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Women and Development Planning

Women are central to development. They control most of the non-money economy through bearing and raising children, and providing much of the labour for household maintenance and subsistence agriculture. Women also make an important contribution to the money economy by their work in both the formal and informal sectors.

Everywhere in the world women have two jobs—in the home and outside it. Women's work is generally undervalued and the additional burden development imposes is usually unrecognized. Their health suffers, their children suffer and their work suffers. Development itself is held back. As Third World countries face new problems women's role becomes increasingly central.

Contemporary Problems of Development

The Environment

It has been said that the present paradox of development lies in the mistaken assumption that growth of commodity production will improve the satisfaction of basic needs. Yet the expansion of cash-cropping and production for export has not been accompanied by the trickle down of benefits to the poor, especially poor women, while at the same time it has led to water pollution, soil erosion, destruction of firewood resources and loss of genetic diversity of plant and animal stocks. A new impoverishment of women has been brought about by the absorption into the market economy of much of the natural resources of land, water and timber on which family subsistence depended, without offering women a new means of support. Their responsibility for maintaining the family by providing food, water and firewood for cooking and heating makes women very aware of environmental degradation and determined to do something about it. To achieve sustainable development, with human and natural resources brought into a dynamic equilibrium, the skills and knowledge of the women, who are the primary sustainers of society, must be utilized.

Such active resistance to environmental degradation has forced policy makers to rethink the relationship between development and the environment. The women who lead ecology

movements in the Third World are offering a new view of development. The Chipko forest conservation movement in India pre-dated the UN Decade for Women. It became identified with women as it was they who led the fight to protect the forest and so preserve sources of fuel and reduce soil erosion. Firewood is the main source of energy in Africa (see *Primary Resources and Energy in the Third World* by John Sousson in this series) but it is becoming more difficult to obtain as land is cleared for cash-cropping. In Ghana, for many families the local supply of wood is now inadequate. Women in households in the savanna have to walk further in search of fuel now than 10 years ago, while over half of those in the forested zone are for the first time experiencing problems, with almost 30 per cent coping with an inadequate supply of firewood. Women have adopted two main coping strategies: reducing the number of cooked meals to one every other day as in parts of West Africa and the Andes, resulting in lower family nutrition levels; and supplementing or replacing fuel wood with agricultural residues such as cassava stalks or dried dung. Some 800 million people now rely on these residues for part of their energy needs thus depriving the soil of inputs traditionally used to improve fertility and soil structure. Many of women's income-earning activities such as fish-smoking, beer-brewing and pottery-making also depend on adequate supplies of fuelwood. In addition, forests supply other raw materials and food products important to women for household consumption, animal fodder and as a source of income.

The spread of irrigation, usually associated with green revolution crops, has led to a decline in both quantity and quality of drinking water. In the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh in 1980 out of 70,000 villages, 36,420 reported water shortages; in 1982 this number rose to 50,000 and in 1985 to 64,565. In some parts of Uttar Pradesh state women have to walk 24—32 kilometres to find drinking water. The burden on women is becoming so acute that they are refusing to marry men from water-shortage areas. The Chipko movement is also trying to protect water sources as it is aware of the link between forest and the maintenance of groundwater levels and water purity. It is now recognized that the exclusion of women from the planning of water supply and sanitation schemes is a major cause of their high rate of failure.

Drought in Africa has caused enormous problems for rural women. Even in dry years there are marked local variations in rainfall and so men find it advantageous to have several wives who farm widely scattered plots. This spreads the risk of crop failure and ensures that the husband with many wives will have at least one wife with a successful harvest. It does not reduce the risk for the other wives as traditionally each wife is responsible for feeding her own children. In some parts of the Sudan women are forced to leave their land and migrate to wetter regions where they work as sharecroppers for wealthy landowners and are paid with a percentage of the harvest which can be used to feed their children and their husband.

Economic Restructuring

During the last decade many Third World countries have found themselves with an

increasing debt burden. Often they have been forced to ask for financial assistance from the International Monetary Fund. In return for this assistance the IMF usually imposes tough financial constraints and demands that the recipient countries restructure their economies. This structural adjustment generally involves an increase in production for export combined with demand-reducing policies such as removal of subsidies on basic foodstuffs, reduction in welfare services, price rises, wage cuts and job losses. It may be argued that the social costs of structural adjustment would have been worse without the IMF intervention but there is little appreciation by international agencies of the gender bias in their impact. In response women have developed new survival strategies. This behaviour has been called 'the invisible adjustment' implying—that women make adjustment policies socially possible by increasing their own economic activity, by working harder and by self-abnegation.

Structural adjustment shifts the burden of welfare from the state to individual families and especially women. Wage cuts force more members of the family to seek paid employment and because women are paid less than men it may be easier for them to find employment. The impact of the economic-crisis of the 1980s on female economic activity rates is very mixed. It varies not only from country but within countries, between economic sectors and urban and rural areas and according to age and educational levels. The most widespread effect was a slowdown in the participation of women in the formal workforce which had been growing since 1960. Women have been particularly affected by the industrial brought about as a result of the introduction of new less labour-intensive technology and of decreased foreign direct investment in assembly industries in most of the 40 Third World countries operating export processing zones. Many women have joined the informal economy or have been forced to migrate. In the Philippines the number of women seeking jobs overseas increased by 70 per cent between 1982 and 1987. Whether women work often depends on the availability of a daughter to take on domestic chores and childcare. In Malaysia it was found that 31 per cent of girls but only 17 per cent of boys did work in the home. Girls may be taken out of school to replace the mother and so lose their chance to be trained for a better job in the future. For example in Bangladesh, when an IMF-supervised adjustment programme was implemented in 1985, the ratio of girls to boys in primary education fell from 77 girls per 100 boys in 1984 to below 67. Other countries experiencing such changes were Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Jamaica while decreased female enrolment in secondary schools has been documented for Indonesia, Jamaica, Nigeria, the Philippines and the Sudan.

Increased food prices force poor families to reduce both the quantity and quality of their food intake and women and children are usually most affected. In a slum in Guayaquil, Ecuador, during the economic crisis of 1987-88, 42 per cent of families gave up drinking milk and 79 per cent of children attending clinics suffered from malnutrition. In a sample of 51 countries studied by UNICEF in 1986 all but two had experienced an increase in child malnutrition between 1980 and 1985 and there is some indication that undernourished

children were more likely to be female. Increased infant mortality in the period 1982-85 was reported for Brazil, Ghana, Uruguay and the Philippines and in many areas these changes seem to have affected girls more than boys.

Men migrate to seek work elsewhere with the result that the number of both extended and female-headed households increases. Women become more powerful in the face of such acute threats to the survival of the family because of their traditional responsibility for reproduction. Both mother and daughters work longer hours and time becomes their scarcest resources. Women seek alternative sources of income to compensate for declines in household income and spend longer shopping for and preparing cheaper types of food. Men feel themselves marginalized and the study in Ecuador showed that adult males responded by increasing their alcohol consumption and their level of violence to women while teenage sons turned to dependence on drugs. The poorest families, often headed by women, bear a disproportionate share of the burden of adjustment and the economic crisis has tended to exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities.

Community Management

Awareness of the needs of their communities tends to be greater among women than men, since it is normally women who have to cope with problems of housing and access to services. Consequently, women often take the lead in demanding improvements in urban services. They may also work together to change social attitudes. Groups of women in Bombay, India, march silently, carrying placards, around houses in which dowry deaths have occurred, public shame on the perpetrators. This is more effective than government legislation in reducing the number of these tragedies. Women's groups in India have also lobbied for legal restraints on the abortion of female foetuses. As pressure on women's time increases, their community management role may change.

Women's survival strategies often depend on building up networks of women within the community. The communal kitchens set up in Lima, Peru, help to reduce the time women spend individually cooking for their families and so allow them extra time to earn money. Development agencies often advocate the spread of these grassroots separate women's organizations because they feel that they avoid confrontation with cultural patterns which oppose the mixing of unrelated women and men and prevent a submergence of women's interests and loss of leadership to men. However, these women's groups may provide a focus for the politicization of women's lives around issues of prime importance to their domestic role, such as rising food costs and the disappearance of their children at the hands of repressive regimes. This link between the empowerment of women for household welfare and consequent political action has not been analysed by most development workers.

As governments are forced to cut back on public sector spending, the burden of providing basic needs services to poor communities is falling increasingly on women. Women are having to spend precious time negotiating directly with international agencies and non-

governmental organizations in order to get free assistance for their children, and training or credit for setting up income-earning enterprises.

Development projects directed at women are often small, scattered and peripheral to the main aims of development. They usually try to promote greater self-sufficiency rather than development in the sense of expansion and qualitative change. Furthermore, the criteria for success are often less stringent than those for projects specifically for men. On the other hand, when general development projects are planned women may find themselves excluded because of restrictive entry conditions. Female-headed households are numerous in the slums of Third World cities but eligibility for new housing is commonly based on the premise that there is a male head of household. Female household heads may not have an income which is large enough or secure enough to qualify for housing. In self help projects they may not have the time or skills necessary to build a house and if they employ a man to do it they may be cheated. These problems are now widely recognized and can be overcome through training, membership of a women's group or special eligibility conditions tailored to suit the constraints of women's lives.

The success of the women who organized the rebuilding of their homes after the earthquake in Mexico City in 1986 is a good example. They learned how to lobby politicians, how good to design apartments which were suitable for their lifestyles and family size and how to prevent contractors cheating them. In doing so they not only rehoused their families but also successfully challenged the patriarchal structure of households, trade unions and political parties. In the face of an environmental disaster, grassroots women's groups were instrumental in reviving their communities.

Development Policies for Women

Since the 1950s, when development planning first came into the international spotlight, a number of approaches, having different effects on women, have been tried. They may be detailed as follows.

Welfare

This was the earliest approach. It dominated from 1950 to 1970 and is still widely used. Its main purpose was to enable women to be better mothers which was seen as their main role in society.

Equity

This was the original approach of Women in Development (WID) and was utilized during the Decade for Women 1975-85. Women were seen as active participants in the development process.

Anti-Poverty

The second WID approach, it aimed to increase the productivity of poor women and saw their poverty as a problem of underdevelopment not of subordination.

Efficiency

This is the most prevalent approach used today. Its aim is to ensure that development is efficient and effective. It is based on an awareness that policies of economic stabilization and adjustment rely on women's contribution to development and aims to make them more efficient managers of poverty.

Empowerment

An approach articulated by Third World feminists since the mid-1980s. It aims to empower women through greater self-reliance and sees women's oppression as stemming not only from male patriarchal attitudes but also from colonial and neo-colonial oppression.

Effort to grafts an awareness of women's needs onto planning through such political action as the Percy Amendment in the United States, which has been followed by similar policies in the Canadian and British government aid agencies and in the World Bank, have had little effect. It is necessary to challenge planning stereotypes relating to the structure of families and the division of labour within low-income households. Planners are often unaware of the work burdens of women and of their problems of time as a scarce resource. The kind of integrated project women need, such as making health and training facilities available at a convenient time and place for women with small children and little access to transport, is rarely attempted.

It is also necessary to distinguish between the practical and strategic needs of women. Practical needs are those such as food and shelter which are required by all the family and are identified as priorities by women and planners alike. They serve to preserve and reinforce the gender division of labour. Strategic needs are those which can empower women, challenge the existing gender division of labour and bring about greater equality. They are difficult to meet because poor women often do not have time to reflect on such needs because of their immediate requirement of seeking the satisfaction of their practical needs. Because equity programmes disturb the status quo and demand long term commitment by governments they are rarely implemented. However, addressing women's strategic needs is vital if fundamental change is to occur.

The costs of ignoring the needs of women are many: uncontrolled population growth, high infant and child mortality, a weakened economy, ineffective agriculture, a deteriorating environment, a divided society and a proper life for all. For young girls and for women it means unequal opportunities, a higher level of risk and a life determined by fate and the decisions of others rather than by choice.

Conclusion

Economic crisis in many Third World countries; enhanced by their peripheral position in the world economy, has led to reductions in spending on health, education and food subsidies and the impact is heaviest on poor women. When women are able to respond

successfully to crises they gain status within the household, either because they have become the chief income earner in the family or because they have gained confidence through learning how to negotiate, successfully with national and international agencies, and to work with other women. This very success may provoke an additional crisis in the internal gender relations of the household. Women's increased power and independence may result in a male backlash of violence and the expansion of female-headed households. It may also lead to more equality and freedom of choice for both men and women. The conflict between 'machismo' or male dominance, and economic need is creating societies in a state of flux in many parts of the Third World.

Trying to develop without acknowledging the people who do two-thirds of the work is inviting failure. Ways must be found to reduce their burden of work if women are to realize their potential. Development plans for women, where they exist, tend to assume mistakenly that women have free time to devote to new projects and to ignore the heterogeneity and differentiation of women.

Women are agents of change, not just victims. The United Nations has realized that the role and status of women are central to changes in population and development. It now argues that development plans must be rethought from the start so that women's abilities, rights and needs are taken into account at every stage. Making investment in women a development priority will require a major change in attitudes to development, not only by governments but also by lending agencies.

Investing in women is not a global panacea. It will not put an end to poverty but it will make a critical contribution. And it will help to create the basis for future generations to make better use of both resources and opportunities.