The theme of the conference was “From Science to Action.” In 35 sessions, attendees discussed the practical application of scientific knowledge in areas such as HIV, infectious causes of chronic diseases and other infectious disease–chronic disease relationships, gender roles in infectious disease transmission and prevention, sexual coercion and its effect on infectious diseases in women, sexually transmitted diseases, health disparities, healthcare workers and caregivers, immunization, effective community-based strategies, the role of cultural competence in women’s health, and more.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation sponsored 26 ICWID scholarships, which allowed persons from non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations from 10 countries and four continents to attend who otherwise would not have had the opportunity. These ICWID scholars will amplify the conference’s impact by taking the knowledge and insights gained back to their home countries and organizations.

The conference successfully illuminated the female face of infectious diseases. While celebrating successes in the prevention and control of prenatal and neonatal Group B Streptococcus infections and achievements in other areas, participants emphasized the many challenges remaining for the future. With the continuation of such efforts, the newly spotlighted female face of infectious diseases can also be the face of hope and progress.

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The Woman at the Dig

Tired from running a combine all day through acres of wheat, alone in front of the TV, I pay attention because the show’s about scientists digging up an ancient site. I have no special interest in bones, pottery, spearheads, or prehistoric garbage dumps, and I always look past the man describing animal migrations, burial rites, or building design and try to catch a glimpse of the women working at the site – one of them might be wearing cut-off jeans and a halter top, clearing a patch of ground with a trowel or brush. These women are all experts. You can tell by the way they look at a bone chip or a pottery shard they understand worlds about the person who left it. Sifting soil, they show more grace than contestants in a Miss Universe pageant.

Years from now, when these farms are ancient history, an expedition with such a woman might come along. I could drop something for her to find, a pocketknife, a brass overalls button. If only she could discover my bones. My eyes would be long gone, but I can see her form coming into focus above me as she gently sweeps aside the last particles of dust – her knee, thigh, hip, shoulders, and finally, set off by sky and spikes of sunlight, her face – a woman who recognizes what she’s found.

Leo Dangel (b. 1941)
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