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Message from Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
to
The Fourth International Women Entrepreneurs Conference

Hyderabad, India
18 December 1993



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Message from Mr. James P. Grant
Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
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The Fourth International Women Entrepreneurs Conference

Hyderabad - 18 December 1993

It is a great pleasure for me to address the Fourth International Women Entrepreneurs Conference.

Women Entrepreneurship is key to fighting the devastating impact economic insecurity can have on the well-being of the family. Poverty and economic insecurity severely limit women's ability to care for their children and maintain their own status, well-being and self-confidence.

Quite recently UNICEF has reviewed its policies on women in development, and concluded that traditional income-generating projects have often focused on income and poverty alleviation, to the exclusion of other pressures that women, especially poor women, are facing. The multiple roles women have in the family, workplace and community impose constraints on their time. In addition, traditional values often impose gender inequality, especially in the unequal division of labour and access to resources. Consequently, UNICEF's approach in the 1990s is being broadened to and will combine interventions that address women's practical as well as what we call 'strategic' needs.

'Strategic' needs are the result of the imbalance in gender relationships and women's overall position in society, and must be addressed if women's status is to be improved in the long term. Policy and legislative changes must be advocated and capacity-building programmes expanded. In the meantime, however, there are many practical needs that must be urgently addressed. UNICEF-supported programmes include credit and savings mechanisms, labour saving technologies, child-care development and support, and skills training.

For example, in Bangladesh UNICEF has supported a poverty-focused development bank, Grameen Bank, that makes credit available to landless and near landless women. In Colombia, UNICEF initiated a training and development programme for poor women in the informal sector to promote institutional change. Training courses on accounting, administration, technical skills, marketing and organizational issues were widely attended by women. Another example comes from Brazil where a UNICEF-supported project has assisted 418 small businesses with credit, benefiting 1,990 people

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directly and establishing 142 solidarity groups. Project monitoring showed that 80 per cent of the women had improved their income and quality of life.

In India, UNICEF has been supporting a programme known as the Development of Women and Children in rural Areas (DWCRA), a poverty alleviation programme initiated by the government of India. Currently, 291 districts are covered under the programme benefitting more than 1.2 million women. Each group of 15-20 women receive a small grant which helps them to undertake income-generating activities. Studies have demonstrated a substantial effect towards liberation of participating women. In many parts of the country women who are involved in the DWCRA programme are now able to sign their names. Virtually one hundred per cent immunization has been accomplished in their villages. Most of the women today not only know about the use of oral rehydration salts to combat lethal dehydration from diarrhoea, but also ensure availability of packets in their houses. Women have also taken up home gardening as a means part of improving their nutrition, and also understand the importance of breastfeeding their babies.

These are only a few examples of UNICEF's global commitment to supporting projects that are aimed at the reduction of gender disparity.

I wish you all a very productive time at the Conference and hope that our common quest for an improved socio-economical status for women will find new strength in the final recommendations of your meeting.

James P. Grant
Executive Director
UNICEF