

midweek for women



Next Monday, member countries of the United Nations meet to consider progress the world has made towards women's equality in the past five years. Former National MP for Lyttelton Colleen Dewe heads the New Zealand delegation which includes MP Marilyn Waring, Mrs Violet Pou, president of the Maori Women's Welfare League, and Mrs Vivienne Boyd, president of the National Council of Women. In the first of a series, Midweek focuses on issues delegates will be discussing.



Two-thirds of work — a tenth of the pay

Women and girls are half the world's population, do two-thirds of the world's work hours, receive a 10th of the world's income, and own less than a 100th of the world's property.

To attack this world-wide "apartheid by sex" the United Nations launched the Decade for Women back in 1975.

Next Monday, exactly halfway through the decade, delegates from almost every nation in the world will meet in Copenhagen to review what has been achieved.

Now in New York the conference organizers, working under former Jamaican Ambassador to the UN Lucille Mair, are busy analysing questionnaires filled in by 86 Governments in an attempt to find out exactly what progress women are making towards equality.

Some of the results to date:

Education: Two out of three of the

educated, many parents tend to invest only in boys. The importance of girls' work in the home and the high incidence of teenage pregnancy are also cited as barriers to female enrolment.

But some countries are trying harder than others — Nepal is now giving cash rewards to schools which have the most girls in their classrooms and Kenya is offering more scholarships and lower fees to women students.

Politics: Women are inching forward in politics — a move seen by the UN as essential for every other kind of progress. In the past five years women's movements have emerged in almost every nation. One result is that most countries are reporting a steady percentage of women exercising their right to vote.

There is also a slight but world-wide increase in the number of women being elected to public

every five-person revolutionary council; and the USSR, long a leader in female emancipation, has near equality of the sexes in its local Soviets and a 35% female stake in the Supreme Soviet.

There is also some evidence that women's involvement in decision-making might change priorities: In a survey covering three villages in India both men and women were asked to choose what the village most needed. The men voted for a new road and the women for a primary health care centre.

Divorce: The idea that families are invariably headed by a man turns out to be one of the myths of the modern world — fully a third of all families are now headed by a woman. One cause is divorce — which has more than doubled in both the USA and the USSR in the past 15 years. And in the developing countries, nearly half of the single women over 15 years of age are now

Maori activist Donna Awatere has been asked to speak at the opening session on racism at the Mid-decade Forum, reports *Broadsheet*. The forum, to be attended by non-government organizations, runs concurrently with the World Conference. Donna met Lucille Mair, Secretary-General of the World Conference, during a visit to New Zealand earlier this year.

den" of bearing and caring for children as well as working outside the home remains the heaviest millstone around the neck of female emancipation.

For millions of women in the Third World — who cook and clean, sew and wash, plant and weed, care for the old and bring up the young — a 16-hour day is not uncommon. For

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Work: New figures from the International Labour Organization nail another myth — that men are the farmers and the food growers. In the developing world today women are responsible for 50% of total food production.

A recent survey in Tanzania, for example, shows that women work an average of 2600 hours a year in agriculture as opposed to only 1800 a year for men. In Africa as a whole, 60% of all agricultural work, 50% of animal husbandry, and 100% of food processing is done by women.

Health: Women are continuing to get a raw deal from the health services. Three-quarters of the health problems of the developing world could be prevented by better nutrition, water, sanitation, education and immunization, all of which are usually the responsibility of women.

But 80% of medical and health budgets are devoted to doctors and hospitals promoting curative medicine to a small proportion of the population. In the rural areas only about 15% of the population have access to modern health care and, during pregnancy and childbirth, more than half of the world's women have no trained help. Only a third have access to family planning.

Overall, a woman's "double bur-

den" is the energy nor the opportunity to invest in training, careers, or self development.

Pay: In the industrialized world, pay differentials have narrowed considerably since 1975 but, on average, a woman is still paid only one-half to three-quarters of the money a man can earn for doing the same job.

Most damning of all the findings in the survey is the fact that economic development itself can be bad news for women. Improving educational opportunities can mean a worsening of inequalities if it means that the opportunities only go to boys.

Improved agricultural techniques like tractors can shorten the working week of men who do the ploughing and lengthen the working hours of the women who do the weeding.

Throughout the developing world, says the conference secretariat, a major problem is that women's work is often invisible — a man laying a water pipe in a city is part of the statistics of development.

A woman carrying a day's supply of water from a well to a village is not. Her work, though vital to the task of meeting the daily needs of the family, goes unrecorded, unsupported and unrewarded.

Children — the commitment they don't want

"Child-free" equates with "care-free" for couples who choose not to have children, a New Zealand study has shown.

Waikato University psychology department lecturer Dr Robyn Rowland has released her conclusions following a study of 363 New Zealand men and women who have chosen to remain "child-free."

"A lot of people felt they had a very good relationship, and they shared things together that they might not be able to do if they had children.

"In general, the couples seemed very happy, well-adjusted, and really enjoyed life," Dr Rowland said.

For a number of them, the only misery of childlessness stemmed from the negative attitude towards them of friends who had children.

"Many people with children feel other people without them are making statements about having children in general, which is not true."

Those who took part in the survey by filling in questionnaires did not have problems with infertility. They had chosen not to have children.

Twenty-two per cent of the men had had vasectomies, and 10% of the women had been sterilized, Dr

disadvantages in having children. Some women thought they would not be able to retain their job status if they had children, and this had been borne out by other studies.

To more than half the sample having children was a long-term commitment they didn't want, she said.

Nearly half the sample indicated they were uninterested in parenthood, but most of them indicated dislike of children was not an important reason.

"Social issues" were part of the reason a third of those surveyed were childless. These included concern about over-population, and concern that their children might not get jobs.

Greater personal freedom without children was a factor for three-quarters of the sample. Another significant factor mentioned was greater intimacy with the partner, and more time for each other without children.

A lot of couples felt many people didn't think deeply enough about having children, Dr Rowland said.

She plans to write up results of the study for an academic journal. The



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