

of women's groups, to create credit and development programmes and establish training and research centres in Asia. She is a founding member of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), a network of women leaders from the South. With the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) NGO Regional Working Group, she played a leading role in preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Noeleen has authored or edited ten books and more than twenty articles and papers on development and women's issues, and has Ph.D and Masters degrees in Sociology. She took up the position as Director of UNIFEM on 15 October 1994.

## Interview with Noeleen

*Q: The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies are premised on the concept of a 'New International Economic Order', which, today, is characterized by the globalization of capital and trade, free markets, etc. How would you weigh the gains and losses for women within this development paradigm, given the trade-offs involved?*

Noeleen: The Beijing Program of Action shall definitely be radically different from Nairobi. After 1985, we have seen how the over-emphasis on growth has created multiple crises. Since then, some rethinking has been undertaken and is still going on. Beijing shall be the product of this continuing process of rethinking and the emerging consensus is that it must be based on the concepts of sustainable development.

As for the gains and losses for women, in societies and countries where economic growth was invested in social development, where [gender] equitable structures were installed, and where the pattern and management of the growth process involved women, then women would obviously be

gainers even within this development framework. Otherwise...

*Q: What has been the involvement of women in national planning and decision-making in the economic and political arenas? (In the Asia-Pacific regions)*

Noeleen: First, let me emphasize the shift from micro/project level involvements of the past, yet, as we shift to macro-involvements, we see that after Nairobi the mechanisms for women to influence national development policies are very weak and lacking in resources.

Then again, we see that outside of government, many efforts of women have been successful. Maybe we can hit the right formula if we can forge partnerships with sympathetic government planners, researchers, etc. But in the end, the real measure of women's influence is when women's realities are made central to development policy.

*Q: Major technological breakthroughs, especially in reproductive technologies have*

*occurred since 1985. The production and distribution of such technologies are market-driven and therefore controlled by corporate entities rather than governments. Does this imply a mandatory change in focus or targets for women (from states to corporations)?*

Noeleen: Perhaps what we need to develop are not new targets for critique or intervention but new systems of accountability to which corporate entities can ultimately submit. After all, it is much more difficult to influence Big Business than states.

*Q: Debates have emerged regarding the pre-eminence of growth over equity and growth versus sustainability.*

*How would you gauge women's participation in this debate?*

A: Women have definitely participated in these debates but only those women who have access to networks, research and fora. There are still many unheard voices, and to avoid the creation of an 'alternative elite', grassroots women need to be incorporated into the whole process of articulating issues, new ways of formulating alternatives, etc.

*Q: Do you think there is still space for women to critique the dominant development paradigm and to create an alternative one?*

Noeleen: Yes, DAWN for one has been engaged in

development critique. Part of the process of creating such alternatives is for women to influence their own national agenda, and of course, participation in regional and international processes must increase.

*Q: In the Draft Plan of Action for the Asia Pacific, it is stressed that NGOs and community-based organizations*



*'supplement state action at the local level in a more coordinated manner.' What are the prospects for such coordination given the divergences, tensions and conflicts between NGOs and governments?*

A: There is a whole range of relations between NGOs and governments, from complete cooption to complete avoidance. I think the ideal, for more effective action, is collaboration, consensus and common grounds.

Sources: UNDP press release on the appointment of Noeleen Heyzer as UNIFEM head. Interview with Noeleen Heyzer, Djakarta, Indonesia, June 8, 1994.