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Creating Income and Employment in The Americas

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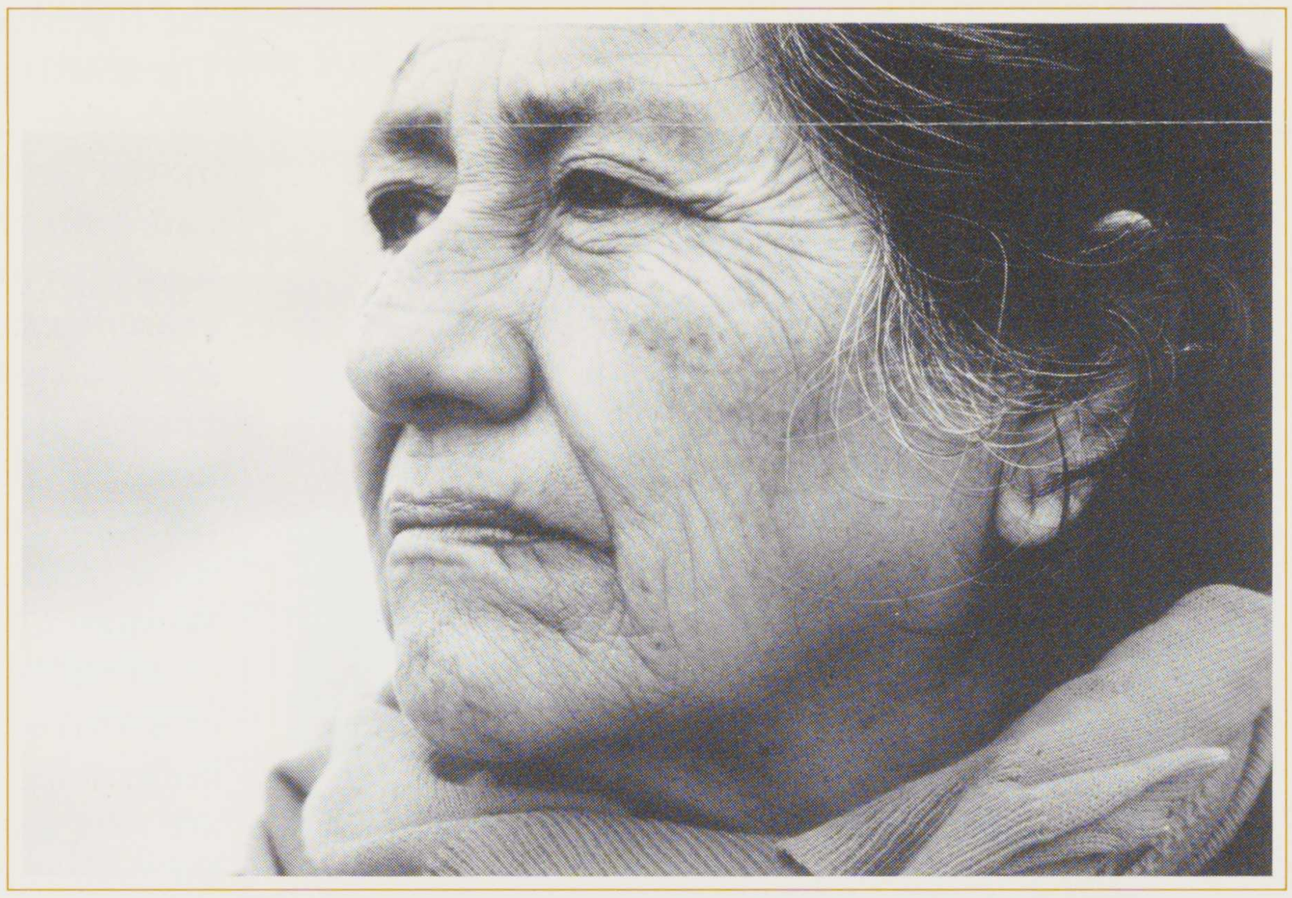
These Women Mean Business!

Alicia makes hats in Santiago, Morelia makes brooms in Bogota, Luisa sells vegetables in Quito, and Uvalda runs a restaurant in Brooklyn.

All over the world, women comprise a significant percentage of the working poor. In developing countries, streets are filled with women who earn a living as vendors, cooks and small-scale producers. Homes are increasingly used not only for living, but also for housing tiny businesses. In their homes, women care for children and domestic needs while also earning an income.



A Peruvian micro-entrepreneur

In recent years, women have entered the labor force in large numbers because of declining economic standards and reductions in real wages worldwide. Women today earn the only income or supplement the income of many families. But due to the international recession, women are not finding employment in the private or public sectors. They are creating their own businesses — micro-enterprises — in order to survive.

The United Nations estimates that 70% of micro-enterprises worldwide are run by women. The Agency for International Development has found that female micro-entrepreneurs are concentrated among the smallest and lowest paid activities in the micro-business sector, such as commerce, personal services, garment making and food production. Many of these enterprises are an extension of domestic work.

Most women who own and operate micro-enterprises do not have the resources — including money, time and information — to formally register their businesses. Many others simply don't bother to register, because of the perceived high costs of registration and low benefits that would come as a result.

These women know that they cannot access bank credit because their needs are too small, they have no

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UNIFEM Supports ACCION's Outreach to Women

UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, has awarded ACCION a three-year grant to expand outreach to women in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Guatemala. The objectives of the grant include increasing access to credit for female micro-entrepreneurs (with a loan to ACCION's Bridge Fund), strengthening participating organizations, especially as regards gender issues, and informing and influencing policy-makers regarding women and credit.

Over 15,000 women will be reached as a result of this grant. In addition, information will be gathered and distributed, including the writing of a book and the production of a video. Loan monitoring and data collection systems will be modified, and program innovations which address the specific needs of women will be created and disseminated. Staff training and the production of training materials regarding women and credit will be included in the project.