

As a modest contribution to this process we are sharing some of what we have learned in order to promote further sharing and discussion among groups in the network. The following excerpts are from two primary sources: the *Women's Program Organizational Review*, published in January 1990; and presentations given at a public forum, "Up In Alms: Women's Organizations Internationally Confront the Funding Crisis", which we organized in Toronto to coincide with the meeting of our Advisory Committee in November 1989.

Our aim is to contribute to a critical awareness and collective analysis of the funding crisis. The material that follows raises more questions than it answers. In spite of international trends that affect all of us, it is clear that there are important differences in our experiences, depending on the region we're working in, whether we are working at the local, regional and international level, and our histories with funding agencies. We need to know more about these differences and similarities. And we need to know more about the contexts in which different funders are operating, since development agencies, church organizations,

private foundations and NGOs have different contingencies, possibilities and limitations. Our strategies for action and alliance need to be more precise and thoughtful if we are not only to survive but to find more effective ways to work for women's empowerment and to build strong movements for women.

What can be done and how can we work in ways that will help one another, rather than accepting the dynamic of competition which the funding crisis imposes on women's groups? We are well aware that many donors are also struggling to find ways to effectively support progressive initiatives. Most important is to begin a dialogue that can facilitate a constructive move toward resolving this critical situation in a way that advances out commitment to women's struggle for equity, social justice and democracy. In order to do this, we as women's groups need to be clear about our needs and concerns, and able to share with others in an open dialogue rather than confronting each other as competitors for a shrinking pot of money.



After the Decade: Trends in funding to women's organizations

The money available for women's activities has always been small. Until the "Women's Decade" many agencies made no allocations to women. However, during the Decade, the introduction of women as a category for funding in multilateral agencies, bilateral agencies and international NGOs enabled women's organizations all over the world to successfully apply for financial assistance. Women's development desks were widely incorporated into funding agencies in the '70s and '80s. In many of these

organizations this process came as a result of the struggles of women within the ranks of the agency staff.

However, the amount of budget monies which women were able to access for "women and development" projects was still very small. In many cases it was as little as 10% of agency budgets (in other cases it has been impossible to quantify because of the way women are interspersed in different development agency projects - but generally we can say that it was a small percentage of agency budgets). The

kind of projects agencies tended to develop and support were small "pilot" initiatives, often focused on income generation or small business-type endeavors geared towards women.

These developments resulted in the creation of an international dependency on development agencies for the financial support of women's programs and movements. At the same time, an atmosphere of competition rapidly developed due to a relatively small amount of financing being accessed by a growing

number of groups. Even state agencies in many countries, such as Women's Bureaux, are attempting to attract funds alongside small women's groups and NGOs with gender-specific programs.

This dependence negatively affects the internal functioning of groups. The processes of accountability set up within women's organizations in relation to aid agencies are many and complex. The pressures and demands of accounting to aid agencies very often overshadow and work against the need to account to the base we serve.

Funding to Women Since the Decade

In the current period (1988 - 1990), many funding agencies have begun to change their policies toward women. A central change within the policy of international agencies is a move toward what is being called "mainstreaming." Mainstreaming aims to integrate gender concerns within what are called "general projects." In many ways it is a return to the situation which existed before the Decade, an approach which has been much criticized for the way in which it fails to recognize women's specific position in the household, their unremunerated, unrecognized domestic and subsistence labor and the skewed sexual division of labor in general. The present policy attempts to envision women as part of broad general programs, but requires that these programs contain a "gender component." At its most extreme, this policy would envision the abolition of women's desks within international agencies, to be replaced by training of all agency officials in "gender and development."

The new mainstreaming trend is found in Canadian agencies, in Scandinavian agencies and in the European Economic Community. This situation has come about in part because of a reaction to the last ten years of focus on women's issues. The head of international relations in one

agency described the reaction in this way: People are tired of "women." There's a feeling that solutions have been tried and they haven't worked and now it's time to move on. They want something fresh to think about - like the environment, say. When "women" come on to the agenda at international meetings, men go out to do their shopping. "Women" are still seen as nothing to do with their programs. On the other hand women's real needs are growing. So there's a contradiction.

It also represents a reaction to the special projects established for women during the Decade. Agencies claim these projects have reached only a small number of women and rather than empowering women, have served to further marginalize them - that is, to confine them to a ghettoized "women's" area, and keep them out of "richer" and "larger" programs. The view is that these small projects have somehow worked against the goals they were originally set up to achieve; the trend needs to be reversed and women need to be conceptualized broadly within general categories. The difference is that now gender will be a tool to analyze the situation of women within this context.

This trend raises a number of questions. First, where mainstreaming is adopted as policy, what will be the mechanisms to guarantee continued attention to women's power within these projects? How will women be sure that the apparently neutral category of "gender" will operate to empower them? Can project officers - the majority of whom are men operating in male dominated organizations with little knowledge or experience in dealing with gender - cope critically with the growing needs of women? Can crash courses in gender for project staff - unaccompanied by changes in the structures of many of these organizations - result in positive effects for women?

Why are policies towards women being conceptualized in such an "either/or" fashion? Clearly women need both

women-specific and integrated activities and organizations. It goes without saying that women need to participate as equals in all processes of development and so in this sense resistance to ghettoized/underfunded women's projects is well placed. However, we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath water.

Women are struggling to develop mechanisms which guarantee that the small gains we have made can become institutionalized practice. Women-specific projects offer that potential. It is



well documented that women's projects, though often small and under-funded, provide women with experience that enables them to take on leadership positions by helping to develop critical consciousness, skills and confidence in a supportive setting.

New Priorities

At the same time as mainstreaming is being implemented, there is also a trend to prioritize other issues. In many European development agencies the coming

attractions are Debt, the Environment, and a return to the well-tryed Population Control. Small scale industrialization is still popular and is becoming increasingly so as a response to the debt crisis. These issues, in particular the environment and the debt, are being kept before the public through media coverage. How will women figure within these issues? We've seen a lot of discussion in the media about struggles with the debt crisis but we haven't seen much about how women's position in the economy relates to this issue.

International Networking

There are other factors affecting funding available to a program like the ICAE Women's Network. With the possible exception of some Nordic agencies and the Dutch, most agencies, particularly some of the richest, give international networks a low priority. In the U.S., support for women's international networks is poor. Many agencies, both in the U.S. and elsewhere, do not have a department for international agencies and so proposals have to be circulated through regional desks. At the Ford Foundation we were told that international proposals had to be approved by all four regional desks - a clear indication of low priority. In general most agencies prefer "direct links" with groups in the Third World. The Ford Foundation in the U.S., for example, places a very high priority on direct relationships with national grassroots groups.

In the rhetoric of some donor agencies, justification for the emphasis on direct links and strengthening regional bodies appropriates the language of the left. There is reference to the importance of "building the grassroots leadership," to the lack of Third World leadership in the international women's networks and to the importance of building regional and national self-reliance. This suggests that groups which meet these criteria would be well

supported. Yet the experience of many so-called Third World groups working with the grassroots at a national level has shown that meeting these criteria is no guarantee of funding support.

A central problem with the way international networking among women is conceptualized by funders is lack of attention to the profound effects it has on local practice. The world faces problems generated by an unequal division of labour and unequal trading arrangements. These conflicts manifest differently from place to place, but they have an international scope. Preferred or exclusive emphasis on women's work at the community or regional level prevents women from effectively coordinating our work at a global level. The director of one women's network called it the "keep the girls at home strategy."

A more serious implication is that international linkages around issues of gender are forced to be mediated through the agencies themselves or through the state. There are obvious problems with this on many levels. Let us take the example of women working in garment factories and in microchip production. These women have to fight the exploitative conditions arising out of this new phenomenon, while at the same time struggling to keep their right to work. This fight can only be effective if it is waged internationally. The state is an obstacle to this struggle, since it is the state which has set up the free trade zones where export processing factories are located. International work through these channels will have limited potential for women, and will obviously condition the possibilities and effectiveness of international alliances. Given the political and economic motivations behind the aid relationship, it is obvious why direct national linkage is important for agencies. This situation is unlikely to change.

by Honor Ford-Smith

