



WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT II

The second half of the 'Decade for Women' has run out one year. At mid-point, in this Decade which began in 1976, there was a major stock taking at another major conference in Copenhagen in July last year. On March 8, this year, the Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka organises activities to mark "International Women's Day". All this activity certainly draws attention to the deprived situation most women face; to some this activity helps most women, while others charge that this spate of discussion through conferences, meetings, and articles which flood the popular press around this time are in effect mainly 'superficial' or 'emotional' and obtain no concessions for the women of the less privileged classes.

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As far back as November 7, 1967 the U.N. General Assembly adopted a Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. This Declaration set out in very forthright terms the principles of rights for women on equal terms with men and called for measures to guarantee their implementation.

It took nearly ten years, however, for 1975 to be declared International Women's Year (IWY) and once again provide the opportunity to focus attention on eliminating the still pervasive discriminations against women. Also, by drawing attention to their situation it was intended to enable women to participate more fully in the economic and social life of our planet. In that year (June-July 1975) a

major international conference was held in Mexico city which proved to be the focal point of IWY activity.

The U.N. General Assembly went further and proclaimed 1976-85 a Decade for Women with the same underlying object of changing the situation of women. At the stock taking at mid-point, in the Decade for Women, the Secretary General of the World Conference in Copenhagen however, was compelled to declare in July 1980 that the situation of women in the world far from improving was deteriorating: to quote "Starkly put, the situation of women in the world in 1980 is deteriorating. Equality, development and peace-triple goals of the Decade — are not within view. In some places they are dreams that are receding into memory." (See box on the following page for her message).

The *Economic Review* in its issue of September 1976 dealt with the major issues concerning Women and Development, at the beginning of the Decade for Women. Nearly five years later we return to the same theme and find the situation not very much different.

At the World Conference in Copenhagen, in July 1980, Sri Lanka accepted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was ratified on behalf of the Government by the head of the Sri Lanka Delegation to the Conference. As noted at the outset it was as far back as November 1976 that the U.N. General Assembly adopted a Declaration on Elimination of Discrimination among Women. We have learnt in the 15 years since then that it is one matter to make declarations and sign conventions and quite another to observe their principles and implement them.

As seen in the papers which discuss the "Ideology of Feminism", and also "Sex Stereotypes", the emancipation of women and the personal development and realisation of individual potential (irrespective of sex) require far reaching changes in the structures of the particular societies in which fulfilment of these noble objectives are being sought.

It is apparent that despite over half a decade of specific UN and country-wide campaigning for making women's rights a reality, discrimination against women pervades very much at all levels of society. The process of strait-

jacketing women into suitable occupations continues in schools and early years in the home, as seen in the paper on "Sex Stereotypes".

The lack of choice for women goes hand in hand with lack of education and training. This spawns a sex biased division of labour which helps to perpetuate inequality at work, barring women from occupations which offer more responsibility, higher pay and a greater job satisfaction. It has been found that there is a large gap between legislation and practice, rhetoric and reality, mainly because women have little or no say in the formulation and implementation of social policies aiming to remedy inequality. The roots of the bias whether at work, or other social activity, which breeds the massive insecurity women have to experience today, lie in society's prejudices and myths.

These and other immediate issues are focussed on in the papers that follow.