

UNCED ACCORDS: FOCUS ON WOMEN



INTRODUCTION

The two-year UNCED process culminated in the signing of two conventions and two non-binding agreements. Women worldwide worked hard to get gender issues into these internationally-accepted texts., fighting for the specific attention and wording that, they hope, will provide the legal and moral foundations from which to press for changes within their countries and communities.

The non-binding agreements (the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21) belong to the category of "soft" law - internationally-accepted principles and plans that signal formal, rather than legal, commitments. This international consensus can then be used as the basis of moral arguments and the standard to which national practices should conform. Its impact is cumulative, as it guides the evolution of attitudes and practices that will, ideally, one day be accepted as customary.

RIO DECLARATION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The Rio Declaration (originally called the Earth Charter), contains 27 principles, leading with: "Human beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature."

Focus on women: Principle 20 states: "Women have a vital role to play in environmental management and development. Their full participa-

tion is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development."

AGENDA 21

This 800-page blueprint for action is a statement of international consensus. Its 40 chapters and more than 100 program areas are divided into four sections: 1) Social and Economic Dimensions of Sustainable Development; 2) Conservation and Management Resources for Development, covering environmental issues; 3) Strengthening the Role of Major Groups, focusing on women, youth, indigenous people, NGOs and trade unions; and 4) Means of Implementation, including financial resources, technology transfer, science, education, international legal instruments, etc.

Focus on women: Women are given specific attention in many sections of Agenda 21. Sections making special reference to women's needs are: Poverty (chapter 3), Demographic Dynamics and Sustainability (chapter 5), Human Health (chapter 6), Environmentally Sound Management of Biotechnology (chapter 16) and Global Action for Women Towards Sustainable and Equitable Development (chapter 24). The last chapter seeks to increase women's participation in sustainable development by implementing previous UN accords (i.e. Nairobi, CEDAW), strengthening special UN agencies (UNIFEM, INSTRAW) and empowering women at all levels of society.

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