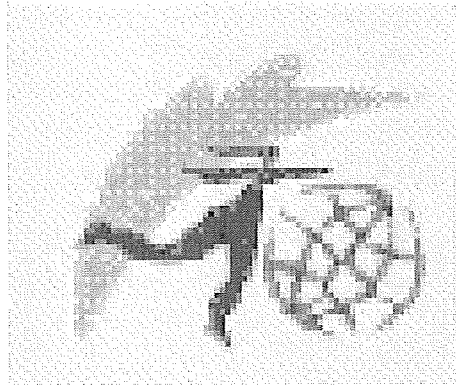


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**REPORT ON THE
III WORLD CONGRESS OF
RURAL WOMEN,
SPAIN 2002**



*Prepared by Sandra Phythian for
Fisheries Research & Development Corporation, and
Womens Industry Network Seafood Community*

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CONGRESS OVERVIEW

The Third World Congress of Rural Women was held in Madrid, Spain from 2nd to the 4th of October 2002. Prior World Congresses had been held in Melbourne, Australia and Washington DC, USA.

The Congress was attended by over 1500 rural women, who represented over 80 countries around the globe. Australia comprised a very large contingent of 160 women – in fact the largest delegation at the Congress. The Australian delegation was headed by Senator Judith Troeth, the Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The Congress aimed to provide a global perspective on issues confronting rural women, and a wide cross section of speakers on a diverse range of issues.

The format of the Congress was keynote addresses, which were followed by simultaneous workshops on different issues. Neither addresses or workshops were interactive due to the size of the audience and language differences. All addresses were delivered in a number of languages by translation via headphones. The Congress was officially opened by Queen Sophia of Spain.

Day one sessions included;

- Rural Women in the global village;
- Gender, sustainable development and food security;
- *simultaneous workshops including* –
- Globalisation, poverty and food security;
- Social and territorial equity;
- Role of rural women in the agricultural sector and in rural environment;
- Rural and farmer women – dynamics of demography – migrations, ageing, depopulation, statistical sources;
- Technologies for research and innovation on agricultural, rural and fisheries development; and
- Effect of the media on the rural development and the new information technologies.

Day two sessions included;

- The role of rural women in agricultural and sustainable rural development;
- Leadership and involvement of rural women;
- *simultaneous workshops including* –
- Gender and public policies;
- Women's involvement in the association networks in the rural Spanish regions;
- Agricultural extension and training for development and leadership;
- Associations and cooperatives in the agro food sectorial;

- Multifunctionality in agriculture and new opportunities for employment in the rural sector; and
- International co-operation and development aid.

Day three sessions included;

- Public policies in support of rural women;
- Rural women: for the world peace and development of people; and
- Official closing ceremony.

Each session comprised a chairperson, a reporter (who reported a summary at the end of each speaker) and 4-6 speakers per session. There was little or no opportunity for question time during the congress proceedings. The session speakers were mostly academic in their positions, and offered academic viewpoints on issues from a top down approach, rather than grass-roots opinions or a bottom up approach. This was disappointing to the audience who needed the balance between this and grass roots perspectives and the ability to discuss the content of presentations. At one point, the audience became so upset that there was no time to discuss a speakers content that yelling and foot stamping commenced. Image 1500 angry women in a confined area!!

Australia provided six speakers who participated in the Congress. These were;

- Senator Judith Troeth, speaking on Australia's public policies in support of rural women
- Sheena Boughen, Director of Consultancy Diapason Pty Ltd, speaking on challenging the conventional economic rationalist model of public policy making
- Karolee Walcott, Co-ordinator Australian Women in Agriculture, speaking on the evolution of telecentres in Australia and their impact on remote Australian pastoral regions
- Fran Freeman, Chief Economist ABARE, speaking on the forces for change affecting rural women and highlighted aspects of their roles in managing the process
- Jan Fitzgerald, President Australian Women in Agriculture, speaking on leadership by rural women.
- Mary Salce, Co-ordinator of Gippsland Womens Network, speaking on associations and operatives in the agri-food sector.

The Keynote address at the beginning of the conference was delivered by Sissel Ekaas, Director of Gender and Population Division, Sustainable Development Department of the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). Sissel's conclusion to her address, "rural women in the global context" was as follows;

"I am personally convinced that agricultural productivity will never reach optimal levels, unless we invest in and empower women farmers and provide them the opportunities and the means to maximise their inputs for the benefit of themselves, their families and society as a whole. To achieve this, we need a winning formula of political will and commitment of resources. Agricultural development policies still do not reflect the needs of women adequately and if they are incorporated, they often fail to be translated into practice.

Gender inequalities and social inequities remain a significant barrier to reaching the Millennium Development Goals of halving the number of poor and hungry by 2015, not to mention the even more important goal of food for all in the foreseeable future. If ever there was a time for giving real meaning to the concept of political will, it is now, at the beginning of this new millennium – it is not only a moral imperative; it is also an economic necessity to usher in the global economic prosperity with social equity that so many millions crave for and deserve as basic human rights."

OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Fourth World Congress will be held in Africa in 2006 – country yet to be advised. This Congress promises to address the needs of delegates to have interactive sessions that talk about grass roots issues with adequate time for discussion and questions.

Attending the 3rd World Congress of Rural Women in Spain, was a fantastic opportunity to meet and network with a incredibly diverse range of women from right around the globe. Women represented so many industries in so many different types of roles.

The feel of this congress was very much about poverty and oppression of women. There was little or no discussion on environmental issues, resource management, security of tenure, disease, and other issues facing us here in Australia. This was disappointing, however it highlighted that we are indeed a lucky country. Much of the globe has not even reached a point where they have the time to commit to issues such as ours – their issues surround severe ongoing drought, poverty, oppression, racial discrimination and genocide. It certainly put some perspective into the global arena when we considered this. We have many issues here in Australia, but we are indeed very lucky with the resources that we have, our relative freedom to pursue a livelihood in our industry, and our prospective future.

At the Congress there was little opportunity to meet women from other countries who are involved in the seafood industry. Name tags only specified a persons name and home country. Whilst it is difficult logistically to manage so many people, there should be opportunities to enable delegates to 'locate' other women with similar interests. It was very disappointing to not locate

other fishing women – I met one seafood woman only, although I am sure there were others there. It should be recommended that the next Congress includes meeting points on session days or even prior to the congress opening where different industries can meet. This then enables delegates to 'seek out' those people during the Congress for further discussion. This opportunity would have been extremely valuable.

Women are extremely good at networking, but with so many women to meet it is impossible to meet very many. A contact listing of all delegates by country or by industry would be most beneficial. To overcome privacy issues, delegates could indicate on registration whether they would permit their details to be circulated. This should be a recommendation for the next congress.

I would also recommend that some workshops are broken into industry groups – so that we can gain a global perspective on issues relating to our specific industry and how those issues are being managed. Recommendation should be made that the next congress include industry specific workshops – including of course the seafood industry.

I would also recommend that Australia indicates interest in a balance between academic and grass roots presentations. Also adequate question time and discussion. We should also seek to provide a speaker on our issues to educate others globally about our best practice and environmental management systems. We lead the way, - it is up to us to help others come on board. We are also a very forward moving country with our involvement of women in the seafood industry in so many sectors and the diversity of roles. In many countries, women's involvement comprises 'labour' and nothing more. We have a role to play in highlighting the contribution that women can make, do make and shall continue to make. We can help inspire other countries to move down this avenue.

Sandra Phythian
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