The Context

"The World Decade for Women" came to an end in 1985. During the decade, a range of women's networks, organizations and movements developed that represent varied perspectives on women's situation and varied feminist responses to it. A major gain of the decade was the strengthening of an organized post-colonial feminist movement and the strengthening of feminism among women of color.

However, the question of what strategy or strategies should be pursued in order to bring about social transformation in women's interest was difficult to resolve. At the end of those ten years, the consensus among women meeting in Nairobi was that although the consciousness of women had been raised, the material conditions facing women had declined.

Since then, the material conditions in most of the "developing" world have continued to deteriorate for both men and women. The crisis has different faces: the ecological (food-fuel-water) crisis, the balance of payments and debt crisis, increased militarization and violence, and ideological crises. Globally these are widening the gap between the so-called "advanced" and "under-developed countries."

In this context women's material conditions are declining. Where access to food and housing becomes critical, it is women's food intake that is reduced. Where access to education declines, it is women who first experience restrictions on where we can go to school and what kinds of school and skills training are available to us. Needs are growing in all areas of survival - housing, food, primary health, education, and in access to work. This survival crisis affects the kind and quality of work women are able to do, and produces related issues around leisure, because where hospital facilities are cut down, where education is cut, it is women's position in the household that subsidizes these needs. It is women who have to take care of the sick, the old and children when state subsidized facilities get cut.

Alongside of this economic trend there has been a change in the ideological climate that we see both in the countries of the "north" and in the "south". This has manifested itself in a rise in religious fundamentalism, a "collapse" of socialism and the phenomenon of "ethnic" conflict. This shift has ground the debate about women's social position to a near-halt. Women as equals in society, women's freedom to exercise reproductive choice or choice about our household arrangements, women's economic independence and our freedom to live without fear of physical or sexual violence have also been undermined.

At the same time as women's needs are growing, women's organizations are confronting a crucial challenge. Over the years since the Decade for Women was begun, women's organizations have reached a stage of development where all over the world we have begun to

institutionalize. We are faced with urgent questions about internal processes and structures necessary to make our services and campaigns effective. We are examining issues of impact and of accountability. We are struggling to theorize our goals, to make qualitative changes in women's lives and to make changes in economic and

political structures. As never before, many mixed-gender organizations are forced to grapple with ways of introducing into their work a dimension which takes gender into account.

We are confronting these problems in an atmosphere of economic difficulty and a new wave of ideological attack...and of shifting and decreasing funding support.

Playing the Funding Game

LESSONS FROM CAFRA
by Tina Johnson, CAFRA
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When CAFRA (Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action) was formed in 1985 we had no money at all. The secretariat was voluntary. The idea was that those of us who formed the secretariat would concern ourselves with proposal writing and raising funds, which at the time was something that we had very little experience with. We learned a lot quickly.

We went through a lot of problems in learning about the different funders, what the different agencies fund and the language that different funding agencies use. You have to know both what kind of projects they fund and what ways they talk about their projects before you can approach them. The first two projects that we wrote proposals for were on violence against women and on agriculture.

We wasted a lot of time not having done the right research. For example, we sent the violence proposal to several agencies and in one case we discovered that the agency had transferred its focus from the Caribbean to Africa after we had gone through the whole process of writing the proposal; in another case the agency had

transferred its area of interest from violence to some other issue.

For about two years we were not funded and our coordinator and administrative assistant worked without salary. The coordinator worked almost full-time, was finishing off her degree at night and had two children. Getting the projects funded was no solution. We learned that most funding agencies like to fund projects rather than to give institutional support. Funders are much more comfortable with funding projects that have a beginning, a clear end and a written report. They are not so interested in process; they are more interested in something concrete which looks good in their annual report.

When we got funding for the projects there was still no money to pay for the project coordination and administration by the secretariat. That money had to be borrowed from the project. The accounting for the project had to be done in such a way that money was available for administration in Trinidad - not for salary assistance, just for postage, telephone, etc.

Part of the problem was our own inexperience in actually writing budgets. At the beginning we did not put in all the money that was needed for long-distance communication and training. We had two