

Communication, Networks and Exchange

Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange



Diario La Epoca, Chile

The theme of the sixth Isis "Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange" (WICCE) was "Communication and Information: Strategies for Networking and Change."

The orientation phase of the program was held at the headquarters of Isis International in Santiago from August 13 to 31, 1990.

The event, organized by Isis International and Isis WICCE, is part of a vast program of exchange and training, specialized in information and documentation on women, intended for women's groups from different countries of the world.

The Program

The general aims of Isis-WICCE are the elimination of sexist discrimination and the strengthening of women. Its main activity consists of facilitating the international exchange of information, and to that end this International Cross-Cultural Exchange Program has been set up. It offers the participants the chance to work on projects of women of different cultures for a few months and so share experiences and acquire new techniques.

In previous years the Program has included subjects such as Media and Communication in 1984; Health in 1985; Women and Appropriate Technology in 1987 and Women Living under Muslim Laws in 1988.

The Exchange Program is set up in collaboration with some group or network - with Isis International in this case - with whom an initial Orientation is carried out. Here the participants share experiences and familiarize themselves with the subjects. After this, the Program includes a period of Exchange of a few months, where the participants split up to interact with different groups.

Kwani Huaraka, from South Africa, who is in charge of coordinating the Isis-WICCE Exchange Program, said that Isis Santiago was chosen as the headquarters for the event because it has the largest and technically most advanced Women's Documentation Center in Latin America; also because it has already had experience in training women in this particular area. The work of Isis International has become known due to its creation of a computerized data base on women and



Carmen Torres

Kwani Huaraka is South African by birth and Namibian by marriage. She has lived for years in Geneva, Switzerland, where she is in charge of coordinating the exchange program of Isis-WICCE.

W in A : How are the participants chosen?

K.H. : Firstly they must be actively involved in women's groups or centers, preferably with a feminist leaning. They must be able to count on the support of their organization or group, and in general these centers select the participants themselves. As this is an international gathering we also try, as far as possible, to include representatives from the four continents - Asia, Africa, Europe and America (including North America, Central America and the Caribbean, and the Pacific.) We don't always achieve a balance in the number of participants per region, but it is one of our goals. In general there are about fifteen participants in all.

W in A : After these three weeks spent on the Orientation Phase at Isis, the participants will go on to centers in different countries. What are the criteria for choosing the particular centers and countries?

K.H. : We know the programs and the objectives of the centers. Depending on these, we decide which groups they will receive from other countries. At the same time, these centers let us know what their goals and activities are, etc. With this information, we send the participants, taking into account what each individual is interested in learning.

CDS/ISIS

CDS/ISIS (version 2.3) is a menu-driven information storage and retrieval system. It is particularly well-adapted for managing various textual data-bases on personal computers. It is able to manipulate an unlimited number of data bases each of which may consist of completely different data elements. The CDS/ISIS user is therefore freed from the expensive task of having to design and write computer programs each time a new project requires the use of information retrieval techniques. Although some features of CDS/ISIS require some knowledge of and experience with computerized information systems, once an application has been designed the system may be used by people having had little or no prior computer experience.

CDS/ISIS is available free of charge, and local support is available in many countries. The CDS/ISIS software and reference manual can be obtained from UNESCO.

Write to: Giampaolo del Bigio
UNESCO
7 Place de Fontenoy
75700 Paris
France

their publications, many of which can be found in their Documentation Center.

The Orientation Phase

The specific aim of the Orientation Phase was to train twelve women in new information technology and technology for the organization of women's documentation centers. Its more general aim was the exchange of experiences and of knowledge in the field of information and communication between women of different parts of the developing world.

The participants' stay in Santiago was the first stage. After attending the Orientation Phase each of them continued their training for two more months in another Women's Center in a country whose activities were of particular interest to their group.

The Orientation Phase, which lasted three weeks, was divided into three basic parts. The first, which took up the whole of one week, consisted of each participating

country presenting the situation of its Group, both from an internal viewpoint and its relations with the rest of society. Each of the participants highlighted discrimination against women in its different forms as an overall problem. Although national differences were identified, six common themes emerged which cover the different problems they face in their work.

- 1) Violence Against Women : this includes rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, prostitution, incest and child abuse.
- 2) Changes in the Law : this includes Muslim laws, constitutional reforms, human rights, divorce, custody of children, abortion and family and marriage laws.
- 3) Health : this includes pregnancy, reproductive rights, family planning, sexuality, abortion, training of health workers and the use of drugs.



4) Education and Information: this includes literacy, women and development, consciousness-raising and awareness of identity, feminist philosophy, the relation of gender, women and means of communication, organizing groups at a grass roots level, state education and documentation centers.

5) Work: this includes working conditions, maternity benefit, childcare, women workers contracted abroad, domestic service, street sellers, the problem of equal pay versus equal responsibility, traffic in women and their treatment as merchandize.

6) General Themes: this includes problems which affect society as a whole but which particularly affect women. Areas such as poverty, the external debt crisis, development aid, the environment, homelessness, political repression, unemployment, etc.

At the end of the week there were talks on the position of the Women's Movement in Chile and in Latin America.

Networks and Media

The second part centered on networking and on concrete examples of disseminating information regarding the position of women through the media. Experiences of Theater, Cinema and Video, Radio programs and Publications were discussed.

On the subject of networks, one of the founders of Isis International, Marilee Karl spoke of how in the last fifteen years we have witnessed considerable development in the Women's Movement which has flourished all over the world. Many groups have turned their attention to the established media as well as generating their own information about and for women. So it was that in 1974 Isis



Carmen Torres

Pudenciana Themba is a journalist in Tanzania, Africa. She works for The Daily News and is involved in the Women's Media Association in her country, one of the few African media agencies which exist.

W in A: Tell me Pudenciana, are you a feminist?

P.T.: I don't know, to be honest. The definition of feminism is very wide, but I am on the side of women, I fight for women's rights. But I also think we must recognize that we are human beings and we do make mistakes sometimes.

W in A: How did you become a journalist?

P.T.: I received a grant from the World Council of Churches to study for a year in Zambia. On my return I joined The Daily News and since then I have attended several training courses.

W in A: The United Nations has pointed out that there are very few women journalists in Africa and that in general they don't have the power to make decisions. How many women work for The Daily News?

P.T.: There are very few women journalists in Tanzania; There are perhaps a few more in radio broadcasting. On The Daily News there are six women and thirty men. In the African conferences which we have attended the participants noted that there are no women editors nor women in positions of responsibility in the media of their countries; the only exception to this is a woman from Zambia who works as assistant editor. All this adds to the scarcity of news about women and allows the propagation of negative images of us.

was formed to provide and promote channels of communication and contact between Womens Groups at an international level. One of its main tools was its Resource Center which was set up to support different groups by supplying them with information for campaigns, training programs and pressure groups. Jane Cottingham, co-founder of Isis, later outlined some of the main objectives of the networks which are:

- To break through the isolation of women who deal with women's problems, by facilitating the exchange of information on subjects of interest;
- To condemn problems and negative traditional practices such as female circumcision and the exploitation of women in the tourism sector;
- To help establish lines of support and solidarity for victims of repression and discrimination;
- To co-ordinate activities such as the International Day of Action for the Health of Women.

Documentation

The third and final week was dedicated to documentation.

Among the objectives outlined by the speakers the one which stood out was the need to motivate the participants to organize and spread information related to women as an important step towards the development of women's programs. They explained that they would also be introducing concepts and methodologies for dealing with and communicating information.

The content of the sessions revolved around:

- 1) The importance of information both in today's society and as an integral part of women's programs;
- 2) How to process and organize information; new processing techniques (communication networks); statistics; the use of information both as a service and a tool.



Rosalind Yagambaram has several jobs at the same time in Penang, Malaysia. She works part time as a secretary to the Union of a local university and she also sells insurance. Ten months ago she also joined a center which takes in battered women. The president of the center chose her to come to this meeting.

W in A: What exactly do you do in the center for battered women?

R.M.: I'm a voluntary worker and at present I am training to become an advisor. As a voluntary worker I give talks, I discuss and I advise because I have personal experience...

W in A: What is the main objective of the centers for battered women?

R.M.: To help women as much as we can. We give them refuge; we have lawyers who offer free legal advice; doctors who give free attention; we organize talks and conferences to inform the women about the discrimination that they have been subjected to. At the moment we work directly with people but in the near future we would like to compile information and form a documentation center, so my newly acquired knowledge will come in very useful.



Carmen Torres

Towards the end of the week the participants had a chance to put the newly acquired knowledge into practice when they were given practical exercises in searching for information in the offices of Isis International.

The Participants

Most of the participants came from Third World countries. Women came from Tanzania, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines, Palestine, Fiji, The Dominican Republic, Pakistan, Columbia, Uruguay, South Africa and Italy. They were Social Workers, Documentalists, University Professors, workers at Women's Crisis Centers, Human Rights Organizations, Journalists or Students, but they all had one thing in common:

they are actively involved in the Feminist Movement in their country.

After the Orientation Phase the representatives from the Dominican Republic and Italy stayed for their practice in Isis, Chile. The rest continued their journey to the United States (to the International Women's Tribune Center); to France (to the Network "Women Living under Muslim Laws"); to the Philippines (to the "Women's Research and Resource Center"); to Fiji (to the Office of the Pacific Region and of the World Wide YWCA); to England (to the Organization "Change"); and to Columbia (to the "Women's House").

By Carmen Gloria Dunnage

Participants



Fotos: Carmen Torres

Pudenciana Themba from the "Tanzania Media Women's Association", Tanzania.

Nikensari Budiutam from the "Kalyanamitra Foundation", Indonesia.

Joanne Lim Siew Thoe and Rosalind Yagambaram from the "Women's Crisis Center", Penang, Malaysia.

Lucia Pavia Ticzon from the "Women's Resource and Research Center", Philippines.

Hala Salem Atieh from "Birzeit University", the West Bank, Palestine.

Trisa Cheer from the "Fiji Women's Rights Movement", Fiji.

Teresa Peralta from the "Centro de Investigacion para la Accion Feminina" (Women's Action Research Center), Dominican Republic.

Amtulah Naheed from "Shirkat Gah", Pakistan.

Jannet del Carmen Rivera Crespo from the "Centro de Apoyo a la Mujer y al Infante" (Women and Infants' Support Center), Columbia.

Graciela Gamou Sambucetti from "Mujer y Sociedad" (Women and Society), Uruguay.

Gertrude Ntombazana Botha from the "Gompo Women's Congress", South Africa.

Marisa del Monte from "Isis International", Italy.

The guest speakers

Sandra Acuña from Chile. Specialist in documentation. Works for the Inter-Governmental Commission for Migration (CIM).

Eliana Barraza from Chile. Statistics expert specializing in the environment.

Alberto Cabezas from Chile. Telecommunications expert. Works at ILET.

Jane Cottingham from England. Co-founder of Isis and present advisor for the Isis-WICCE Program. Specializes in Development, Communications, Women and Health.

Sonia Cuales from Trinidad Tobago. Coordinator of CEPAL's Caribbean Women's Program.

Ingrid Droguett from Chile. Journalist. In charge of dissemination for the "Casa de la Mujer - La Morada".

Luisa Johnson from Chile. Specialist in information networks.

Marilee Karl from the United States. Co-founder of Isis and current president of Isis International. Specializes in Development, Communications and Women.

Soledad Larrain from Chile. Psychologist. Sub-director of SERNAM (the Women's National Service).

Jacqueline Pitanguy from Brazil. Sociologist. Ex-president of the Brazilian National Council for Women's Rights.

Ana Maria Portugal from Peru. Feminist journalist and activist from the Peruvian Women's Center "Flora Tristan." Associate of Isis International and correspondent for "Fempres".

Maria Antonieta Saa from Chile. Mayoress of Conchali. Ex-advisor for the "Mujeres de la Concertacion" Program and ex-editor of Isis International.

Jerline Todd from Jamaica. Member of the group "Sistren".

Jessica Ulloa from Chile. Video Producer.

Maria Rebeca Yáñez from Chile. Specialist in documentation. Consultant for CEPAL specializing in information systems.

