

Separate but equal?

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 paper, the success of women's ministries appeared to depend perhaps on too wide a range of prerequisites, including an ample budget, adequate status, a progressive political culture and the authority and charisma of the individuals heading them.

Stephen Gelb of the University of Natal's Institute for Social and Economic Research provided the background for a discussion on the constraints and capacity of the government to meet the needs of women. He emphasised the importance of a healthy macro-economic situation for redistribution to women and the need for clarity as to who would gain or lose from any policy embarked upon.

Kate Truscott of the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action warned that women would remain marginal to the economy if they were treated as a "welfare category" and their advancement was not seen as a part of legitimate economic development.

Many international donor agencies, she said, had adopted this approach to the detriment of women. In Zimbabwe, for example, policies emphasised income generating projects for women, with the result that they were saturating the market with commodities that rendered little income.

Ronel Scheffer is Idasa's production editor.

South African women

WOMEN in this country may not readily refer to South Africa's assortment of women's organisations as a "women's movement", yet many foreign women fully admire our efforts as such.

Shireen Huq, a Bangladeshi development specialist who was among the foreign guests at the recent workshop held on women's empowerment, is one foreigner



who thinks that South African women are too modest about their achievements in the field of women's rights.

"Outside South Africa we think you *do* have a women's movement," she told delegates. "You are too modest...I feel a lot of energy here and I am privileged to take some of it back with me to Bangladesh."

Huq, who works for the Danish Development Agency and a women's organisation known as Nariphokko, told the workshop that the women of Bangladesh lagged behind their South African counterparts in

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are easy and fashionable talk-shop words, rarely supported by concrete thought and even less often by concrete plans of action.

Where women meet with other women to discuss their needs and experiences, the issues of violence and personal safety

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ality to their political parties rather than a broader constituency of women. The status of the ministry itself is low, generally the most incompetent bureaucrats are transferred to it and although the ministry, for example, has the right to comment on programmes before implementation, staff often are not competent for this. At times the women's ministry has been unable to absorb resources because it lacks the capability.

Huq concedes, however, that the mere existence of the ministry has created opportunities to begin to address women's issues. A review of structures is underway with a view to make them more effective.

Other interesting foreign contributions came from Janet Kyogabiirwe of the Directorate of Women and Development in Uganda, Judith Chikore of the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Zimbabwe and Getrude Blake, who had a top post in the foreign ministry in Sierra Leone but is currently in South Africa with the UN Monitoring Commission.

Sierra Leone is the only country among them where women's issues have been taken up successfully in government departments in the absence of a women's ministry. According to Blake, the decision not to have a women's ministry was a deliberate one on the part of the president, and women are

well represented in government structures.

She attributes the advanced social position of women in Sierra Leone to positive customary traditions and the fact that women traders had attained a considerable degree of economic independence. The country has a strong women's movement which dates back to before independence when programmes were first introduced to improve the education of women.

In Uganda, which is ruled by the National Resistance Council, women are elected to local, regional and national levels of government and expected to represent the interests of non-governmental organisations. These may or may not cover women's affairs, but according to Kyogabiirwe the system works well.

A women's ministry was introduced in 1988 and its aims included raising the status of women - specifically their economic status - and integrating women in the mainstream of government.



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all. By mystifying its causes and shifting around responsibility, it becomes less than a serious crime.

An argument which is often heard with regard to domestic violence usually runs

domestic violence is the one that argues that violence against women is "part of the culture" of a particular group. This is a debatable point in itself that depends on how one defines "culture" and how one reads differ-

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