CHAPTER - VI

RECENT TRENDS OF A.I.W.C.
VI.1. NATIONAL PROGRAMME OF IMPROVED CHULHA (NPIC)

The AIWC started implementing the programme of the Improved Chulha (wood stove) since 1984 through its network of branches and other grassroot level organisations and it was identified as a Nodal Agency by the Ministry of Non-Conventional Energy Sources. Government of India right from the beginning of the project with direct funding since 1984, a large number of training programmes in construction and maintenance of improved Chulha have been conducted and more than 3,000 women have benefitted covering almost all the states. Under the new concept of self employed workers (SEW) the trained women constructed chulhas in the beneficiaries houses during the extension programme for which they were paid Rs.20/- per chulha in two instalments as construction charges. This became an effective programme of self employment for women within their own villages and many rural women have thus acquired self employment and are continuing the construction of improved chulhas throughout the country.

VI.1.2. NATIONAL PROJECT ON BIOGAS DEVELOPMENT (NPBD)

In the beginning AIWC was conducting only the
awareness programmes on Biogas, then the organisation started implementing the national project on biogas development. Since then AIWC has constructed 3,037 biogas plants in almost all the states of the country.

This programme is being implemented through the branches of AIWC and other grassroot level organisations on turnkey basis which are spread all over the country.

Besides the above two national project the AIWC carried on awareness programmes on all other technologies like the use and maintenance of Biogas Plant, Solar Cooker improver and the use of various other renewable energy sources such as wind mills, solar stills, solar driers, solar lantern etc.

In 1995 at the Fourth U.N. World Conference on Women at Beijing, AIWC and International Network for Sustainable Energy (INFORSE) organised a workshop, panel discussions and exhibition on the subject 'Income generation through New and Renewable Sources of Energy Technologies'.

VI.1.3. CONSUMER AWARENESS PROGRAMME

In 1995, the AIWC organised a 3 days Consumer Awareness Programme for voluntary organisations on Consumer
Following this, 10 Consumer Awareness Programmes were organised in different parts of Delhi by the Delhi branches of AIWC for 1995-96. The target groups were the general public. Women in rural population, slum dwellers, voluntary organisations, personnel and doctors etc. Different branches of AIWC are doing consumer awareness programmes and Vikaspuri Branch of Delhi has received an award from Delhi State Government for their work in this areas.

VI.1.4. ENVIRONMENT AWARENESS CAMPS

In 1988, for the first time a sum of Rs.30,000 was granted to the AIWC by the Ministry of Environment to set up ecological awareness camps to disseminate information and awareness about the need for clean environment and pollution free. The branches of AIWC were requested to hold camps in rural areas also.

Since then the AIWC is being sanctioned grants from the Ministry of Environment and Forest to hold environment awareness camps from time to time. During 1994-95, the AIWC held 17 such camps while in 1996, 20 environment camps were conducted under the National Environment Awareness Campaign. This year project for preparation of compost by Vermiculture has been taken up in AIWC Headquarters.
VI.1.5. DRUG DE-ADDICTION

The Delhi Women's League, a branch of AIWC was the first to start a counselling centre for alcohol and drug addicts called 'Abhay' with the help of the funds from the Ministry of Welfare in 1986. A group of AIWC members were sent to the T.T. Ranganathan Clinical Research Foundation, Madras, by the ministry along with member of other organisations for a week's crash course on how to deal with drug addicts, the method of counselling etc. 'Abhay' then conducted a three-week de-toxification camp at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Hospital, Delhi in collaboration with the Delhi Administration and Ministry of Welfare. At present drug de-addiction work is limited to awareness and counselling at AIWC.

VI.1.6. FOOD PRODUCTION FOR IMPROVING THE CONSUMPTION OF NUTRITIOUS CROPS BY LEPROSY PATIENTS IN SHAHDARA COLONY, DELHI.

This programme for Leprosy patients was started by the AIWC in 1992 with the funds available from Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) for a period of 18 months.

The objective of the project was to increase consumption of nutritious food by leprosy patients through
their own food products in the Shahadara Colony. FAO provided technical services of an international consultant and three national consultants.

The impact of the project on the leprosy patients was tremendous in the sense that they learnt to adopt modern agricultural practices. Through kitchen gardens they have been able to grow their own vegetables improving the quality of their food consumption and nutrition. The project helped their economic status too.

Besides the above project, the AIWC set up 3 creche units in 1992. At present there are 100 children on their rolls ITC Ladies Welfare Society, Delhi provides financial assistance for meeting teachers salaries and supplement food for the children.

A Candle Production Unit for the leprosy patients was started in 1992. 7 women of Leprosy Colony have been trained in making different types of candles. The candles are sold to ITDC hotels through rate contract tenders.

VI.1.7. NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FOR ADULT WOMEN AND DROP-OUTS

This is the recent All India Level activity of AIWC started in the year 1996. Under this programme twenty centres have been set up in various parts of the country
through the AIWC branches for a two year programme for primary education. This scheme is being funded by the AIWC. It is proposed to set up 20 more centres in 1997-98.

VI.1.8. CONDENSED COURSE OF EDUCATION FOR ADULT WOMEN

Central Social Welfare Board has agreed to fund AIWC Branches for 100 centres for condensed courses in Primary/Middle/High School. Already CSWB has sanctioned 32 courses and the rest are under consideration.

VI.1.9. TRAINING IN COMPUTER

The Central Office of AIWC started a Computer Training Course in August 1996 with the grant received from Central Social Welfare Board. 27 girls from low income families who have completed Higher Secondary (+2) studies are receiving free training in the basic course of Computer. After the completion of one year course these girls will be able to get employment.

VI.1.10. HEALTH AND SANITATION

The AIWC in collaboration with UNICEF organised zonal workshops on 'Health and Sanitation' all over India in the year 1996. The objective of the workshop was to create awareness about various aspects of sanitation. The
Human Resource Ministry's Women and Child Development Department contributed to this endeavour by making Food and Nutrition Board, organise exhibition on nutritional aspects of food and related diseases during the workshops.

VI.2. **INTERNATIONAL FRONT**

The International connections formed by the AIWC served not only the cause of women but the country as well and helped to create widespread understanding of India, its people and its problems.

In 1928, the AIWC was asked to participate in a women's conference organised by the Pan Pacific Union at Honolulu. In 1930, Margaret Cousins and Sarojini Naidu attended the International Congress of Women for suffrage and equal citizenship in Berlin. The delegates from India created a favourable impression of India women and removed to some extent, the false impressions held abroad of Indian conservatism. Increased interest was shown by British Women's Organisations after Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy and Shareefah Hamid Ali gave evidence before the joint select committee of parliament of franchise. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was appointed Liaison Officer to establish contacts with women's organisations abroad and secure their support and interest for India's aspirations. In Britain, Grace Lancaster was appointed Liaison Officer to keep in touch with the Indian conditions.
In 1937 the Council of the League of Nations appointed the AIWC to be a correspondent member of its advisory committee on social questions. Agatha Harrison and Grace Lancaster of the liaison group attended the 1937 and 1938 sessions of the AIWC and spoke of the deep impression created by the AIWC's work and appealed to women of all countries to join hands with the women of India to work for freedom, justice and lasting peace.

In 1947, the Liaison group extended generous help for refugees following the partition of India.

The Commission of the status of women was formed by the United Nations in 1946. The Charter of the UNO had set up the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to deal with all matters of social and economic importance among the member states. ECOSOC placed AIWC on its list of consultative non-government organisations in 1947 and their President, Hansa Mehta was appointed to the Women's Commission.

After the Independence in 1947, the AIWC received several invitations to attend international conferences and seminars.
In 1958, AIWC was given consultative status, category with the United Nations.

In 1971, the AIWC representative in Geneva attended the Second Session of the U.N. Preparatory Committee on Human Environment. She called an Adhoc Committee of NGOs in Geneva comprising of the LAW, the International Council of Social Welfare and the AIWC. They submitted several proposals to the preparatory committee.

At Nairobi in 1984, the AIWC participated in a demonstration-cum-exhibition of technology and tools. Models of improved chulhas and photographs, video films and pamphlets were displayed. Special attention was given to the problems of poor rural women who had to face drudgery in domestic duties.

In 1986, the Law with whom the AIWC is affiliated, held its 26th Triennial Congress in Mauritius. AIWC sent a delegation of members.

In 1988, the AIWC was represented as a delegate to the following:

PPSEAWA Conference, Canberra; International Women's Seminar, Moscow; U.N. Commission for Status for Women, Vienna; International Peace Conference, Iraq; Conference on Prevention of Drug Abuse, Malaysia; Indo-
Soviet Seminar, Tashkent; International Council of Social Welfare, Berlin; XII International Conference for the Advancement of Counselling, Alberta, Canada; X International Conference of NGOs, Canada.

In 1991, the AIWC was represented in two international conferences:

(a) "Conference of Peace, Justice and Development Ingredients for an emerging World Order" where the AIWC Secretary General presented a paper on the subject which was very much appreciated.

(b) "NGO in a changing United Nations Opportunities and Responsibilities at Geneva.

The AIWC with the support PPSEQA, UNESCO and UNEP organised a very successful conference on "Women Environment for the SAARC Countries" in New Delhi in 1992. This led to attending the Earth Summit at Rio-de-Janeiro, Brazil in June, 1992 and AIWC's increasing involvement in environmental issues. In 1993, the AIWC was represented at the Human Rights Conference in Vienna and in 1994 at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

In 1994, the President, AIWC visited Ireland on the invitation of Dr. Keith Munroe and Anne Munroe, the
great grand Nephew of Mrs. Margaret Cousins, to attend the function on unveiling a commemorative plaque of Mrs. Margaret Cousins, founder of AIWC. During this visit the possibility of setting up an Irish branch of AIWC was also discussed.

The representative of AIWC attended the status of Women's Commission meeting in New York in March 1995. AIWC was designated as one of the two focal points for the 4th World Conference of Women at Beijing. AIWC lead a delegation of 60 members comprising of members of six other national women's organisations to the "Fourth World Conference on Women" at Beijing, China in 1995 and organised 4 Workshops at the NGO Forum on the themes of 'Religious Fundamentalism and Women' Women and Rural Energy - Income Generation through NRSE Technologies, "Empowerment through Education and Women, Civil Society and the State". The President of AIWC presented a statement at the United Nations Meeting on behalf of the seven women's organisations.

The AIWC was elected Vice-President of Congo at Geneva and the representative in New York was elected President of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women. At the invitation of PPSEAWA in 1996 the Secretary General of AIWC acted as a Resource Person for the workshop on "Family, Women and Health at Western Samoa where she
presented a paper on AIWC project on women in AIDS which was very well received.

The same year the President of AIWC led a delegation to United Nations Work Conference, Habitat-II. The President made a statement in the Plenary Session of United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat-II) in Istanbul in June 1996. The objective of the conference was all to make the world's cities, towns and villages healthy, safe, equitable and sustainable.

b) World Food Summit at Rome, Italy in November 1996 was convened to provide an opportunity to governments, international organisations and all sectors to adopt a policy statement and a plan of action on Universal food security. AIWC participated in this Summit and submitted recommendations at the NGO forum.

Smt. Lalitha Balakrishnan of the All India Women's Conference received the prestigious award Global 500, Roll of Honour at Istanbul, Turkey for her efforts in the environmental field which resulted in 3000 rural women being trained in the construction and maintenance of improved wood stoves and their being self-employed and earning decent incomes.
The AIWC affiliated to the International Alliance of Women and enjoys consultative status with ECO, UNICEF, FAWA, PAN, PACIFIC and SOUTH EAST ASIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION, ESCAP and THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION, DELHI.

The individual members of AIWC have played an important role in several international conferences, meetings and projects and organisations. They have also been honoured with several awards.

VI.3. THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN
BEIJING, CHINA - 4-15 SEPTEMBER 1995

In September 1995, thousands of women and men from around the world met in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The conference has been convened by the United Nation General Assembly, with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women serving as preparatory committee. Conference participants and observers included were delegates of organisations of the United Nations Systems, inter-governmental organisation, women associations, experts and professional associations.

Theme - PEACE, EQUALITY and DEVELOPMENT.
The objectives of the Conference is

* To review and appraise the advancement of women since 1985 in terms of the objectives of the Nairobi Forward Looking strategies for the Advancement of Women in the year 2000.

* To mobilise women and men at both the policy making and grass root levels to achieve those objectives.

* To adopt a 'Platform for Action' concentrating on some of the key issues identified as representing a Fundamental obstacle to the advancement of the majority of women in the world. It will include elements relating to awareness raising decision making, literacy, poverty, health, violence, national machinery, refugees and technology.

To determine the priorities to be followed in 1996-2001 for implementation of the strategies within the United Nations System.

The publication of the Beijing report 'A Perspective from the Indian Women' movement reflects a consensus of views among a large number of women's organisations and groups in India on Nine crucial issues of concern for Indian Women. The initiative for the
publication was taken up by Seven National Women's organisations namely:

1) All India Democratic Women's Association
2) All India Women's Conference
3) Centre for Women's Development Studies
4) Joint Women's Programme
5) Mahila Dakshata Samiti
6) National Federation of Indian Women
7) Young Women's Christian Association of India.

Just as women do not form a homogenous group, the women's movement in India is also not homogenous and within the movement there are different preception, ideologies, and politics. However in the course of work among women of all sections in India, these different trends have also increasingly found common ground and a frame work within which wider united actions have been found possible. At present women movement has been able to work out a common approach on many of the critical challenges facing Indian Women.

This process of working towards a consensus based on struggle has been an on going one for the last decade and a half. The other aspect jof this process is mobilisation of hundreds and thousands of women in struggle. It is primarily the growing and militant
mobilisation of women on demands for equality and justice which have forced ruling governments to conceded some of their demands.

The publication of the report is not a status paper nor does it cover all the issues which affect the Indian women. It has a limited aim which is to acquaint other movements and organisations working in different countries with some of the concerns of the Indian Movement.

Although the publication deals only with issues within India, they believe that their experience is equally valid for redefining the slogan of Sisterhood at the international level. It goes without saying that in their own struggle for equality and Justice Women of the G-7 countries have the support and solidarity of women in India.

The Beijing Conference publication focussed on Nine crucial issues of concern for Indian Women they are:

1) Impact of new economic policies or policies of orthodox stabilisation and structural adjustment on women.

2) Women, health and population policies.

3) Women and Education.

4) Communalism, Religious Fundamentalism and Women
5) Violence against women in India.
6) Women and Law
7) Women and Media
8) Women and Family
9) Political Participation of Women.

The Beijing Conference naturally enhanced the will to build strong international solidarity.

VI.3.1. BEIJING RECOMMENDATIONS

1) The UN should constitute a monitoring body with judicial powers to check the activities of multinational corporations in relation to the exploitation of labour and environment. The present subversion of the UN mandate by dominant powers, principally the US, has to be reversed as must its subordination to financial institutions like the WTO and funding agencies. The U.N. should support the efforts of third world countries to re-negotiate their membership of such institutions which are at present heavily weighted against their interests.

2) U.N. Programmes suggested for raising the economic status of women should be based on land reforms and granting land rights to women. It should draw up special international conventions to protect the rights
of women agricultural workers and women in the unorganised sector, including home based workers to be implemented on a time bound basis. This would include legislation by member countries which would redefine women's work in agriculture to eliminate the notion of women's work being light work and guarantee equal minimum wages to women. It would also include the provision of creche facilities maternity benefits and protection against sexual harassment at the work place for all women workers.

3) Recognising that economic independence is a pre-requisite for equality, member countries, including the Government of India have to themselves end and also prevent the retrenchment and displacement of women workers due to modernisation and technological development without providing them alternative employment opportunities and upgradation of skills through training.

4) The U.N. should set up separate international agencies to prevent international trafficking in women and children. Special safeguards for immigrant women must be ensured.

5) A Special Convention for the protection of the girl child should be mandatory for all member states, and in
particular press for an enabling environment for the abolition of child labour and the guarantee of free and compulsory education for all children in member countries.

VI.3.2. OTHER ISSUES RELEVANT FOR INDIA AND MANY THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES WHICH SHOULD BE REFLECTED IN U.N. CONCERNS ARE:

1) Opposition to the cuts in food subsidies as Governments have the responsibility of providing food security for their people. In order to ensure essential commodities at affordable prices to all consumers, the public distribution system should be strengthened, expanded and the anomalies in the present system should be removed. Land under cultivation should not be indiscriminately diverted for commercial or industrial use as a part of Government Policy. Cash crops and food exports have to be subordinated to the food needs of the people.

2) Increasingly women, particularly tribal women, are being denied access to common property resources like forests and grazing lands under the pretext of environmental protection, even as these lands are leased out for commercial purposes. This policy has to be reversed and women should have access to common property resources which are an important source of livelihood.
3) The Government has to take the responsibility to provide basic needs such as potable water. Sanitation facilities, housing, clothing, health and education to all privatisation in these spheres has to be strictly opposed.

4) Present population policies of the Government are anti-women and have to be reversed U.N. agencies should ensure that aid to third world countries is not linked to population policies in third world countries. We demand an end to all programmes that promote the use of harmful, invasive, hormonal contraceptives both in the family planning programme and in the Indian market as they deeply and adversely impact on women's health. Women's health should not be subordinated to population goals nor restricted to reproductive matters. The Government must provide comprehensive and universal health should not be subordinated to population goals, nor restricted to reproductive matters. The Government must provide comprehensive and universal health care to all citizens and not leave them to the mercy of private practitioners and multinational pharmaceutical companies while at the same time Government should end gender bias in the provision of pharmaceutical services.
5) Fertility and the number of children should not be a criteria to decide the eligibility of a candidate to contest an election. Women's political participation needs to be encouraged by extending the present reservations in the Panchayats to at least 33 per cent reservations in the State Assemblies and Parliament.

6) The Government should take steps to effectively delink religion from politics to prevent the misuse of religious sentiment for political gain. Communal propaganda should be made a ground for disqualification for contesting elections and holding electoral or public office. It should also be a disqualification for Government jobs.

7) A comprehensive law against sexual assault needs to be enacted which will particularly address itself to custodial rape, a political instrument rape on the basis of economic power, child rape and abuse and sexual assault at the work place. Specific provisions are necessary to protect dalit and tribal women from caste oppression and sexual assault. The Government should build transit and shelter homes for women who are victims of violence or who are at risk.
8) Legislation to provide legal rights to women in the family such as joint matrimonial property, guardianship, adoption, inheritance and property rights is essential. Wife battering needs to be recognised as a crime and a comprehensive legislation on domestic violence is necessary.

9) Women's education needs to be viewed as her right and not linked to other goals such as family planning etc. Budgetary provisions for education along with incentives such as mid-day meal schemes, uniforms, free books to the poorer sections to prevent dropouts must form part of Government policy apart from free and compulsory education upto the secondary level. For this budgetary provisions have to be steeply raised. Higher education should not be curtailed and definitely not left to the profiteering of the private sector. At present there is a move to cut funds for Women's studies. It must be strongly opposed since such centres that generate a new body of knowledge will become subordinated to private vested interests.

10) Support services such as creches, care of the old or chronically sick and for deserted women, particularly for female headed families must be widely available to
enable women to participate in public life and the political sphere in the community and in productive labour.

11) Recently All India Women's Conference joined the Joint Action Forum for women to mobilise public opinion in favour of the Women's Reservation Bill. Mrs. Kunti Paul, President, AIWC joined the Chetna Yatra a nation wide rail tour in favour of the bill.