

WOMEN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA

The Roundtable on Women and Economic Development in Asia was held at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John on March 13, 1997. Participants included Richard V. Gorham, former Canadian Ambassador to China, Cathy Wright from the Saint John Human Development Council, Najma Sharif from Saint Mary's University, Xie Xiaoyan from the Embassy of the People's Republic of China.

Participants agreed that the policy options identified in this panel discussion need to be understood against the background and within the context of certain characteristics of current Canadian foreign policy and its implementation. These are:

*** The Discrepancy between Women in Development (WID) as Policy and Women in Development (WID) as Reality**

Too often options evolve narrowly from existing policy frameworks without considering the need for a "reality check" on the latter. Consequently, these options tend to perpetuate the weaknesses in current policy. The consensus was that WID represented a well-developed Canadian policy that has generated a lot of "paper", but that the WID reality in no way measures up to the policy.

*** The Two-Pronged thrust of Canadian Policy**

Canada's foreign policy seeks to promote trade on the one hand, and poverty reduction/human rights on the other. A connection between these two orientations is often advanced. If a country adds increased efficiency to higher rates of economic growth, the results will include a better distribution of wealth, increased equality, less poverty, and decreased marginalization.

While there is nothing inherently wrong with having more than one orientation, it was pointed out that the connection has been used to justify the mismeasure of development. Participants agreed that development and economic growth are not synonymous.

*** The Generic Nature of Foreign Policy**

By definition foreign policy must reflect Canada's position toward other countries without recognition of individual country differences and priorities. This means things such as the WID policy must be generic, even though the application of this policy must be tailored to national, political, and cultural specificities.

The generic nature of foreign policy makes it difficult to develop policy alternatives based on more specific national and regional activities. Lessons learned from WID