

# The Project FIVE-O Story



The Women's Conference in Mexico in 1975 was the first-ever global inter-governmental conference specifically organized to address women's issues and world problems from women's perspectives. The World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of International Women's Year adopted by the conference set the overall theme of the UN Decade for Women and all other world conferences on women afterwards. This was to be: Equality – Development – Peace.

Participating representatives of women's NGOs left Mexico determined to put these words into action.

During the years following the Mexico Conference, the presidents of four NGOs, Soroptimist International (SI), **International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW)**, Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) - who later resigned and Zonta joined - and International Federation of University Women (IFUW), discussed a possible partnership to fulfill the goals of the Plan of Action. An idea was launched by Beryl Nashar, President of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, who after discussing it with people in United Nations agencies and receiving encouragement especially from UNESCO, put it to the presidents of the other organisations. The idea was to organize occupational training centres for less fortunate women particularly in developing countries. It was received enthusiastically.

In 1979 International Council of Women (ICW) was invited to join the partnership. With their participation the partnership would consist of five women's NGOs that together comprised a substantial world-wide membership. Together they could contribute to the improvement of the status of women through the provision of vocational training to the underprivileged in developing countries. Members of the organisations in these countries would be encouraged to get together and plan the programme.

In Copenhagen, during the second Women's Conference in July 1980, the five presidents concluded the discussions so far carried through by correspondence, by agreeing on a partnership to establish joint projects in vocational training/employment skills for women in developing countries. The partnership was given the name PROJECT FIVE-O. Funding would be sought from UNESCO or other UN sources. In their approach to UN bodies the organisations would emphasise their combined strength: they are all worldwide, they have similar objectives regarding the status of women, they have local clubs in the developing countries that would be able to implement programmes, they are all in consultative status with the UN, they represent about 75 million volunteer women in 75 countries in all continents.

This agreement to start the partnership was achieved at two meetings, on 13 July and 27 July.

**BPW**



Before initiating a more extensive programme it was found important to begin with a pilot project to form a useful basis for evaluation. The pilot project as well as any future project would emphasise training in vocational skills enabling the trainees to become self-supporting through employment or other income-generating activities. Family health education should be included in all programmes, and also literacy where necessary. Based on the successful evaluation of the pilot project, other projects were approved in the years to follow.

In 1986 a non-typical project was approved in **Mexico**. It is targeted at young women in the La Paz region where health facilities are scarce, and the project was approved for training and education of nurses. This nursing school has later, in 2003, as the first education institution in Mexico, achieved the ISO 9001:2000 certification. The school educates more than 200 nurses every year.

In 1994 a project was founded in **Kathmandu, Nepal**. Its programme is for training of women in food processing (pickle), mushroom growing, organic compost making and waste management. Literacy and sewing and tailoring as well as sales technique and accounting are also included. A new project has been launched to offer training to women outside of Kathmandu.

Some of the projects are small in number of beneficiaries, but combined and over the years thousands and thousands of women have been given the possibility of improving their status in life thanks to the skills learned and the income-generating activities they were able to embark on, and which gave them not only an income, but also higher self-esteem and a happier family life.

Funds for the financing of the projects have been obtained from the UNESCO Co-Action Programme, but over the years voluntary donations have also come from members of the five organisations in rich countries who have thereby supported their fellow members in the developing countries in their establishment of the projects. These local members in charge of the projects contribute continually with their skills, time, monitoring, and also personal financial contributions, and it is thanks to their devotion and contribution that the less fortunate women in developing countries have got an opportunity to get an income, to improve the life and health of their families, to become aware of women's rights and opportunities.

The activities of the Five-O projects, started in 1980, were begun to fulfill the objectives of the International Women's Year 1975 and the goals of the Women's Decade 1976-1985. Their programmes also comply with the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted 15 years after the foundation of the Project Five-O partnership. They also fully comply with the Millennium Development Goals, adopted at the Millennium Summit in September 2000, to eradicate poverty, to ensure education and improved health, to promote gender equality and empower women.



The current participating five organisations are:

- International Council of Women
- International Federation of Business and Professional Women
- International Federation of University Women
- Soroptimist International
- Zonta International

**PROJECT FIVE-O SHOWS THAT 'WOMEN HELPING WOMEN' DOES WORK!**