

WOMEN & Development

According to a United Nations Development Program report, a typical African woman's day goes something like this:



by Lynne Sampson

Women perform two thirds of the world's work and produce half the world's food, yet receive only ten per cent of the world's income and own one per cent of the world's property.

These ominous figures were released by the United Nations during the Decade for Women (1976-1985). Women in the Third world are the major victims of this imbalance. Through child care, food production, and other household labour, they contribute one third of the world's economic product, yet this work is given no official value in the national balance sheets because it is unpaid. Because of this, development plans have usually overlooked the crucial role women play in national economies, and this has often doomed these plans to

failure.

In a seminar at Saint Mary's University last week, Susan Brown of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) explained why development programs which bypassed women's roles have not succeeded. Training and credit have been provided for men in cases where it is women who actually do the work. For example, men were trained to operate and repair water pumps installed in some villages. But fetching water had always been a "woman's job", and continued to be one even though women were not shown how to use or fix the pump. Thus the machines were often left untouched or in disrepair.

Similar problems have arisen in food production. In Africa, where women grow up to eighty per cent of the food, the empha-

sis has been on cash crops. In deciding which crops to grow, the farmers (i.e. the women) have been largely ignored by the planners. The land a woman farms is usually owned by her husband or other male relative, so she has little say in what is grown there. If he decides to grow cash crops, her labour is diverted to this. Still expected to feed her family, she has little spare time or land to grow subsistence crops. The cultivation of cash crops has contributed to Africa's dependency on food imports and the resulting food crisis.

Education is often unavailable to women in developing countries. Illiteracy rates are consistently higher among women than among men. Traditional beliefs hold that girls do not need an education since their primary roles will be as wives and

mothers.

However, it is to help them fulfill these roles that education is most important, says Brown. "UNESCO is full of figures telling you if you keep a girl in school, you will find she marries later and has fewer and healthier children, her children are more likely to grow up literate, her babies are less likely to die, and she will live longer."

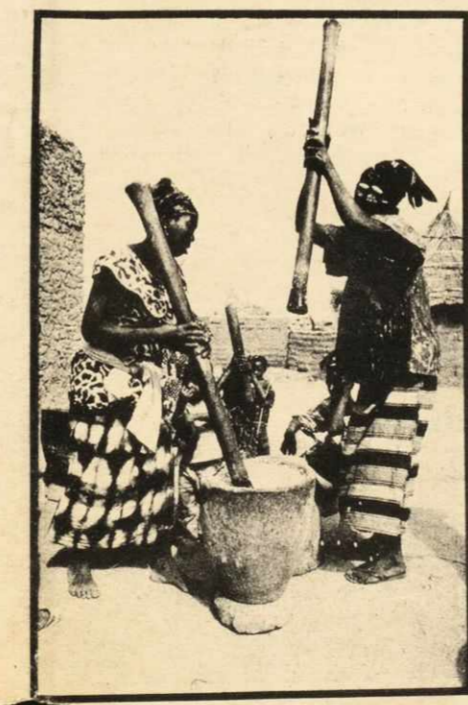
Education is important in determining what kind of health care a woman and her family receive. Women make the decisions about diet and medicines for their families. Therefore it is important they know which foods are most nutritious and which medicines are best for which illnesses. If a woman cannot read the instructions on a medicine bottle, it is unlikely she or her family will get any benefit from it.

If development programs have failed by ignoring women, says Brown, family planning programs have failed by ignoring men. "One of my major beefs with family planning programs is that they are always aimed at the woman, as if it's her fault she has too many children. Nine times out of ten, she is the last person to say whether she will have more children." In agricultural societies, where children are equated with economic production, there is pressure to have as many children as possible, especially since chances are high one or more of them will die. If men are not educated in the benefits of spacing births so

concentrated in a few major centres, have become more numerous, although more are needed.

Women themselves are deeply involved in efforts to improve their lives. A nationwide network of women's representatives from all areas of the country is working to establish health, work, and literacy programs. Each representative tells the association what the needs of her village are, giving ordinary peasant women a voice.

This women's association has also made proposals to the government to abolish old laws which were oppressive to women. Some of these laws, along with men's attitudes, have kept women's status from improving as much as they had hoped. In spite of the leadership abilities, courage, and resourcefulness shown by women in the revolution, some Nicaraguan men are still holding to their "machismo" attitudes, refusing the villages mobilizing support for the Sandinistas. "We had no voice for 45 years," she says, "because we were poor, because we were women. In the eyes of the world we were nothing. Now we must work to protect what we have fought for, because if we are not careful we will lose everything we have gained." Even after the revolution, Nicaraguan women are still fighting to keep the rewards they have won.



After the revolution's over

by Lynne Sampson

Historically, women have played important roles in the revolutionary struggles of many nations. *Dream of a Free Country*, a film shown in the Green Room last Wednesday as part of the DSU Community Affairs Program, documents this role in the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979, and shows women's continuing struggle for improved status.

Women played an active role in the struggle against the regime of former president Anastasio Somoza. They made up thirty per cent of the Sandinista armed forces. Those who did not carry guns fought in other ways. Women who remained in their towns or villages sometimes made bombs out of household items, such as weaving materials or empty bottles. They acted as mobilizers of support, carried messages, and distributed leaflets. Often the first contacts made in households were women who convinced their

husbands to give food or shelter to the guerrillas.

Women from many different classes and backgrounds joined the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). Gloria Carrion, a leader of the FSLN, organized women to participate in the revolution. One woman Carrion approached thought she couldn't be a village coordinator because she was illiterate. "You're smart," Carrion told her. "You can remember most of what they tell you". Many such women with no education became effective leaders. Some led guerilla troops and even conducted negotiations with President Somoza for the release of prisoners.

Their role in the revolution has boosted Nicaraguan women's status since Somoza's overthrow. The Sandinista government has acknowledged women's contributions and declared they should be respected and rewarded for their efforts. Women's access to edu-

cation is one of the things the government has tried to improve. Illiteracy among women has fallen from 55 to 14 per cent since 1980. Nicaraguan women feel many things must be done to improve their situations. Traditionally they have had to work outside the home to help feed their families, but women are concentrated in low-paying, unskilled, unsteady jobs. There is a need to provide training programs to teach women marketable job skills. There is also a widespread need for child care, since joining the labour force is a necessity for most Nicaraguan women.

Providing wide access to medical care is also an important goal. Women must be familiar with basic health care measures. Malnutrition is widespread among Nicaraguan women and children, and women who are aware of basic nutritional needs are less likely to have malnourished families. The government has recognized this and has to acknowledge women as equals. One woman interviewed said many of her friends are afraid of their husbands and would not ask them to share in the housework or child care for fear of a beating.

Coco Lopez, a woman interviewed for the film, worked in increased access to health care. Medical clinics, previously con-

4:45 a.m.: she wakes up, washes, prepares food for her family, and eats some leftovers herself.

5:00 to 5:30: She walks to the fields, invariably with a baby on her back, whom she will have to nurse throughout the day.

5:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. (9½ hours): She plows, hoes, weeds, and plants. The sun is usually very hot, and there is seldom any shade. She probably rests very little during these hours, and eats even less.

3 to 4: she collects firewood and carries it home on her head. TRhe carries it home on her head. The sun is still blazing down, and the load may weigh as much as 50 pounds.

4 to 5:30: she pounds and grinds grain.

5:30 to 6:30: she fetches water typically from more than a mile away.

6:30 to 7:30: she lights a fire and cooks for her family.

7:30 to 8:30: She serves them food. Usually she does not eat until everyone else has eaten. The food left for her will probably be the least appetizing and least nutritious portions.

8:30-9:30: she washes the dishes and bathes the children and herself.

9:30: she goes to bed, though her wifely duties may not be over yet.

Speaking the Language of Violence



by Ish Theilheimer
reprinted from Voice of Women Newsletter

Next time a military analyst on TV talks about nuclear warfare, think about the words he — it's almost sure to be a he — uses.

The experts have a language of their own almost impossible for normal people to understand. This specialized lingo allows them to contemplate mass murder and global extinction every day without losing their lunches. They discuss human extermination with the gusto and ease of sportscasters.

A nuclear war, for example, is

tions from which they operate.

From associating with arms experts, she learned that "talking about nuclear weapons is fun. The words are quick, clean, light; they trip off the tongue. Nearly everyone I observed — lecturers, students, hawks, doves, men, and women — took pleasure in using the words."

That pleasure is understandable. Being able to talk breezily and cheerily about the tools of one's own destruction is a powerful feeling. It imparts a sense of mastery, immortality. Who's afraid of the big bad bomb?

A number of women, including Cohn, Helen Caldicott, and Ottawa's Maude Barlow, have commented on the macho nature of nuclear jargon. Naturally, missiles are phallic symbols. Experts talk about "penetration aids" and "getting more bang for your buck". One Pentagon technocrat even described nuclear war to Cohn as a "pissing contest".

Defence analysts pride themselves on their rationality. They complain that peace movement types are too emotional. Cohn relates how "to speak the word (peace) is to immediately brand oneself as a soft-headed activist instead of a professional to be taken seriously.

To be taken seriously in an arms control debate, it is necessary to know the lingo and speak it with authority. It can be unnerving at a government consultative session to hear representatives of Project Ploughshares, Greenpeace, and even Operation Dismantle casually discussing glick-ems, throw-weights, and Mervs.

The language is insidious. It reduces the most terrifying threat the world has known to something familiar, friendly, and trendy.

But even if the experts aren't (or perhaps because they aren't) terrified of nuclear war, the rest of us have ample cause to be

Who's afraid of the big, bad bomb?

not a war, it's an "exchange", something like what your family does at Christmas under the tree. Nuclear scientists are constantly working to develop "clean" weapons that will cause a minimum of "collateral damage", or human death.

Often, too, these weapons acquire pet names. The bomb that levelled Hiroshima was called "Little Boy". A few days later, one called "Fat Man" vapourized over 100,000 residents of Nagasaki.

Ballistic missile submarines — abbreviated SSBNs — are known in the trade as "boomers". Trident subs, for example, carry 16 missiles. The section of the sub in which they're stored is

