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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDUSTRIALIZATION IN SRI LANKA *

prepared by

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INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka earlier known as Ceylon is a small beautiful island with an area of 25,332 sq. miles (70,330 km), and a population of 13.94 million people. Sri Lanka's size is comparable to that of Tasmania. Her population is about that of Australia.

The people belong to various races - Sinhalese 72%, Tamils 10%; the balance is made up of Moors, Muslims and Burghers.

The people of Sri Lanka also belong to different religions - Buddhists 68%, Hindus 18%, Christians 8% and Muslims about 6%. Sri Lanka is basically an agricultural country. Agro-based industries have been in existence for many years. Most other industries sprang up in the 1960's. About 3,000 industries have been established since 1960. You will therefore see that industrialization in Sri Lanka is fairly recent.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Although almost half of the number graduating from the Universities in Sri Lanka are women, it is a very regrettable fact that educated women in Sri Lanka constitute a grossly under-utilized resource. It will also be seen that the areas where there is high participation of educated women are in no way linked with industry.

TABLE (1) - % of women in workforce as skilled and non-skilled vs educated

Approx. % of women in workforce	OCCUPATIONAL / CAREER AREAS	
	NOT LINKED TO EDUCATION	LINKED TO EDUCATION/TRAINING
80 - 100	Handloom industry Batik industry Garment industry Packing & Labelling Other industries Plucking, sorting etc. in the Plantation Sector Cane & Basketware	Nursing Midwifery
40 - 80	Rubber Plantation Farm work Ceramic Industry Brick & Tile Manufacture Coir & Fibre Industry	Teaching, Medical Profession Medical Technician Lab. Technicians Stenographers, Typists Telephone Operators, Hostesses
10 - 40	Waitresses Screen printers	Lawyers, Tax Officers Banking, Journalism Postal Officers Librarians, Biologists
Less than 10	Cooks Bus conductors Traffic wardens Film actresses	Managers, Engineers Research Officers, Accountants Architects, Surveyors Quality Controllers, Administrators Film Directors/Editors, Vet. Surgeons

TABLE (2) - % of Women Employees by major occupational categories - 1976

MAJOR OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	(%) - 1976
1) Administrative & Managerial Workers	6.7
2) Professional, Technical & Related Workers	12.0
3) Clerical & Related Workers	17.6
4) Sales Workers	15.4
5) Forewomen & Supervisors	9.9
6) Skilled & Semi-skilled Workers	33.7
7) Unskilled Workers	39.8

Source — Department of Labour - Employment Survey 1976

TABLE (3) - % of Women in total workforce by major divisions of industries

MAJOR DIVISIONS OF INDUSTRIES	% OF WOMEN TO TOTAL NO. OF EMPLOYEES
(1) Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing	51.7
(2) Mining and Quarrying	15.4
(3) Manufacturing	31.4
(4) Electricity, gas and water	3.2
(5) Construction	5.3
(6) Wholesale & Retail Trade (Restaurant & Hotels)	16.5
(7) Transport & Storage	1.7
(8) Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Business Services	16.8
(9) Community, Social & Personal Services	14.8
% of Women Workers in all Industries	<u>34.0</u>

Source — Department of Labour Employment Survey- 1976

TABLE (4) - No. of Employees by Sex in Industry - 1976

SEX	PRIVATE SECTOR	PUBLIC SECTOR	TOTAL
Males	148,890	547,381	696,271
Females	79,594	279,780	359,374
TOTAL	<u>228,484</u>	<u>827,161</u>	<u>1,055,645</u>

Source - Department of Labour Employment Survey - 1976

From the above tables one fact emerges clearly i.e. the educated woman plays a very insignificant role in industry. The number of women in management, administrative and executive posts and in the technical sphere in industry is negligible.

Table (2) shows that more women are employed in the lower rungs of the occupational scale.

Table (3) serves to indicate that more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the workforce are women and that they predominate in the agricultural and manufacturing industries, and are concentrated in the unskilled grades in estates and in the skilled and unskilled grades in the manufacturing sector.

Given the facts that about 50% of the population of Sri Lanka are women and that 34% of the total workforce are women - one might get an erroneous idea about the status of women in employment in Sri Lanka.

The thrust of the women's workforce is in the lower occupational rungs where incomes are the lowest.

Much has to be done to roll away the unseen and intangible barriers which seem to lock-out women from entry into the higher rungs of occupation in industry.

THE MAJOR CONSTRAINTS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDUSTRY

Although the female population of Sri Lanka is about 50%, the various traditions, religious beliefs and cultural beliefs have all played various roles in retarding the emancipation of women and their participation in the industrialization and technological development of Sri Lanka.

History, too has contributed to constrain in achieving effective participation of women in industry today. During 1505-1656 the Portugese dominated Ceylon. This was followed by a period of Dutch Rule during 1656-1796. The era of British rule was from 1797-1948. During these periods women were employed only in the plantation and rural sector where female labour was exploited.

Fortunately, in 1931 Universal Franchise was granted in Ceylon to those over 21 years, in 1959 this age limit was reduced to 18 years. Since 1931 women have been in politics and this to a great extent helped to encourage women to participate in the socio-economic development of Sri Lanka.

Since 1945, elementary, secondary and tertiary education has been free. This coupled with the rapid expansion of educational facilities and institutions matched with the social demands and with the added advantage of instruction in the mother tongue have significantly helped to transform an elitist ex-colonial society to a more egalitarian social structure. Women have been equal beneficiaries of all these social and educational changes with the result that the rate of literacy among women is about 72% compared to 85% among men. Thus the women of today are more capable of benefiting from the employment opportunities generated by the development of agriculture and industry.

There is however a major national problem that might retard the pace of women's increased participation in industry. There is an ever increasing unemployment problem of educated youth. Today's figure stands at about 1.2 million - both male and female products of a general education. The massive unemployment problems might have the retrogradory and undesirable effect on women's job opportunities which will become more vulnerable in a shrinking labour market.

So far there has been no national policy of the women's role in the socio-economic progress of the country. A certain amount of integration of some of the 32 women's organisations in the country will help to formulate policies and focus attention on the participation of women in industrial and technological development of Sri Lanka.

Proposals are now afoot to set up a women's bureau in Sri Lanka. I will deal with the proposed functions of this bureau later on in this paper.

Professional women in Sri Lanka receive equal pay with men and have a sense of economic independence. Yet their absence in the higher echelons of industry indicates that there still exist undefined prejudices about their employment in this sphere.

There is gross exploitation of women in the labour force. The key area of exploitation is in the wage area. There is a definite wage discrimination in small industries, cottage industries and in the plantation sector.

Even where there is legislation with regard to wages, one finds that different wages are prescribed for men and women.

Wages are related to job classification which are based on sex-differentiation for example -

Class A jobs - for males

Class B jobs - for females

Remuneration attached to Class B is lower than that attached to Class A. In other instances where wages for the different industries are laid down by the Wages Board and published from time to time in the Sri Lanka Labour Gazette a straight-forward demarcation of rates of minimum pay applicable to males and females is made. Minimum wages for females being about 65-80% that of the males.

These lower rates of pay in occupations which are already the lowest paid in Sri Lanka have a deterrent effect on women's entry to the workforce.

Another form of restraint which affects the educated women is through what in Sri Lanka is known as the "Quota System." Up to recently in the Administrative Service the limitation was up to 25%. This limit of 25% also imposed on women entrants to the General Clerical Service.

The adoption of this quota system had been possible because in the Chapter on Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in the Constitution of Sri Lanka, there was a clause about non-discrimination in appointments on the grounds of race, religion, caste or sex, which however, embodied the following proviso provided that in the interest of such services, specific posts or classes of posts may be reserved for members of either sex

I am pleased to announce that this limiting proviso has been deleted in the new constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka which came into effect on 7 September 1978.

A further restricting factor is the lack of well equipped training centres which can impart mechanical skills to women. In 86 Trades, catered for by the National Apprentice Board only 10 have any women apprentices. While tradition and religious beliefs have constrained women from greater entry into industrial activity, I must mention that prejudices against women and certain myths about women's inability to wield authority and lack of responsibility, have been used by men in power to suppress women from rising to managerial positions in industry.

POLICY

A Policy has therefore to be formulated : -

- 1) To correct the imbalance between education and job opportunities by
 - a) Restructuring rural industrialisation in a decentralised manner so as to generate job opportunities for the educated female youth.
 - b) Changing the content of education by linking it to the socio-economic changes
- 2) To generate greater opportunity for women to acquire basic skills for self employment.
- 3) To specialise in new skills for new tasks and those tasks which were predominantly men's jobs. These should be identified and catered for so that women can be integrated into national reconstruction and development programmes. The methodology in which this type of training could be imparted, must be determined.
- 4) To provide women with an opportunity to have a say in the formulation and implementation of matters which directly affect them - in Sri Lanka most decisions about women are taken without them.
- 5) To create an awareness perhaps through mass media, that -
 - a) Woman is no longer an appendage of her husband, an ornament in the home, a mere household manager and a child-bearer, but that she is an independent human being with distinct rights, opportunities and responsibilities.
 - b) Woman is a productive worker and a valuable resource of the country.
- 6) To ensure equal pay for work of equal value.
- 7) To make available to women with small children, a few years no-pay leave without losing employment or to provide creches and infant schools and playing facilities.
- 8) To make available to women part-time jobs, so that household incomes would increase.
- 9) To introduce the concept of flex-hours so that women can attend to the needs of children when required.
- 10) To introduce formal courses in management and leadership and also training in trade union activities.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND INDUSTRIALISATION

Rural development and industrialisation will create the potential to absorb more and more women in various processes. With improved infrastructural requirements and better technology it will be possible for these industries to provide better jobs, better wages and to significantly increase productivity and to provide more employment opportunities for educated women in the administration of these industries.

Sri Lanka has many material resources in the rural areas which are not fully utilized. Although some of these industries have been in existence for many years—the productivity and profitability are low due to lack of proper technology, poor inter-institutional co-ordination, lack of integration, poor planning of Raw Material supply, production and marketing and last but not least the lack of quality consciousness and quality control.

The new Government of Sri Lanka, which incidentally, from September 7, is known as the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, has already given a clear indication that the thrust of the development effort will be in the rural areas with the supporting participation of the people using locally available resources and skills.

With in view steps have already been taken to set up one Rural Development Society in each village. There are 20,000 villages in Sri Lanka and 70% of the population live in these rural areas.

The proposed Rural Development Societies will help the villagers to organize themselves to control and utilize their socio-economic environments so as to optimize productivity, generate self-employment and raise their standard of living. Leadership training is to be provided to the poor landless and the educated unemployed youth - both male and female. Only persons with staying power will be selected for camp leadership training.

They will be responsible for bringing about changes in the village and will be known as "Change Agents."

PLANNING FOR RURAL INDUSTRIALISATION

The aims and objectives of planning for the increased participation of women in industry in Sri Lanka should include : -

- 1) The identification of projects and the development of industries which use in the main, locally available Raw Materials and local female skills.
- 2) Introduction of technologically improved industrialisation which will result in higher productivity so that high incomes can be assured and workers get not only better job satisfaction but also better take home pay packages.
- 3) The provision of financial assistance to set up village department stores which can serve to stabilize prices in the whole country and help entrepreneurship, as well as the consumer. The advantages of these are : -
 - a) in the case of perishable items they can pay the farmer or supplier on the spot and arrange for collection of the goods by the central distributing organisation in the area.
 - b) in the case of articles produced by artisans and entrepreneurs, they can purchase when the market prices are low and sell at reasonable prices when they are rising.
- 4) Project planning for the involvement of women in industry like any other project planning must be carefully identified. The potential of women must be evaluated. Indiscreet mechanisation and rationalisation which tend to restrict women's participation in the organised sector must necessarily be avoided.

The Projects could be planned to give full-time or seasonal full-time employment or subsidiary or supplementary self-employment. Planned projects should have the inherent capacity for generating employment at hours suitable to the rural woman. They should be of low capital investment and utilize local skills for processing locally available Raw Materials.

The planned projects should be of diverse types so that they can be suited to the different rural localities.

The projects should be planned so as to attract women to stay at home and work for the project or come to work from their homes so as to avoid urban immigration and the consequential innumerable problems that stem from this. For this, the rural sector projects must provide facilities for leisure and pleasure and perhaps provide creches, infant schools etc. It is here that the State has to play the most important role.

In a developing country such as Sri Lanka project planning cannot concentrate only on production quantities and productivity. We have rather an obligation to think of -

- 1) WHAT is to be produced ?
 for example bread (made of imported flour)
 or Rice and Rice-based products
 Terylene or Cotton
 Electricity for air-conditioning or for
 village electrification and rural industry.
- 2) WHERE is the project to be sited ?
 Rural or Urban
- 3) WHAT TECHNOLOGY should be used ?
 Automatic capital intensive
 or low cost, labour intensive ?

These aspects must be given the most careful thought, in the very minutest detail so that women can get increasing job opportunities with reasonable wages and without the inconveniences and family problems that arise if they have to migrate to urban areas in search of employment.

Planning of the infrastructure must take into account the possible future expansion of industries in the rural sector.

Mass media must be utilized to break through traditional and cultural barriers which prevent the fuller participation of women in industry and to awaken the consciousness of women for the need of developing their own areas as part of their contribution to national development.

Planning must take into account the great need of the moment i.e. producing in sufficient quantities and acceptable quality, those items of food, clothing and household requisites required by the people of the country.

Planning for rural industrial development which will result in women getting greater employment opportunities must be a two-pronged effort.

- 1) Existing industries must be upgraded so that not only productivity but also product quality is sustained, thus ensuring ready marketability of the goods.
- 2) Newer industries, particularly agro-based industries must be developed where women too can actively participate.

FUNCTIONS of the proposed Womens' Bureau which I referred to earlier will be : -

- i. To identify all areas, projects and institutions related to women in Sri Lanka and work for the improvement of their quality of life
- ii. To continuously review and evaluate the extent to which women have been integrated in the economic and social life of the country on a basis of equality with men.
- iii. Make recommendations from time to time with a view to guaranteeing full equality for women before the law in all sectors where such equality does not presently exist.
- iv. To ensure the preservation of Sri Lanka culture and traditions by fostering moral and ethical values so far as they affect the role of women in the process of modernization.
- v. To foster and encourage greater participation by women in the various spheres of national life.
- vi. To promote the availability of training and educational facilities, both formal and non-formal, thereby providing greater avenues for socially meaningful action by women.
- vii. To conduct research and collect and disseminate information on all matters pertaining to the achievement of the above objectives.
- viii. To initiate and monitor projects financed with both national and foreign funds with the objectives of ensuring that the position of women is thereby improved.
- ix. To advise the Government in formulating policies and implementing programmes for increased participation of women in national development.

The Bureau will also serve as a Central Agency to channel foreign assistance from International Organisations interested in promoting projects and programmes related to the welfare of women in Sri Lanka.

CASE STUDY

At the helm of industry in Sri Lanka one finds only a sprinkling of women. They are either in the creative arts or handloom sectors. Hence, rather unhappily, I am perforced to cite myself as the subject of the case study.

I terminated my education at the secondary stage because purely academic studies held no attraction for me. I was more mechanical and business minded but had little opportunity for furthering studies in these directions. Furthermore I had a strong passion for doing something practical, yet something off the beaten track.

My first challenging interest was the running of a taxi service - which was a domain dominated by man. While engaged in this activity I was toying with the idea of emerging into the manufacturing business. I explored the possibilities and feasibilities of manufacturing either blades or nails, which at that time were not made in Sri Lanka. These ideas however met with strong opposition from friends and family members who were the potential major investors.

My thoughts were next directed to the Food Processing Industry because a German friend of mine embedded the germ of the idea in my mind. The meat processing idea then became the focus of my attention. I still cannot think what made me dare to venture into this field which was at that time the sole monopoly of a well organized and large foreign controlled establishment. It has indeed been a privilege to have ventured out and participated in this industry which in my country had always been looked upon essentially as a male preserve.

Having decided the field of industry which I wished to break into I had to overcome the most difficult obstacle that came in the way of transforming dream into reality, namely getting Government approval and sanction to proceed abroad to study the subject and to acquire the necessary training and select the range of machinery required.

Having cleared this obstacle, I had to choose a firm which was prepared to collaborate in the training process. I had the good fortune of being associated with Firma Stockmayer in Versmold Westphalen in West Germany. They helped to give me the necessary training and technological know-how to achieve what I am proud to say has been a very successful business endeavour in my country.

The crash training programme launched by them was successfully completed by me in just one year. During this period I was given the opportunity to work with the very machines I intended to purchase for installation in the factory in Sri Lanka.

I returned to my homeland fired with the zest of forming the company and seeing the machinery installed in a building as soon as possible. Within 6 months the factory was built and machinery imported and installed and the company, of which I am the Chairman and Managing Director was formed.

The next obstacle was to obtain a butchers licence. In Sri Lanka by tradition only a member of the family gets a new licence. I had to make out a case that I was not going to slaughter cattle for sale as fresh meats but to convert the meat to serve as the starting Raw Material for processed finished goods. With some luck, I obtained the licence from our Municipal Authorities. Originally, it was intended to handle three carcasses of pigs a day. This has now increased to twenty pigs per day and could increase to more except for the non-availability of greater numbers of pigs.

In order to increase employment and also not to be hampered by having to purchase the pigs in the open market, I have now commenced the distribution of piglings to villagers who rear them and sell them back to me for processing.

I have also diversified the range of products manufactured by our Company known as Ceylon Meat Products, which now manufactures a total of thirty five products of standard quality.

Furthermore the islandwide distribution of our goods is handled by our sister Company GOLDI ENTERPRISES LIMITED. 70% of the GOLDI products feed the Tourist Industry of Sri Lanka.

From the aforementioned you will see that the entry into industry and the climb-up has not been a path strewn with roses.

The choice itself was difficult

Achieving the objective was difficult

Keeping production targets is difficult

Facing stiff competition is difficult

Overcoming constraints and keeping up profitability is difficult

Yet it has been achieved, is a going concern and will I hope with God's Help, grow bigger and help to generate more employment to our people.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY UNIDO

Proposals for enactments and legislation to ensure that irrespective of sex :

- 1) everyone be entitled to work according to his or her ability
- 2) everyone be entitled to equal pay for work of equal value
- 3) everyone has security of health and life and adequate risk insurance
- 4) everyone must be entitled to combine active parenthood with employment.

CONCLUSION

Women in Sri Lanka, particularly the educated women have not entered the sphere of industry in a proportion in any way linked to the access they have had to education.

With the establishment of the Womens' Bureau in the Ministry of Plan Implementation which functions directly under the President of the Republic there is a great expectation that the interests, welfare and the role that women can play in enhancing the socio-economic development of Sri Lanka will be more carefully identified and all forms of existing discriminations will be removed very early.

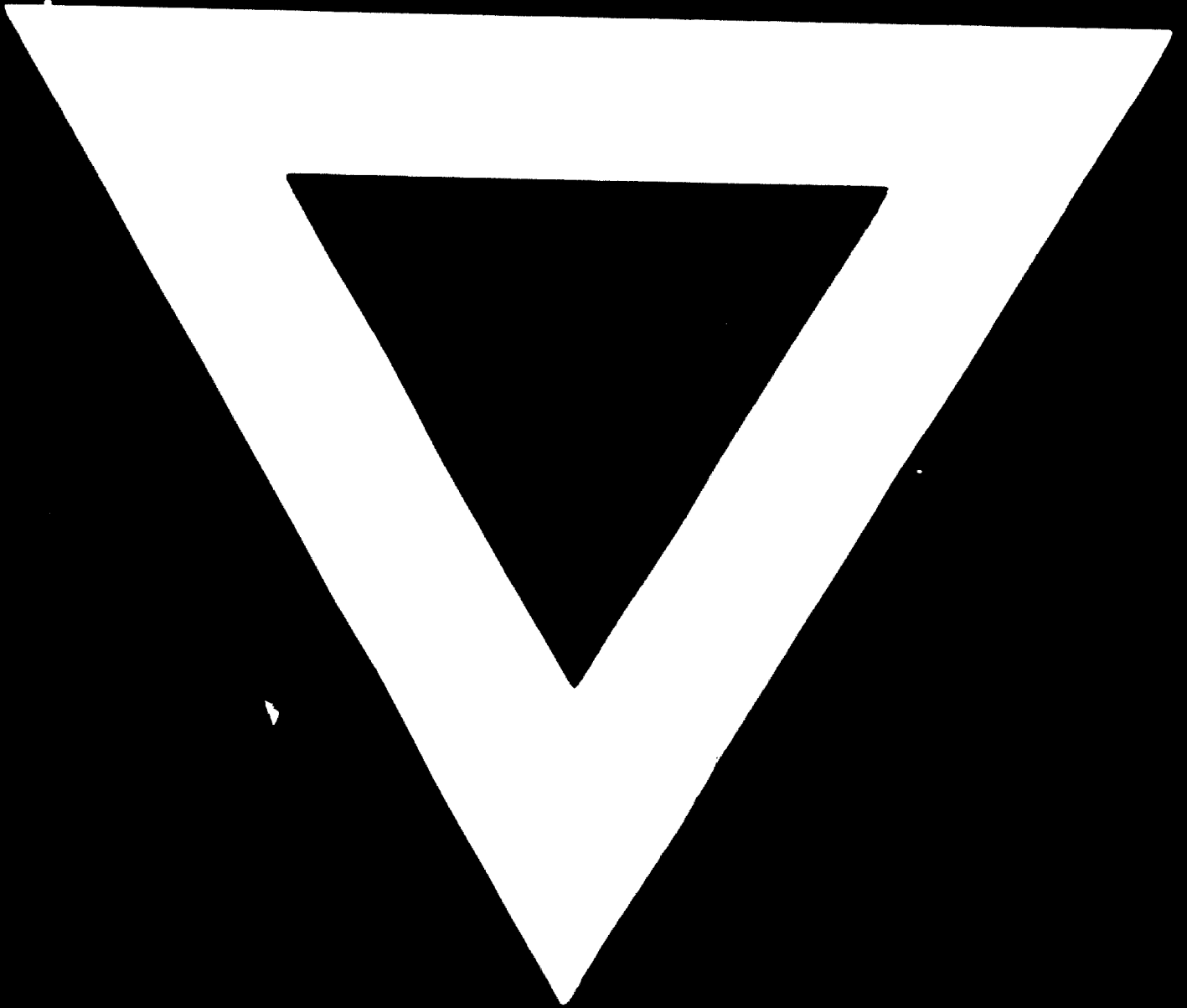
I wish to thank the organisers of this meeting for having invited me to this Seminar and given me the opportunity to speak at this Forum.

I would like to state, with no offence to any organisations, that often, resolutions are made, programmes planned, meetings held - yet after a lapse of time we find that the situation remains much the same.

I am however confident that the profitable exchange of ideas we have had at this meeting, will give us the necessary impetus to play a more significant role in industry. It now remains for us women who are of different nations, different backgrounds and different views to ensure that the proposals suggested here and those submitted to UNIDO for consideration will be translated into meaningful action in our own countries with the least possible delay.



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