

Women's organization founded in 1897 holding its own

In the modern world of working women and instant information, the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada is holding its own, says Bernice Noblitt, president of the 45,000-member organization.

Although the organization has lost some numbers, it hasn't lost as

many as other older organizations, she said Monday. This, despite the fact many more women are working outside the home today and that the FWIC has to compete with many newer, single-issue groups.

Started in 1897 as a vehicle for the education and support of rural women in Canada, women's institutes played an important role in their lives and still do, she said.

"It's more relevant than other organizations because it handles all the issues of the day and it's bringing those issues to 45,000 women."

The issues are evident in the resolutions being considered by about 1,200 delegates to the 10th national convention of the FWIC at the University of Western Ontario this week.

Wife battering, pornography, acid rain, nuclear disarmament and video violence will be discussed Thursday, while the Charter of Rights, quality of life for seniors, child abuse and technological change are the subject of workshops this afternoon.

By submitting briefs to the federal government on these and other issues, Noblitt said, she has been able to raise the visibility of the FWIC during her three-year term. Living in Ottawa has made it easier for her to get the government's attention and to make the organiza-

tion an effective lobbying group.

Although the better education of women and easier access to information has made the traditional educational role of the FWIC less important, Noblitt said women's institutes still provide a necessary social support for rural women.

"The great bond of friendship amongst our members is very strong. They support each other in their communities. You don't get that in an organization that forms overnight and springs up for one issue."

The theme for the convention,

which ends Thursday, is Women — Unlimited Potential. It was chosen to encourage women to take a more active role in the development of their communities — something rural women should do, said Noblitt, who has been active in women's institutes for more than 45 years.

"Women are now a driving force in the agri-food system and more and more becoming the farm managers themselves," she told convention delegates Monday.

"We are in the front line of social action and we have the numbers in members to back it up."



BERNICE NOBLITT
--- handles all issues of day

Leader of nine million

Canadian covers globe helping women

By Kathryn Hazel
of The Free Press

As president of the nine-million-member Associated Country Women of the World, Ellen McLean is no stranger to jet lag.

Elected in 1983 as head of the 52-year-old international organization, she often travels to its central office in London, England, as well as to many of its 68 member countries, including several in the Third World.

It's quite a change from her life in Eureka, N.S., 185 kilometres from Halifax, where she lives with her husband and two sons.

But, when she looks back at her 32-year involvement with the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada — one of the national rural women's groups affiliated with the ACWW — and her childhood in Montreal, it seems inevitable.

McLean's parents came from Denmark, which prompted her life-long interest in different cultures and languages. This interest led to her increasing involvement in the Women's Institute after she married and moved to Nova Scotia in 1953.

"The international aspect of our work has always been one of the real pluses of being a member — the fact that we went beyond the four walls of our home and right out into the world," she said Monday while in London to attend the Federated Women's Institutes' 10th national convention at the University of Western Ontario.

The main concern of the Associated Country Women of the World is to help women everywhere and, by doing so, teach them how to help others.

"The ACWW is about the development of women — the improvement, in whatever way possible, of the quality of life for women," she said.

The organization provides education and training as well as donations for projects in such countries as Brazil, Pakistan, Kenya and Jamaica, focusing on the provision of clean water and sanitation, the United Nations' theme for this decade.

"It's fine if we help a village in Kenya, Botswana or whatever, but if we do not help them with sanitation or teach them, there's no point in having clean water," she said.

In the ACWW's Wells For Kenya project, for example, it's not enough to give the people a pump to get clean water, she said. "Who's going to look after it? Probably the women. So we train them."

The organization stresses the grassroots approach to development, she said, making it particularly effective in Third World countries, where women in the villages do the training.

As a result of this concern, the Federated Women's Institutes is raising \$50,000 from its 45,000 members in Canada for the ACWW to use in its work.

McLean, who received an honorary degree from St. Francis Xavier University in 1976 for her work with rural women, said the international organization's goal of development for women is the same as the goal for the women's institutes here.

"It's all about the development of women in Canada. Where are we if women aren't the 50 per cent of that development process?"



ELLEN McLEAN
--- no stranger to jet lag