



INTERNATIONAL STEERING
COMMITTEE (ISC) ON THE
ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT
OF RURAL WOMEN

COMITE DIRECTEUR
INTERNATIONAL (CDI)
SUR LA PROMOTION
ECONOMIQUE DES
FEMMES RURALES

INTERNATIONALE
STUURGROEP (ISG) VOOR
DE BEVORDERING VAN DE
ECONOMISCHE SITUATIE
VAN RURALE VROUWEN

COMITE DIRECTIVO
INTERNACIONAL (CDI)
SOBRE EL ADELANTO
DE LA MUJER RURAL

اللجنة التوجيهية
الدولية المعنية بالتهوض
بالأحوال الاقتصادية
لنساء الريف

SIXTH WORKING MEETING OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ISC

November 29 and 30, 1995

Palais d'Egmont, Brussels

**Discussion: Rural women in the Action Programme of the Fourth World
Conference on Women (4 - 15 September 1995, Beijing)**

The Geneva Declaration for the Economic Advancement of Rural Women is already mentioned in the Second Chapter (overall framework) in addition to other important conventions and action programmes.

The paragraphs discussing rural women were drawn up primarily during the Prepcom in New York in April 1995.

A new article in the Declaration (§ 26) mentions the economic independence of women and the elimination of poverty among them, by promoting equal access to means of production and opportunities in public services for women from rural areas, among other measures.

In addition, a supplementary summary of vulnerable groups, including rural women, is added in an introductory paragraph (§ 116 and 117) in the chapter about violence against women.

On the other hand, the reference to rural women has been deleted from another paragraph (§ 47, previously § 38), in which the summary of various categories of women is reduced to the "most vulnerable groups".

In general it can be seen that there are many references to rural women. Women from rural areas are discussed primarily in the chapters about poverty, health, the economy and the environment. This can be considered to be logical, since these are the principal areas where the specific situation of rural women is noticeable. When all these paragraphs are examined together, we can gain a good picture of the situation of rural women, as well as the measures required to improve their position.



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Brief outline: Rural women in the Action Programme of the Fourth World Conference on Women (4 - 15 September 1995, Beijing)

The Action Programme stresses that poverty primarily hits women in rural areas. A policy, and programmes, should be drawn up for this target group among others, in the framework of the fight against poverty. The agricultural sector is essential for food security in developing countries. Female agricultural producers should be granted sufficient access to financial, technical and marketing services. Land ownership, technology and training should also be accessible to women.

Rural women generally have less access to education, in the first place due to the difficulty in reaching them from a geographical standpoint. In the framework of the fight against illiteracy, extra efforts should be made for rural women, according to the Action Programme. Alongside official education, rural women should also be given the opportunity of following non-formal education, addressing health, entrepreneurial skills, agriculture and their legal rights.

As regards health, rural women are more vulnerable, not only because they usually live in extreme poverty, but also because the availability of pure water, health services and sanitary installations is more scarce in rural areas. The Action Programme therefore pays particular attention to the provision of services in these districts. Primary health care for rural areas was cited as a priority. Policy makers should bear the needs of rural women in mind in gender analyses in preparation for the policy and programmes on this subject.

In the section of the Action Programme about violence against women, and the part about war and conflicts, rural women are mentioned as one of the more vulnerable groups.

Women often carry out various working tasks, both inside and outside the home. However, they encounter a number of problems as regards access to credit, land, technology and training. This applies particularly to rural women, who at the same time are less well protected by labour legislation. The Action Programme asks governments to review their legislation so that women receive equal rights concerning access to economic resources, such as land ownership, credit, etc. Further research should also be carried out on the contribution made by women as regards unpaid work in the family business or farm. Rural women should be helped to generate income via better professional training, access to credit (example of the Grameenbank) and the stimulation of small businesses. Recognizing of the role of women in food production is also essential. Women in rural areas should also be urged to join cooperatives or other organizations.

The Action Programme maintains that the degeneration of nature also has various negative consequences for the lives and health of rural women. They should be given special attention when the programmes are drawn up. Indeed, via access to credit, training, land and other resources, they can play a part in working towards a more sustainable development. A gender perspective should be incorporated into the policy and programmes for rural areas. Female farmers should have training opportunities and access to marketing services and environment-friendly technologies. At the same time, the knowledge of rural women themselves should be used. Finally, the role of women in food production, irrigation, land use, etc., should be studied in greater depth.



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STATUTES OF THE INTERNATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE (ISC)

(working document)

1. The ISC

The Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women, which was held with the collaboration of IFAD in February 1992 in Geneva, was the first meeting organized in support of rural women in developing countries. Wishing to give full recognition to the contribution of women to the rural economy, this historic summit brought together a powerful opinion-forming group: 64 wives of heads of state or government, government delegates, officials from international organizations. The aim of the summit was to generate political commitment at the highest level and to mobilize public opinion worldwide by highlighting the importance of the economic contribution made by rural women, and the extent of their untapped potential. It culminated by the adoption by the wives of the heads of state or government, of the Geneva Declaration for rural women, which called for a radical shift in the perception of the beneficiaries of rural development. It also focused the attention of the world on the importance of rural women in the development process.

Those who took part in the Geneva summit approved a strategy to ensure the implementation of the summit's objectives. In accordance with paragraph 14 (ix) of the Geneva Declaration, this strategy was based on the setting-up of an International Steering Committee (ISC), to include the First Ladies of three countries of each of the five regions: Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and the Near East and North Africa. The countries chosen were the following:

- Angola, Nigeria and Senegal for Africa;
- Colombia, El Salvador and Paraguay for the Americas;
- Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Tonga for Asia and the Pacific;
- Belgium, Czechoslovakia (the Slovak Republic following the separation) and Turkey for Europe;
- Egypt, Jordan and Morocco for the Near East and North Africa.

Since then, the ISC was enlarged by a sixteenth member, St Lucia, representing the Caribbean.



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The ISC was given the responsibility of coordinating the follow-up activities leading from the Geneva summit; setting up links with inter-agency bodies for women and development; organizing meetings to monitor the implementation of the Declaration and the principles it embodies; keeping au fait with the main World Conferences; ensuring that the concerns of rural women are put high on the agenda of all national, regional and international deliberations leading up to and including the UN Fourth World Conference on Women; and participating in the UN Fourth World Conference on Women.

2. The ISC-Secretariat

In order to coordinate the ISC-activities, and to provide the ISC with technical and administrative support, an ISC-Secretariat was set up. Up till november 1994, the Secretariat was at the IFAD offices in Rome. From November 1994 till XXXX 1996, it was the King Baudouin Foundation in Brussels which took on its running.

3. The first meetings of the ISC

The First meeting of the ISC took place in Brussels in February 1994, under the patronage of H.M. Queen Fabiola. It was attended by First Ladies or their Special Envoys from the fifteen countries which made up the Committee, as well as the leaders of several international development agencies and of the European Community. This meeting was the culmination of a long process of follow-up activities which had taken place over the two years since Geneva. It served both to examine the progress so far and to lay out the path for the continuing role of the Geneva Declaration, the First Ladies and the ISC in ensuring the integration of rural women in the development process.

In September 1995, the Committee took part in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The ISC enjoyed an observer status, and was represented by six First Ladies. H.M. Queen Fabiola pronounced a speech at the Conference, in Her capacity of Spokeswoman of the ISC; the ISC held a press conference and participated in numerous activities and workshops both at the Conference and at the NGO Forum in Huairou. By participating in the Conference, the ISC enhanced its visibility on the international scene and acquired a larger international recognition. The second meeting of the ISC took place in Amman, in XXXX 1996.

4. Creation of Regional Committees

The main purpose of the establishment of Regional Committees is to mobilize all efforts and commitment for the implementation of the Geneva Declaration at regional levels. The Regional Committees are responsible for the preparation of regional plans of action and the monitoring of

the progress in their implementation; other activities include the preparation and implementation of specific regional and sub-regional activities such as training for rural women and research on rural women; the assistance to the National Steering Committees in the preparation of national plans of action; the mobilization of support from regional institutions in order to ensure the integration of the summit's recommendations in their policies and programmes; and the organization of periodic meetings for the evaluation and coordination at regional levels. During the last years, the different regions have been very active with regard to the creation of Regional Committees. In September 1995, during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the Asian-Pacific region created the Regional Steering Committee for its region; with regard to the Americas, the annual Conferences of Spouses of Heads of State and Government of the Americas offer an appropriate forum that enables the First Ladies of this region to discuss issues related to rural women. The African region also seems to move towards the creation of a Regional Steering Committee.

Although much can be done at regional level now, the First Ladies of the ISC believe they still have an important role to play, and that it is necessary to maintain a multilateral advocacy-lobby group; moreover, the bi-annual meetings of the ISC have the advantage of enabling ISC members from different parts of the world to exchange views on themes of concern for rural women, and of offering an adequate forum to share experiences.

5. Modus operandi of the ISC

Learning from their past experience, and taking into account as well the challenges that lie ahead as the modified situation of their organisation (creation of RSC,...), the First Ladies of the ISC decided during the Amman meeting in XXXX 1996 to provide the ISC with a more defined structure, by adopting the following statutes:

A. Membership

- The members of the ISC are wives of heads of state or government. It can happen that, because she is unable to join the ISC herself, a First Lady suggests that another woman from her country would take her place in the ISC. However, suggestions are subject to approval by all ISC-members; this possibility to include non-First Ladies as members of the Committee must remain an exception to the rule.
- The duration of the memberships will be limited to 4 years; they can be renewed only once. The first mandates that were issued in 1992 will come to an end after the Amman meeting in May 1996. In order to enable new members to join the ISC in a continuous way over the years, it has been agreed that, with regard to the period starting after the Amman meeting, half of the mandates will be renewed for only two years.
- During their meetings, the members of the ISC can decide to invite new members to join the ISC. The main motivation behind the suggestion or approval of the invitation of a new member, should be the personal involvement of the First Lady in the action towards the improvement of the living conditions of rural women, or her determination to become an active member of the Committee. It is also important to invite only these First Ladies, who still have the prospect of a mandate of a minimum of 2 years.
- The mandate of a First Lady as a member of the ISC can come to an end before the full completion of the 4 years period in two (*three*) cases :
 - in case a First Lady is unable to exercise her mandate, due to death, or to the ending of her husband's mandate as a head of state or government; in this case, priority should be given for the completion of her mandate to her successor. However, the other members of the region will check the willingness of the First Lady to get personally and fully involved in the activities of the ISC;
 - each member of the ISC can decide to retire from the Committee;
 - *in case a First Lady remains totally absent from the ISC activities, the ISC members can decide to put her mandate at the Committee's disposal.*In this latter case (*the two last cases*), the First Ladies of the region of the retiring member should make a suggestion regarding her replacement.

B. Composition of the Committee

- The number of ISC members was originally set to 15, being 3 for each region. In 1994, the ISC was enlarged by a sixteenth member, representing the Caribbean in the region of the Americas. The ISC members of one region can suggest to modify the number of First Ladies representing their region in the ISC. Suggestions will be subject to approval by all members of the ISC. It was suggested to enlarge this number to a maximum of 5 for each region.

C. Presidency

- Every two years, on a rotational basis according to the regions, the Presidency of the ISC will be entrusted to another First Lady.
- The responsibilities of the Presidency of the ISC include the organisation and the taking care of the bi-annual ISC-meeting and of the preceding meeting of the Representatives, as well as their management and their secretariat.
- It can be suggested to the Presidency, to maintain close collaboration with the Representatives of the former and of the future presidencies during the preparation of the meeting.
- Each bi-annual meeting will define which country will host the new Presidency. It would also be advisable that each meeting would specify the region from which a country will host the next Presidency.
- Each Presidency starts two months after an ISC meeting, in order to enable the new Presidency to prepare its meeting in an appropriate way.

D. Patronage

- The members of the ISC can ask a First Lady who has been particularly involved in the activities of the Committee, to become patron of the ISC.
- The patronage of the ISC is not linked to the effective Presidency. It symbolizes the continuity of the ISC, and contributes to its recognition.

E. Representatives

- Each member of the ISC will designate a Representative, who will ensure a maximum of continuity to the action of the ISC.

F. Prominent advisors

- The members of the ISC can ask prominent persons, who have been involved in a significant way in the action for the economic advancement of rural women, to participate in the meetings. Suggestions will be subject to approval by all members of the ISC.
- These persons will be invited to participate in the meeting in the capacity of advisors.

G. Meetings of the ISC

- Every two years, a meeting of the ISC will be organised by the Presidency.
- The Presidency will decide about the date of the meeting, as well as about the modalities of its organisation.
- On initiative of the Presidency, a preparatory meeting at the level of the Representatives will be organised during the months that precede the ISC-meeting.

H. Themes to be discussed during the meetings

- The agenda of the ISC-meetings will always include the evaluation of the situation of rural women in the various parts of the world.
- The Presidency of the ISC can include other themes on the agenda of the meeting, taking into account that these themes will have direct implications on the situation of rural women.

I. Regional Steering Committees

- The creation of Regional Steering Committees on the economic advancement of rural women will benefit from the full support of the ISC.
- The Regional Steering Committees will be recognised by the ISC as the intermediaries between the ISC and the First Ladies of the regions involved.

Amman, XXXXXXXX , 1996.

REPORT

SUMMIT ON THE
ECONOMIC
ADVANCEMENT
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WOMEN



FOREWORD

In the development rhetoric, much has been said though admittedly less has been done. New ideas are hard to come by and, to be effective, must be translated into action through new coalitions. The Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women held in Geneva on 25-26 February, 1992 attended by 64 Wives of Heads of State or Government and numerous top officials of governments and international agencies, if it did not produce entirely new ideas on the substance of the matter it at least promoted many coalitions in support of this important theme as well as greater worldwide awareness of what was at stake among the public and the decision-makers. That was unquestionably timely. The novelty was to add the collective energy of Wives of Heads of State or Government to other efforts in support of poor rural women.

For in spite of all on-going action the plight of poor rural women is still deteriorating. Poor women are increasingly worse off than poor men. Yet specific, well-tested and cost-effective policies can be adopted to improve their lives with dramatic results.

This report is about why Her Majesty the Queen of the Belgians and six other Wives of Heads of State or Government took up their initiative to convene the Summit which they attended together with 57 of their peers, thus convening the largest gathering ever of First Ladies in the world. The Summit spells out clearly what effort is being made by the participants in their own countries - it gives a picture of the current situation. The statistics speak for themselves. But this is not just a story of economic decline. The speeches of the Wives of Heads of State or Government attending the Summit laid strong emphasis on the need to let the voice of poor rural women be heard and, coupled with it, the need for rural women to gain self-confidence and self-assertiveness as key actors and producers in the countryside and not just as the object of "social" or "welfare" approaches. The inclusion of women in the policy-making process will benefit not only other women but also society as a whole.

This report is also about the key role that rural credit schemes have played and must play more widely if we are ever to face up to this challenge adequately. Time and again rural credit schemes have shown that they work with extraordinary success. Poor rural women are bankable. Rural credit for low income groups is cost-effective. It would be irrational not to build on our experience as quickly as is practical.

From the speeches of the Wives of Heads of State or Government in the report, similarities are apparent in the problems of poor rural women the world over, regardless of deep cultural differences. It was, therefore, possible for the Summit to set out a list of pragmatic, down-to-earth measures that need to be taken immediately. It did so at the behest of poor rural women themselves who had met previously in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean to determine an agenda of action for the Summit.

The Wives of Heads of State or Government have decided to follow up on their initiative to make sure that more is done for rural women. The present report is about how they propose to do this. Indeed we have been told that follow-up activities are already under way in several countries. Effective follow-up is the key to the future.

The Summit was given unusually wide coverage by the news media. Millions of readers became aware of the problems of poor rural women, and were made to realize that their solutions were not just in terms of charity.

IFAD, which provided the secretariat, is proud to have been associated with this unprecedented meeting and also to have benefited from assistance and advice of the multilateral community and in particular of the personal support of Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The economic advancement of rural women is an idea whose time has come. However, ideas will remain but tokens until coalitions which espouse them reach a critical mass. This is finally what this report is about. It is about banking on rural women. It is thus about the implementation of this idea, nay more of an ideal, whose time has come.

Idriss Jazairy
President
International Fund for Agricultural Development

INTRODUCTION

The Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women which was held at the Palais des Nations on 25-26 February 1992 in Geneva under the Patronage of Her Majesty Queen Fabiola of Belgium was an unusual challenge.

Rural women are, more often than not, neglected. Frequently isolated in remote villages in the interior of their countries, they are limited in their economic and political power. Their situation has continued to deteriorate trapping them in deeper poverty every year. Efforts by national development programmes, international agencies, women's groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc. to contain and reverse the trend have so far not been sufficient.

The challenge for the Summit was whether it would be possible to mobilize Wives of Heads of State or Government to use their personal standing and commitment to bring new energies in support of poor rural women. The question was: Would enough First Ladies consider the cause worthwhile enough to take the trouble and assume the expense of participating?

The result exceeded all expectations. The First Ladies spoke with authority. Some were rural women themselves. Some had set up nationwide programmes to help rural women. Many were involved in women's movements in their countries. Side by side with them, rural women from the field made their voices sound loud and clear during the gathering. Many of the speeches were poignant, drawing on actions already being taken in their own countries on issues that were being discussed at the Summit and on the wisdom and day-to-day experience of common people. All – those already active as well as those who were motivated by the Summit – left with a deep resolve to become even more actively engaged in the service of this noble cause. All drew from a collective sense of mutual support and encouragement. Press coverage was extraordinarily widespread. A very limited survey of the world press produced 1000 articles on the Summit. Newspapers, magazines, television, radio and wire services which rarely if ever report on "world food issues" did so in this particular case. For the first time, millions of readers around the world became aware of the plight of rural women and of proposals to improve their lot. This was no small achievement.

At first IFAD expected about 30 First Ladies. The final number was 64, thanks to the active involvement of the Core Group of Initiators. The First Ladies were accompanied by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, his wife Mrs. Lea Maria Boutros-Ghali, the heads of several leading UN agencies and international financial institutions and such international statesmen as H.E. Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere. Last but not least rural women from all developing regions of the world were able to attend and to speak up. The President of Switzerland, H.E. René Felber was present to welcome all participants.

The Summit produced the Geneva Declaration for Rural Women which spelled out the crisis faced by rural women and offered practical measures that could be taken to help them. The Summit also produced a tremendous meeting of minds among women from all walks of life encountering each other for the first time. Many found that the issues which concerned them in their countries were similar, if not identical, to those in other countries thousands of miles away. So were the solutions.

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

The Summit was the culmination of long months of preparations. The idea came from Her Majesty Queen Fabiola of Belgium and a "Core Group" of six Wives of Heads of State or Government: Mrs. Ana Milena Muñoz de Gaviria of Colombia; Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak of Egypt; Dato Seri Datin Paduka Dr. Siti Hasmah Binte Haji Mohammed Ali of Malaysia; Mrs. Maryam Babangida of Nigeria; Mrs. Elisabeth Diouf of Senegal; and Mrs. Semra Ozal of Turkey.

They asked IFAD to organize a Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women. Their decision was endorsed by the United Nation's Economic and Social Council in 1991, which encouraged all concerned to take part.

Why IFAD? In the previous year, IFAD launched an initiative to spotlight the plight of poor rural women. It organized four regional meetings followed by an international consultation in October 1991 with delegates from 80 countries who exchanged views with project workers, voluntary aid agencies and women in the field. It established Guidelines for Action to promote the advancement of poor rural women. IFAD is, however, a financial institution which lends money for projects to help the poorest of the poor on the basis of sound banking principles.

Poor rural women are not charity cases, says IFAD. They are bankable. The theme of the Summit, printed on all its publications, was "Banking on Women". The idea is that with sufficient bank credit, education, training, encouragement and a fair deal in relation to men, poor rural women can improve their output, repay loans, bring up their children better – and live less arduous lives.

"Let us all then bank on rural women," Mr. Idriss Jazairy, the President of IFAD, told the Summit. "This is definitely an idea whose time has come, an idea which makes good economic sense while being also morally right... A mere 15% increase in women's productivity could actually wipe out food shortages in sub-Saharan Africa."

The starting point for the First Ladies in Geneva was gloomy. Experts reckon that over the past 20 years the number of poor rural women has risen by more than 50% to 565 million. It is still going up by about 15 million a year and could reach 700 million by the end of the century if nothing is done. More than 15 years after the launching of the UN Decade for Women, rural women are getting poorer and more marginalized. They are caught in a downward spiral of poverty, forcing them to work ever harder for their families. They become poorer because of forces outside their control. Men do better: while the number of women in absolute poverty has increased by 50% in the past 20 years, the percentage for men and women together has grown by just 40%.

THE NEW FACE OF POVERTY

Women comprise nearly 60% of the rural poor in the developing world. Their numbers have increased by roughly 50% while the number of poor men has increased by about 30%. An ugly new phrase has entered the language: the feminisation of poverty.

How did it happen? Many debt-ridden governments have had to cut spending to balance their budgets. Education and health services benefiting poor rural women have been slashed. The degradation of the environment has affected smallholdings and subsistence agriculture, where women predominate. Civil wars have wrecked families, leaving women in charge. Husbands have migrated to towns and cities seeking wage labour and a better life, leaving their families to fend for themselves. In Africa, about 30% of families are female-headed. In the Caribbean the figure is 40-50%. In 114 countries surveyed by IFAD, about 66.2 million women head households and 16 million of these women are landless.

Yet rural women are a valuable asset with great potential and with a vast reservoir of knowledge of the countryside. The IFAD survey also shows that women comprise 67% of the developing-world agricultural labour force. In Africa, they produce 70% of their family's food supply. Nonetheless their contribution is grossly under-estimated and mostly remains outside official statistics. If they can be helped to produce more, there will be three results:

- Their families will not go hungry and their village and country will benefit.
- They will be able to afford to consume more and thereby increase demand for goods and services – and thus promote economic growth.
- Greater production will also encourage capital accumulation as well as better health and education for children.

But there have been many impediments. Some banks do not consider poor rural women creditworthy. In Brazil, one study cited at the Summit shows that funds in a nationwide credit

programme handed 88% of the total to men. In India and Cameroon, women's share of agricultural credit is less than 10%. In sub-Saharan Africa the figure is as low as 5%. At the same time, loans from moneylenders can carry interest charges as high as 270%.

Land-tenure and inheritance legislation often denies women title to property that would give them access to credit (as collateral). In land-distribution schemes in many countries only a minority of beneficiaries are women.

Government planners often design agricultural development policies on the basis of large farms, ignoring small ones worked mainly by women. Their schools teach fewer girls than boys. Illiteracy rates are on average 21% higher among girls.

Another report for the Summit showed that government agricultural advice services are usually geared for male farmers. This is no surprise. Only 7% of all agricultural advisers in Africa are women. In Asia and Latin America, the rate is slightly better: 15%. By one reckoning, agricultural advice services around the world spend about 5% of their time on women.

In parts of the developing world, it is considered inappropriate for visiting male agricultural advisers to give training to local women. Frequently, rural women are treated as legal minors, submissive to their menfolk. They desperately need and deserve recognition as economic agents and as participants in decision making.

THE MOULD CAN BE BROKEN

Nonetheless, as the First Ladies underlined in their speeches, there are solutions, and they are not expensive. Small credit schemes for rural women can work wonders. A loan of \$50 can start a woman down the road away from poverty. The rate of repayment is amazingly high. In the Production Credit for Rural Women project in Nepal, for example, the success rate is 95%. In Pakistan, a scheme is under way to recruit female "credit delivery workers". Landless women can be given small loans for off-farm businesses such as bee-keeping, raising silkworms, processing paddy and oilseeds, fish-farming, weaving and making furniture.

The IFAD-supported Grameen Bank of Bangladesh makes micro-loans mostly of \$30 usually to landless rural women in "peer groups" at interest rates well below the moneylenders' rates. Customers must follow the ideals of the bank: by trying to save, by boiling water, by using contraception and by refusing to participate in the traditional system of "bride price" — a payment by parents to the bridegroom-to-be for marrying their daughter — which has ruined many families. The number of the bank's customers has risen from 50,000 in 1983 to over 1 million in 1991, of whom 92% are women. The repayment rate is 97%.

A report for the Summit from the southern uplands of Yemen, where 30% of households are headed by women, described how community centres have taught some 6,000 women to read and write as well as the principles of health and nutrition, and also how to grow vegetables and fruit trees, raise livestock and keep bees. Many development projects aimed at helping rural women are designed to work through newly created women's groups, intended to give the women more self-confidence in dealing with men.

In Nepal, "women development officers" and "women group organizers" promote development in remote villages partly with micro-loans. The rate of repayment is over 90%. In one village, women are on their third loan and some have started small businesses. Bankers are impressed.

In Lesotho, women's groups accumulate enough funds for a down-payment on loans — individual or collective. They decide how loans, labour and profit will be allocated. The groups create self-confidence and self-reliance among the women. Repayment rates are over 90%.

Occasionally, hidden ironies emerge. In a development project on the Caribbean island of Dominica, only 10% of the loans went to women. Further investigation showed, however, that 30% of the credit given to men was in fact being handled by their wives.

THE FIRST LADIES AND RURAL WOMEN SPEAK OUT SIDE BY SIDE

The speeches at the Summit were often eloquent and always down-to-earth. They were full of stark statistics and strong emotions. There was a touch of anger about the plight of rural women and the recognition that it was getting worse. This was not a conference of pious hopes and rhetoric. Time and again, the speakers, who included a number of rural women, pointed to practical difficulties and made pragmatic proposals.

They took different approaches. Many re-affirmed the consensus on the practical measures that must be adopted by both governments and aid donors — more education, training, credit and the participation of poor rural women in the shaping of their destiny. Some argued forcefully that the problem had a psychological and political dimension. Others raised the related problems of population growth and protection of the environment.

The Arab world, whose attitude to the status of women is at times questioned, was one of the cultural communities that was best represented at the Summit level. Among the participants were the Wives of the presidents of Egypt, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and The Sudan and of the Prime Minister of Algeria, the Queen of Jordan, the Crown Princess of Morocco and the Wife of the President of Lebanon's Parliament. There were also high level representatives from Tunisia, Oman, Iraq, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

Queen Fabiola, under whose patronage the Summit was held, was particularly forthright about the fate of some rural women. "While trying to escape from this spiral of poverty, some of them and their children leave the land hoping to find better living conditions in urban areas," she said. "But all too often these young people fall victim to a scandalous and degrading trade. For in their millions they end up in prostitution in the big cities of their countries and in the western world. This is a modern form of slavery."

The Queen called for more rural credit for women, the right to hold title to their land, the employment of more female agricultural advisers and greater consultation with rural women about their needs. "They cannot be treated as second-class citizens," she declared.

It was soon clear that the Summit spoke with authority. "I have lived and worked for most of my life as a rural woman," said Lady Nancy Korowi of Papua New Guinea. "I am all too familiar with the issues." One of them was that in her country "the large majority of rural women are illiterate". Another was that development strategies "were directed at rural areas without any consideration for, or participation by, rural dwellers, half of whom are women". Equally serious was the fact that less than 3% of Papua New Guinea women used family-planning methods and the average family has five children.

An unusually high estimate of the economic contribution of women came from Mrs. Cheiffou Bibata of Niger. She said a recent estimate of the "informal sector", in which women play an important part, had led experts to reckon that women contributed 65% of the gross domestic product. Mrs. Bibata also set out the psychological dimension of the difficulties encountered by poor rural women:

Women continue to be sidelined to do the most undesirable jobs without having their own place in the decision-making process. They are not used to taking part in public life. But they are the only ones to know what their own needs are and what the solutions might be. Not having been asked to take part, they are convinced that their experience and their work are not worthy of the attention of decision-making organs. They have acquired the habit of keeping quiet and passively accepting their destiny. But now they must organize!

To Mrs. Janet Museveni of Uganda, the key to the promotion of rural women was political power. African women had to be freed, she said, from their predicament in which "tradition and custom have conspired with law to ensure that she remains locked up in the 19th century while the rest of mankind steps into the 21st". But it was difficult for women to shake themselves free and stand up for their rights. "There is a crisis of self-confidence and self-esteem," she said. "We have here a shattered self-image and we must find a way to restore wholeness as a matter of urgency."

Although women played a bigger role than men in African economies, many had not been taught to read and write, keep accounts or make sensible investments, Mrs. Museveni said. "It is any wonder that the economies of Africa are ailing?" She mentioned one possible solution: international aid agencies could insist on women being members of decision-making bodies to which they lend money.

In Nigeria, Mrs. Maryam Babangida reported, the Better Life Programme for Rural Women which she established is well under way. "The most important outcome," she said, "was the realisation that we had to mobilize and organize the rural women to enable them to participate fully in their own upliftment." This was done through cooperatives. These have provided security and credibility for rural women as well as access to land and credit.

This approach, coupled with adult education classes, leads to the empowerment of rural women, she said. Like Mrs. Museveni, Nigeria's First Lady felt that "political empowerment remains the catalyst to greater participation and emancipation of women, especially in economic matters." Mrs. Fatma Khaled Ahmed El Bashir of The Sudan said women's organizations in her country were at the stage of being able to carry out projects in farming, the environment and small industries.

One of the rural women to address the Summit, Ms. Mairo Habila from Nigeria, praised the Better Life Programme. "The land made available to us for farming has increased," she said. "Fertilizer is made available to us. Pesticides are provided. Agricultural extension officers teach us new techniques. Some farm implements and better seedlings are supplied to our cooperative. We were assisted with a loan which we are trying to repay."

Another rural woman, Ms. Maria de los Angeles Acevedo from Costa Rica, told the Summit she had to put up with three disadvantages. First, women worked on small plots on poor land while agro-industry, employing few skilled workers, used the best land. Second, women earned less than men and had less access to education and training and thus to jobs. And third, violence against wives persisted as part of the culture.

Mrs. Sophie Buyoya, the First Lady of Burundi, said it was the social custom in her country that women were taught "total submission to their husbands" and that they "should have nothing to say and still less to decide". They could not inherit land. She worried that women who had accepted submission made matters worse by criticising other women who "challenge social norms in demanding their rights or in adopting anti-conformist attitudes."

From thousands of miles away across the Atlantic in the Caribbean island of St. Lucia came an echo of the same problem. "It is essential that an awareness of self-worth is created in the rural women and a recognition of the value of their contribution not only among themselves but in society as a whole," said her counterpart Mrs. Janice Compton. "There must be an introduction in national income accounts of all production of primary goods by rural women, whether for home consumption, barter or sale."

Queen Halaevalu Mata'Aho of Tonga complained that while governments failed to look to the needs of women, the women themselves "continue to display a distinct hesitation and reluctance to take the urgent decisive actions necessary to rectify this situation."

The First Lady of Ecuador, Mrs. Carmen Calisto de Borja-Cevallos, put her view firmly. "The only way that social policies will respond to the needs and desires of a social actor, in this case women, is recognizing the right to take part in the entire process of defining, organizing and carrying out the policy," she said.

Mrs. Rosine Vieyra Soglo of Benin told the Summit that women comprised two thirds of her country's illiterates and girls suffered discrimination in education. "The integration of women in the development process is an economic imperative," she said. A rural woman from Bolivia, Ms. Jesusa Flores, offered an example of women seizing the initiative in the development process of her village, Tarabuco, which badly needed a road. "The men wouldn't help but only made fun of us," she said. "We tried to build some roads but they weren't wide enough." After the women erected a sign saying "road building by women because there aren't any men in this town", the men helped.

In Barbados, Dr. Angelita Sandiford reported, the government was in the process of developing a "national policy on women". Switzerland's Mrs. Luce Felber said she rejoiced that the Swiss Development Corporation had put women and the environment as new priorities for action in the developing world. And from Cyprus, Mrs. Androula Vassiliou suggested that however valuable non-formal education was in the empowerment of rural women, formal education was more durable.

"SHE IS A WITCH"

With a touch of irony, Mrs. Nana Konadu Agyeman-Rawlings of Ghana commented on male attitudes: "It is only 'abnormal' women who become leaders and high achievers. At school a girl who tops her class is a witch!" The first challenge for women, she declared, was to become decision-makers and the second was to "inspire our girls at school".

The First Ladies universally agreed on the principle that rural women needed better educational policies. But a skeptical Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak of Egypt asked: "Where can we be confident that these internationally advocated policies have been adopted and implemented? Have the services proposed been just wishful thinking?" Because young girls are assigned to help in the house and farm and to fetch water and firewood, she said, they are still the last to go to school and the first to be pulled out."

Schooling for girls was often viewed as superfluous, luxurious and unnecessary, she added. So the benefits had to be demonstrated. She urged that curricula be tailored to the needs of rural life: basic literacy, farming, husbandry, food processing, health care, nutrition and child care.

Population growth was another deep concern of the First Ladies. Mrs. Semra Ozal of Turkey made the point forcefully. "Too early, too late, too frequent and too many pregnancies are the reasons for maternal deaths," she said. "Most of these reasons can be overcome by efficient family-planning programmes. While 50% of Turkish married women were aware of these methods in 1980, the rate reached 77% in 1988." Mrs. Ozal added that there was clear relation between the educational level of women and their fertility rate. "A higher educational level results in a decrease in the desired number of children," she said.

An entirely different problem of rural women was raised by Mrs. Magda Bianchi de Serrano of Guatemala: that of ethnic minorities. Guatemala is a special case. "Rural women in my country belong to 27 different ethnic groups with a great variety of cultural behavior, ways of life and language," Mrs. Serrano told the Summit. The danger was to try to impose the culture of Spanish-speaking townspeople on women from rural ethnic groups. When this was done, it resulted in splits in the family structure and troubles which ethnic communities found difficult to handle. The answer? Development policies that are "harmonised with customs and the social behavior of the group".

A lot of plain speaking about rural women came from Mrs. Maria de Jesus Barroso Soares of Portugal. Since the 1950s, she said, Portuguese men started to leave the land and "the feminisation of agriculture" began — a phenomenon well-known throughout Black Africa. It meant more hard work for the women but "the man continued as chief, even though he worked the land only on his holidays from his job." Will the new generations of women accept this? Only improved education for women would be decisive in leading to a new power relationship between men and women, she concluded. But there was hope. Thanks to the European Community, agricultural training and credit schemes for young farmers of both sexes have been set up in Portugal.

From Uruguay, the message was that training proved that "the potential of rural women is explosive," according to Mrs. María Julia Pou de Lacalle Herrera. "By stimulating and supporting them you unchain an action that multiplies itself." The results are most effective, she added, if television and radio are used. Without training, said Grand Duchess Josephine Charlotte of Luxembourg, "women, and men for that matter, are not able either to know their rights and obligations or to take charge of their own destiny". One of the rural women at the Summit, Ms. Hajah Haton Binte Othman from Malaysia, described how she had been trained to grow mangoes and orchids, increased her income and generated work for members of her family.

There was also widespread agreement on the need for credit to be available to women on the same basis as it is available to men. Mrs. Margarita Cristiani-Burkard reported on what was being done in El Salvador: "In 1990 the Government started to create communal banks directed at women with few resources, giving priority to those who are heads of households. It has proved an excellent mechanism with rotating funds. There are now 220 communal banks in urban areas and 106 in the countryside." This concern was echoed in the speech of Mrs. Siti Mwinyi of Tanzania where the Government, she said, was planning to open a women's bank to provide credit for purchase of seeds, fertilizer and improved technologies.

Zambia is still wrestling with the problem, said Mrs. Vera Chiluba. International agencies were helping, but women lacked access to credit because they had no land to use as collateral. "The high rate of illiteracy has a negative effect," Mrs. Chiluba added. "Men's negative attitudes prevent women from benefiting. And unprofitable producer prices prevent women from being able to afford to buy new technology."

A rural woman from Senegal, Ms. Thiéna Gueye, criticized high rates of credit charged by moneylenders and called for the expansion of groups such as Senegal's National Federation of Groups for the Promotion of Women.

Credit is at the forefront of Botswana's agricultural policies, said Lady Olebile Gladys Masire. Some 52% of the projects supported by the Government's Financial Action Policy go to rural women, she said. In Peru, said Mrs. Susana Higuchi de Fujimori, the Government is aware of the urgent need for rural credit and has opened rural banks for this purpose. A call for more credit for rural women also came from Mrs. Cristina Chamorro Barrios of Nicaragua. In Chile, according to Mrs. Maria Soledad Alvear Valenzuela, a massive programme was under way to regularize rural land titles, financed by the World Bank, which would give priority to women who were heads of families.

Several of the participants dwelt on the plight of rural women. Mrs. Sh. Tsevelmaa Ochirbat of Mongolia said women had obtained many rights in her country but she described as "extremely harsh" a woman's life as a nomadic pastoralist with temperatures below freezing for six months a year. Mrs. Thongvinh Phomvihane of Laos said that in her country it was the women who bore the "heavy burden of daily life in the countryside". From Sierra Leone, Lady Hannah Momoh said special attention to women had not been paid in her country in the formulation of agricultural policies. She complained of low literacy rates in vocational and technical education. Mrs. Momoh lamented the girls who became pregnant at school, reverted to illiteracy and suffered from a poor standard of living.

The "serious obstacles" in reaching poor rural women in Gabon in a programme of public health—due to inadequate resources, logistical difficulties and a "certain incomprehension" on the part of the poorly prepared recipients—were described by Mrs. Edith Omar-Bongo. A complaint about the failure of preventive medicine programmes in Liberia came from Mrs. Comfort Thelma Duncan-Sawyer, who said sick rural women visited clinics "only when all help at home has failed". She also called for a campaign against early teenage marriages.

However, a more upbeat report came from Princess Sonam Chhoden Wangchuck of Bhutan who said women in her country had equal status with men by custom, tradition and law, they inherit and own land and other property, they manage their own money and "they play a lead role in farming decisions". From Lithuania, Mrs. Grazina Landsbergiene reported that a programme of land reform was being launched to create more small farmers. In Indonesia, Mrs. Sulasikin Murpratomo said that "provision of credits and aid is geared towards increasing the economic empowerment of the rural women ... leading to self-reliance".

Another rural woman, Ms. Ayse Ünlü, reported on the work of the Rural Women's Economic Development Programme in her country, Turkey. A similar women's organization, the Seva Vanitha Movement, is being developed in Sri Lanka, the First Lady, Mrs. Hema Premadasa, reported. Similarly, Angola's Government, now trying to restore an economy broken by 30 years of civil war, has established "a secretariat of state devoted exclusively for the promotion and development of women", according to Mrs. Ana Paula Dos Santos. Reports on programmes for women also came from Mrs. Rosario Paz Zamora of Bolivia, who described her Government's policy priorities, and Mrs. Constanca Mangué de Obiang of Equatorial Guinea.

Land is a key issue in Colombia, said Mrs. Ana Milena Muñoz de Gaviria. She reported that 20% of new land titles issued by the land-reform institute there went to women and it was hoped the percentage would rise. Mrs. Gaviria also said that women could be vitally important in protecting the environment, but that because they were extremely poor they were destroying forests for firewood. She hoped that the industrialized countries would understand that by helping to fight poverty they could protect the environment for all.

Concern about the environment was also voiced by Mrs. Lobo Touré of Mali, who worried that by collecting firewood women were becoming an "agent of desertification" and its first victim, and by Mrs. Aura Herzog of Israel, who worried about erosion, the use of poisonous fertilizer, the disposal of water, and air and water pollution. "The time has come for women to be as concerned with the environment as they are with health," she said.

"WE MUST HAND DOWN THE MESSAGE"

Dato Seri Datin Paduka Dr. Siti Hasmah Binte Haji Mohammed Ali of Malaysia called for "concerted efforts to sensitize women on their role of managing resources and conserve the environment". She added that "women, as mothers, must hand down this message to future generations. Only then can we ensure sustainable development".

The problems of poor rural women in the English-speaking Caribbean were underlined by Lady Ivy Cooke of Jamaica, who reported that of the 2.5 million women in the region, 40% were heads of households and a quarter of them worked smallholdings of less than one acre. They rarely owned land. Lady Cooke worried about the effect which increasing poverty among rural women was having on the future of the family as an institution promoting economic and social progress. Illiteracy was increasing in Latin America and the Caribbean in general. Rural women were five times more likely to be illiterate than urban women. They were 50% less likely than men to have access to advice about agricultural advisory services and training opportunities.

The start which Namibia's post-independence government has made in trying to help rural women was described by Mrs. Theopoldine Nujoma. The constitution says women have traditionally suffered discrimination and should be enabled to play a full role in the life of the nation. Women will be helped by two Government departments: for Women's Affairs and for Rural Development. The latter is to "alleviate poverty in rural areas with an emphasis on female-headed households, rural youth, poorest women, elderly and unemployed migrants".

Mrs. Marike de Klerk said that in neighbouring South Africa many voluntary organizations were working in rural areas. "Like me," she added, "many of them also believe that the answer lies not in mass migration from rural to urban areas but in raising standards of living in rural communities, among other things by enhancing the skills and economic capacity of rural women and their children".

From Senegal, Mrs. Elisabeth Diouf complained that millions of women worked long and hard without pay. She called for "true partnership" between women and men. Her speech attracted so much attention at home that she was greeted with friendly demonstrations when she returned to Dakar.

Queen Sofia of Spain said she came to the Summit to "express my gratitude, support and solidarity to so many rural women who silently, with a supreme effort, struggle day by day to improve the condition of life of their people, and especially old people and children, whose dependence on the work of the rural woman is total". Crown Princess Lalla Meriem of Morocco said her Government was doing its best to promote the welfare of rural women through better health services and living conditions. Mrs. Nabiha Gueddana of Tunisia stressed the need for food security in developing countries and urged that part of government spending aimed at achieving it should go for rural women.

Another speaker reminded her audience of the most pressing of all crises facing rural women: civil war. "I want to seize this opportunity to launch a vibrant appeal for the women who are the poorest

of the poor: women refugees who have lost everything in a civil war in Rwanda which has lasted a year," said Mrs. Immaculée Nyirabizeyimana.

Lady Lala Mara of Fiji summed it up by saying that the economic advancement of women in rural and urban areas "is intertwined with our social, political and legal empowerment". Structural adjustments were inevitable. "We must be prepared to encounter difficulties," she added. "For what we are advocating is a transformation of society."

Of the Summit's special guests, Dato Zakiah Hanum binte Haji Abdul Hamid of Malaysia said the lower strata of rural women had to be sought out, coached and guided. After teaching literacy, "the interest generated must be sustained through a continuous diffusion of knowledge, skills and values". Former President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania was blunt. "The present disgraceful conditions of poor women can be improved if we all work together with them, using our own skills and opportunities in their interest," he said. "It can be done. Do your part!"

Another special guest, Dr. Bashoroun M.K.O. Abiola of Nigeria, commended women's programmes in several countries and added: "Our challenge is to take these programmes to every region in every country." Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo of Burkina Faso, following up the frequent calls for rural credit for women, observed: "It's not just a question of access to rural credit but also a place in the great bank of human dignity ..." Among other special guests at the Summit was Professor Paolo Freire of Brazil.

One of the special representatives of First Ladies was Mrs. Shailaja Acharya, Nepal's Minister for Agriculture. She reported on the plight of women in her country, where the maternal mortality rate is 850 per 100,000 live births and the infant mortality rate is 107 per 1,000 live births. Most farm work is done by women yet agricultural advice is directed at men. "I suppose it is to rectify this situation that my Government has a woman in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture," she added. A Women in Development division has been started in her Ministry and female agricultural advisers are being recruited. Among other special representatives who spoke were Mrs. Jirina Calfova of Czechoslovakia, Mrs. Vilma Espín Guillois, President of the Federation of Cuban Women, Mrs. Saleha Farouq Etimadi of Afghanistan and Mrs. Nellie Nseula of Malawi.

THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE EC WILL HELP

There were several signs of international support for rural women. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, said his great hope was that the conference on the financing of development, which he intended to organize, would guarantee enough resources to help social reforms "and especially those consecrated to the development of women". He welcomed the Geneva Summit and undertook "that the UN will continue to work with determination, perseverance and imagination so that rural women in particular may play a greater role in the development of our planet".

There was a firm commitment in writing supporting aid for rural women from the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors. In a message to the Geneva Summit, Mr. Delors said:

Through the Lomé Convention and its policy towards Latin America and Asia, the European Community has the necessary legal and financial instruments. They are ready. It is up to decision-makers in the South to propose projects and use the means which have been released for the economic advancement of rural women. It is urgent to make progress in the areas of the right to land and access to credit and training.

Mr. Delors saw an opportunity for women in the wave of democratization which has passed over Latin America and is now spreading in Africa. He suggested that this was a good time to ask an awkward question: How could countries build genuine democracies if the elementary rights for women were not respected?

WOMEN ROAD-BUILDERS

James Ingram, the former Executive Director of the World Food Programme, underlined the importance of women in food-for-work projects. "Virtually the entire road network of Lesotho has been built by women; the construction of the largest irrigation infrastructures of India depended mostly on them; and the reforestation of large areas," he said.

Speaking for the World Bank, Julian Lord Grenfell said aid to women worked. "Very poor women in Bangladesh who were allowed to borrow for the first time at market rates not only increased their incomes by half; they repaid almost all their loans on time; they improved their children's attendance at school; and they increased their own practice of family planning," he reported. One study in Africa showed that, given the same access as men to land, education, extension services, information and credit, women outproduce men by 6%. About 40% of World Bank loans approved last year included specific actions to help women.

The world of Islam is moving towards promoting the role of women, said Hamid Algabid, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The last conference, in Dakar, ended with a declaration that reaffirmed "the importance of women in the process of development in Muslim societies and called for greater participation of women in the activities of economic and social development".

James Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF, took up a different question. "Some cynics have questioned the value of this unprecedented gathering of 64 First Ladies," he said. "UNICEF does not. This Summit can have many beneficial results that will greatly advance the health and well-being of women and girls. If the Geneva Summit were to reaffirm a first call for rural girls in all programmes for the advancement of women", he added, "you will help revolutionize the pace, the scope and the relevance of development strategies for the 1990s".

Priority will be given to rural women in the 1992-1996 programme of the African Development Bank, according to its President, Mr. Babacar Ndiaye. Some 40% of the Bank's soft loans and 30% of its non-concessional loans will go on agriculture. For the Inter-American Development Bank, Dr. Nohra Rey de Marulanda said the institution was launching a pilot project in Central America and Panama to document the role of women and to seek ways of enlarging women's access to credit, agricultural training and other services. At the request of Mrs. Ana Milena Muñoz de Gaviria, First Lady of Colombia, Dr. Rey de Marulanda announced that the Bank would see if it could extend the project to the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean.

An offer came from Dr. Mukhtar A. Hamour of the Islamic Development Bank. "The Bank extends a hand of cooperation to all international and national development institutions that are willing to carry out programmes in areas identified by this Summit," he said. Sympathy for promotion of the role of rural women also came from the International Monetary Funds's Mrs. Helen Junz, who said: "With many countries now in the process of economic adjustment, and 50 such programmes currently supported by the IMF, the need to assure better utilization of one of the most dynamic resources available to developing countries - their women - is ... a basic economic need."

The Director-General of the International Labour Organisation in Geneva, Mr. Michel Hansenne, issued a call for ILO conventions on the right of women and of rural workers not only to be ratified by all governments but also to be applied. The Director-General of the UN's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Mr. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, reported on the work of his Organization in helping rural women and concluded with an old saying: "Educate a man and you educate an individual. Educate a woman and you educate a nation."

Ms. Margaret Shields, Director of the UN's International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women pointed out that although it seemed obvious that more female agricultural advisers were needed in developing countries, too few girls were getting sufficient education to qualify for the specialised training required for the job. Mr. Gerald Trant, Executive Director of the UN's World Food Council, said the time was long overdue for the role of women to be understood as "a prime factor in rural development." Among other speakers representing UN bodies were Dr. Arcot Ramachandran, Executive Director of the UN Institute for Training and Research and Dr. M. Abdelmoumène of the World Health Organization.

The Wives of Heads of State or Government of many leading industrialized countries were not able to take part. On this subject the New York Times said, in an editorial: "By signing the Geneva Declaration for Rural Women, 64 First Ladies called welcome attention to the world's hardest and least recognized workers. It is a pity that Barbara Bush and most other Western First Ladies failed to attend." However, a message of Mrs. Barbara Bush was read in a plenary session in which she said:

As George Bush and I have travelled around the world we have seen for ourselves that rural women in every country are a vital part of the social and economic fabric of their societies. Their contributions are important not only to their families but to economic development and democracy itself. That is why we are so excited by the challenge of this Summit's goals and plans for increasing public awareness and commitment to the advancement of rural women throughout the world. And the Summit's involvement of so many distinguished women brings an especially high level of attention to this important global concern...May your work truly benefit the rural women of the world.

A DECLARATION DESIGNED TO LAST

At the end, the First Ladies approved The Geneva Declaration for Rural Women. This will be the basic document for future efforts around the world to promote the cause of rural women. It received international publicity. It was sent to governments who are asked to implement the measures demanded. It was also sent to donors in the hope that they will encourage and help governments to do so. And it was sent to the heads of all UN agencies as well as aid agencies linked to the UN system.

There are many declarations about pressing international issues which come and go. Will this one be treated any differently? It should be. Unlike some declarations, it is very practical. It is precisely targeted. It is carefully reasoned. And it has a provision for follow-up to make sure it has an impact.

The declaration begins with an expression of solidarity with rural women and the determination of the First Ladies to raise the level of awareness of decision-makers at the national, regional and international levels of the plight of rural women. They insisted that the work of rural women be acknowledged and properly valued.

They said women worked as farmers, wage-earners, petty traders, artisans, micro-producers and domestic servants, formed the backbone of the rural labour force and produced well over half of the developing world's food. "Yet over half a billion rural women are poor and lack access to resources and markets. In fact the number is estimated to have increased by 50% over the past 20 years," the Declaration added.

The First Ladies underlined the fact that rural women collected fuel, often firewood, and were vulnerable to environmental degradation. They said women needed training on alternative technologies for domestic fuels and on methods of preserving the environment.

After their preamble, the First Ladies set out 12 objectives. Top of the list was the need to mobilize political will at the national and international levels to produce actions that helped rural women. Next came the need to make sure that development plans took due account of the role of women in household, productive and community work.

Third came a call for resources to be distributed more fairly to women through "alternative policy instruments". Initiatives also were needed to boost production among rural women and men but with special attention to disadvantaged and female-headed households. Governments should realize that by promoting food production by rural women, they were enhancing their country's food security as well.

An effort was also needed, the First Ladies said, to lighten women's workload not only of farm work but also of gathering firewood, collecting water and countless other domestic tasks. Among the

other objectives were the need to improve mothers' health and nutrition, and to improve schools, radio and television so that they met the specific needs of rural women.

From a broader point of view, the First Ladies issued a call for rural women's "social, political and economic empowerment" including opportunities to assume leadership positions, possibly through rural women's organizations.

Then came the strategies to be adopted. The First Ladies asked aid donors of all kinds to spend more on rural women and for the women to take part in planning for their betterment. They asked governments to pass laws giving women equity in inheritance, marriage, divorce and child custody as well as protection from exploitation and guarantees of equal pay for equal work.

Donors were asked to make sure that policy-makers received training in gender issues. They especially needed to collect reliable information on which to make sound judgements about policies concerning rural women. Donors and governments were also asked to give rural women access to information about their rights — to social services, education, credit and market opportunities. New laws should spell out the right to access to land, including land of good quality, in their own name. Governments should give a helping hand when needed to the creation of networks of women's rural enterprises.

Banks should be encouraged to reach out with loans in rural areas to individuals and groups on the basis of "gender equality". Research institutes working on high-yield "miracle" seeds should also work on alternative energy resources and time-saving work methods for rural women. Agricultural training advisers (mostly men) should be taught "gender sensitization". They should gear their training to building on rural women's extensive knowledge of indigenous food crops, plants, animals, farming methods and ecosystems.

Adult education for rural women should be much improved and girls should receive at least primary and secondary education. Rural women should be given preferential access to government training programmes. Child marriages should be discouraged. And the level of social services should be kept as high as possible.

HOW TO FOLLOW IT UP

There was also a clear list containing different kinds of follow-up action:

- UN agencies should revise their guidelines for helping rural women by taking into account the Geneva Declaration.
- Governments should work out plans of action to help rural women.
- UN regional economic commissions should work out ways of exchanging experiences in programmes to help rural women.
- Aid agencies should "substantially" increase their resources spent on the specific and individual needs of rural women.
- Governments which have not done so should sign the convention banning discrimination against women.
- Governments should plan now to report "quantifiable progress" in helping rural women, to the 1995 UN Conference on Women.
- Since rural women represent a potent political force around the world, donors should help "the building of bridges across continents" for them to advance their cause.
- The First Ladies themselves will "work together in the coming years to mobilize political and financial resources".
- They will establish an International Steering Committee (ISC) with three First Ladies from each continent to meet biennially in order to review progress and support new ideas.

The committee was to be made up of the First Ladies of Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Tonga (for Asia); Angola, Nigeria and Senegal (for Africa); Colombia, El Salvador and Paraguay (for Latin America),

Belgium, Czechoslovakia and Turkey (for Europe) and Egypt, Jordan and Morocco (for the Near East and North Africa). Regional and national steering committees were to be set up later.

The First Ladies also committed themselves to seek the endorsement of the Geneva Declaration by the UN's Economic and Social Council. This will give it an international stamp of approval and support.

They decided to work closely with the committees in the UN system which coordinate policies on rural women. They were particularly interested in the sub-group on Women in Development of the UN's Joint Consultative Group on Policy and also in two panels, on People's Participation in Aid Planning and Women in Development, of the UN's Administrative Committee on Co-ordination. They will also work in close cooperation with the Division for the Advancement of Women in the UN office in Vienna.

The First Ladies also agreed to hold regional and national follow-up meetings organized by steering committees. They will help to push through plans of action developed by Summit follow-up committees and to monitor how the Geneva Declaration is put into practice. The idea is to ensure that the concerns of rural women are high on the agenda of all national, regional and international deliberations leading up to, and including, the 1995 UN World Conference on Women.

The ISC is to hold its first biennial meeting in February 1994 in Brussels, to be hosted by Queen Fabiola. Another meeting will be held before the UN Conference on Women in 1995. The ISC will send a report on the Geneva Summit and follow-up to this conference.

NO NEWS IS BAD NEWS

For those concerned with advocating a cause, lack of media coverage can be immensely frustrating. There is a distinction between publicity for publicity's sake and getting a message across by the most effective means. As for the problems of rural women, the world media are usually uninterested.

Not this time.

By the standards of press coverage of international conferences linked to the UN, this Summit received extraordinary treatment. More than one thousand articles were written world wide on this event.

Take Burundi. *Le Renouveau* ran an article on the Summit of 60 inches. In Nigeria, there were reports in the *New Nigerian*, *The Democrat*, the *Daily Times*, the *Punch*, *National Concord*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and the *Daily Sketch*.

Senegal too had wide coverage partly, like Nigeria, because its First Lady was one of the organizers of the Summit. Among the headlines: "Rural women, an army against hunger" and "Development feminine-style". *Togo-Presse* spoke of a "Conclave at Geneva". In Bangladesh, the *New Nation* ran long articles on such subjects as how "Income-producing ventures can help rural women". The *Jakarta Post*, in Indonesia, picked up Queen Fabiola's lament about rural women forced into prostitution in the towns. The *Indonesia Times* described the "plight of rural women around the world".

Dawn, a leading Pakistan newspaper, asked "What to do about poor rural women?" The *Pakistan Times*, reporting the Geneva Declaration, headlines: "Global body to mobilize political, financial support". The *Nation*, in a headline across five columns, told its readers: "90 percent of rural women have no access to financial credits". The *News* printed an article by IFAD's President Jazairy with the headline: "Putting poor women on the map".

In Belgium, the press coverage was remarkable, partly because Queen Fabiola was the patron. Never before can the Belgians have been provided with so much information about the rural poor. *Le Soir* described the Summit with a smile as "subversive" because the participants wanted to change the traditions of the countryside. Another headline said: "Condemned to poverty, they feed their families, and guarantee 60-70% of agricultural production, but they are too often forgotten by the experts."

AN "HISTORIC EVENT"

To coincide with what is called an "historic event", the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* printed a long article by Mr. Jazairy on "The misery of rural women in the South" and another article under the headline: "Women come to the aid of development." *Le Monde's* correspondent reported the stress at the Summit on women's education and the need to fight against sexism, and quoted the self-critical comment of Mrs. Rosine Vieyra Soglo of Benin, who said: "We bring up our males, our sons, badly because we turn them into lords".

The French news magazine *Point de Vue* had a four-page spread. The headline in *Jeune Afrique* was: "Honour to the ladies". A leading Italian newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, ran a 30-inch article on the First Ladies setting out the issues and commenting that the impoverishment of rural women was "a silent tragedy far from the corridors of power". Most Italian newspapers covered the Summit.

The coverage in Spain was extensive, partly because of the presence of Queen Sofia. Thorough reports appeared not only in leading newspapers *El País*, *La Vanguardia* and *ABC* but also in the glossy magazine *Hola* (a five-page spread) and the news magazines *Hechos*, *Semana*, *Diez Minutos*, *El Mundo* and *Panorama*, all of which ran two- to four-page spreads.

The Swiss, for whom big international conferences in Geneva are a common occurrence, realized that this one was different. "Chic women for shock Summit," headlined *La Suisse*, which provided voluminous coverage. It also headlined: "Solidarity, a feminine word" and "They fight for the poorest". *La Tribune* of Geneva offered some headline advice over the Summit's two days. On the first, it said "Women Unite". On the second: "Women, stay angry!" The *Journal de Geneve* reported that "First Ladies assault poverty". *La Liberté* of Fribourg, well-briefed, said: "A follow-up is essential". Coverage of the Summit by canton and smaller newspapers was unusually extensive.

In the Arab world, *El Watan* of Algeria reported on the Summit under the headline "An alarm bell". *Al Khabar* and *Le Matin* carried detailed stories. In Cairo, *Al Ahram*, a leading newspaper, carried five columns and Saudi Arabia's *Asharq al-Awsat* ran two long stories.

Coverage in Morocco was extensive. One long article in *Le Matin du Sahara* called Crown Princess Lalla Meriem's presence at the Summit "a symbol and a witness" of the country's commitment to helping rural women. *La Presse* of Tunisia reported that "the rich did not come to the rendez-vous". *As-Sabah's* comprehensive report covered two pages and *Al-Sharq* of Qatar filled one page with its story. Three leading Syrian newspapers, *Al-Thawra*, *Tichrin* and *Al-Baath*, covered the Summit thoroughly.

In London, the correspondent of the *Sunday Times* began her 35-inch report in an unusually self-deprecating manner:

"And how do you find staying at the Inter-Continental hotel?" I gaily asked Thiena Gueye, a Senegalese farmer, hoping for some amusing *Crocodile Dundee*-style anecdote, like the most pathetic of all patronising western reporters. She shot me a crushing look. "That is hardly the point," she said, through an interpreter. "I am here to fight for water, for roads, for credit, for rights."

The *International Herald Tribune* ran a long article by Mr. Jazairy, an editorial on the Summit by the *New York Times* and a critical article by a development specialist with a response. Mr. Jazairy's article was given the headline: "Putting women on the map." The critic, Peggy Antrobus, dismissed the Summit as a junket for big shots. The response came from the daughter of one of the organizers of the Summit, Dato Seri Datin Paduka Dr. Siti Hasmah Binte Mohammed Ali of Malaysia.

Her daughter, Marina, described her mother as "a medical doctor who spent most of her career working in rural areas on public health programmes" before her husband became Prime Minister of Malaysia. "As wife of the prime minister, she is able to combine her considerable social conscience with the clout to get things done," Marina wrote. "Social conscience is not the exclusive preserve of the non-elite, as Ms. Antrobus seems to think. Does she believe that women who happen to marry government leaders have no hearts and brains and should be decorative when they can do much more?"

The New York Times began by saying there was an air of gimmickry about the Summit but went on to comment that "the purpose was a good one: to draw attention to the appalling lot of the rural women in the poorest, most populous countries." The newspaper concluded that "Raising the status of women is the key to greater food output, better health care and increased literacy in developing countries."

Most notable by far in American coverage was a cover story over seven pages in Newsweek magazine pegged to the Summit and entitled "Women Power". It was a thorough, readable and punchy report. "Women do most of the work in the developing world," it said. "Now there is a campaign to help them." The Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Baltimore Sun and the Christian Science Monitor provided substantial reports. So did, in Canada, the Toronto Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star and the Montreal Gazette.

In Latin America coverage was extensive — leading newspapers in Colombia, such as El Espectador, El Tiempo, El País, La Prensa and La Tarde gave wide coverage. So did newspapers in Chile including El Mercurio. Among Peru's main papers, El Comercio ran four articles. Summit related reports appeared in Costa Rica, Bolivia and Ecuador just to name a few.

And the next stage? At the Summit, there was a universal determination to keep up the momentum.

Everybody agreed that there was much more to be done: the task had been only started. When asked, the First Ladies mostly used the same two words to sum up what they wanted: effective follow-up.

THE GENEVA DECLARATION FOR RURAL WOMEN



PREAMBLE

1. We, the Wives of Heads of State or Government from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania, have gathered here to express our solidarity with the rural women of the world. By expressing our solidarity, we are determined to raise the awareness of decision-makers, at the national, regional and international levels, of the condition of rural women. We declare our commitment to their social and economic advancement and, thereby, to the enhancement of the well-being of the rural family and to equitable, sustainable development.

2. We recognize the importance and value of rural women's contribution to democracy and socio-economic development. We also recognize that in many developing countries, women constitute more than 50% of the rural population and up to 50 - 70% of the agricultural labour force. Without their effective participation neither democracy nor development can be sustained. It is therefore necessary that rural women's multiple contributions to the family, to democracy and to development be acknowledged and properly valued. The undervaluing of rural women's contribution to development and their under-representation in decision-making have increased their marginalization.

3. We believe that the current global movement towards democracy will help to change social and political attitudes towards women and their access to and control over resources, while creating conditions under which rural women themselves will be more aware of their own self-image and rights. Therefore, we declare our resolve to play a decisive role in the democratization of our political systems, from grassroots to national level.

4. Rural women the world over are an integral and vital force in the development processes that are the key to socio-economic progress. Rural women include farmers, wage workers, petty traders, artisans, industrial home workers, micro-producers and domestic servants. They form the backbone of the agricultural labour force across much of the developing world and produce 35 - 45% of Gross Domestic Product and well over 50% of the developing world's food. Yet, over half a billion rural women are poor and lack access to resources and markets. In fact, the number is estimated to have increased by 50% over the past 20 years and today they outnumber poor men.

5. Among the factors that have contributed to the intensification of poverty over the last decade are: on-going economic crises in the developing world due to deteriorating terms of trade, the debt crisis, inefficient allocation of government expenditures, capital flight, the social costs of adjustment, political instability, recession in the developed world, environmental degradation and demographic pressure. Women's poverty has also been aggravated for a variety of reasons, among which are changes in household and family structures leading to a growing number of female-headed households and to a weakening of household survival strategies. In many developing countries today, more than one-third of rural households are headed by a female.

6. Poverty intensifies the constraints under which women struggle to survive and carry out their responsibility to provide family and national food security.

7. The lack of support for women's economic activities, and particularly for those of the poorest, is not simply a women's issue. It is a general development problem which must be addressed, because gender equality, poverty reduction and development are inextricably linked.

8. Up to 90% of rural women in developing countries rely on the land for their livelihood. They are the main providers of water and fuelwood and are responsible for the health of their families. Rural women are vulnerable to environmental degradation and the diminution of natural resources, and they cannot always rely on the sustained use of resources when these are under pressure. It is important to consider, as a priority, training strategies for rural women on alternative technologies for domestic fuels. Furthermore, recognizing that rural women are central to sustaining the resource base and that they are often at the forefront of popular movements to protect the environment, development interventions must draw upon their traditional knowledge and experience of environmental conservation.

9. Building on the Mexico and the Copenhagen Declarations, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development of African Women, and in view of the forthcoming 1995 Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, we women around the world are determined to arouse public opinion and mobilize all necessary political will and resources in order to transform the status and quality of life of rural women and their families.

10. In this context, we take note of the plans of action and the specific guidelines developed by a number of United Nations organizations and non-governmental organizations for the advancement of rural women in accordance with their own mandates.

11. Rural women's social and economic advancement has to be promoted within the framework of national plans for social and economic development. In this process close cooperation and partnership between men and women is essential. This cooperation must be strengthened at all levels of development intervention by making public opinion and policy-makers and implementers aware of the importance of the multiple roles of women.

OBJECTIVES

12. In their operational strategies and action programmes, many national governments, development organizations and international financial institutions address the problem of women in general, without specifically focusing on rural women. We urge that future strategies and actions have as their primary focus the condition of rural women, especially the poorest. The objectives of such efforts should be to:

- (i) Mobilize political will at the national and international levels in order to target rural women as participants and direct beneficiaries of all development policies, programmes and projects.
- (ii) Ensure that the economic needs and well-being of rural women are taken account of in all sectoral policies and programmes by bringing into sharp focus the role of women in household, productive and community work, in the design of development interventions and the adequate allocation of resources.
- (iii) Improve rural women's access to resources through alternative policy instruments that ensure more equitable gender-based distribution of land, labour, capital, technology, social services and infrastructure.
- (iv) Launch initiatives essential for raising the productive capacities of both men and women, with special attention to rural women from disadvantaged households, female-headed households, young rural women, disabled women, and migrant and displaced women.
- (v) Promote national and household food security by supporting the critical role of women in food production and income generation.
- (vi) Alleviate women's heavy workload, which often involves long hours spent daily gathering fuel, collecting water, producing and preparing food, maintaining their homes, nurturing their children and, in addition, earning incomes that are essential to the survival of their families.
- (vii) Improve the health and nutritional status of mothers and their children and thereby the quality of life of the family.
- (viii) Reorient the information, communication and educational systems so that they meet the specific needs of rural women while preserving and promoting their cultural identity.
- (ix) Optimize the role of rural women as agents of change, and create conditions for their social, political and economic empowerment.
- (x) Create opportunities for rural women to assume leadership positions in the decision-making process.
- (xi) Promote, strengthen and disseminate rural women's organizations in order to establish effective channels for their access to decision-making bodies at all levels.
- (xii) Develop a constructive partnership between men and women in rural areas, based on social mobilization and an enhanced understanding of women's multiple roles and economic needs.

STRATEGIES

13. In order to achieve measurable progress in the economic advancement of rural women and improve the welfare of rural families around the world, with particular focus on the poorest, we define and recommend the following strategies, recognizing that full political commitment is a pre-condition for their successful implementation:

- (i) Governments, national institutions, non-governmental organizations, private sector agencies, United Nations agencies and other donor agencies should allocate greater resources to promote the economic and social advancement of rural women.
- (ii) Rural women should be invited to participate in the formulation of development plans and policies which affect their well-being. Project design teams should include representatives of rural women to ensure that they benefit equitably from development.
- (iii) New legislation and institutional procedures should be introduced and/or the existing ones reformed in order to ensure that rural women have equitable and sustainable access to productive resources. Similar measures should be taken to ensure that women have equity in inheritance, marriage, divorce and child custody, with due regard for different legal systems. Also, legal and administrative measures should be taken to protect rural women from exploitation in the labour, capital and product markets. They must be assured of equal pay for equal work.
- (iv) Mechanisms must be established, with adequate resource support, to provide gender-analysis training to policy-makers, development practitioners and field workers and to collect and analyse local, national, and regional data. These will assist policy-makers and project designers in assessing the socio-economic condition of rural women so that they can target development interventions at the disadvantaged groups and design indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of projects. This action is recommended in view of the fact that data reflecting the economic and social significance of rural women's work, disaggregated by gender and income levels, are scarce. Even where they exist, they rarely appear in the government statistics used to formulate policies and develop programmes, largely because the economic value of much of women's work is not properly measured.
- (v) Similar mechanisms should be in place to make information available to rural women on a wide range of subjects relevant to their needs and constraints. All rural women must have secure access to information in areas that they consider of most importance, and they should be made aware of their rights as well as of the resources, technology, production, social services, market opportunities and credit available to them. Women should also be given access to training in communication techniques so that they can produce and circulate their own information materials as needed. The mass media such as newspapers, radio, television and films should have special space and time allocated for programmes for rural women in which they would not only be the focus but could also express their views.
- (vi) Existing land legislation should be reviewed so that rural women are not discriminated against in gaining access to land. Institutions should be set up to promote a more equitable distribution of land, and to ensure the security of women's access to land of good quality. Women should be considered as direct beneficiaries of agrarian reform or settlement programmes and land property titles should be registered under the name of women tenants as well as men. Mechanisms should also be in place to reduce women's vulnerability to loss of land in cases of divorce, separation and widowhood. Support should be mobilized to protect individual and communal landholdings, and natural resources from environmental damage.
- (vii) Policy and resource support should be provided to strengthen programmes and projects which raise rural women's non-agricultural self-employment and improve their access to

micro-enterprises. A network of rural women's enterprises should be established to facilitate entry into large-scale outlets and marketing organizations.

- (viii) Rural women's access to credit and financial services should be improved, on the basis of gender equality, by encouraging financial institutions to create new procedures for reaching rural beneficiaries and promoting community groups that will provide a local structure for improving rural women's access to information, training and guarantees, so that credit can be readily made available to them.
- (ix) National, regional and international research institutions should reorient their programmes to address the problems of rural women, particularly in areas of technology for alternative energy sources and improved productivity and time-saving for women, keeping in view the requirements of health and safety. Rural women should also have full access to modern institutions and technology. Priority should be given to infrastructure development to improve women's access to water, fuel, and health, education and extension services.
- (x) Rural women have extensive knowledge of indigenous food crops, plants, animals, farming methods and ecosystems. Therefore, they should be involved in the discussions about what technologies and other resources they need. National extension systems should be reoriented in order to disseminate appropriate technologies for women. To make extension services more effective, the curriculum for extension workers should include gender sensitization. The number of women extension workers should be increased and local women trained as extension workers. The language of extension should be accessible to rural women. Strong links should be established between researchers, women farmers and extension workers.
- (xi) Facilities for women's education and functional literacy should be strengthened, and access to these made easier for rural women. They should be included in training programmes, in the use of appropriate agricultural techniques and in natural resource management. Women should get priority in the training of trainers.
- (xii) Conditions should be created to ensure that rural girls and young women receive at least primary and secondary education, health and vocational training and support to enhance the quality of their lives.
- (xiii) Rural women, especially those from disadvantaged households, must be included in training programmes and non-formal education of all types, and given preferential access to fellowships and scholarships.
- (xiv) Parents and community leaders should be sensitized and child marriages discouraged, so that boys and girls are given equal opportunity in education and training.
- (xv) Adequate resources should be allocated to maintain and improve social services in the areas of education, health, family planning, nutrition and recreation. These are essential to the well-being of rural families and complementary to rural men's and women's productive capacity.

IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP

14. The objectives of this Declaration can be realized only if the strategies outlined are implemented and followed up. To this end:

- (i) We welcome the fact that many United Nations agencies have established policies and guidelines concerning their approach to the needs of rural women. We urge that such guidelines be revised, as appropriate, in recognition of the concerns which we have expressed in this Declaration.
- (ii) We request all governments to do their utmost to formulate specific plans of action for the advancement of rural women outlining policies, projects and programmes. These plans of action should include a detailed assessment of the resources required and specify institutional responsibilities for mobilizing resources, implementing programmes, and monitoring and evaluation.
- (iii) We urge the United Nations Regional Economic Commissions to aid national governments in mobilizing resources for financial and technical assistance, to facilitate the exchange of country/project experiences and to establish a regional apparatus for monitoring the progress of implementation of this Declaration.
- (iv) We urge multilateral and bilateral funding agencies and non-governmental organizations substantially to increase their allocation of resources to projects and programmes which fully take into account the specific and individual needs of women, especially in rural areas. In addition, all financing and technical assistance agencies are urged to ensure that the projects they support become increasingly sensitive to issues of poverty and gender. We also urge them to ensure that project monitoring systems maintain gender- and income-specific data on targets and achievements. All food agencies, international financial institutions and other interested inter-governmental bodies should seek to reinforce existing mechanisms so as to improve coordination of their activities to implement the recommendations of this Declaration.
- (v) We appeal to all governments that have already signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and other United Nations resolutions pertaining to rural women to implement them fully, and urge governments which have not done so to ratify the Convention.
- (vi) We appeal to all governments and regional and international organizations to report to the 1995 Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women on quantifiable progress in implementing policies and programmes with significant positive impact on the economic and social well-being of rural women and their families.
- (vii) We recognize that within the context of international cooperation (i.e., North-South and South-South relations) the rural women of our countries represent a potent political force. This force can be utilized to strengthen and consolidate international cooperation in all its forms. We regard the initiative of this Summit as a step towards the building of bridges between rural women across continents - making a contribution to a new form of international cooperation - which will have a significant impact on global development, peace and harmony. We call on the international community to support this initiative, as provided for in Resolution E/1991/64, dated 26 July 1991, of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), which reflects the spirit and content of this Declaration in policies and programmes at all levels.
- (viii) We declare that we remain fully committed to the realization of the aspirations of rural women as reflected in this Declaration. We will continue to work together in the coming years

to mobilize political and financial resources and to establish enduring procedures globally, regionally and nationally to monitor the implementation of the Declaration.

- (ix) Finally, we hereby resolve to establish at the global level a committee of representatives of the Wives of Heads of State or Government with three members from each continent. This group will meet biennially to review the progress of implementation and to support national and regional initiatives for the advancement of rural women.

PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FOLLOW-UP TO
THE GENEVA SUMMIT



PROPOSED ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE GENEVA SUMMIT

The Geneva Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women urges that necessary steps be taken by all concerned to ensure that countries will give urgent priority to rural women in development programmes to change their conditions of life and to prevent 15 million additional rural women from falling annually into the poverty trap. To this end,

The Geneva Summit proposes 13 follow-up activities to support the implementation of the Geneva Declaration. The proposed activities are listed below:

- a. to set-up an International Steering Committee of the Geneva Summit on Rural Women (ISC), in accordance with paragraph 14 (ix) of the Geneva Declaration;*
- b. to prepare the report of the Geneva Summit;*
- c. to arrange for the endorsement of the Geneva Declaration by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) in 1992 and for support by member states;*
- d. to establish a working link between the ISC and existing inter-agency mechanisms for women in development;*
- e. to participate in the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992;*
- f. to hold the first Summit follow-up meeting in June 1992 in a place to be decided later;*
- g. to hold regional follow-up meetings within one year of the Summit;*
- h. to hold national follow-up meetings;*
- i. to formulate and implement plans of action developed by summit follow-up committees at national, regional and international levels in accordance with the Geneva Declaration;*
- j. to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Geneva Declaration;*
- k. to hold the first biennial meeting of First Ladies of member countries of the ISC in February 1994 in Brussels hosted by H.M. the Queen of the Belgians;*
- l. to hold a special meeting of the ISC prior to the 1995 UN World Conference on Women; and*
- m. to report to the 1995 UN World Conference on Women.*

ISC OF THE GENEVA SUMMIT ON RURAL WOMEN

In accordance with paragraph 14 (ix) of the Geneva Declaration for Rural Women, an ISC of the Geneva Summit on Rural Women is hereby established with the following membership:

Asia

1. Malaysia
2. Sri Lanka
3. Tonga

Africa

1. Angola
2. Nigeria
3. Senegal

the Americas

1. Colombia
2. El Salvador
3. Paraguay

Europe

1. Belgium
2. Czechoslovakia
3. Turkey

Near East and North Africa

1. Egypt
2. Jordan
3. Morocco

The Summit nominates H.M. the Queen of the Belgians as the Chairperson. The first follow-up meeting of the ISC in June 1992 will nominate five countries as Vice-Chairpersons, and one as Secretary-General of the ISC. The terms of reference of the ISC are presented in Attachment 1. An independent Summit secretariat will be set up and housed in the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to provide technical and administrative support to the ISC. The secretariat will be financed through voluntary contributions. Bilateral and multilateral donors, UN agencies, regional economic commissions and private donors are also requested to make financial contributions to facilitate the work of the ISC.

REPORT OF THE GENEVA SUMMIT

IFAD is requested to publish the report of the Geneva Summit within three months of the Summit and distribute it worldwide.

ENDORSEMENT OF THE GENEVA DECLARATION BY ECOSOC

IFAD is requested to work with countries whose First Ladies/senior envoys participated in the Geneva Summit to ensure that the ECOSOC, through an appropriate resolution, endorses the Geneva Declaration in 1992 and transmits it to the General Assembly of the UN. Arrangements will also be made by the participants of the Summit to obtain support for the Geneva Declaration from member states.

ESTABLISHING THE LINKS BETWEEN THE ISC AND EXISTING INTER-AGENCY MECHANISMS

The ISC Secretary-General will write to all agencies and inter-agency mechanisms such as the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) Women in Development Sub-Group, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Task Force on Rural Development and its panel on People's Participation and Women in Development, the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the UN Commission on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and any others, to seek support for the implementation of the Geneva Declaration and to define the mechanisms for coordination. The ISC will work, in particular, in close collaboration with the Division for the Advancement of Women in the UN office in Vienna.

REPORT TO THE RIO EARTH SUMMIT

It is decided that the ISC Secretary-General or a designated member will submit a report on the Geneva Summit to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992, highlighting the link between the preservation of the environment and the economic advancement of rural women.

FIRST SUMMIT FOLLOW-UP MEETING

With support from donors, the ISC will take the responsibility for organizing the first follow-up meeting. The meeting will work out the details of follow-up activities and the methodology of global monitoring of the implementation of the Geneva Declaration. The meeting will also establish the Regional Steering Committee of the Geneva Summit on Rural Women (RSC), and provide guidelines for the establishment of National Steering Committees (NSC) of the Geneva Summit on Rural Women (proposed structure and terms of reference of RSC and NSC are presented in Attachment 1). In addition to members of the ISC, a representative of the UN Secretary-General, representatives of the UN, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and regional and economic commissions will be invited to attend this meeting.

REGIONAL FOLLOW-UP MEETING

Regional follow-up meeting(s) will be organized at regional/sub-regional level(s) by the RSC with support from donor agencies, in particular regional and sub-regional organizations. The meetings of the RSC should be held within one year to finalize regional action plans on the basis of a review of national plans of action. The national plans of action should be prepared before June 1993 by the NSC set up for this purpose.

NATIONAL FOLLOW-UP MEETINGS

The participating Wives of Heads of State or Government and other heads of delegations as well as interested countries which have not participated in the Summit are invited to establish NSCs as soon as possible after the first meeting of the ISC. The NSCs should hold meetings as appropriate with participation of all relevant national and international development agencies working at the country level to draw up national plans of action and forward them to the RSCs in order to assist in the formulation of regional plans of action.

The NSCs should be seen as an overall national mechanism to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Geneva Declaration through national organizations, government programmes and projects, NGOs, UN agencies and other external aid agencies. NSCs will periodically submit reports to the RSCs on the progress of implementation of Summit follow-up activities.

As the coordinator of the UN system operating in the field, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is requested to facilitate NSC involvement in all relevant project identification missions, implementation and project evaluations undertaken by UN agencies, development banks and bilateral donors. Each Wife of Head of State or Government of a developing country, in her

capacity as patron of the NSC, might also write an open letter to all development agencies operating in the country, urging them to include the objectives and strategies of the Geneva Declaration in their programmes and financially contribute to the functioning of the NSCs.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PLANS OF ACTION

The ISC, RSCs and NSCs will assist, where appropriate, in the implementation of all follow-up activities, in accordance with the Geneva Declaration. All national and international development agencies are requested to review their priorities in the light of the Geneva Declaration in order to promote the economic advancement of rural women.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the implementation of the Geneva Declaration could be carried out by the ISC, RSCs and NSCs, as well as by individual development agencies and existing inter-agency mechanisms.

FIRST BIENNIAL MEETING OF ISC COUNTRIES

The first biennial meeting of the ISC will be held in Brussels in February 1994 and will be followed by a meeting of the First Ladies of ISC countries to review the progress of the implementation of the Geneva Declaration. This meeting will be hosted by H.M. the Queen of the Belgians.

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ISC PRIOR TO THE 1995 UN WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

The ISC will be convened in a special meeting in 1995, prior to the UN World Conference on Women, to review the progress of the implementation of the Geneva Declaration for the purpose of preparing a report for the Conference.

REPORT TO THE 1995 UN WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

Arrangements should be made with the Secretariat of the Conference to have one representative Wife of Head of State or Government of ISC countries report to the Conference on the global implementation of the Geneva Declaration, thereby establishing a direct link between the summit of the Wives of Heads of State or Government and the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women.

STRUCTURE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SUMMIT FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEES

THE ISC OF THE GENEVA SUMMIT ON RURAL WOMEN

Structure:

It is resolved to establish at the global level a committee of representatives of the Wives of Heads of State or Government with three members from each continent: Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe, Near East and North Africa. This group will meet biennially to review the progress of the implementation of the Geneva Declaration for Rural Women and to support national and regional initiatives for the advancement of rural women.

Terms of reference:

- (i) to establish links with existing inter-agency mechanisms for women in development on matters related to the implementation of the Geneva Declaration;
- (ii) to monitor the implementation of the Geneva Declaration for Rural Women and of the plans of action resulting therefrom;
- (iii) to organize periodic meetings to monitor the progress of the implementation of the recommendations of the Geneva Summit in different continents;
- (iv) to ensure that policies of national/regional/international governmental/non governmental entities take into account the recommendations of the Geneva Summit;
- (v) to support national, regional and international initiatives for the economic advancement of rural women;
- (vi) to ensure that the concerns of rural women are put high on the agenda of all national, regional and international deliberations leading up to and including the 1995 UN World Conference on Women; and
- (vii) to report to the 1995 UN World Conference on Women.

RSC'S OF THE GENEVA SUMMIT ON RURAL WOMEN

Suggested structure:

- Wives of Heads of State or Government of member countries of ISCs from the region;
- ISC members from the region;
- other representatives co-opted by ISC members, regardless of whether or not they participated in the Geneva Summit;
- representatives of regional financial institutions, UN agencies, regional economic commissions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and
- representatives of national ministries of finance, planning, agriculture, rural development and women in development.

Suggested terms of reference:

- (i) to prepare plans of action for the respective regions, in accordance with the Geneva Declaration, taking into account regional and sub-regional specificities and national plans of action;
- (ii) to prepare and implement specific regional and sub-regional activities such as, training for rural women, research on rural women, exchange visits and projects of regional significance;

- (iii) to assist NSCs in the preparation of national plans of action;
- (iv) to mobilize support from regional institutions in order to ensure the integration of Summit recommendations in their policies and programmes;
- (v) to assist and participate actively in major regional political and economic meetings in order to ensure that the concerns of rural women are fully reflected in the deliberations and conclusions of these meetings;
- (vi) to monitor the progress of the implementation of regional plans of action, following the spirit and content of the Geneva Declaration;
- (vii) to organize periodic meetings for evaluation and coordination at the regional level;
- (viii) to ensure that all donors incorporate the recommendations of the Geneva Declaration in their regional projects and programmes;
- (ix) to report periodically to the ISC on the implementation of regional and national plans of action in support of the Geneva Declaration; and
- (x) to prepare input for the 1995 UN World Conference on Women.

NCS'S OF THE GENEVA SUMMIT ON RURAL WOMEN

Suggested structure:

- Wife of Head of State or Government of the country;
- representatives of relevant governmental bodies, including ministerial departments responsible for agriculture, rural development, the advancement of women, and planning;
- representatives of regional and international development agencies and NGOs working in the country; and
- representatives of national financial institutions.

Suggested terms of reference:

- (i) to ensure that the concerns of rural women will be put high on the national policy agenda;
- (ii) to formulate national plans of action;
- (iii) to ensure the implementation and effective integration of Summit recommendations in national policies and programmes;
- (iv) to ensure that all donors incorporate the recommendations of the Geneva Declaration in their projects and programmes at the national level;
- (v) to implement, where appropriate, projects and programmes for the promotion of the economic advancement of rural women at the national level;
- (vi) to prepare inputs for the 1995 UN World Conference on Women; and
- (vii) to monitor and evaluate periodically the progress of the implementation of national plans of action in light of the Geneva Declaration, and to report periodically to the RSC.

STATUTES OF THE ISC

SUGGESTIONS BY THE ISC SECRETARIAT (BASED ON VARIOUS SOURCES)

A. Membership

- The members of the ISC are wives of heads of state or government. It can happen that, because she is unable to join the ISC herself, a First Lady suggests that another woman of her country would take her place in the ISC. However, suggestions are subject to approval by all ISC-members; this possibility to include non-First Ladies as members of the Committee must remain an exception to the rule.
- Originally, the number of ISC-members was set to 15, being 3 for each region involved. In 1994, the ISC was enlarged by a sixteenth member, representing the Caribbean. The ISC-members of one region can suggest to modify the number of First Ladies representing their region in the ISC. Suggestions will be subject to approval by all members of the ISC.
- The duration of the memberships will be limited to 4 years, which means that the first mandates that were issued in 1992 will come to an end after the Amman-meeting. The mandates of the members can be renewed only once.
- During their meetings, the members of the ISC can decide to invite new members to join the ISC. The invitation will be made to the First Lady herself, and not to the country she represents, which implies that, if the First Lady becomes unable to attend the ISC-activities, her mandate will return to the ISC. In case of the retirement of a First Lady from the Committee, the other countries of the region should make a suggestion with regard to her replacement.
- The main motivation behind the suggestion or approval of the invitation of a new member, should be the personal involvement of the First Lady in the action towards the improvement of the living conditions of rural women, or her determination to become an active member of the Committee. It is also important to invite only these First Ladies, whose husbands still have a mandate as head of state or government for a minimum duration of 2 years.
- The mandate of a First Lady as a member of the ISC can come to an end before the full completion of the 4 years period in three cases :
 - in case a First Lady is unable to exercise her mandate, due to death, or to the ending of her husband's mandate as a head of state or government;
 - each member of the ISC can decide to retire from the Committee;
 - in case a First Lady remains totally absent from the ISC-activities, the ISC-members can decide to put her mandate at the Committee's disposal.

In these cases, the First Ladies of the region of the retiring member should make a suggestion regarding her replacement.

- In order to enable new members to join the ISC, a minimum of 25 % of the members will leave the Committee after each ISC-meeting.

- Each member of the ISC will designate one fixed Representative. The Representatives will participate in the preparatory meetings related to the ISC-meetings. Attention will be paid by the First Ladies in order to send the same Representative to the various meetings.

B. Presidency

- Every two years, on a rotational basis according to the regions, the Presidency of the ISC will be entrusted to an other First Lady.
- The responsibilities of the Presidency of the ISC include the organisation and the taking care of the bi-annual ISC-meeting and of the preceding meeting of the Representatives, as well as their management and their secretariat.
- It can be suggested to the Presidency, to maintain close collaboration with the Representatives of the former and the future presidencies.

C. Patronage

- The members of the ISC can ask a First Lady who has been particularly involved in the activities of the Committee, to become patron of the ISC.
- The patronage of the ISC is not linked to its Presidency; it does not involve specific obligations.

D. Prominent advisors

- The members of the ISC can ask prominent women, who have been involved in a significant way in the action for the economic advancement of rural women, to join the Committee. Suggestions will be subject to approval by all members of the ISC.
- These women will be invited, in the capacity of "prominent advisors", to participate in the activities of the ISC.
- The mandates of the "prominent advisors" will not be limited in time.

E. Meetings of the ISC

- Every two years, a meeting of the ISC will be organised by the Presidency.
- The Presidency will decide about the date of the meeting, as well as about the modalities of its organisation.
- On initiative of the Presidency, a meeting of the Representatives will be organised during the months that precede the ISC-meeting.

F. Themes to be discussed and actions to be taken

- The agenda of the ISC-meetings will always include the evaluation of the situation of rural women in the various parts of the world.
- The Presidency of the ISC can include other themes on the agenda of the meeting, taking into account that these themes will have a direct link with the situation of rural women living in poverty.

G. Regional Steering Committees

- The creation of Regional Steering Committees on the economic advancement of rural women will benefit from the full support of the ISC.
- The Regional Steering Committees will be recognised by the ISC as the intermediaries between the ISC and the First Ladies of the regions involved.



INTERNATIONAL STEERING
COMMITTEE (ISC) ON THE
ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT
OF RURAL WOMEN

COMITE DIRECTEUR
INTERNATIONAL (CDI)
SUR LA PROMOTION
ECONOMIQUE DES
FEMMES RURALES

INTERNATIONALE
STUURGROEP (ISG) VOOR
DE BEVORDERING VAN DE
ECONOMISCHE SITUATIE
VAN RURALE VROUWEN

COMITE DIRECTIVO
INTERNACIONAL (CDI)
SOBRE EL ADELANTO
DE LA MUJER RURAL

اللجنة التوجيهية
الدولية المعنية بالنهوض
بالأحوال الاقتصادية
لنساء الريف

SIXTH WORKING MEETING OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ISC

November 29 and 30, 1995
Palais d'Egmont, Brussels

Agenda

1. Evaluation of the ISC-participation to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing
2. Financial situation of the ISC after Beijing
3. Agenda of the Second ISC Meeting (spring 1996 in Amman)
 - 3.1 Themes to be discussed
(including the implementation of the "rural women"-aspects of the Beijing platform for action; other suggestions are welcome)
 - 3.2 Future of the ISC
(for more details, see annexes 2 and 10 of the Report on the ISC-activities in Beijing)
 - a) Membership, Presidency and Patronage
 - b) Contributions
 - c) International Secretariat
 - d) Meetings (ISC-international)
 - 3.3 Creation of Regional Steering Committees (cfr Asian-Pacific region)
 - 3.4 Eventual extension of the ISC activities to other, related themes
4. Practical organisation of the Amman Meeting
(including eventual participation of rural women, international institutions, ...)
5. Miscellaneous



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