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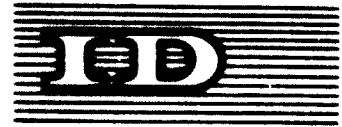
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Preparatory Meeting on the Role of Women
in Industrialization in Developing
Countries

Vienna, Austria, 6 - 10 November 1978

**NOTE FOR THE PREPARATORY MEETING ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN
IN INDUSTRIALIZATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ***

prepared by

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This brief note reviews the main activities carried out by the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs dealing with the various aspects of women's engagement in industry in developing countries, as well as it is an attempt to put forward suggestions for future collaboration between the CSDHA and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization which could be discussed at the preparatory meeting on the role of women in industrialization in developing countries. Since the Centre will send a representative to this preparatory meeting, more detailed information concerning the ongoing work and future projects allowing for co-operation with UNIDO may be presented on that occasion.

The Role of Women in Industrialization in Developing Countries

In the developing countries the emergence of modern industry has had consequences which are often controversial if not outright unfavourable to the socio-economic status of women. Industrialization has in many instances eliminated existing artisan industries - traditional employers of women, - while at the same time did not facilitate women's incorporation in the new jobs. Moreover, where new employment opportunities have been opened women have been frequently cheap-labour targets and they have remained underrepresented in the higher paid and highly qualified positions.

Thus, for example, in many Latin American countries import-substitution processes in the industrial sector, using imported capital-intensive technology, have restricted the incorporation of labour into the industry for both men and women. However, the presence of a substantial male labour force in the urban areas prevented women from being absorbed in blue-collar jobs and confined them to marginal employment and petty trade. More recently, however, in some developing countries the growth of what is often termed "offshore sourcing" (the location by transnational corporations of plants in developing countries to manufacture consumer products and components for export) has particularly incorporated women in the new industrial jobs.

In contrast to the import-substitution pattern of industrialization, where the main attraction for foreign capital is the existence of protected markets created by favourable government policies, the export-oriented industries are in search of low cost labour. Because of the importance of low wages for them, even while they were operating in their mother countries, such firms (i.e. electronics, textile, clothing) employed those segments

of the labour force which were less qualified, less likely to organize in unions and willing to work for very low pay. In the United States, for example, this labour tended to be predominantly female and non-white, as it remains until today. In recent years, cost-cutting competitive market pressures drove a large number of international firms to search for low wage workshops, mainly in Asia, but also in the Caribbean Islands and in Central America. In general, it is the female labour-intensive industries which have had the greatest propensity to move offshore; and in their Asian and Caribbean plants these industries continue to employ mostly women.

The employment opportunities opened to women by this industrialization were likely to be in subordinate and unskilled jobs, a situation which has raised questions about the conditions of work and the opportunities for improvement of women's socio-economic status created by such industries. In particular, it has been pointed out that most of the workers are paid a subsistence wage with little hope for a raise; sometimes institutional pressures are exerted in order to prevent the organization of unions, so as not to discourage foreign investment. Finally, the skills taught in most of these industries are not transferable, thus increasing the insecurity of the workers in a situation where employment would be highly dependent on the fluctuations in the world market.

Two studies undertaken by the CSDHA attempted to analyse some of the effects of industrialization on women's employment and working conditions in developing countries: a) The participation of Women in the Development of Latin America, UN document ESA/CSDHA/AC.10/4/Rev.1, 1976; b) Effective Mobilization of Women in Development: report of the Secretary-General, to be presented at the 33rd session of the General Assembly. However, there is a real need for more careful and detailed analysis of the major determinants of women's employment in industry in developing countries, especially in a cross-cultural perspective, beyond the general descriptions and characterizations contained in these studies (and summarized above). For example, very little is known about the impact of hiring and wage policies of transnational corporations on the social, economic and cultural status of women in developing countries. In this respect, also, the effect of technological choices on the role of women in industrial employment has to be evaluated, and in particular, its impact on the job opportunities and qualitative changes in wages, working conditions, health hazards, skills,

participation in decision-making and management. It was felt, therefore, that more investigation should be done concerning women in industry in developing countries, with special attention to the above mentioned aspects, and the Centre intends to undertake further research along these lines. Since UNIDO is planning to carry out a study on the "possible detrimental effects of industrialization on the socio-economic conditions of women in developing countries (*) it would be recommended that the research efforts of UNIDO and the CSDHA be co-ordinated so as to avoid possible duplication.

Rural Development, Rural Industrialization and Access to Incentives and Assets

It is a well-known fact that economic growth has in many instances brought the deterioration of employment opportunities and the worsening of working conditions for women in the rural areas. Moreover, because most development plans and programmes usually exclude the women's component, the benefits and incentives thereby generated, such as access to training, land, loans credit, participation in management and decision-making and better job opportunities, are usually available to men only. In addition, these programmes seldom extend the access and availability of possible technological benefits to vulnerable communities in need of appropriate technology for domestic use which could alleviate women's heavy work load and facilitate their integration and participation in the mainstream of economic development.

In view of the above, the evaluation of the consequences of economic growth for the socio-economic status of rural women (**) and the support of efforts to make available those incentives (such as appropriate technology (***), training, credits, land) necessary for the full integration of the rural women in the process of economic development are of paramount importance. In this respect, the initiative of UNIDO in undertaking case studies on successful rural industrialization, the role

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- (*) see: Integration of Women in Development, ID/B/202, para.13
- (**) see: "Women's economic role and working conditions in agriculture: a general survey", in Effective Mobilization of Women in Development, op. cit.
- (***) On appropriate technology for rural women, see two studies by the CSDHA
- a) Water, Women and Development, UN document E/CONF.70/A.19, 1977;
- b) Appropriate Technology for Developing Countries and the Needs of Rural Women, ESA/S + T/AC.7/CRP.3/Add.3, 1977.

of rural women in this process and the impact of the changes on women's welfare is noteworthy (*). Rural industrialization programmes which in general are part of developmental strategies aiming at a more equilibrated pattern of economic development and income distribution between the rural and the urban areas should include special provisions ensuring an equitable share of the tasks and benefits from such programmes for both men and women, thereby facilitating the achievement of the programmes' objectives.

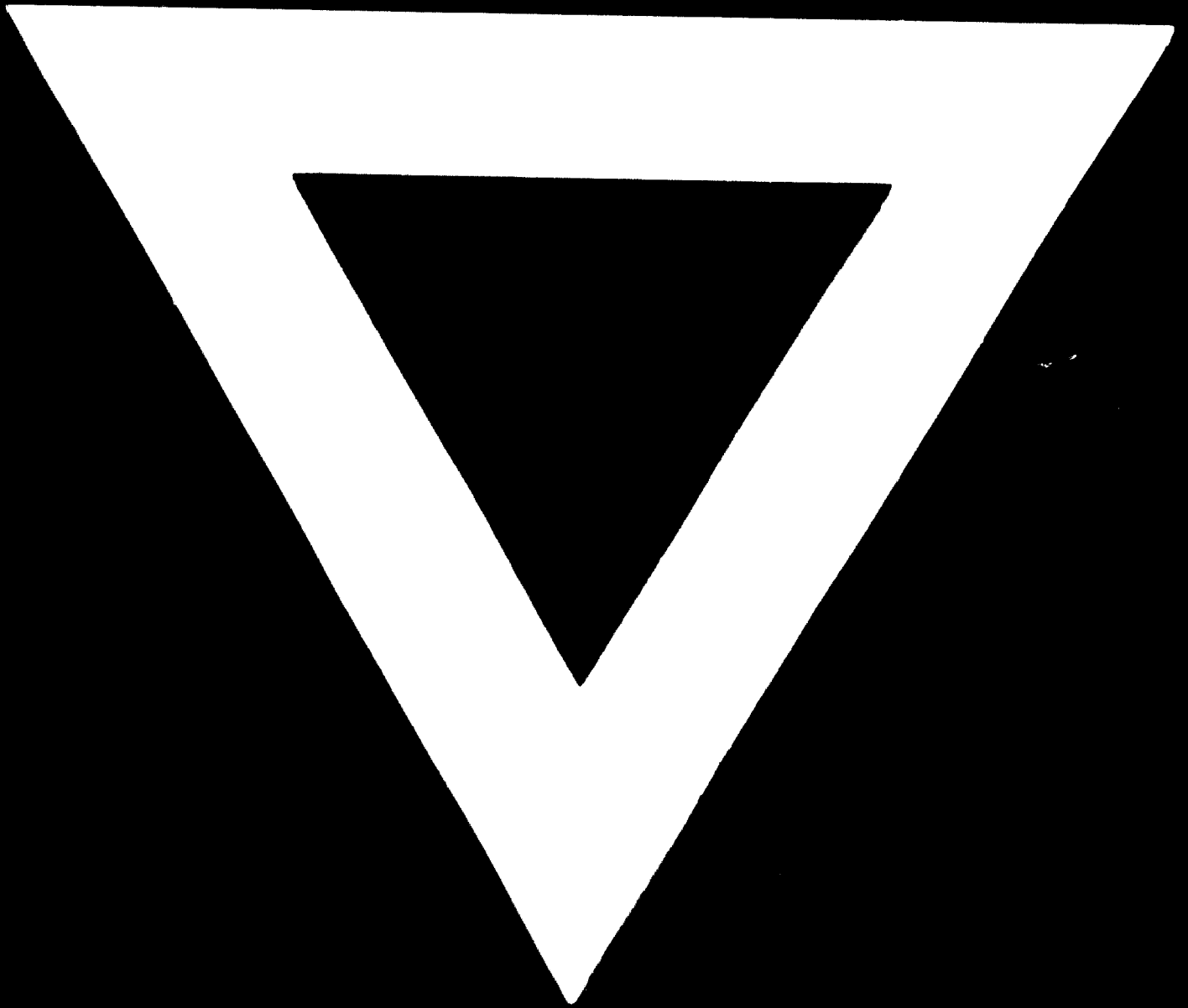
In its own efforts to guarantee to women these incentives indispensable for the enhancement of their well-being, the CSDHA, in accordance with the General Assembly resolution 31/133, has recommended for approval to the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women (**) primarily such projects that would provide craft training, labour saving and income-generating activities to the poorest groups of women and in particular to rural women (***). It might be expected that, in the future, co-operation between the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs and UNIDO in reference to the activities of the Voluntary Fund will develop; in particular such co-operation would include the identification of those projects on rural industrialization for which support from the Voluntary Fund might be appropriate.

(*) see UN document ID/B/202, op. cit. para.11

(**) On the Voluntary Fund see UN document A/32/174, 1977

(***) One project which has been recommended for approval is an activity which will assist women with the extraction of salt in Niger. Projects that help women in utilizing techniques of food storage and preservation, and training of women in agriculture and horticulture techniques, have also been recommended for approval.

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