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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR, 1975

The XXIII Meeting of the Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization, focusing its attention on the major issues concerning women in health, approved Resolution X, which urged the Governments:

- a) to assign high priority to the promotion and protection of women's health, together with employment and educational opportunities, and particularly to meeting their needs in rural areas;
- b) to give high priority to the inclusion of women in planning, decision-making, execution and evaluation of health programs at all levels, and to improve the information they possess concerning participation of and opportunities for women in the health sector;
- c) to develop the necessary machinery for ensuring the creation or improvement of public or private institutions to take responsibility for the care of the children of working mothers.

The resolution also recommended that the Organization provide the necessary assistance to the countries in obtaining data concerning the participation of women in health occupations and take positive action to establish an active policy of recruitment, promotion and training of women for professional and other posts, aiming towards their increased representation at the planning and decision-making levels of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau.

The resolution called for a report on the measures taken and the progress achieved in these areas to the 76th Meeting of the Executive Committee and to the XXIV Meeting of the Directing Council.

A brief report of the activities undertaken and being planned by the Organization in this area was presented and discussed at the 76th Meeting of the Executive Committee (CE76/22).

This report attempts to bring to the attention of the Directing Council some of the important global events which are particularly relevant to this Region; specific proposals of the Organization for concerted efforts during the next decade towards improvement of the participation of women in health and development, and also major issues and constraints in achieving the latter, towards which special efforts must be devoted in order to achieve the goals set forth for the decade.

The highlight of the International Women's Year, 1975, was the World Conference held in Mexico City from 19 June to 2 July 1975, during which a World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year was adopted.

The United Nations General Assembly at its Thirtieth Session in January 1976 adopted a resolution proclaiming the period from 1976 to 1985 United Nations Decade for Women, Equality, Development and Peace, to be devoted to effective and sustained national, regional and international action to implement the World Plan of Action and related resolutions of the Conference, and called upon Governments to examine the recommendations contained in the World Plan of Action and, to this end, to establish short-, medium- and long-term targets and priorities. The General Assembly also decided to convene in 1980, at the mid-term of the proposed decade, a world conference to review and evaluate the progress made in implementing the objectives of the International Women's Year as recommended by the World Conference of the International Women's Year.

The International Women's Year World Conference emphasized that changes in the social and economic structure of societies, even though they are among the prerequisites, cannot of themselves ensure an immediate improvement in the status of a group which has long been disadvantaged. The World Plan of Action endorsed the need for formulation of national policies and programs to provide women with equal opportunities for participation in the development process and elimination of all obstacles that stand in the way of achieving equal status between the sexes.

The World Plan of Action suggested specific actions both at national and international levels in all areas, including political participation, education and training, employment, health and nutrition, housing, and related social services. Among the areas emphasized for action, of special importance are: integrated rural development; health, reproduction, growth and development including family health and child health, family planning, nutrition and health education; education and training at all levels and in all sectors; creation of employment opportunities; youth projects, including

adequate emphasis on the participation of young women; and involvement of women in public administration. It was also recognized that plans for achieving equal participation of women in all spheres of the development process must become an integral part of national development policies and plans.

The Organization has continued to promote and participate in the various regional activities concerning the integration of women in development. Studies and analyses have been made of national and international documents, pertinent to the Region, concerning the status of women and proposals for their integration in development. Included in these are the documents of ECLA, CELADE, UNICEF, UNESCO, OAS, ILO, IACW, and of the World Plan of Action approved at the International Women's Year Conference in Mexico, particularly the resolutions pertaining to the health of women and the integration of women in health and social development. These analyses have enabled the Organization to develop a strategy for action for the next decade based on the major concerns and issues which affect the integration of women in the development process as well as on the specific recommendations made at the International Women's Year in the substantive area of health.

A regional seminar was held under the auspices of the UN and the Government of Argentina from 22 to 30 March 1976, for study of the obstacles that hinder the integration of women in economic, social and political participation. The Organization was represented in this seminar in an observer capacity. The reports presented by the delegations of the countries of the Region represented at this meeting were further analyzed with a view to identifying the major obstacles to the participation of women in political, social and economic development. From the analysis of these obstacles it is evident that attitudinal changes towards the traditional roles accorded to the sexes in society must occur through information and education of the communities simultaneously with legal and structural changes that could facilitate the participation of women in the society as equal partners.

Strategies for Action, 1975-1985

The Organization, in keeping with its concerns for the health and welfare of women and children, as well as the status of women in the health sector, and specifically in reference to Resolution X of the XXIII Meeting of the Directing Council, has defined the following program areas for action, which would be developed at regional and national levels during the next decade, in accordance with the priorities assigned by the governments.

1. Strengthening of Health Services for Women and Children

Assist the countries in the development of an adequate infrastructure for the delivery of services to ensure the provision of:

- comprehensive and continuous health care for all infants, preschool and school-age children without prejudice on grounds of sex;
- continuous care during pregnancy, delivery and postnatal periods by trained health personnel;
- gynecological and cancer screening for cervical and breast cancer services;
- health care for adolescent girls and boys, including counseling on sexual growth and development, sexually transmitted diseases, and family life;
- family planning services to permit the family to decide to have children when they want them and to avoid the health risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

In strengthening these health services, particular attention must be focused on rural and marginal urban areas, where the population is generally underserved by health and social services.

2. Health and Family Life Education Programs

Assist the countries in the development of health education programs aimed at the family as a unit, with specific efforts to:

- promote positive health practices, informing the family of its health needs, potential hazards and how to avoid them;
- promote childbearing and childrearing practices that have positive effects on the health of women and the family as a whole;
- combat taboos and cultural practices that are detrimental to the health of the family;
- promote involvement and participation of the community in the development of family health services.

3. Food and Nutrition

To assist the countries in carrying out programs aimed at the reduction of the prevalence of nutrition deficiencies and disorders, in particular among women and children, specifically:

- adoption of food and nutrition policies that would take into account the nutrition requirements of women, particularly during pregnancy and lactation;

- provision of supplementary nutrition programs for pregnant women and lactating mothers and children, especially in marginal urban and rural areas;
- promotion of positive family food habits and feeding practices through nutrition education.

4. Social and Child Care Services

The promotion of the development of:

- day-care facilities, nurseries, and health facilities, located near the large work centers;
- counseling and social work services, and social services centers.

5. Policy Formulation

To assist the countries of the Region in the adoption of policies aimed at:

- providing social and economic support to female-headed households;
- legislation including expanded social security benefits for women and children;
- providing for changes in labor legislation to include maternity and paternity leave benefits.

6. Development of Vocational Education and Training programs

Particularly in the areas of:

- food processing and food marketing;
- food handling and preparation;
- family economics;
- handicrafts;
- formulation and management of cooperatives.

Such programs should be focused on the rural areas within the context of rural development programs, and should particularly involve young women and men.

7. Promotion of the Participation of Women in the Health Sector

There is a serious lack of basic information on women in the health occupations, the barriers to training and specialization in various fields, and the influences of various structural and attitudinal factors on their career paths and ultimate contribution to the health field. These and other data are necessary for the planning, implementation and evaluation of strategies for increasing women's participation in the health sector.

In view of this situation, the following areas of work represent PAHO's current emphases, which will, of course, require modification as more information and a better understanding and specification of the problem evolves:

- providing assistance to the Governments in compiling accurate statistics on the numbers and percentages of women in various health occupations and in training for these careers;
- carrying out and supporting research on comparative remuneration practices of men and women; the structural and attitudinal factors influencing women's health careers, training choices and ultimate achievement; the attitudes of health consumers towards female physicians and dentists, and other related topics;
- providing assistance to the Governments in designing programs aimed at stimulating young women to select health careers and providing a variety of educational and other incentives to them;
- encouraging the governments at every opportunity to recruit qualified women into the higher-level health planning and policy-making positions.

8. Women in the Pan American Sanitary Bureau

A Joint Staff/Administration Group appointed in 1975 to investigate the status of women in the PASB and to recommend measures to achieve an equal distribution and opportunities for advancement of both sexes in the Bureau has, after analyses of the existing situation, formulated a plan of action with short- and medium-term objectives. The plan identifies four main objectives:

- increase the percentage of professional women among the permanent and short-term staff;
- increase the number and type of career opportunities available to women in PASB;

- ensure that men and women receive equal consideration in recruitment, promotion, reclassification, and career service appointments;
- increase staff and administration awareness of women's issues and promote positive attitudes.

Although PAHO and other specialized agencies have accepted the World Plan of Action in principle and have, in fact, adopted resolutions reflecting some of the same concerns, it must be recognized that the main tasks are still ahead. A concerted effort and a real commitment is needed on the part of the governments and the Organization to develop innovative and effective programs, discarding some of the traditional assumptions about sex roles and facilitating the change.

For the promotion and development of some of these activities additional resources are required. With the identification of project proposals, the Organization will seek extrabudgetary support, particularly from the fund for voluntary contributions for the International Women's Year established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in Resolution 1850 for activities the express purpose of which is to ensure the full integration of women in development.