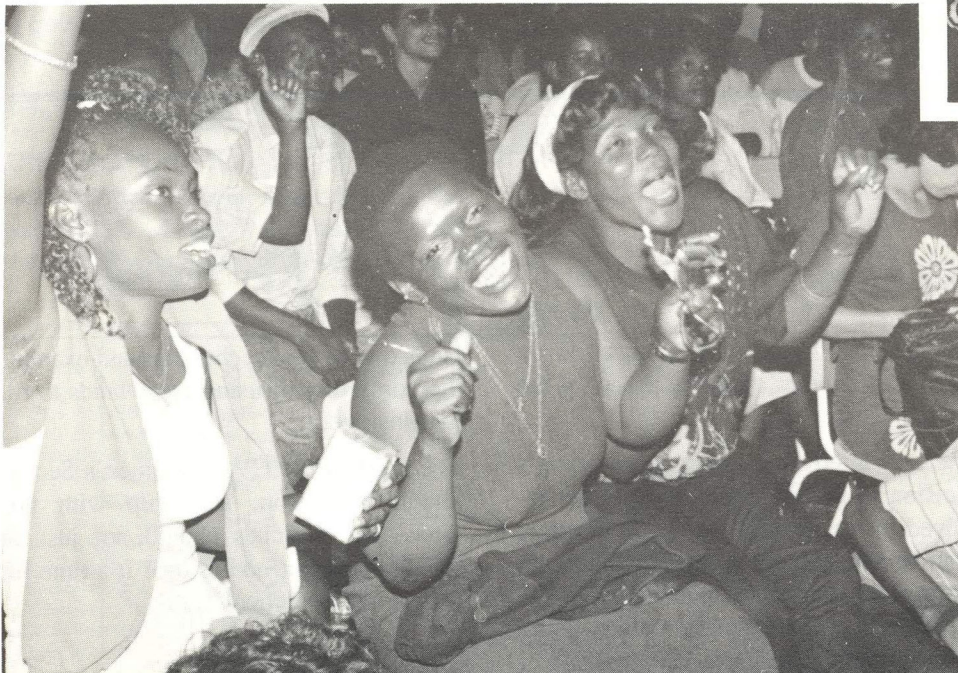
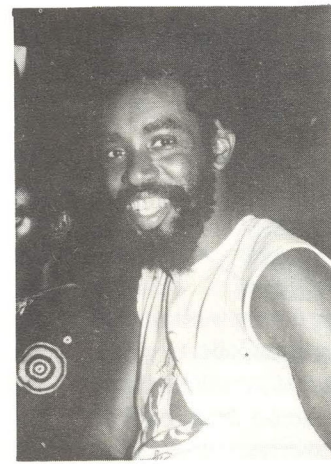
SISTER'S CELEBRATION

It had been raining on and off most of the day. But come hell or high water, organisers of the 5th Sister's Celebration decided the show must go on. Well — hell and high water did come, but that didn't stop a sparkling array of stars, an enthusiastic audience and a determined set of organisers!!.

As technicians were setting up and the early crowd was getting comfortable in the amphitheatre at the Cultural Training Centre, the sky's opened, and heavy rain began to fall. Quick as can be, audience joined technicians and crammed themselves and the equipment under cover into the Jamaica School of Music auditorium. Billed to start at 6, the show actually got underway at 9 but all those who'd come out were determined to stay, not least of all the stars themselves. All of them showed up and gave polished performances — even more commendable since they donate their services free in order to ensure at least one show for the year that working women can afford.

Judy Mowatt - the Black Madonna, shares a joke backstage

The Sister's Celebration has grown over the years from a small show before an audience of about one hundred at Zinc Fence in New Kingston to command audiences in the thousands — with patrons coming from as far as Hanover, Clarendon and Portland. It remains true to its original aim of highlighting female artists and their male counterparts who deal with decent images of women through their music and poetry. This year's show was dedicated to domestic workers.



Getting Down! Women from all walks of life dominated the audience and set the mood

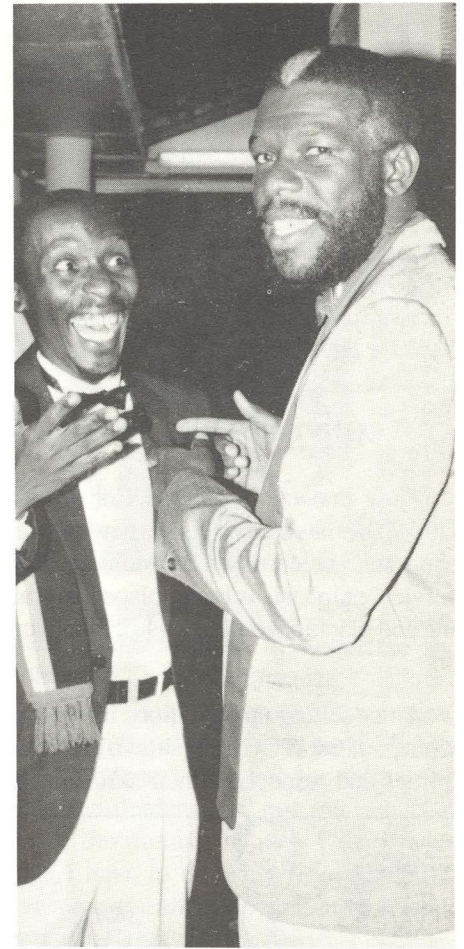
THE SHOW DID GO ON!



Feeling the vibe - Junior Reed (l) & Pam Hall (above)

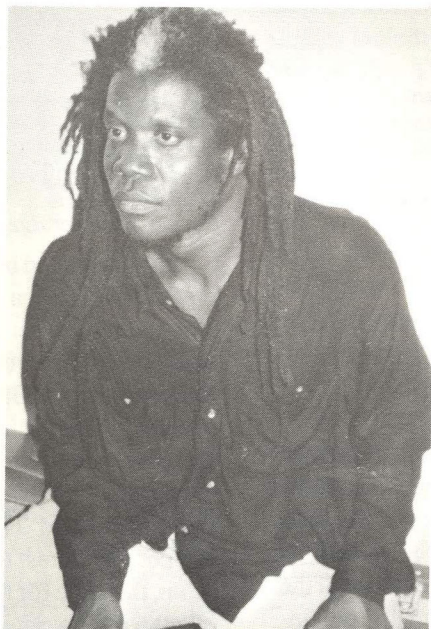


Jean Breeze and friends



Bello and Blacka - a laugh a minute

Mbala (far left) and Edi Fitzroy haven't missed a Celebration



Mutabaruka waiting in the wings



Sister Organisers (l-r) Carol Narcisse, Medlyn Phillips, Alafia Samuels and Joan French

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN NON-TRADITIONAL JOBS

For young women coming onto the job market nowadays, possibilities in the field of construction and related areas have opened up like never before in the last few years. We can thank those pioneers among us who, when they saw the door to the male domains open a crack, pushed boldly through, leaving it open for other women to follow. So check it out; open more doors, because there's no place we can't go!

TRAINING FOR CONSTRUCTION WORK

Now that the Women's Construction Collective has closed its carpentry workshop and scaled down its building repair service, emphasis is being placed on training and placing women construction workers.

Since setting up operations in 1983, the women of the WCC have shown their capabilities and respect for their skills and ap-



"Fat, thin, big breasts - we have all shapes and sizes working on site. So long as you are reasonably fit, your body shape can't stop you." Jean, WCC member.

proach to the work has grown among contractors. Says one, "The women are steady. They don't fight and cuss like the men, so we don't lose valuable building time...."

To enhance the training programme, the WCC is continuing to place its best



"Some of the men are supportive. Some are a bit too friendly. A few are outrageous and trying to be elsewhere!" Debbie, WCC member.

recruits at the Layne Community College in Oregon, USA, for a two-and-a-half month specialist course. A skills training manual is also being produced in a popular, easy to read format which focusses particularly on basic skills in masonry and carpentry. It does however, have important sections on confidence building and safety factors as well as advice from the WCC ladies on how to best conduct yourself among the men on site. It's worth noting that construction skills carry a higher wage level than working in the Free Zone or doing domestic work.

Interested? Contact Millicent Powell, Construction Resource and Development Centre, 166 1/2 Old Hope Road, Kingston 6. Unfortunately the CRDC telephone was 'Gilbertised' so you'll have to visit the office or write if you want to get in touch



"THAT'S MS BREAKENRIDGE, CHARTERED VALUATION SURVEYOR..."

Of the ten Chartered Valuation Surveyors in Jamaica, two are women. One of them is Norma Breakenridge. She tells you that when she receives letters as Manager of all government factories at the Factories Corporation, (formally the Jamaica Industrial Development Corporation), "They are often addressed to Mr

Breakenridge. People readily think it's a man's profession! They come to respect you in time, but you have to break down the barriers first."



Norma Breakenridge

Norma started breaking down the barriers in 1975 when she went to England among the first set of Jamaican women to study for a degree in Land Administration. She came back to Jamaica at the end of her successful studies in 1978 and worked at the government's Land Valuation Office, in charge of the National Rent Restriction Programme and Transfer Tax Valuation. Not content to rest there, Norma struck out again, this time for New Zealand where she was the only woman on a Masters Degree programme in Farm Management and Rural Valuation. She has since completed a

two year Chartered Surveyor's course on the job here in Jamaica and a three-month data processing management course in Washington, as well as a certificate course in marketing.

At the Factories Corporation, Norma's predecessor was a man who held the job for 17 years. She says there are still some men with whom she works who have to get used to a woman being in the position, "particularly the older ones." Norma is in no way deterred by this attitude. Since she's been on the job, "Turnover has increased substantially with more money coming in from rent collections. People are realising that women mean business too! And, we are more meticulous than the men when it comes to details."

Equal pay is not really an issue for Norma at this time. She says, "The question of equal pay has not been tested. The problem now is for the women to get the top posts. We need to be more deeply rooted. The bias is still in favour of the men."

A Valuation Surveyor can be asked to do several tasks. She may be required to value properties for sale, rental, insurance, etc. She may also have to carry out investment analysis, feasibility or viability studies, project management, management of residential, commercial industrial and resort properties and provide general advice to clients.

Interested? You can apply to the College of Arts, Science and Technology (CAST) for the three year Diploma Course in Land Economy and Valuation Surveying. On that basis you can do your degree in a two year programme in England. If you have three good 'A' Levels (Norma says Geography, Economics and Maths is the best combination) you can apply to go straight onto the degree programme. Government scholarships are available.



"SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO BE TOUGH"

Dahlia Monteith had never heard of Quantity Surveying when she left school. But she knew she did not want "a stereotype, woman's job".

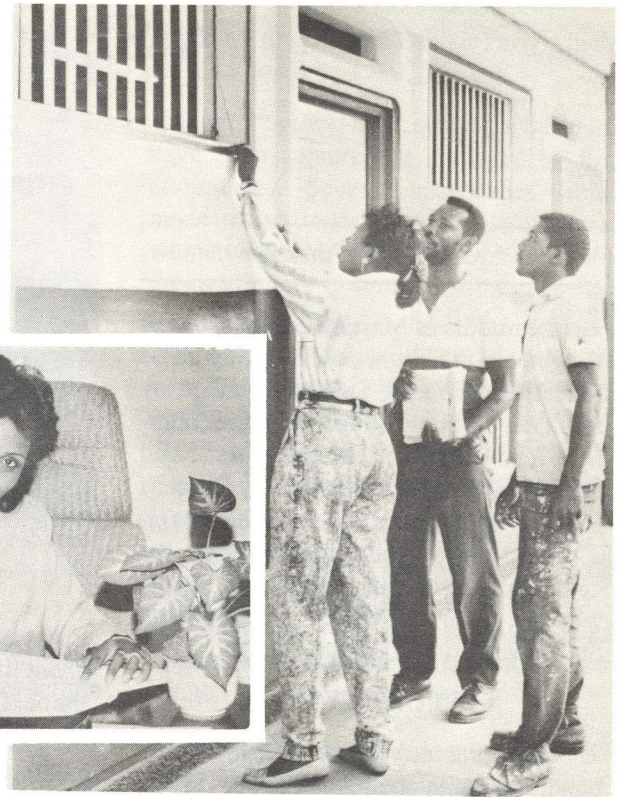
Through friends she met a Chartered Quantity Surveyor who offered her a job in his firm with the possibility for training. It was a field entirely new to Dahlia and she found it exciting. So, 15 years ago, she became the first woman in Jamaica to test

the waters of Quantity Surveying as her chosen profession.

Since Quantity Surveying wasn't taught as a subject in any training institution at the time, she took up a part-time course in construction at the College of Arts, Science and Technology, that being a strong foundation for acquiring skills in the field.



Dahlia Monteith - in the field and (inset) in the office.



"The men predicted I'd only last two weeks. Their attitude was that women belong in the kitchen or in cookery classes. But after a while I started to set the pace in terms of grades. Mind you, I had to apply myself. I had played with dolls, not tool kits, so I had to arm myself with a dictionary to deal with the new terminology!"

Getting married and having three children while still at college (another was born much later) did nothing to stop Dahlia's career goals. She went on to complete her studies including the City and Guilds Certificate (Part 11) in London and is now an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Building and Quantity Surveying.

Her first job on completing her diploma was with a firm of building consultants. From there she was seconded to the government's \$80 million Airports Upgrading Project in 1978. In the first two years she went from the post of Senior Quantity Surveyor to Chief Quantity Surveyor in charge of the entire project including eight major, and nearly 70 subsidiary contractors.

"It was exhilarating and challenging," she says. "Sometimes you have to be tough with the contractors because they think as a woman you're stupid. They soon learn differently though!"

Dahlia pays due respect to the support given by her husband, a technician and cable specialist at the Jamaica Telephone Company. "A lot of men attach conditions to their relationships with women. My husband has always been very understanding about the demands of my job - the late nights, the number of men I work with, times I have to be away from home. He gave me moral and economic support while I was at college. He is my friend, companion and confidante."

Dahlia is currently the only woman Quantity Surveyor in Jamaica with her own firm - Integrated Quantity Surveyors. She's also Treasurer of the Jamaica Institute of Quantity Surveyors. Despite her successes though, she has one bearbug - the difficulties in becoming a Chartered member of the profession. "The four qualifying examinations to get the International Charter are certainly not beyond us here in Jamaica. But each exam can cost as much as \$12,000.00 in books alone. It's run by the British and people from all over the world sit these exams, but only about a hundred are allowed in every year."

Interested? Check the College of Arts, Science and Technology for full details of courses in Quantity Surveying.

A SPACE TO GROW IN

by Joan Ross-Frankson

In the middle of Majesty Gardens, one of Kingston's urban ghettos, there are some four acres of fertile land, surrounded by factories, slum dwellings, concrete 'high-rise-low-income' apartments and heavy, heavy traffic. The Majesty Gardens Farm (or MGs as it's known in the area) is a project run by nine women from the community with the support of social workers, Francis Madden of the Grace Staff Foundation and June Spence.

SUPPORT SYSTEM

The farm presently supports lush, healthy bundles of callaloo and pak choy. It also provides an important support system for the women that has impacted on their lives significantly. Their stories show just how vital the farm has been in building their individual independence, confidence and self-worth; in changing the quality of their lives and giving them hope to move on to greater things. As Madden comments, "We had to work on getting work to be a habit. When this is done and the women have some money coming in regularly, social relations improve."

One woman beats her child far less frequently than she did when she was unemployed and without funds. It was the frustration that struck out when he kept asking for food and she didn't have it to give him all day long because she couldn't afford to send him to school either. Now there is less frustration. Her child goes to school and she can feed him with the basic necessities of life.

Another had always been described as 'simple'. Her man and her brothers took this as a cue to beat her regularly and take any money she had. The women in the group opened a bank account for her and give her on-going help with money management. They also identified the fact that she had weak eyesight and organised the purchase of glasses. She's on her feet and coping.



Madden (r) and Spence - planning from the bottom up.

P was an alcoholic who didn't care enough about life to bother about anything except the next drink. The group gave it's support, getting her to a doctor and then into counselling. P really began to care when at the age of 48, she bought her first bed.

A member of the Women's Working Group since 1982, Francis Madden was involved in a programme for the aged in Majesty Gardens when she came into contact with women who had been in the Special Employment Programme or "Crash Programme" in the 1970s. At the time they were unemployed as the programme had ended.

At a meeting in the community, Madden asked, "What can these women do?" The community leaders suggested farming and went further to identify those women to be involved and the land, which is owned by the Jamaica Industrial Development Corporation. After making representation to JIDC, the community was given permission to use the land on condition that no permanent structure was built or long-term crop started there.

ASSISTANCE FROM BUSINESS PLACES

More representations were made and assistance started to come in. Grace Canning, a food processing plant situated at one side of the farm, provided a tractor and driver to clear the land of garbage and weeds. The Food and Population Council provided funding for equipment, fencing and a tem-

porary stipend. Small businesses in the area gave technical assistance and provided some financing. The government's Relief Programme and the Ministry of Agriculture provided small tools.

The first three months of the project were spent in preparing the ground and setting in the first crop. At the end of six months, the project started turning over cash, having as it did ready (and nearby) outlets at Grace Canning and a former branch of the Agricultural Marketing Corporation.

In September of last year, Hurricane Gilbert took all the crops, top-soil and fencing, but when we visited in January, the women were busily reaping the sections replanted out in callaloo and pak-choy. They had not been deterred!

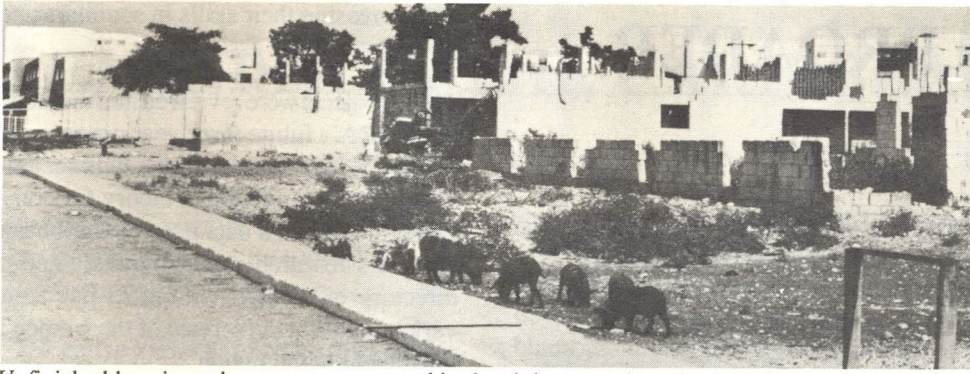
ROLE PLAY AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION

But that's really the bare bones of the story of MGs. There were huge social difficulties that had to be overcome from the start. For one thing, getting the women to work together; to fully appreciate that the project and the funds generated were for all to share. At first each woman had her own small plot but if one person was absent, none of the others would consider that her plot still needed to be tended. The collective approach they now use ensures the development of the entire farm.

Decision-making, or lack of it, was another problem.

"They lacked confidence to make decisions and act upfront," says Madden. "Everyone wanted to stay in the background. No-one wanted to accept responsibility or take up leadership roles...."

These problems were overcome in months of role-play and rap sessions during lunch breaks - and disciplinary action. When knives and machetes were brought into play, those responsible were suspended without any pay. Says Madden, "As the problems were worked through, the natural



Unfinished housing scheme - none captured in the eight years the units were left abandoned by the government

leaders in the group came forward.”

Madden also tells you with great satisfaction, about the benefits of getting such community projects off the ground with 'bottom-up' as opposed to 'top-down' planning.

“We have no problems from the community because it was the community that identified the project and selected the women to work in it. This means, for example, that we don't suffer from praedial larceny - we are protected by the community. Everyone is involved - community leaders, the M.P and the councillor are on the Management Committee. We have clear goals. There are no suspicions.”

SUPPORTING SURVIVAL MECHANISMS

The project has supported, rather than replaced, the survival mechanisms the women had in place before the farm was set up. They only work on the farm four days a week from which they earn about \$80.00. From this they throw half into a partner with a draw-down of nearly \$700.00. Generally MG farmers use this draw-down for making large purchases, or turn it over at weekends in higglering, a main source of income for many of them.

“In the past our experience has been that going in full time is not necessarily a guarantee that a project will work,” says Madden.

Another plus for the project has been the longstanding credibility of Grace Staff Foundation in the community, backing income-generating projects, giving assistance to fishermen, running a health programme and improving sanitary conveniences. In addition, the women have good, cheap, support systems in the com-

munity such as a Day-Care centre and Children's Medical Clinic run by the St Andrew Parish Church.

HOUSING PLAN

Having secured a space in which to work, earn and grow, the lady farmers are setting their sights on more long-term goals. One is a housing plan. Most of them live in very poor conditions in the bottom section of the community. They have set their minds on completing a nearby housing scheme, started under the People's National Party government in 1979 but apparently aban-

doned by the Jamaica Labour Party which came to power in 1980.

In the eight years since, not one of the units have been captured or damaged by the community. Several approaches were made to the Minister of Construction by the women and their representatives and there was a glimmer of hope that they may be successful - if they could find a 'responsible body or group' willing to take over the scheme on their behalf. Elections were pending when we spoke to the women, but they were determined to continue lobbying whether the government changed or not.

Another major goal is to set up an exchange programme which could take them out of the country to exchange views, experiences and expertise with women working in similar projects in the region and further afield.

If you can give assistance in putting the MG ladies in touch with such projects, contact them c/o Francis Madden, Grace Kennedy and Co Ltd, 641/2 Harbour Street, Kingston.

FRUITS OF THEIR LABOUR

“I wasn't working - and, really, I never do anything like this before. So, it was a little hard at first, but I get used to it now. And it helpful financially because I don't have anyone was giving me anything, so this really help out a whole lot.

At first the people dem wasn't so cooperative, but we get used to we one another and start to get serious. We just decide to work together and every little thing we just share with one another. I am not such a 'bossy' person or nothing just quiet, just easy going. Dem can rely on me for any little thing; to come to me and seh, 'Miss Puncie so and so'. Den mi will seh, 'I can call Miss Madden' or if I can help, I help out . . .”

Gloria Brown, 'Miss Puncie', 58 years old, is the acknowledged leader of the group.

“Where the farm is concerned it let us be very active and it is very helpful under the circumstances for us to earn money. We



Reaping the lush callaloo

feel and we know and we see that we will achieve better later on . . .”

Mary, 67 years old, former 'crash programme' worker and housewife.

“I have been here since the start and I would like to be here until the ending. I achieve things out of it, like furniture and difference, where I never had before. I decide fi work fi mi living and put out more interest inna it. Me woulda only try to achieve a house because ah don't have one right now...”

Miss Lou, 34 years old, had never worked before in her life.

STRONGER AND BROADER

by Joan Ross-Frankson

The women who 120 years ago, started the women's self-help movement in the region can rest easy. Today, the Caribbean Women's Movement is stronger and broader than ever before and pushing towards new frontiers in our region's development.

It may well be true to say that 'eyelash older than beard', but Lady Musgrave, who helped found the (first) Women's Self Help Society of Jamaica in 1869, primarily to cater to the needs of white and high coloured 'gentlewomen', would in this day and age feel compelled to join forces with other groupings in the Association of Women's Organisations of Jamaica (AWOJA). Amy Ashwood Garvey and Una Marson wouldn't hesitate to become vibrant members of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA). And, for sure, the female social workers from St Lucia, Barbados, Grenada and British Guiana, meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in 1936 for one of the first regional conferences of women, would have wanted to join their sisters from all 13 of the English-speaking Caribbean countries at the 10th Anniversary Celebrations of the University of the West Indies' Women and Development Unit (WAND).

The last quarter of 1988 can be noted in Caribbean women's history (herstory) as having far more lasting significance than the mere passing of that troublesome fellow, Gilbert — although many of us do not yet know this fact, our story being minor matters as far as the Caribbean media is concerned.

Our history will surely record the fact that when AWOJA had its formal launching on Saturday, December 3, over 50 organisations had already taken part in the process of developing this umbrella organisation to strengthen the voice of Jamaican women.

The broad character of the first elected executive is testimony to the fact that AWOJA is beginning to cut across the

traditional divisions among us — divisions of class, race, political ideology, age, religious views. Lady Musgrave would have been into that. She would have seen the obvious - that this new beginning could not be if it were not time for it, (however fragile one may argue the beginning is).

Lady Musgrave would have applauded the words of the guest speaker Dorianne Wilson-Smillie, along with the representatives of some 36 women's organisations and scores of women present who don't belong to any organisation or group.

"We need this Association to make our truth shine," Wilson-Smillie said. "Truth as (broad) as women working in the Free Zones, small rural women's groups, church women's groups and clubs, professional women's associations, cultural women's associations and political women's organisations. We need to reach out and let individual women know that other women share their concerns and that together our voices become louder."

Yes, Lady M would have appreciated that, and the call to "listen with tolerance and respect to pick out those issues we can work on together."

As early feminists, Amy and Una's morale would have been boosted being amongst the 70-odd members who turned out for the 1st Regional General Meeting of CAFRA (Barbados, November 12-13).

CAFRA members came from all corners of the Caribbean and beyond; from as far as Boston, New York and Toronto.

For the first time since the organisation began its life, the members were able to fully appreciate just how many and just how varied their activities had been in their various territories.

The Women In Agriculture project in Dominica and St Vincent is already empowering grassroots women through the use of participatory research. The Women's History Project is giving women in the region pride in their own talents by

publishing their poems and short stories and increasing their skills in seminars and through technical assistance.

These projects were reviewed and included in CAFRA's future three year programme of work along with plans for a summer university course in feminist theory for community activists, a data base of Caribbean women's research and activities, and a directory of women willing to put their various skills at the service of the women's movement in the region.

Amy and Una would definitely have loved to see so much research and action being undertaken by and on behalf of their Caribbean sisters.

And those Social Workers in 1936 would not have believed that 52 years later the woman of not five but of 13 English-speaking Caribbean islands would come together. All together at last; not just social workers, but journalists and academics, and church women, construction workers and higglers, political activists, disabled women, young and old woman.

We learnt much about each others lives. Those with long years of political activity taught those with no experience. But those without experience, by the questions they asked and observations they made, also helped the more experienced to judge their experience with new eyes. And so in our final statement we could "declare triumphantly that we have a collective strength that can roll away the great stone and allow us to be shapers of our own destiny."

We must give nuff respect to those social workers, Lady Musgrave, Amy and Una and the others who laid the foundation of our coming together now and in the future.

As Senator Dr. Lucille Mair said in a message to the launching of AWOJA, "More and more as we work together, as we pool our traditional and often unique talents of wisdom and courage — we are going to find an almost inexhaustable source of power — a collective power — which women can use towards equalising and humanising our society, and this can carry us to new frontiers in the development of our region."



FEMINISM IN THE CARIBBEAN

Caribbean Women at the UWI's Women and Development Unit's 10th Anniversary Celebrations give their views.

“Negative views have come from the historical development of Feminism in the United States, where one associated it with aggressive females. I've met people who say they don't understand what feminism means; that it's a new word that's not indigenous to the region. Maybe we should develop our own word - a Caribbean version”

Sybil Francis

Extra-Mural Department, UWI, Jamaica.



Sybil Francis

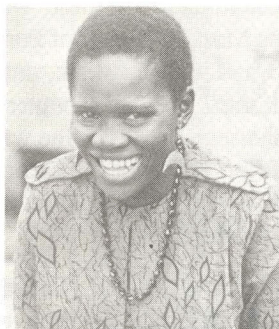
“Feminists in the Caribbean have not polarised themselves from men to the extent that women in North America and Europe have. We see feminism more as a transformation of society for both sexes, rather than a separate struggle. . . .”

Tina Johnson

Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action(CAFRA)
Trinidad & Tobago.

“I'm not a full-fledged feminist. I'm getting there. I have feminist views. I do believe as a woman, I'm deprived of my rights and once you start to address those things, and struggle towards changing them, which I am doing, then you're on the path to feminism. But I can't openly say I'm a feminist because I'm still forced to take certain shit from men. I don't have that strength yet because I'm not economically independent, and I am not yet strong enough to deal with my own sexuality.

Being in company with feminists and lesbians in Europe and the U.S., while on study-leave, exposed me, Pauline



at my own vagina in the mirror; writing a poem and sharing it with other women. In those places you can choose where you go and who with, without being labelled “sodomite”. This society is much tighter and it's harder to be free in yourself as a woman among other women; or even to go out alone without a man wanting to rub up against you, because 'you mus' be looking something.' . . .”

Pauline Crawford

Sistren Theatre Collective
Jamaica.

“Feminism is one of the most revolutionary movements that exists. It challenges that most fundamental of all human relationships - the relationships between women and men, (which) to some extent characterises and reproduces other exploitative relations in the society.

The feminist movement is strongest in the so-called Third World, which is after all, most of the world. This was shown clearly at the (End of Decade) Nairobi Conference (Kenya - 1985) when many of the women from the United States, blacks included, felt isolated because they were not aware of many of the developments taking place in the worldwide feminist movement. One of the reasons the movement has blossomed in Third World countries has been the link made between women's exploitation and other forms of exploitation. Because of this, the movement in our countries is truly a revolutionary one on a national level as well as being an individual or personal transformation. . . .”

Rhoda Reddock

ISER, UWI - Trinidad and Tobago

Crawford, to myself, in terms of my health and my own body. I used to think something was wrong with exploring my own body; looking

“Whether you want to call it feminism or not, there is a gender issue that needs to be addressed in the quest for development - the historical perspective of where women used to be, where we are now, and where we would like to go, within the context of a society that is structured in such a way that women are at the bottom. When you talk about exploitation of women it suggests that the women are the victims, but I'm suggesting that women are doing as much exploitation of women as men are doing. In order to understand feminism, we need to understand these historical developments and try to place them within the larger framework of race and class and the struggle for development and independence. . . .”

Alafia Samuels

Association of Women's Organisations In Jamaica (AWOJA)
Jamaica



Andaiye

“The definition of feminism as the awareness that women are oppressed and the commitment to do something about it, is a little vague and, I think meant to let people feel that everybody can participate. My own definition has something to do with a perspective on the inequalities in the world which places at its centre, the subordination and oppression of women. But I'm still battling with the whole thing.

I started in political activity in the Black Power Movement and I feel very strongly about race. Then I moved into my “hard-left” phase where “class is all”. At this stage I just don't think it makes any sense to move to a position that says “gender is all”. But I don't know how to make the practical

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WORKING HARD TO BUILD POPULAR PARTICIPATION

by Christeline Henry

Haiti's newest military President, General Prosper Avril, has taken to inviting the country's politicians to the palace for his policy speeches - but these affairs can well be described as 'stag parties'.

In Haiti, there are no lack of issues to fight and no lack of opportunity for grassroots women to become involved. But generally, women occupy a very small part of the political limelight in the country's state structure.

Out of 30-odd candidates in last year's aborted elections, there was only one woman. Carmen Sylair, an economist, visited Haiti from France, where she lives, to run for the presidency. Sylair was never a popular candidate.

"Nobody knew her. She had no programme for the women. All she seemed to say was 'I am a woman and if I have the job

Political power for women is seen in terms of the creation of structures which allow them greater participation in all areas of national life.

the women will be happy', not 'How can I change the situation?', comments Guerty Amie, a grassroots activist.

Claudette Werleigh, of the Institute of Technology and Animation (ITECA) agrees with Amie. "It is not a matter of having a woman for president. We want a president who can stop the Duvalierist control of the country".

It is usually said that women are so busy that they do not get involved in politics, but Werleigh notes, "Women took part in all aspects of the process which threw Jean Claude Duvalier out of power."

And from time to time under the Duvalier dictatorship there were feared women

legislators. Most notable of these was Madame Adolphe Max, ex-mayor of Port-au-Prince, who was for many years, until 1986, the head of the Ton Ton Macoutes - that brutal Haitian secret police. She was also in charge of Fort Dimanche, a notorious political prison where many taken in, were never seen again.

More recently another woman, Carmen Christophe, briefly held the position of mayor of Port-au-Prince.

President Avril installed Christophe in the post, but was forced to fire her two months later after her staff refused to work with her and garbage piled up in the city.

Christophe, as a well-known Duvalier supporter who made her money through the corrupt state lottery, was not unpopular because of her sex. The people of Haiti are not now prepared to support any Duvalierist, whether they be male or female.

Haitians do not deny that female politicians are few and far between but they don't see the solution as merely getting women into the state structure. They see political power for women more in terms of the creation of structures which allow them greater participation in all areas of national life.

And women are actively carrying forward this viewpoint. The majority of women's organisations are grassroots-oriented and come under the umbrella of the

Notorious woman legislator, Madame Max, was head of the feared Ton Ton Macoutes, and ran Fort Dimanche, a political prison where many died.

National Alliance of Popular Organisations (ANOP).

Says Amie, "ANOP is a movement for justice - and justice in this society is a

political issue. The people who have been politically exploited in Haiti are the same ones who have been massacred and assassinated. This has to stop and this is why we are working so hard to build popular participation - not just among women but among peasants, students and other disadvantaged groups. In the process issues of gender come into play and we are not going to ignore them."

And no one in Haiti is ignoring the mothers and wives of the several corporals and sergeants of the Haitian army, who

We are working to build popular participation not just among women but among all disadvantaged groups.

were arrested last year October following an alleged coup attempt. Previously a loose grouping, these women have since organised press conferences and given strident speeches at mass and community meetings, whipping up solidarity for the imprisoned soldiers - who, it is widely believed, are innocent.

Since these women have begun their campaign already a one-day general strike and several street protests have been staged to demand the release of their men.

"Our husbands and sons have not been charged with any crime; yet we have not been able to communicate with them. Now when we bring food the authorities refuse it. We don't know if they are on hunger strike or if they have been killed", cries one of the women.

These women, previously housewives, have found their voice and now an entire nation listens and many lend their support. This, Haitians say is the road to democracy.

And, in the interim, the President continues to have his stag parties.

(Christeline Henry is a Grenadian freelance journalist.)

PLAY ON SISTREN! PLAY ON!

by Leone Ross

Playing to a largely-female, many-hued audience at the Barn Theatre, Sistren's latest play **Buss Out!** started with wild throbbing drum beats that sent feet tapping and bottoms moving on seats.

Themes of class struggle, unity between women, male/female relationships and struggle for change were explored and challenged as the seasoned actresses of Sistren Theatre Collective moved into gear.

Buss Out! can best be summed up as 'characteristically Sistren' by all those who have seen, felt and admired Sistren in performance before. The presentation of strong female characters resolving conflicts within themselves and society, is a familiar Sistren one.



Miss G, the uptown girl, and Auntie Bev of the ghetto, meet on the occasion of the death of Bev's child at the hands of the lumpen agents who are intimidating the squatters at Chiggerfoot Lane. As the squatters demand their rights, Miss G arrives to 'publicise' the event and champion the cause of the poor - for a prize of course! Her aim is to get herself a consultancy.



Auntie Bev's suspicion of her is well-founded!

The situation for Miss G goes askew when she finds that her class and colour cannot always save her. When the TV cameras (she's organised) fail to arrive to film a confrontation (she has instigated) between the parties, she is carried off to jail along with the working-class women she is patronising.

Pat Cumper's script, built from the improvisations of the group, provides us with flashbacks based on the brilliant life stories of Sistren members in **Lionheart Gal**. Director Earl Warner uses these flashbacks to clue us into the backgrounds of Miss G and Auntie Bev. We realise that both have had to deal with struggles of their own in their separate worlds; both have experienced barriers because of colour, class and gender. It is in the jail with 'chink' biting them, and to the chants of familiar Jamaican ring-games, that the women tell the stories of their lives, and realise their common problems.

The play ends on a positive note as the key issues of unity and change are identified. The place of both middle-class and working-class women in the struggle against oppression is side by side, each doing what she is capable of doing.

Sistren delivered with their usual enthusiasm and fervour, and the story-line,

even though a bit predictable at times, was made very palatable by the professionalism of the actresses. The performances were of a very high quality. Bev Hanson, changing voices and facial expressions with great skill and ease was brilliant in her multiple masculine roles. Bev Elliot was perfect as the warrior, Auntie Bev, a character that was very well developed. Hilary Nicholson, as the uptown, middle-class Miss G, held her own in a role the audience could not help but dislike.

Particular congrats must go to Lillian Foster in the role of Maddix. Playing an 'insane' character is always a difficult piece of acting to sustain, but Lillian met the challenge without flinching.

Buss Out! is a welcome chunk of West Indian women's lives. Its best characteristic was its final effect on the audience - a mood of warmth and thoughtfulness, and



Brilliant performances: Hanson (above) and Foster, Nicholson and Elliott (photo far left)

an uncontrollable desire to bawl out, "Gwaan Sistren! Play on and on!"

Lights, camera, action on Chiggerfoot Lane!

(Leone Ross is a second year Arts student at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies.)

"Don't Put Yuh Hand on Mi Property"

By Patricia Mohammed

Calypsos have always mirrored man/woman relations in Trinidad society. Since, calypsonians are mainly male and of African descent, it is not surprising that, traditionally, women have been portrayed as manipulative sex objects and figures of ridicule. But over the last decade many female, and some male, calypsonians have begun to challenge these popular stereotypes. That some of the calypsoes sung by women are in fact written by men is also evidence of a male awareness of the issues.

URGING WOMEN TO FIGHT BACK

In 1979 **Singing Francine** wrote and performed "Run Away", advising women to leave men who humiliated and brutalised them: "Dog does run away/Cat does run away/Child does run away when you treating them bad/Woman put two wheels on your heels/You should run away too." And, in 1980, **Singing Diane** continued this trend, which was very popularly received by women in Trinidad, with her calypso "Ah Done Wid Dat". She goes one step further than Francine, and tells her violent partner she is leaving: "If ah don't leave now/Is licks in the morning/In the evening/I telling you flat/Ah done wit 'dat."

It was no coincidence that both these calypsoes complained about male brutality within sexual relations, and that both urged women to fight back and to challenge male philandering, beating up, exploitation and disrespect.

AGAINST RAPE

In 1980 also, two calypsoes took account of the growing incidence of rape and acknowledged the woman as victim rather than as promiscuous female temptress. **Scrunter's** "Take the Number" is critical of the advice he overheard his neighbour giving her teenaged daughter; to miss the school bus and 'take the number' of any car

in which she happens to travel. And **Lady Jane** urged the authorities to, "Send those rapermen to jail/Beat them with the birch 'til they wail/Then send in Calypso Jane/To throw some cat in dey tail", a suggestion which was not always pleasantly received by male members of her audiences.

By 1983 there were other kinds of statements reflecting the independent and forthright aspects of women. **Explainer's** "Don't Touch Me Rass", is most challenging, and having been written and performed by himself, acknowledges a male awareness of women, from his own race and class, who are not easy prey to predatory men: "Don't touch me rass/Mister yu hand too farse/All ah them brother just like to feel up, feel up/But I is ah sister who don't like to deal up, deal up."

CONSCIOUS AWARENESS

Poser's "Ah Going to Party Tonight" was a particular favourite among women, for who had ever sung of a woman telling her husband that she'd done all that she had to do in the house and was leaving him home to mind the baby while she went out to party! Only the conscious awareness of women's independence could lead to this theme being put into a calypso. Similarly, another entitled "Yes Darling", made fun of men who were dominated by their wives, an aspect of sexual relations which no calypsonian worth his salt would have admitted to at one time.

In "Die With My Dignity" (1987), **Singing Sandra** deals with sexual exploitation which many women are forced to undergo to keep their jobs. While inspiring women, her message to the exploiter is also clear: "You keep your money/I'll keep me honey/And die with me dignity." It was an instantly recognisable theme to Trinidadian women and the response was overwhelming. In a newspaper interview **Singing Sandra** recalls: "A lot of women commented on the topic. They would come up to me after the shows and thank me for singing the song."

WOMEN CALYPSONIANS MORE CONFIDENT

It is not surprising therefore that by 1988 calypsoes about women, sung by women but not always written by them, were more confident and much less appeasing or accommodating to male society. **Twiggy** states quite categorically, "Don't Put Yuh Hand On Me Property"; **Bianca Hull** decries the traditional views of female beauty by singing "I Am A Beautiful Woman" and **Twiggy** again sings that she wants "A recession fighter/A man wid real class/Someone who will try to help me/A man who wouldn't play the . . ."

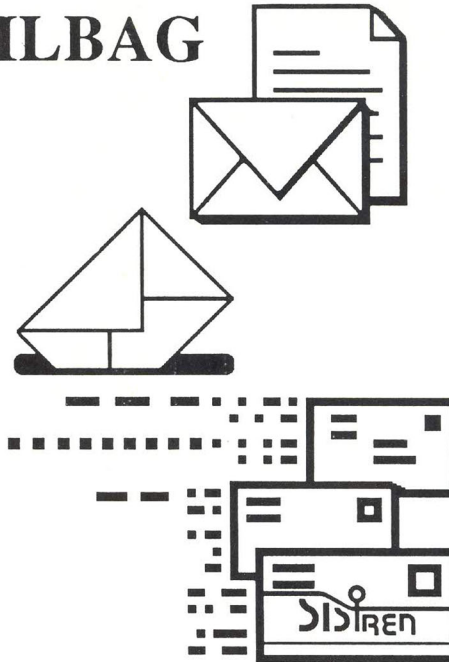
Not at all subtle in its message, nor particularly clever lyrically, but certainly capturing the mood of women last year, was **Denyse Plummer's** "Woman is Boss". I watched her perform this calypso every night for more than 30 nights at the Revue Tent and the crowd reaction was always the same. During her performance, scores of women would get up, some dancing on their chairs, others wildly waving their hands in support.

Immediately after her performance, the male MC would rush on stage clamouring "Man is boss! Man is boss!" much to the delight of the men in the audience. Bringing reassurance to the anxious ones, perhaps, that this was still a social fact.

(Extracted from a paper "Women's Responses in the 70's and 80's in Trinidad" presented by Patricia Mohammed at the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the University of the West Indies Women and Development Unit (WAND) in October 1988. Mohammed is former Coordinator of Trinidad's Rape Crisis Centre.)

The logo for SIREN features the word "SIREN" in a bold, stylized, sans-serif font. The letter 'I' is replaced by a vertical line with a small circle at the top, resembling a siren's horn or a stylized 'i'. The logo is positioned above a horizontal line.

FROM OUR MAILBAG



Dear Sistren

We here in the St. Elizabeth/Westmoreland area really need the perspective and education that Sistren can provide.

Last night my neighbour, myself and two teenage, young women travelled to Sav-lamar to see 'Obeah Wedding' — a Ralph Holness production. My neighbour and I were appalled and depressed by the content of the play which was a portrayal of the status quo of women's lives with not one provocative thought to raise consciousness.

Today we decided that Sistren Theatre Collective could provide an alternative which is badly needed. I write to ask for information about this possibility in the hope that we here on the South Coast can benefit from your educational theatre sometime early this year or next year if your schedule permits.

Sincerely
Mary Ann Jones
Whitehouse, Westmoreland

Dear Sistren,

While visiting Montego Bay doing a short-term outreach for social work, I became aware of your group. I am particularly interested in the magazine (for which) I enclose a year's subscription.

The Sistren magazine I saw talked about sexual assault and domestic violence.

Jo Ellen Watson
Seattle, U.S.A.

Dear Sistren,

I read with joy and sadness your newsletters. Usually if I am at the YWCA at the time the newsletters come in I can get copies. I write now for them to be sent directly to me.

What a 'calamity' with women eh. All over this world we 'stuck'. Right now my mind is in a state with the role my church want me to play, the role my developing society want me to play and the role that I want 'me' to play. And all the little 'conditions' cloud my mind and is pure confusion.

In walks Sistren newsmagazine and some of the crookedness start to 'halt and straighten out'.

'Bags of thanks.' Please publish more about our Moslem sisters. Has any progress been made in their status? How far have they journeyed for equal rights and justice?

Love you
Marva Stupart
Kingston

MEDIA WATCHING

Questionnaire

The Women's Media Watch has developed a questionnaire which the group hopes will help in its task of 'improving the image of women in the media as one means of decreasing sexual violence'.

The questionnaire is an attempt to develop an information base on the opinions of women's organisations and individual women about this issue. The information will not be used for public consumption but to guide the work of the Women's Media Watch. Want to help?

Contact: Judith Wedderburn
Women's Media Watch
P.O. Box 344, Kgn. 5. Tel: 929-2457

Sexist Media Views on Domestic Labour

The Jamaican media has been called upon to take the lead in resisting negative images of women in family life, and to stop putting woman forward as instinctively domesticated and the sole bearer of household burdens.

The call was made during Women's Week '89 celebrations at a lunch-time session put on by the Association of Women's Organisations in Jamaica (AWOJA) and facilitated by the Groundwork Theatre Company (GTC) at the Mutual Life Building in Kingston.

GTC kicked off with a series of skits based on radio and television commercials. All

the commercials either portrayed domestic work as incidental or promoted old fashioned values about the women's role in the household structure.

After the presentation several women pointed out that the negative images of women in the media went beyond semi-nude pin-up girls to a sexist refusal to recognise the oppressiveness of household labour and the importance of sharing domestic responsibilities.

The group called on men to recognise the destructiveness of the male superiority syndrome and the need for collaboration in the home. It was also recognised that many problems are being perpetuated by women themselves, through their own lack of respect for domestic helpers.



*Who Cares About The Rain? Not these revellers at the 5th Sister's Celebration concert, who braved the downpour and helped move the show undercover.
More pictures, centrespread*

Feminism cont'd from pg. 19

link between the three things - class, race and gender. So even though feminism seeks to attain a triple level in regards to all these aspects of oppression, practical problems of struggle come up that I've not yet resolved. . ."

Andaiye,
Red Thread
Guyana

"In 1974, one of the eminent professional women's organisations invited me to address them and the officer of the organisation hastened to say, 'By the way, we're not into women's liberation. . . .' Having made the commitment to speak, I found it necessary 15 years ago, to define what I thought feminism was; to say, 'Some of you have done good works. You've proven the status of women in your organisation, and your interests spread beyond your own personal concern to the wider community. One

gives full credit to all of this so I would not presume to suggest you should use any label which is objectionable to you, but I'd like to say I have absolutely no problems with identifying myself as a feminist. I see this as implying that I am conscious of both the strengths and constraints which circumscribe women's lives. I need to closely examine what the sources of those constraints are, and I need consciously to address, challenge, oppose some of the values and systems which operate as a constraint on women. I would like to suggest to you that when people get caught up with words, they should be quite clear about what the words mean.'

'Feminism is to do with the liberation of women's energy, resources, skills, talents. And "liberation" is another word for "emancipation" which happens to be a very very good word in the history of the Caribbean. It's emancipation we're talking about so if you have problems with that - tough! But you still have to think through what are the sources of your reservation. Are they genuine reservations? Are they imposed by the language? It's a soul-searching, primarily individual exercise, but it increasingly becomes a collective exercise. We have to have dialogue about what feminism is before rejecting it out of hand.'

I would like to think that feminism at this point in time has moved beyond that stage where intelligent, conscious women were terrified of identifying themselves with it. If we still have residues of that feeling in the Caribbean, then we have a serious problem. There has been so much public exposure of the difficulties that women still suffer at all levels of the society, we cannot claim ignorance anymore about our true condition, or that as women we have to do something about that condition. Women, especially those in 'eminent' positions have a responsibility to carry the analysis to its logical conclusion and do what has to be done. . ."

Dr. Lucille Mair,
U.W.I. Jamaica

(Editor's note: Dr. Mair has since been appointed to the Senate and is Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in the new Government of Jamaica)