The year 2000 will see the problems of today's world either solved or exacerbated. The whole planet is pushing ahead at a breathtaking pace creating the problems of energy shortage, destruction of forests, of soils and of watersheds. We push ever mindlessly onward to create more advanced technologies which often ignore human values and which might prove uncontrollable. Lastly, it is very likely that in 2000 a large part of the world's population will still live in poverty and will still be crippled by hunger and disease.

We must never fail to recognize that the earth cannot be blamed for hunger and poverty. Economic and political systems are what make it impossible for people to afford food and to live in dignity. It is greed and ignorance which plunder the soils, the forests and the seas. It is lack of political will which permits the forces of ignorance and greed to continue their course unabated.

Again, such is the world you now enter—a world where the interconnectedness of events is total. Events in Iran, Afghanistan, Korea or Mexico have an impact on our lifestyles and pocketbooks just as the drought in North Dakota raises the price of grain in India.

There is no longer any room in our thinking for a we/they attitude. We share the earth together. We must depend on one another. Only an us attitude will ensure peace.
Four years ago, I went to talk with women in villages of six developing countries as a means of learning more about the effects of change on their societies—(Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Mexico).

Why did I want to listen to the most voiceless of the voiceless in the poorest regions of the world? Because I believe that the international community is ignorant of ordinary people's needs and aspirations; because I believe that those who make policy decisions on international assistance are arrogant in their disregard for the opinions of the world's poor. And because I believe that stereotypical role assignments are the real barriers to the development of people, of nations and of world society. I felt that women, the very heart of families and society, through their perceptions of the problems facing them might help us become more aware of our common future.

But, when I first suggested the project, I encountered what I call "planners blindness." Poor, illiterate women? What do they have to do with us? There was no empathy for, or curiosity about, the plight of individuals who comprise half the population of the developing world. In the minds of those planners, wisdom and common sense have somehow become equated with literacy.
Certainly, literate folk have no monopoly on wisdom. Those women were articulate: they know their needs; they reach out to learn about us; they care about a peaceful, common future. I was humbled by their wisdom and selflessness.

I sat under tea bushes, palm trees and on the steps of a rural clinic...to listen to women.

They told of their lives, explaining that they do as much as 80% of the heavy agricultural labor, gather fuel, and carry water--each day. Often, they eat last, which means whatever is left in the pot (And statistics show that Third World women are more malnourished than are their menfolk.) They rarely choose their husbands; marriages are arranged at an early age by parents. I met several women who did not even see their husbands until after the wedding ceremony in which they were not allowed to participate.

They said they are not allowed to own land, inherit property or goods, or obtain credit. They are subjected to irrational divorce and polygamy. Many women with whom I spoke admitted that wife-beating is accepted as part of life. The sum of the above? A life of labor, childbearing and rearing--voicelessness: a life without choice or options.