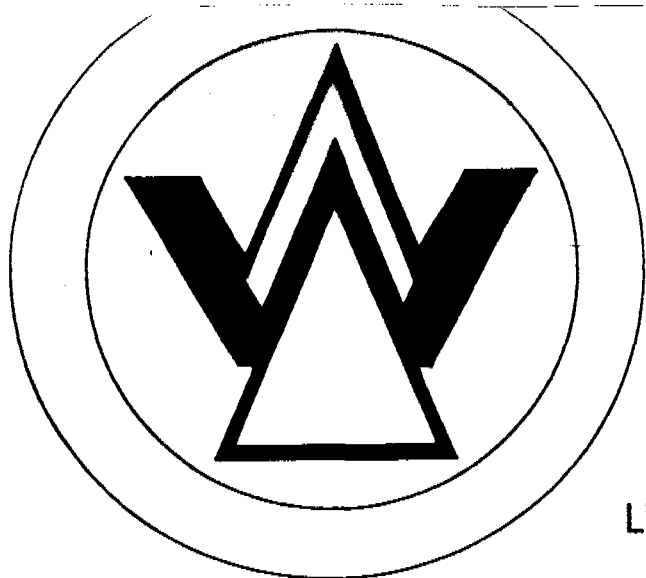


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AFRICAN WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

L'ASSEMBLEE DES FEMMES AFRICAINES

**WHAT ZIMBABWEAN WOMEN
ARE SAYING**

- ABOUT RURAL WATER
- ABOUT ENERGY
- ABOUT AGRICULTURE
- ABOUT ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

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RURAL WATER

Background facts:

Large numbers of rural people are drinking from unprotected wells and rivers. Consequently, most of the diseases women and children are treated for at rural clinics (bilharzia, poliomyelitis, and malaria) are water related. Many water sources have been destroyed because the kind of cultivation of vleis and stream banks has led to drying up of wetlands and siltation of rivers.

The Women Say:

The destruction of these water sources and the fact that boreholes are often sited long distances from the villages and frequently breakdown mean that life for them and their children is a constant drudgery. They carry water over longer distances with heavier and heavier loads.

In the planning stages of water projects, women who know about the water problem are not consulted while, instead, men are chosen to represent women when decisions are made. They cite the design of boreholes as an example: because women are not involved in their design, most pumps are too heavy for women and girls. And they say:

- that more boreholes and water catchment areas be constructed;
- that old boreholes be reconstructed and better maintained;
- that smaller dams be built in dry stoney areas; and
- that de-salinisation research on boreholes be improved.

The women stress as most important that there be more popular involvement by women as well as by men in the water master plans. The chief reason, they say, that problems affecting women are not given priority attention is that women are not represented on committees nor in local authorities.

ENERGY

Background Facts:

Traditionally, the provision of energy has been and is still the responsibility of women. Most rural people rely on fuel wood for domestic energy. In the past women picked up dead twigs and grass but as these become unavailable, they resort to whole branches and then to whole trees. Population pressure and increased use of marginal lands for agriculture has led to disappearance of much of the natural forests. The result is a serious energy crisis in much of rural Zimbabwe. Rural women must travel longer and longer distances to search for fire wood. The amount of time women spend on gathering firewood deprives them and their families of time to spend on cooking and other household chores.

The Women Recommend

- that biogas knowledge be made available to all;
- that government subsidise or provide loans for low cost fuel efficient stoves;
- that women be actively involved in the design of these stoves and that they be tested in the rural areas;
- that more research be done on use of solar energy;
- that government hasten its pace to electify the rural areas;
- that reforestation programmes be accelerated;
- that government look for indigenous trees alternative to gum trees which have a long-term negative effect on soil structure;
- that schools be encouraged to have students grow seedlings which can be replanted in needed areas; and
- that the practice of depleting the forests in rural areas to provide fuelwood for urban people be discouraged.

AGRICULTURE/FOOD SECURITY

Background Facts

Eighty percent of Zimbabwe's people live off the land. Women have been traditionally responsible for producing food for their families while men sought paid employment in urban areas. The country adopted from the colonial past a dual agricultural system: a Commercial sector and a Communal sector. The Commercial farmers, mainly whites, had large tracts of land in regions with more reliable rainfall and good soils. These farmers produce cash crops mainly for export. They own advanced farming equipment, have access to credit and comprehensive extension service. By contrast, the communal sector is characterised by subsistence farmers with small pieces of land, little access to credit or extension services, and situated on agriculturally marginal land. There is extensive degradation in the communal area and only minimal degradation in the commercial areas.

Women in Zimbabwe have been traditionally responsible for producing food for their families, while, men sought paid employment in urban areas. Even on commercial farms the majority of the workers were women.

Some Successes since Independence came in 1980

1. General Marketing Board depots are now located closer to villages, lessening the transportation burden.
2. Women can now get Agricultural Finance loans.
3. Health nutrition education is helping women make sound decisions with their crops.
4. Their yields per acre have increased.

Women Voice Constraints/Problems

- acute shortage of agricultural equipment and draught animals;
- agriculture producer prices too low;
- inadequate transportation equipment delay selling of their produce;
- lack of female extension officers (women say husbands discourage wives spending time with male extension officers);
- husbands (usually away in cities) dictate to wives on types of seeds to grow yet women with their accumulated experience with ploughing and tending crops can better make wise agricultural decisions.

Women Recommend

- that every farmer have access to extension workers;
- that women be fully integrated into agricultural research and extension;
- that women have right to own land and be able to decide on what crops to grow instead of waiting for their absent husbands to make decisions;
- that collective ploughing be encouraged;
- that grazing areas be selected and that those farmers who fail to comply have their livestock forcibly padlocked;
- that government assist in insuring there is adequate transport of a harvest before it spoils.

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

Recognising that reduction of mortality rates in this as in other developing countries is more a result of improved environment than sophisticated drugs, the women of Zimbabwe had this to say:

- that since most diseases in Zimbabwe are water related, it is the supply of clean drinking water, better sanitation and better housing that will provide lasting solutions to health problems;
- that family planning education is especially necessary for men in rural areas. (On this subject the women are better educated than the men.);
- that although 70% of the children have been immunised, efforts to reach the other 30% should be intensified;
- that the number of village health workers be increased;
- that each rural clinic have at least one doctor and three nurses;
- that the attitude of the nurses toward the rural people be improved;
- that the drugs/medicine supply for rural clinics be increased and traditional medicine research carried out to alleviate drug shortage;
- that more ambulances be available for emergency transport.

* All of the factual material and the positions ascribed to women of Zimbabwe are taken from reports of the Preparatory Workshop to the African Women's Assembly held on 15-16 August, 1988 at Belvedere Teachers College, Harare. The Reports provide an overview of what women in Zimbabwe are now doing and how they think they might be involved more effectively in efforts to conserve natural resources. Their concern is with the ways that will help to achieve self sufficiency in food, water and energy.