

Introduction

This publication is the second volume in what we, the editors, hope will be a long series of seminar publications illustrating the breadth of expertise that IFUW members possess, and the internationality of our organization. At the 26th IFUW triennial conference held at Graz in August 1998 there were nine interdisciplinary seminars attended by a total of around 500 persons. One of IFUW's strengths is the inter-disciplinarity of its members who are graduates from all fields of study and research. A major function of the seminars is thus to disseminate this interdisciplinarity, and make visible how we, as women graduates, can contribute to the global and multicultural world in which we live today.

The choice of topics for the interdisciplinary seminars at each conference is closely linked to IFUW's co-operation with UN bodies and other NGOs. In Graz it also marked the conclusion of IFUW's Study and Action Programme for 1992-1998 *Women's Future: Survival or Progress?* The selection of topics for this volume should thus be seen as a follow-up to the previous book published in 1997.¹ Whereas the first volume in many cases had more empirical studies, this second volume concentrates on papers giving possible solutions to some of the issues which we were, and still are, working on as an organization, as well as indicating a way forward. Some topics on which papers were included in the previous volume are therefore omitted here.

The interdisciplinary seminars were varied, from panel presentations, e.g. *The Role of Women NGOs*,² and the afternoon session in *Essential Skills or a Changing Labour Market: Implications for Women Graduates*, to discussions, e.g. *Refugees - Their Rights and Needs*; and the presentation of papers. With a total of over 50 speakers the task of choosing what to include has been a difficult one for us as editors *Gendering Empowerment* as it is, of course, impossible to give more than a taste of some of the topics. Another criteria for choice was topics that link to the present Study and Action Programme for the period 1998-2001 *Globalization: Connections through Education* which looks at how we might implement some of the areas of concern in the Beijing *Platform for Action*. We have therefore decided to concentrate on four issues, but also to include the written introduction to those seminars which some conveners sent for the programme in Graz. These give a good indication of the scope of these seminars, even though the papers are not included.

The Adolescent Girl and Health Issues:

More than half of the world's population is below the age of 25, nearly 5% of whom live in developing countries. Adolescent girls have particular health risks including: complications or death from pregnancy and childbirth; unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion; sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS; social rejection; and destructive sexual relations. This seminar focused on the health of this important, though often neglected, age group. (Convener: Marianne Haslegrave, Britain)

Refugees - Their Rights and Needs:

There are over 22 million refugees and about 20 million displaced persons in the world today. Of these, more than 80 percent are women and children. ... Knowledge should empower us to take positive action to help these people. What does it mean to be coerced to leave one's home and be exiled, facing an uncertain future in a foreign country and culture? The expectation of safety is often an illusion. There is a high percentage of women refugees, with or without children, often without husbands who are fighting, in jail, or perhaps missing or dead. Women refugees often have a double burden to carry. They are susceptible to violence, intimidation, and sexual abuse. The idea of this seminar is to inform one another, and on returning home to disseminate in the wider community such as universities schools, religious institutions and political parties the pressing needs of what has to be done at all levels to help refugees. (Convener: Ati Blom, The Netherlands)

The Role of Women NGOs:

Global changes are offering both opportunities for and danger to women, as in any time of crisis. Where international policy fails, women have new solutions to offer and can enter public policy debate in a way that they have never been able to do before. There is no question today that women, by their effective performance at family and community level, have proven their worth as valuable partners globally. There is a danger, however, that women's advance will, be reversed if we are not able to take this opportunity to move forward. Women NGOs have a crucial role to play in building on the work that women are already doing. As non-governmental organizations, they have the advantage of transcending political boundaries; as non-profit, they go beyond that of an official body, and as humanitarian, they have a shared vision of the disadvantaged, the silent and the invisible.

This seminar provided insights on how the role of women NGOs has developed within the UN system and beyond, notably since the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women. It will seek to illustrate the processes of partnership and interaction that have undeniably built the strength of women NGOs in promoting gender equality and the right of women to sustainable development. (Convener: Conchita Ponchini, Switzerland)

Other seminars not included here dealt with: *Child Labour; Economic Exploitation of Girls;* and *The Effects of Poverty on Nutrition and Health.* As we are at the start of a new millennium it seems appropriate to concentrate on issues which are forward looking or are serious challenges in everyday life. This volume starts therefore with a selection of papers from the seminar on *Conflict Resolution: Women's Involvement and Contribution.* As the convener, Kathleen Laurila, USA, wrote:, "Non-violent conflict resolution is emerging as a method of approaching conflict that reduces tensions by first finding common ground, and then working together to find a solution. Women have been in the forefront in the use of this method in many areas - family conflict, violence, public policy, and war." The papers in this seminar show various innovative and very different

ways of solving conflicts from the personal level to that very difficult problem of post-conflict trauma on which the paper by Judith Issroff, England and Israel, throws some very interesting and thought-provoking light.

Phyllis Ghim Lian Chew, Singapore, ties together the search for world peace, gender equality, the pursuit of power and unity. The ruling masculine principle is contrasted the feminine one but in reality neither is better than the other. Silvia Cohen Imach and Lucia Briones, Argentina, brought to the seminar a case story on a shelter for abused women and daughters. The long history of violence is found both in the public sphere and the private world of family life. *Antigona* was created as an institution to support, to advice, and to assist all those involved with the problem of violence.

Jean Lloyd-Jones, USA, discusses her two models "The Ladder" and "The Web" as an indication of the male and female way of organization. The hierarchical and competitive order of the ladder as well as the networking and cooperative linking of the web are illustrated. Coming immediately prior to the World Conference on Higher Education in Paris 1998 and the World Conference on Science, Budapest 1999, the seminar *Essential Skills or a Changing Labour Market: Implications for Women Graduates* dealt with the demands on women graduates, if they are going to participate fully in the work force and attain decision-making positions. Today in an age when mass higher education has become the norm, we need to take a closer look at the challenges facing graduates seeking employment in the new realities of the labour market. Flexibility of subject area, entrepreneurial skills, equivalence of degrees and courses in a global world are only some aspects of the changes facing all graduates. Change should be seen as a opportunity, not least for women, to get in at the start of a revision and radical rethinking of the whole higher education system so as to optimize the contribution of higher education to sustainable human development. The afternoon Round Table discussion led by Dr. Mary Louise Kearney, Head of the Unit for the World Conference on Higher Education, UNESCO, October 1998, provided a basis for IFUW's input at that conference. The panel discussed whether the combination of skills required is different for women than for men, and if so, what advantages and disadvantages may ensue? If, as predicted, future work structures value competence over hierarchy, will women benefit from the new situation? In certain cultural contexts, women do not have equal opportunities for entering higher education or competing with men, so ways of changing this were voiced, as well as examples of empowering strategies. Networking to overcome cultural barriers, lifelong education and professional training are essential skills which women must learn to use for their own and for society's benefit.

M. Gramajo de Doz, N. Barnes, N. Zurita and A. Ben Altabef, Argentina, authored as a team an interesting overview of the educational history and gender situation in one Latin American country. Daphne Elliott, Australia, promotes the lifelong learning facilities within higher education with its implications

as to the needs of women graduates due to the global and changing labour market.

These new requirements presage major changes for students, staff and decision-makers. Ildikó Hrubos, Hungary, describes the sociopolitical and economic transformation which began in her country a decade ago. In Hrubos' view wide discrepancies are shown. Actually there seem to be only two professions - economics and law - which are overfeminized in Hungary. Chitra Karunaratne, Sri Lanka, notes that the relationship between Higher Education and employment in a post-industrial economy is undergoing rapid changes. Women's access to higher education and a country's experience of equal opportunity is well told with statistical evidence. Women's career opportunities and barriers are enlightened as well as the need to encourage girls to enter technical and scientific fields of education.

The two papers selected from the seminar on *Women in Decision-Making Positions* provide examples of how women can empower themselves. Huguette Delavault, France, publicizes the idea of "Parity" in decision-making in political, economic and cultural reality. The "Parity Tomorrow" group is an informal coalition which has not only an activist agenda but also a research component. Kay Fusano from Japan, on the other hand, takes a look at the figures for women's participation in politics, and the strategies used by some women's organizations to encourage women to become politicians.

Finally we have chosen to include three papers from the seminar *Gender, Cultural Identity and National Heritage*, a topic which since the Graz conference has become increasingly the focus in discussions of race and multi culturality in our globalized world. Mercedes Borkovsky writes about the parallels of real life professionals and soap opera heroines as characterization of the gender in the Latin Americas. A vexed love story, or a mass media subculture, or a woman's professional identity, or a cosmopolitan hybridization - which is the emerging and dramatic choice for the graduated women of the 21st century. As one of the audience stated a comparative study by IFUW members of such characters in different cultures would provide some interesting comments on cultural differences. Jenny Pretorius presents the results of a study on women's representation in the media in South Africa. The volume ends with a paper which in many ways illustrates the links between the different IFUW Study and Action Programmes. Anne Holden Rønning, Norway, concentrates on the significant issue of bi-cultural and bi-lingual life situations which cause cultural confusion. New identities, self-esteem, self-confidence are understood as being formed and re-formed as a result of geographical and social mobility. Excellent examples and interpretations are derived from new literatures in English to illustrate how literature can empower us. The editors would like to express their thanks to Diego Valle from the Computing Section of the Faculty of Arts, University of Bergen, Norway, for his invaluable technical assistance and expertise in preparing these papers for publication, and to the Department of English, University of Bergen for the use of their equipment.

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¹ *Women's Future: Survival or Progress?* ed. Anne Holden Rønning and Elizabeth Mary Horkan. Geneva: IFUW, 1997.

² To be published separately by Conchita Ponchini.