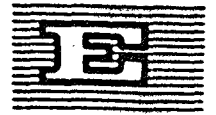




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GENERAL

**WORLD CONFERENCE
OF THE
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR**
MEXICO CITY, 19 JUNE TO 2 JULY 1975

UN/SA COLLECTION

E/CONF.66/BP/13
23 May 1975

ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

CONFERENCE BACKGROUND PAPER

GENUINE EDUCATION FOR EQUALITY

Prepared by the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization

1. The purpose of this document is to supplement and expand the information supplied by Unesco for inclusion in the Secretary-General's report on item 9 concerning the obstacles encountered by women in their attempts to gain equality of opportunity, rights and possibilities in the field of education and training. It is more ambitious and at the same time more concentrated. It treats of ideas, as seems appropriate to the competence of an organization which claims an equal interest in science, culture and communication.

I. General considerations

2. Two changes are at present radically altering the status of women, far beyond anything stated to be intended; these are, firstly, the development of birth control and, secondly, the world-wide increase in paid work for women.
3. As far as methods of contraception are concerned, it is true to say that, for various reasons, they have not yet revolutionized the status of women throughout the world. But the potential is there, and in many countries where, only a few years ago, no one would have dreamed of using them, husbands and wives are going discreetly to obtain information or to ask for help. The spacing out of births, the choice of how many children to have and when, and even the idea of an optimum size for a family, or the desire to have no children at all, are making a difference to the economic and cultural achievements within women's grasp, and are placing their rôle in the family and in society in a new light.
4. In the outward aspects of women's work, several new phenomena are emerging. Except for a few privileged individuals, women have, of course, always worked hard in all regions of the world. But unprecedented tendencies have been appearing in the past ten years, both statistically and in regard to social and cultural values.
5. In the developed countries, the number of women in paid employment is growing rapidly. In Western Europe, 30 to 40 per cent of women are wage-earners, and more than 50 per cent in the Soviet Union. In the United States of America, the number of working women rose from 34 per cent in 1950 to 43 per cent in 1971. Still more

striking is the increase in the number of married women who go out to work: in Australia, they accounted for 6.5 per cent in 1947 and 37.3 per cent in 1973. Married women now represent 20.7 per cent of the total labour force of the country. In Canada, 57 per cent of working women are married. At the high level of competition and competence that is usual in industrialized societies, the education of these women and of all women, strongly influences their station in life, even when, as in some of these societies, the social structures as a whole provide considerable scope for the advancement of women.

6. In the developing countries, there has always been a very heavy concentration of working women in the rural areas; this is still so but there are variations from region to region. In Africa, nine-tenths of the working women are to be found in agriculture. In Asia, work on the land is more equally shared between men and women, either owing to the modernization of methods, which seems for the time being, to be disadvantageous to women, or for cultural and religious reasons which militate against women's working outside the home. In Latin America, women are mostly employed in the tertiary sector. Whatever the situation, the problem of the advancement of women is encountered in a new form because more women are coming into the employment market than in the past, because of changes in agriculture and because of the drift from the country to the towns. In every case, the position of women has to be considered afresh, and education is playing an even more important part than it used to do in deciding their fate.

7. In fact, although paid work for women is everywhere on the increase, the sort of work entrusted to women is less well paid and less important than that given to men, even in the fields of education and health, where there is a strong feminine professional element. This is still more true in other fields. In Canada, the hourly wage is lower for women in a considerable number of occupations, excluding those of waitress and washer-up. In Morocco and in the Philippines, where women have rapidly gained a place in the tertiary sector, since 27 per cent of office workers are women in Morocco and 23 per cent in the Philippines, women holding posts

of administrative responsibility account for 10 per cent in Morocco and 14 per cent in the Philippines. The socialist countries show the highest proportion of women in all types of employment and, in particular, in the traditionally male occupations or in scientific posts in leading fields - 75,000 women engineers in 1969 in the USSR, for example - but childcare and housework nevertheless remain serious concerns.

8. Besides the discrimination from which women suffer in work outside the home, there is also the silent discrimination consisting in failure to accord due recognition to the work of keeping a home, and in neglect of the importance of education in the smooth running of family life, including the performance of housework, agricultural and other tasks. According to John Galbraith, in 1970 the American housewife carried out at home the equivalent of \$257 worth of work per week, representing \$13,364 per annum, and the total amount of "services" rendered by American women to the nation amounted in 1970 to approximately one-quarter of the total gross national product. Moreover, the majority of women who "go out to work" have no help at home, so that the hours they work in the course of a week mount up to staggering totals. As for women in the developing countries, it is well known that they lead a hard life, although their status is often portrayed in an over-simplified manner in western countries. For all these women, as well as for men, whether they be peasants, office-workers or university graduates, a body of practical knowledge, or - why not say it? - of domestic, medical and technical science, is becoming more and more desirable for the management of home and family and on the general business of living. Here too, education is essential, even in the things which seem simplest, because competence exists at this level too and renders considerable services, even though, very often, the domestic virtues have been invoked in attempts to chain women premanently to the secondary tasks which they alone were supposed to be capable of carrying out, and from which, in fact, they liberated men.

9. It is Unesco's belief that the need for qualified manpower and a wider range of skills in all societies is, in the long run, working in favour of the advancement of women, even if, at present, this need brings with it a number of extra difficulties and strains for women themselves. and is causing uneasiness in the most traditional

communities or groups. In the final reckoning, the prospect of a better life is bound to be attractive to all and an understanding will gradually dawn that those values which are thought, mistakenly, to be threatened by the emancipation of women will be better defended by women who are ^{strong than by women who are} down-trodden, from the point of view both of their own virtues and of the family, the community, citizenship and peace.

10. Education, clearly, is more than ever one of the keys to women's emancipation. The difficulty stems from the fact that women's education like other women's problems, cannot be dissociated from the combination of factors which give a society its structure. The daughters of certain groups will therefore have easier access to the educational system than those of other groups, and will obtain more satisfactory results within it, not necessarily through favouritism or deliberate élitism, but because of the higher cultural level of their home environment. The quality of the education provided for girls and for boys will leave an indelible stamp on both, and if it is too rigid or ill-adapted to the life they must lead, it will discriminate against them all, but the women will have most difficulty in finding jobs or in making use of their knowledge in stable occupations if the necessary social facilities for looking after children do not exist. Finally, even women's outlook on life, their courage and their ambitions will be better stimulated by a system of social values which recognizes equal rights for them, and this equality is in many ways bound up with the eradication of other forms of discrimination and of injustice in general. For this reason, in most cases so far, the most advanced women or women's movements have constantly wavered between feminism and peaceful or violent revolution, even if, to some of them, the two do not seem incompatible.

11. There are, however, good grounds for "feminism", and what happens with regard to the education of girls and women is a sufficient argument to justify it as an attitude and a policy. From earliest infancy, in most countries of the world, boys are encouraged in their studies, even if they are mediocre, but girls receive no help and may even, at times, be prevented from studying. While they are at school, girls may be called home at any time to look after or to nurse sick brothers and sisters, to do the shopping, to help with the cooking, particularly among those sections of the population which are worst off. Girls attend clubs, join sports

associations and take part in excursions or travel much less frequently than their brothers. If a girl goes to school and "does well" there, it is very probable that neither her teachers nor her family will encourage her to be ambitious. Everything she accomplishes will be considered already "well enough for a girl": she may become a teacher, but only in primary or secondary school she will very seldom become a research worker, particularly in the scientific field, even supposing that anyone is willing to offer her a post or a fellowship. A large number of callings will be virtually barred to her, either because the training required takes too long and is too expensive (as in medicine, for example), or because they are not thought to be suited to feminine "capacities", or, again, because the idea of marriage will curtail professional prospects, even without the girl's being herself aware of it, and even without societies' realizing that they are, in their heedlessness, losing the value of the investments they have made over the years on behalf of the women and girls whom they have at last decided to educate - but without really believing in education for women and without gaining anything from it. Let us suppose, however, that all the obstacles that a girl or a woman encounters have been overcome. She has obtained her degree, has won respect, is working and, by chance, by temperament or from profound conviction, wishes to assume real responsibilities. She is already an exception. If she is not married, people wonder why. If she is, they speculate about how she "reconciles" her family life with her professional career. In both cases, the general problems of society, security of employment, access to senior posts, active participation in political life, the expression of ideas and ideals, all of which are serious, difficult issues for everyone, are even more so for her. It only needs, on top of this, the children and the household duties referred to above, for the situation to become almost impossible; the gap increases between men's careers, providing time to enhance their professional status and opportunities of enjoying profitable leisure-time activities, and women's careers, where worries, obligations and additional pressures lead to loss of material and intellectual opportunities over a very large part of life besides keeping the mind occupied in a way altogether prejudicial to the much-vaunted creative capacity ostensibly peculiar to men.

12. Education is, nevertheless, still the real key to the advancement of women, for, despite all the obstacles which educated women have to face - obstacles infinitely more numerous than those confronting educated men - an educated woman is stronger than an uneducated woman. Conversely, everything that stands in the way of women's education may, and should, be regarded as reactionary and detrimental, in the long run, to the general well-being of society and of the international community. In nineteenth-century Europe it was asserted that the working class should not be educated. But in a great many European countries, the establishment of general schooling marked the rise of real democracies; and all the productive revolutions which have occurred throughout history - even in prosperous countries - have always been consolidated and strengthened by immense educational undertakings combined with a stream of scientific and technical discoveries, study and invention thus progressing hand-in-hand. It is within this overall context that the advancement of women must be considered, with a clear understanding that, from their earliest days, girls must receive as much encouragement as boys, their studies must be estimated as highly and financed as generously, their intelligence, curiosity of mind, and initiative similarly cultivated. For sexual differences count for much less in the fulfilment of human beings and the well-being of their communities than the economic security and social conditions in which they are placed, and the affection and respect in which they are held at the period of life when their need is greatest: childhood.

II. Particular considerations

13. It appears that the efforts made in the education of girls and women - whether in or out of school - need to be amplified at certain particular points, so that we may have curricula less liable to produce discrimination and more likely to generate optimism and opportunities. Four particularly important sectors come to mind:

physical education, the teaching of the rudiments of hygiene and medicine, access to scientific and technical knowledge, instruction in civics and the basis of politics.

In these four spheres, we come up against difficulties affecting all pupils, students or adults, both boys and girls, men as well as women. But in these four sectors measures have to be taken and special attention has to be paid to girls and women for here, as elsewhere, they encounter additional obstacles not met with by men.

14. Physical education for girls is not always regarded sympathetically by parents or by certain communities, and yet it is one of the foundations for giving women real equality. It goes hand-in-hand with simplification of women's dress. Is it even necessary to mention in this context the cumbersome garments, the heavy ornaments, the corsets, and the strict conventions with regard to clothing to which girls have have been subjected, even in the most developed countries? Anyone who has not worn certain high-heeled shoes, in European countries since the Second World War, cannot appreciate the absurd lengths to which fashion can go or the underlying intention behind these crazes, the aim of which is not, in fact, to make women prettier but to immobilize them and make them an object of fresh interest to men. Any sort of freedom needs to be given practical expression if it is not to remain merely an abstract conception and freedom is, first and foremost, freedom of bodily movement. To come and go, to jump, to run, to dance, to put muscles to work, are all fundamental needs of the human body. If allowed to be spontaneous, little girls are nearly always just as boisterous as little boys, being fond of open-air games, gangs, climbing and chasing. But very often society puts a curb on such innocent activities at puberty, or even earlier. What is more, it either openly or by devious means opposes physical education for girls, which it believes is likely to make them more "masculine", ignoring the fact that such a risk is very slight in comparison with the advantages to health, personality and psychological well-being to be gained from the practice of sports, so long as they are not unduly competitive. It is therefore extremely desirable that girls should be able to reap the same advantages as boys and that, on reaching womanhood, they should continue to have opportunities for physical exercise and to enjoy it, besides benefiting from the skill and confidence in life which it builds up. It may be mentioned, incidentally, that many developing countries, on gaining their independence, have immediately taken positive steps to develop physical education for girls.

15. Of equal importance for any genuine promotion of equality for women is a knowledge of hygiene and medicine, which all should have for the sake both of their own harmonious development and of the well-being of their families. In fact, women and only women have to contend with such profound physical changes in the course of their lives, punctuated moreover, very often, by several pregnancies. It would be extremely helpful for all women to understand how their own bodies work, and what are their real physical needs and possibilities. Fear of womanhood makes it a hundred times worse. It is a cause for concern that women should remain a mystery to themselves, at the mercy of terrors and fears such as those of pregnancy, childbirth and old age, when these can, to a great extent, be dispelled by knowledge. The interest at last being taken in the "alternative medicines" of some developing countries, together with the move to reorientate western medicine towards preventive medicine and psychosomatic therapies, offer good hopes that a more subtle, more sophisticated and less costly approach will make it possible to care for the health of human beings in a more satisfactory manner. But this overall progress must be brought to bear on the problems peculiar to women, which has by no means been the case up to now: many scientists, many uneducated people and countless poets have tended to regard woman's lot as fixed by fate, necessarily implying weakness and accompanied by disorders and moods which are inexplicable and, in the end, irremediable. A grounding in hygiene and medicine is important for another reason. For a long time to come women will in all probability act as "family doctor", and the importance of this job needs no emphasis. Moreover it could be carried out with less waste of time and greater efficiency if it were made easier by a kind of theoretical and practical training which is seldom provided at present. This kind of instruction should also, incidentally, be given to boys, who should play an active part as fathers, with the necessary competence, as an essential factor in the establishment of genuine equality within the family.

16. Women's access to scientific and technical knowledge also seems to call for special attention. Whether we like it or not, the societies of the future will all depend on science and technology, whether they be poor or rich, agricultural or urbanized, and whether or not they have natural resources. And it is to this very

scientific and technical knowledge that women find it so difficult to gain access, at every level. At the level of psychological prejudice, which denies that women are capable of scientific "exactitude" and "objectivity". At the level of educational and vocational guidance. At the level of opportunities for study, scholarships and fellowships, and posts in teaching and research.

At the level of the major creative careers and the high rewards that go with them. Many people still think that a girl is not capable of doing mathematics, or that, if she is, no good will come of it either for the girl herself or for the community. Similarly, the choice of a technical career still seems adventurous and exceptional. Women are thought of as bookkeepers, but are not seen as managers, and only exceptionally as economists. And yet more and more women are turning to the natural or social sciences and displaying keen interest in them; to an increasing extent, too, they are holding important posts with heavy responsibilities in fields where no one would have dreamt of employing them only ten years ago. But the élite of the scientific world is still essentially composed of men, and while right of entry to it is fiercely disputed among the men themselves, to women it is practically barred. To arrive at a dispassionate judgement of this problem, we must retrace the history of science, in particular that of western science in the nineteenth century. Western science then set itself up as a proud stronghold of objectivity and mistrust of everything "different" - "women", "savages" and "lunatics". It was developed by a successful group of men who worked for humanity without even glancing in its direction, and who sought to describe phenomena in quantitative and verifiable terms to other specialists, who were also men. This attitude still persists in the scientific community. At the same time, contrary movements developed which were often absurd and which tended to discredit science, by invoking higher values. But these movements have remained marginal and are, on the whole, a product of wealthy societies. Science and technology are still essential factors in progress, development and all real power. For this reason, it is more than ever necessary for women to be knowledgeable.

17. This is also one of the necessary requirements for effective participation by women in social and political responsibilities and in the promotion of peace. But it is not the only one: indeed, education for international understanding, co-operation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, for which guidelines were defined by the Member States of Unesco in a recommendation adopted by the General Conference on 19 November 1974, have so far failed to find a place in a great many of the world's educational systems. This is even more serious for women, since they still have to "catch up" on knowledge in this field and on politics in general. The right to vote - which they have now won almost everywhere - has not long been theirs, and their inability to play an effective part in their countries' affairs has certainly helped to give them the idea, and to strengthen men's belief, that these problems are not their business. Such a simple thing as reading a newspaper - which is already a luxury, since it implies being able to read and having a newspaper - was even more impossible for women than for men: more of them are illiterate and it is uncommon, even in the developed countries, to see them engrossed in reading the latest news. Nor are they allowed to participate in the various discussions held in their towns or villages, or in various types of meetings. But women's progress in the teaching profession, and, on a different plane, the part played by women in liberation movements, have begun to change such stereotypes and habits. Women writers, teachers or intellectuals have made important contributions to political thought and militant action. Women in the country and the town have combined education and the revolutionary struggle of which it seemed a part. Some of them have been killed or tortured. Women teachers and their pupils, of all schools of thought, religions or beliefs are asking questions about the problems of our time and are striving by peaceful means to solve them. For all those women and for all others, education is essential; for all women, their participation in the building of a new society is an essential ingredient of a juster world, transcending ideological differences. The word "politicization" need cause alarm only

if it stands for thoughtless indoctrination of passive women. If, on the contrary, it refers to a new awareness of the dignity of each individual woman, and of all human beings without discrimination, and of the place they must hold if the problems of the community are to be solved, by discarding the habits of the past, in a movement of national and international solidarity, then "politicization" is good. But for this thoughtful and knowledgeable women are needed, who have had what is customarily called a genuine political education and have the necessary responsibilities. Here, too, education remains more than ever, the principal road to equality.