

WOMEN: STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

As governments tighten their purse strings, women find their own pocketbooks emptier than ever. Around the world, governments are heavily in debt. To meet this crisis, they have to cut back on programs: we call such economic reforms "structural adjustment." Cut-backs often affect health-care, educational, and social programs. Because women are usually responsible for feeding the family, caring for sick relatives, and making sure the children go to school, these cuts affect women disproportionately.

Commonwealth ministers responsible for women's affairs meet every three years. The impact of structural adjustment frequently comes up in their discussions. They note that investments in the nutrition, health, and education of a country's population are crucial to

the development of its economy and the well-being of its people.

Meeting in Ottawa in 1990, they passed a Declaration on Women and Structural Adjustment. They pledged their governments to:

- increase funding of nutrition, education, and health programs;
- improve opportunities for women to earn money through small businesses and agricultural production;
- reform laws and other policies to make sure women have the right to own land and borrow money; and
- increase the involvement of women in decision-making at all levels of government.

In Cyprus in 1993, the ministers asked the Commonwealth Heads of Government to be sure to carry out these measures. ∞

THE WORLD OF WOMEN

In some African countries, women in rural areas do 60 to 90 percent of the farm work while their husbands work in cities. They do this on top of looking after the home and the children. Yet, they are often illiterate because they are denied an education. Also, they have limited rights to own property, they can't get credit, they have few support systems or training opportunities, and they have little access to information. According to the United Nations, women:

- are more than 50 percent of the world's population;
- do 66 percent of hours worked;
- get 10 percent of world's income;
- and own 1 percent of its property.

WOMEN AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The key phrase in developed and developing countries these days is *sustainable development*: development that looks to the long term because it is designed not to deplete or destroy resources. Many people are now starting to realize women hold the key to sustainable development and protecting the environment.

In many countries, women do most of the work on the farms that feed their families. They collect the water and fuel and dispose of the waste. Damage to the forests, soil erosion, and water pollution pose an

immediate threat to survival. Many women have, over time, learned how to help protect their environments.

According to one Commonwealth study, women haven't been given enough credit for their work as guardians of the environment. Also, not enough is being done to train women to manage their households in a more environmentally friendly way.

Women need to be recognized as the people who manage natural resources and protect the land. Methods of organic farming from

developed nations need to be adapted by the women who understand their own environments and economic needs. And government planners need to understand the importance of involving women in efforts to conserve the environment.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has prepared training manuals to help teach conservation techniques to women in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. These manuals emphasize the successful efforts of local women's groups in conservation.