

Global Research Assembly

Chicago

July 1977

### **GLOBAL WOMEN' S FORUM: AWAKENMENT**

I want to talk about awakening, the female revolution, and the moral issue of our time. "The Global Women's Forum is concerned with two billion women, their capabilities, expectations, and involvement in world development." That is the first page of our new brochure. Awakening is a shift of images that births new consciousness. Something happens, whereby images are shifted and new consciousness is born. It is born in several ways. It is born in relationship to the final and most ultimate relationship of all, the mystery. It is born in relationship to freedom or the expectation of the future, the capability of a human being to run out and grab that future, and not wait for it. Awakening is born when care pours out and you find you couldn't stop it if you wanted to. Awakening is the experience of fulfillment in an event in which you discover that this mundane moment is the happiness you have always wanted.

Now, think for a moment of the events of life that have jarred the images out of which you have existed, and one by one, a montage appears. Camus has called this experience of awakening "seeing the magic colors of life". Does it sound familiar? Awakening is the incredible opportunity to take another human life by the hand and show that life the Other World where there are no boundaries of race, of culture, or of religious bigotry.

We are the people who are conscious of awakening in what we do so that images are shifted in the midst of preschools, digging ditches in the mud, weighing babies, and all the things that people are doing. We are about awakening, and we are about engagement.

Our campaign of awakening is not finished until that experience has been occasioned for four billion people. I am always amused when someone says that after we do 5,000 Town Meetings in the United States we will be finished. There are four billion people in the world to be awakened. In earlier times, when leaps of consciousness took place, simpler tools and forms of awakening could be used. We have discovered that in complex and pluriform times there are many ways and many tools to awaken human beings. This has to do with the scope and rapidity of change in the twentieth century. In our missional encounters with the world, we are going to jar the consciousness of people, awaken them, and leave them with new images of possibility for doing something in response to that awakening.

When the past patterns of life are no longer practical methods for sustaining a community's life, how does that community renew itself? How does it grasp a relationship within itself so it can take a relationship to the broader society of which it is a part? We invented Town Meeting to give new images to a local community so that its future could be different.

How does the economic community, with all its fantastic contributions to this century, sense itself as very much a part of what is happening in the world and responsible for the total fabric of society? We invented LENS to awaken the business community across the world to this possibility, stretching their context around the world and showing them methods that could be used in their doing of the economic realm.

What about the students of today, beyond the 1960's when they said "No" to what they saw as the establishment pattern of the good life all across this world? How do they grasp a future of hope and authentic engagement? We have invented tools for student involvement that show possibility and some alternative to what they have said "No" about.

How do the women of today, as they put form on their revolution, move beyond their own selfactualization and sense themselves as key to everything that happens in the future? That is why we have invented the Global Women's Forum to awaken the women of the world.

The women of today have participated in a revolution that has been won. No one can name the date when the women's revolution really began. In our task force room we have a quote from a Vietnamese feminist. The date on it is 600 A.D. It is just as difficult to determine the female revolution's effect on the future. I'm prepared to say today, however I may wish to change my mind in the future, that I believe when the history of our time is written, that that revolution will be called its most profound happening. It has altered for all time the historical and sociological relationship of the male and the female. Because that relationship has been jolted, every other sociological unit and every other relationship has been jolted. The family, the community, jolted and changed for all time. The female revolution has forced us back to the recovery of the ontological ground of maleness and femaleness, to the redefining of the practical manifestations of the male and female principles that we all possess, and to the rearticulation of roles that we as human beings play in our everyday lives. The movement of women in the West has focused upon issues, important as they are, which are but manifestations of a deeper intuition that beyond masculine or feminine consciousness, there must be something more.

This has caused a development in human consciousness within which the discovery of the uniquenesses of male and female are to be found. I believe my colleague described this consciousness relative to nationalism and humanness in the Opening Address of this Assembly when he said that he no longer senses himself as an Australian, though he is an Australian, and he will always be an Australian. I believe that before the women's movement becomes a battlefield for the men and women across the globe and falls into the trap of focusing upon questions whose answers lie somewhere in the future, we have the responsibility to articulate and demonstrate new images of women's copartnership with the men of the world and collegiality with other women of the world for the future. That is why we have the Global Women's Forum.

The glory and the brilliance of the achievement of the 20th Century places it in history as an achievement beyond comprehension if you were to stand in any other time. And yet, it is a fact that most of the world still exists in darkness and does not share in that brilliance. It has been our decision as a group to address ourselves to that fact. It is the moral issue of our time. I have been trying in poetic images to say this as indicatively as my standing here.

I suspect you have that same difficulty, for it is not something that comes from the outside, as, "This is what you ought to do something about". Many of us have visited villages in this world where that fact does not come across as an imperative in any way.

One of my colleagues was working in the fields side by side with the women of Kwang Yung II. One of the women from the village took my colleague's hand in hers, and placed her hand on the smooth skin of the American woman. My colleague said to me, "In that moment, that indicative became real, for the difference between us was that skin, and she was not as old as I, and her hands would never, ever look like mine". I hope that you are practicing your own way of talking about the unbelievable way in which 85% of the people of this world must live.

We have submitted a proposal to U.S. Aid for International Development titled "Women and Development" which includes the Global Women's Forum as a program in conjunction with the Women's Advancement Program (#34) of the Human Development Project. The sobering issue that faces the feminine revolution is the same that lies at the root of all current world developments. This tragedy is that 85% of the world's population lives in an entirely different universe than the remaining 15% of us who have and control the health, the education, the technical knowhow, the resources, the money, the means of production, and the general essentials for not only the "good" life, but a human life. This means that of the four billion people in the world, 3.4 billion are suffering severe deprivation. Some 1.7 billion of these are in dire need, or at the level of what is meant by "the poorest of the poor". About 900 million of these are female who live in the worst of all circumstances, and are perhaps the most abused and misused humans on earth. That is why we have the Global Women's Forum.

The brochure we have been working on describes the Global Women's Forum as a oneday event that deals with the serious questions of total participation in community and nation building. It acknowledges the recent shifts that have occurred in the lives of women and explores meaningful engagement in the copartnership of the future. Since October, 1975, we have held 63 Global Women's Forums. Maybe that surprises you. We have been in the process of testing and testing and testing this product. We have done Forums in Europe, Sub Asia, SEAPAC, and North America. One of the exciting implications for the future is that most of the Forums that we have held have been in SEAPAC. The ones we have held in India have been a combination of the urban and rural.

What we have in mind, finally, is to do something about the awakening of the village women of the world; to reach the rural. But 2 billion people can hardly be reached with about 25 trained faculty. Our strategy therefore is to move with rapidity with the women across the world who have been advantaged and who sense that beyond their own awakening, there is engagement for them relative to the women of the world in taking this Forum of awakening to their sisters who are the poorest of the poor.

This spring we went to Europe, Sub Asia, and SEAPAC, placing little emphasis on North America. Sixteen hundred women attended the Global Women's Forum. It's still hard to say at this point just how many women you can expect at a Forum. We prepared for 40 women in Kwang Yung II because the women who were the leadership in that village felt that that would be a tremendous turnout. Those women are farmers. But it rained! And when it rains they can't go to the field. So, we stopped registration when approximately 132 women had arrived. And at one point someone counted more than 150 women.

We finally put together the form for how a Global Women's Forum can be set up in a village while we were in Nam Wai. The keys to it are very simple. It takes only three days, and there are only four steps. The first thing to do is visit the symbolic leaders who are male and tell them why you are there and what you want to do. The symbolic leader that we visited in Nam Wai shook his head and said, "Do you know, this is the first time that anyone has ever thought of having a program just for the women of this village". We didn't know if they would come. But it rained! One by one and sometimes two by two, the women started coming down the road. As they came into the school where the Forum was being held, there was much chatter. We asked, "What are they saying?" Our colleagues told us that they were wondering what was going to go on. When they walked into the room, they walked into a room very much like many rooms you have seen before; montages at each place on the table, flowers on the table, and pictures on the wall. So they knew something would happen. They filled up the places at the table and then we started putting chairs in the back to accommodate more people, and finally we lost count again. Now they didn't all stay the whole time. The lady pig farmers of Nam Wai don't have the luxury of a day off. But I think

that if a woman comes to a Global Women's Forum, sings a song, and takes the montage home with her, she will have encountered what I would mean by the happening of the day.

The second thing to do in a village Forum is to visit the women who are the leaders. If the male symbolic leader has given the names of six women, even if everyone else in the village thinks that only one of them can or will help, visit all six of them and find those women who are going to spread the word around and go to the Forum themselves. Then you can tell the other women in the village who is going to be there, and they respond.

The third thing we found to do was to put up posters. We put them up in the nodes and in the trees along the road from the bus. It doesn't matter if the village women can't read. We put up posters with drawings or posters with half a montage on them. Then people who can't read simply ask someone else what the posters say.

Last, one just goes from door to door saying, "Tomorrow's the Meeting" The best time to do this is the day before the Forum. The calendars of village women are not set for a month ahead. They live from day to day. If you had told them about it the week before, the event might not be in their consciousness.

We discovered this spring that we do, indeed, have a tool that can be used for urban and rural women. I think I believed that for a long time, but we have shown that this is the case. The stories that have come from the forums in India and Malaysia and Indonesia and the Philippines have confirmed that the women of the world, if just given a chance, are ready to move.

I have often talked about why I believe women are the key in community. To my colleagues in Social Demonstration Projects, I have often begun by noting that the first "Iron Men" of Fifth City were women. I rehearse the story of the four or five women who have been the backbone of that project. A collapsing or paralyzed community has a profound effect upon every life in that community, but it particularly scars the males of the community whose manhood is taken away. Every image the male has had of himself, whether it is provider or warrior, or guardian, is gone. The women of a community just don't have the luxury of stopping. For one thing, they're the mothers and someone has to be there standing continuously with the children of the families. For another thing, women have the quality that I attribute to femaleness above all else (though women are not the only ones who have it): endurance, and the capacity to spring back, like a bouncing ball. Women have the capacity to take another breath and go on in a situation. I believe that the women will also move because, no matter what you might have experienced in your life or what you believe, the women of the world really do love the men of the world. The pain that women have about what has happened to their men is very obvious.

During this Summer Assembly we have dismantled and refined the construct of this day. You have seen the program with the montage on the cover which we have been using in the past. If you have seen this, and experienced the Global Women' Forum in the past, you will not be shocked with the changes. You would say it is the same day. However, our workshops have not been right, and it's with a bit of fear and trepidation that we say we're not sure if they're right yet. But we are willing to try what we have and think again. We have created a new brochure and have received word that we have another inkind gift of 5000 montages.

We have worked hard on scheduling and strategy. I guess those of you who have been working in Global Community Forum or Global Social Demonstration replication understand how numbers can be overwhelming; it drives you right out of your mind. First of all we talked about "what's possible", then talked about "what's feasible", then talked about "what's practical", and then came back to "what's symbolic". We had an unbelievable time in figuring out what our recommendation would be for the Global Women's Forum.

I'm proud to announce that on this spring's trek the trips that we took (a team in Europe, a team in N.E. Asia, a team in S.E. Asia, and a team in India, plus two forums in North America) supported themselves. They did not cost us one penny because we raised the money to do it. We are excited about that. Now, we did cheat a little bit. We allowed our other colleagues in Centrum to pay the rent, the lights, and so on. So we didn't pay the administration cost. But we have put that into a new budget to show the world what it's going to take to do this.

Our strategy is to reach 1% of the two billion women by the end of 1985. That is synchronized with the United Nations "Decade For Women". It helps our story, and it is exciting to participate in this "Decade For Women".

What we really are out to do is to awaken the women of the world, who, however unaware, are already participating in what the female revolution has accomplished and is forming, in order that every woman in the world can participate very directly in addressing her life to the moral issue of our time. We feel that the montage on the cover of the program holds what we are doing. These programs are given to everyone who attends the Global Women's Forum. At the end of the day, we say, "This is your gift. We hope that you will take this picture and put it somewhere special. Put it somewhere to remind you that you are part of something much larger than yourself and that your relationship is not just to the women of the world but to the future of all the earth".

Q. HOW HAVE THE WORKSHOPS BEEN CHANGED THIS SUMMER?

A major concern has been holding the fine line in Global Women's Forum (an awakening tool) between maintaining the awakening function but pushing into practicality. We have had to tell ourselves repeatedly that an awakening tool is not concerned with follow-up, and is not concerned with what those women will do the day after the Forum. But the afternoon workshop in particular has been weak in methods of practical engagement. We have kept the social process triangles and the global context in the morning workshop, but the afternoon workshop has leaned more toward specific and concrete things to do.

#### Q. COULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCES FOR THE COMING YEAR?

We have talked about some way to draw a picture to show that during these next years, if you were doing so many forums, a very small proportion in the beginning would be for the 85%. Our target would be the 15%. Over the years this would shift until in 1985, the largest proportion would be for the 85% and we would be doing a very small number for the 15%. We don't ever intend to stop giving this Forum for the 15%. All of you who have participated in the day would probably say that that would be a mistake, but in terms of specific audiences, we have learned a lot from Global Community Forum.

We have been very grateful for the hard lesson that Global Community Forum taught us: that no organization or network of authorization is going to do this day for us. We are clear that we have a job to do and that we are the ones that are going to do it. Specifically, it was very interesting, though not surprising, that perhaps the groups which have been most receptive to this day have been the YWCA's across the world, and Zonta. We are not specifically expecting a great groundswell from organizations per se.

We will try to discern the places we need to go in order to do mass impact; to do it quickly where we know we can do it, considering where we haven't been and where we need to go. Perhaps we will want to do it soon in Australia, Canada, and Latin America. The question in the back of our minds is, "Where could we take this Forum that would be a surprise?"

#### Q. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MEN IN THE PLANNING AND IN RELATING TO THE PROGRAM?

I believe that men are far better at articulating the day and recruiting it than women are. We have found that to be true in several cases. It's partly because men don't have the kind of unnecessary images of defensiveness that women do when someone asks, "Is this about feminism?" A man has a better way to respond to that question than a woman does. Women, in the first instance, don't know whether they are being attacked or affirmed when asked that question. A man is being neither of those; he's being asked a question (as is anyone).

We would not have had the Nam Wai Forum if it hadn't been for one particular man. I really believe it was his day, and he probably could say that he and I had as great a time as anybody ever had, walking in the rain, going from door to door, and congratulating each other everytime someone said "Yes". Another man has set up two Forums. He called on people, told them about it, and they became excited. That's what men can do in setup. After the Forum, we just have to remember that this is an awakening tool. It's like Global Community Forum or anything else that is an awakening tool. I do not think there is any problem.