EDUCATION AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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SECTION I
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The essence of development[1]

A small group of women had come together for a training programme. Talking about the purpose of the workshop, one of the trainers asked - "is there something you yearn for?" After some thought, one landless woman answered - "I want to live in dignity, I do not want to be reduced to a state of helplessness where there is no respect for me as a human being - yes, that's what I want, I want to live in dignity." This statement left many speechless and forced the group to talk about the essence of development. To come to grips with the essence of what development means to ordinary people, they decided to play a game. They imagined some divine power had given them ten boons and they were supposed to prepare their list in one hour. Barely half an hour later, this is what they asked:

- To live in dignity.
- Meet basic needs like clean water, fuel, food for subsistence (two meals a day), employment/income and roof over our head.
- Freedom from violence, tensions and war.
- Justice - a society where right and wrong is recognised.
- Self-sufficiency, not to be dependent for essentials on the outside world.
- Opportunity to know the world outside (mobility, exposure, information and education)
- Society where every child experiences childhood, where children go to school.
- Equity between men / women and between people.
- Clean environment.
- Good health.
- A government that is within the reach of the people and a say in decisions which affects our life.

On the top of their list was dignity. Daily struggle for water, fuel, minor forest produce, fodder and a small daily wage in addition to endless household chores, violence in the hands of a drunken husband, fear of abuse and taunts of being a parasite, strips ordinary citizens of this country of their dignity. The poor made to cringe even for basic necessities that should be theirs by right. Women face the added indignity of physical abuse and rape. Their contribution to the family's survival is not recognised and they are seen as "parasites". At every stage in their life they are forced to fight with their back against the wall. "Is there no value for a woman's life," they asked.

This lucid list of demands for a mythical divine power tells more than all the great books and theories of development put together. This gut level response of poor women provides the conceptual framework to understand women's status and women's empowerment.

India is truly a country of paradoxes. For over fifty years now, our political leaders and administrators have repeatedly affirmed that we cannot achieve the goal of education for all unless we reach out to women and girls and ensure they have access to basic education. Yet, this goal has eluded us. Yes, there are significant regional differences, but

[1] Field Notes of Vimala Ramachandran, 1989-91

the moot point is that a very significant proportion of Indian women and girls do not have access to basic education (Percentage of literate women 39.42 according to 1991 Census; 40.1 according to NCAER/HDI 1994). Any discussion on the reasons for this unfortunate situation invariably ends in a debate on women's status and how it influences women's access to education and other development resources. Therefore it was felt that this EFA-2000 review would be incomplete without revisiting the debate on women's status and its implications for educational access and educational achievement.

What is the relationship between women's status and women's education? It is universally acknowledged that in societies where women are valued as women, they seem to have greater access to education. On the other hand, it has also been seen that when women are educated, there is a significant improvement in their status within the family and in society. While education can play a positive interventionist role in improving the status of women, the fact remains that low status coupled with rigid socio-cultural practices deny women this basic right. Urban India has thrown up another paradox. In the mid-1970s as a result of proactive mobilisation by women's groups in the urban areas there was sudden media interest on violence against women. Educated women (even officers and university teachers!) were victims of brutal violence within their own homes. This phenomenon labelled "dowry death" seems to corroborate global evidence on the wide prevalence of domestic violence. It became apparent that education alone does not always lead to higher status. Experience of income generation programmes initiated by Government of India demonstrated that enhancing the income of women alone is not enough. The critical issue is control over income. Similarly, the mere enactment of progressive legislation on property rights, rape, domestic violence, sex selective abortion, 30 percent reservation in Panchayat Raj Institutions and the like remain ineffective in the absence of proactive mobilisation to ensure their implementation. The presence of oppressive practices, discrimination, abuse and violence in all regions of the country and in almost every social class and community points towards a much deeper malice in Indian society. This unfortunate phenomenon was attributed to the low status of women. For the last fifty years administrators and political leaders have thrown up their arms helplessly and declared that nothing short of a social revolution will shake up the society.

What is "status"? Is it some intangible and unmeasurable concept that means different things to different people? Since the mid-1970s, researchers have worked on the relative position and condition of women, vis-à-vis men. They used the term 'status' to capture the prevailing situation by measuring a range of developmental indicators. For example - Demographic status covering number of men and women in different age groups, sex ratio, birth rate etc. Educational status capturing number of women and men achieving different levels of education. Health status - life expectancy, age-specific mortality, nutritional deficiency, access to healthcare services and so on. In 1974 Government of India published the pioneering work "Towards equality – report of the committee on the status of women in India". Since then the indicators used to measure women's status has been fine-tuned and adapted to almost every sector in India. In fact, India is one of the first countries to collect gender-disaggregated data on a wide range of development indicators.

At the root of the debate on status is the notion of power. Women's powerlessness stems from their lack of access to and control over resources – material resources, human resources and intangible resources[2]. This unequal gender relation manifests itself in different ways. Women's work and women's contribution to the economy is either undervalued or outright dismissed. The way work is defined; not just by the society but even by economists; devalues women's contribution to the survival and maintenance of the household and to family occupation (land, cattle, home-based work). Essentially what we mean is that women's work is not "valued" in monitory terms. As a result, they are perceived as being a drain on family and societal resources. Their skill, knowledge and abilities are also undervalued. While Dalit and other socially and economically disadvantaged communities in India also experience this kind of powerlessness, there is another dimension of women's powerlessness. Women's reproductive role (birthing, nurturing, caring and ensuring the survival of children) that ensures intergenerational survival of communities is distorted. They are portrayed as being weak and thereby "dependent" on men. It is indeed ironic that while the male "seed" is taken as the determining factor for inheritance, women shoulder the burden of 'sex determination'. This is perhaps the most important factor that influences women's status within the family and also responsible for a large proportion domestic violence, desertion and abuse. This kind of powerlessness makes women vulnerable. The prevalence of family and societal violence against women is today acknowledged as a sensitive indicator of women's status. It is this asymmetry in power relations that determines status.

Why has this unequal power relations remained unchallenged for thousands of years? Here we move into another dimension of social organisation. Traditionally women's mobility has been restricted; as a result her knowledge base is also limited. Lack of access to education, mobility and contact with the larger world has confined women to their immediate environment. There knowledge base is weak and what they do know (about food, health, cattle, plants, herbs, illness and the like) is undervalued. The sheer business of survival takes a heavy toll. Education is not perceived as a priority in their daily battle for food, water, fuel and subsistence chores for the survival of their family. Poor women are caught in a vicious situation where social isolation that stems from lack of mobility and access to information and knowledge beyond their immediate present alienates them from decision-making processes within the family and in the society. In a social milieu where women are not valued as a human being, they perceives themselves as a victims even of well intentioned schemes and programmes that purport to address their health, education, employment and family planning needs. Women have little control over or knowledge about their body and their life. All these factors reinforce a very low self-image. Ultimately poor women are trapped in their own self-perception. And the prevailing unequal gender relations perpetuate this perception. Historically, social reformers and radical movements created environment for change. But in the

[2] This framework has been developed in three books: Naila Kabeer, Reversed Realities – Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought (Kali for Women, New Delhi 1994); Ranjani K Murty, Gender and Development in India (IWID, Madras, 1994) and Srilatha Batliwala et al, Status of Rural Women in Karnataka, NIAS, Bangalore, 1998

absence of any such social movement, women in Indian continue to be trapped in the cycle of poverty, powerlessness and low status.

Women's status and education

"Why has education been inaccessible to rural women for centuries? Part of the answer lies on the supply side - there is clearly a lack of adequate and sensitive educational efforts to mobilise rural women, involve them in the educational process and help them reflect critically on their lives. The other side of the problem lies in women's own inability and lack of will to demand education and to assert themselves. One can begin to understand this inability by a simple analysis of the socio-economic milieu in which a majority of poor rural women exist:

- Caught up in daily struggles for fuel, fodder, and wage, they have no time for anything else.
- Their well-defined social roles and norms of interaction leave little room for education and critical thinking.
- Going about their chores in isolation, they are unable to share their experience of oppression with other women, and are therefore unable to tap their collective strength.
- They are denied access to information and alienated from decision-making processes. Even when they relate to government schemes, they do so as passive recipients.
- Victimised by schemes that purport to address their health, education, and employment needs, they are forced to view their environment with fear and suspicion.
- Systematically robbed of their confidence to think and learn without fear of failure, they are subsequently paralysed by their own low self-image.

As a result of these factors, women are caught in a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle; their inability to educate themselves perpetuates the stereotype that education is irrelevant to women.[3]"

The two key words we come across in the debate on women's status are access and control. "What do 'access' and 'control' mean? In the context of material, human and intangible resources, access refers to the opportunity available to use the resources. For instance, do women get an opportunity to take a loan or go to the health centre for treatment? If they do, they can be said to have access to these resources. Control is much more complex, and needs to be understood within the notion of shared power and on-going negotiation. Control over a resource is the bargaining power to define or determine the use of that resource… However, control cannot be defined identically for every kind of resource. For a woman, control over her sexuality, fertility, mental and physical security, mobility, and intangible personal resources means her right to male decisions about the use of these resources and that this right, and her decision about the use of these resources is accepted by others… On the other hand, control over public and private resources, political spaces, or redressal systems, means the right to equal participation in decision-making about the use of these resources, and the benefits that accrue from such use. For instance, women must have a right to an equal say in determining what crops will be planted on the family land, when and at what price they will be sold, how the resultant income will be spent, what trees should be planted in a community aforestation programme, whom they will vole for in an election, or where a school will be located…

[3] Project Document: Mahila Samakhya – Education for Women's Equality, Department of Education, Government. of India, March 1989

Thus we are not defining control as a mere shift of decision making from men to women; rather, control means an acknowledged and socially sanctioned equal share in decision making, in both the private and public spheres".[4]

We can thus measure women's status through the prism of 'access' and 'control'. Indicators or analytical tools can be used to analyse women's status. These indicators are now being used in the Human Development Reports brought out by UNDP to rank countries on a Gender Development Index. Government of India is also in the process of fine-tuning and adapting the Gender Development Index (GDI) to India. In the last ten years there is a realisation that unless we have "proof" by way of data, indicators, case histories and so on - the mainstream development pundits will continue to dismiss "gender" as a crucial determinant in the overall well-being of society. Till a decade back, the development community dominated by economists was reluctant to grapple with non-economic factors that impact on development. Most "solutions" were formulated in economic terms. In the last ten years, partly because of advocacy spearheaded by the Human Development Reports and partly because of widespread media coverage of growing societal violence, ethnic strife, rampant corruption, the collapse of the Soviet Block and so on - development pundits are willing to seriously study non-economic issues in development planning. We are now poised at a threshold, where the impact of gender injustice on the overall development scenario, is more that evident. In India, we are all aware that we can never realise the goal of "Education for All" unless we are willing to squarely address gender dimension of education planning and administration.

[4] Page 17-18, Batliwala et al, op cit. 1998

SECTION II

MEASURING "WOMEN'S STATUS"

Educational planners in India have tried a wide range of strategies to bridge the gap between men and women. Almost every conceivable strategy has been tried out. Fifty years after Independence we are still grappling with unequal access. Why have they not worked? What went wrong? A thorough exercise was done in 1985-86 and the Government acknowledged that there were no easy answers. What the education sector can do is to work as a catalyst and provide the initial momentum for change. The National Policy on Education (1986 and Revised Version of 1992) stated that the Government will use education as a means to achieve gender equality. The chapter titled "Education for Women's Equality" went as far as to state that education will be used as a tool to correct centuries of discrimination. Yet, translating this very radical policy into implementable strategies and activities has been a very difficult task. This is because women's status cannot be altered by the actions of one arm of the Government.

Sex ratio

This is perhaps the most sensitive index of women's status. It is determined by a wide range of factors linked to women's access to public and private resources. Sex ratio is an outcome indicator that is result of higher mortality of girl children in the 0-5 age group, neglect and discrimination in food, healthcare and physical well being at all stages of life. In recent times technology assisted female foeticide is practised in some pockets – despite prevailing legislation banning the use of diagnostic tests to determine the sex of the child. Similarly, the prevalence of infanticide in some Districts sent shock waves throughout the country. There is a temptation to simplify this complex problem. As Dreze and Sen point out:

"To begin with, we should deal with two misunderstandings that arise from time to time in popular discussion of the issue of low female-male ratios in India... First, it is sometimes thought that the main cause of the problem is some phenomenon of hidden female infanticide, not captured in reported death statistics. In fact census figures on female-male ratios are quite consistent with what one would predict based on (1) standard female-male ratios at birth of about .95, and (2) independently recorded age- and sex-specific mortality rates…It is possible, of course, that recorded child death include some female infant deaths due to infanticide, which are reported by parents as due to some other causes. But anthropological evidence suggests that female infanticide, when it does occur, takes place very soon after birth. The bulk of excessive female mortality in childhood, on the other hand, occurs after the age of one, with a less unequal pattern in the first year... The force of excess female mortality, therefore, lies in mortality rates in age groups beyond female infanticide. The female disadvantage in these age groups is itself due to a well-documented practice of preferential treatment of boys and neglect of female children in intra-household allocation. There is, indeed, considerable direct evidence of neglect of female children in terms of health care, nutrition, and related needs, particularly in North India."[5]

Education alone cannot become the magic wand. Co-ordinated action at several fronts

[5] Pages 143-144, Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen: India Economic Development and Social Opportunity, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995

could enable women break out of the vicious cycle of poverty and powerlessness. Repeated failure to ensure convergence of developmental inputs in the larger framework of empowerment has been the bane of sectoral planning - not only in India, but also across the world. While almost all Governments, donor agencies and multilateral organisations (including the World Bank) pay lip service to convergence, operationalising a multi-sectoral strategy in a system that is built on clear demarcation of sectoral territories have been a daunting prospect. While it may be almost impossible to ensure complete convergence, Governments can chose a limited number of sectors and plan for convergence at the field level. This is where indicators come handy.

Child sex ratio (0-6) in select "Red Alert" Districts of India (Census 1991)	
Bhind, Madhya Pradesh	850 per 1000 boys
Jaisalmer, Rajasthan	851 per 1000 boys
Kaithal, Haryana	854 per 1000 boys
Jind, Haryana	855 per 1000 boys
Salem, Tamil Nadu	859 per 1000 boys

This section lists nine indicators that can be used to measure women's status. This sub-section has been adapted from Ranjani Murty (1994), Naila Kabeer (1994) and S Batliwala (1998) work on women's empowerment. Recent data has also been used to highlight issues and also point towards gaps in existing database on women.

Women, work and their access to and control over productive assets and resources:

Select States	% of cultivators and agricultural labourers who were women and girls, by select States, Census 1991		% of women and girls in the workforce who were cultivators or agricultural labourers, by select State, Census 1991	
	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers	Cultivators	Agricultural Labourers
Andhra Pradesh	29.73	51.13	22.37	60.33
Arunachal Pradesh	50.45	36.27	83.78	5.12
Bihar	11.62	25.59	31.60	59.29
Haryana	11.70	12.81	46.64	25.04
Kerala	10.38	32.28	5.56	36.09
Maharashtra	38.75	53.02	39.07	43.69
Orissa	10.60	34.90	25.84	55.06
Punjab	1.21	4.45	8.72	24.36
Rajasthan	23.16	35.80	69.34	18.23
Tamil Nadu	25.58	47.17	20.92	53.79
West Bengal	7.19	19.42	16.23	37.88
India	20.07	38.12	34.57	44.24

It is said that women do three-fifths of the world's work, earn one-tenth of the world's income and own one-hundredth of the world's assets. Women work, but their work is not visible in statistics. Census of India records that only 27 per cent women in rural areas and 9 percent women in urban areas are formally in the workforce! There are staggering differences across States – while in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra 43 and 47 percent

women are reported as being in the work force in rural areas; Punjab records a mere 4 per cent. As seen in the table below a clearer picture seems to emerge when we look at the data on agricultural labourers and cultivators in different States.

What does this tell us? The number of women and girl cultivators is large and growing. While it is true that the recording system adopted in the 1991 Census was very strict and people were asked to report unpaid work of women on family farms, the fact remains that more and more women are today part of the work force. Unfortunately we do not have much information on ownership. Women works on land, in looms, take care of cattle, on other family assets – but they rarely own them. Similarly, women rarely seem to own the house they live in, as a result they are always vulnerable. As Dr Bina Agarwal points out: "Indeed while the link between property and class relations has been well established in political economy, the link between property and gender relations has remained largely unexamined. Land has been and continues to be the most significant form of property in rural South Asia. It is a critical determinant of economic well-being, social status and political power. However there is substantial evidence that economic resources in the hands of male household members often do not benefit female members in equal degree. Independent ownership of such resources, especially land, can thus be of critical importance in promoting the well being and empowerment of women."[6]

The absence of material assets like housing, land, tools of production is critical for the survival of poor households. And within the household, women's access to and control over them determines their ability to lead a life of dignity. It also reduces their vulnerability. Coupled with prevailing norms of use of such resources and traditional division of labour (where men plough and women plant, weed etc.) formal ownership could be negated in actual practice. In a situation of crisis, like being widowed or separated, women are often forced to abandon immovable family assets like house and land. This may be the case even in situations where women may continue to be legal owners. Developing indicators for ownership and control over assets and resources could be explored. Government programme for housing, land distribution, loan for acquiring other productive assets could insist on either sole or joint ownership, thereby safeguarding women's access. Ensuring easy access to credit through self-help groups, credit groups and the like have made a significant difference to women's access to productive assets. Needless to add, other indicators may have to be developed to measure extent of control over these assets.

Women's access to public resources – forests, commons, water, sanitation, education, health etc:

In every democratic society some basic resources are guaranteed by the State as a fundamental right of citizens. Public resources range from access to village commons, forest produce, water and fuel at one end of the spectrum to access to education, training and healthcare at the other end. Women's inability to access these resources has a profound impact on status. The health status of a community is a very sensitive index of

[6] Bina Agarwal – A field of ones own – gender and land rights in South Asia, Cambridge University Press, 1994

well being. It is well known that lack of basic healthcare services for pregnant women is responsible for high infant, child and maternal mortality rates in many parts of the country. It is indeed shocking that only 24.5 per cent of all deliveries are conducted in institutions and trained professionals in India attend only 24.3 deliveries. This implies that 51.3 per cent of all deliveries are neither in institutions nor does a trained person attend them. Regional variations are significant – with Kerala topping the list with 92.3 per cent deliveries in Institutions and Rajasthan coming last with delivery conducted by untrained persons being as high as 75.4 percent in urban areas and 80 per cent in rural areas (SRS, GOI, 1993). Only 1.3 per cent of GDP is spent on health and 88 % of pregnant women in the 15-49 age group are anaemic. It is estimated that Maternal Morality Rate is as high as 570 per 100,000 live births in 1993 and Infant Mortality Rate is 73 per 1000 live births in 1996 (HDSA, 1998).

Percentage Distribution of female deaths related to childbirth and pregnancy by specific cause, Rural India 1990 and 1994 (RGI, GOI, 1994)[7]		
Bleeding and Pregnancy and Puerperium	23.70	23.70
Anaemia	19.40	19.30
Toxaemia	15.20	13.10
Puerperal Sepsis	08.10	10.60
Abortion	11.80	12.60
Mal-Position of child	07.10	06.40
Not classified	14.70	14.20
Total	100	100

Let us look at people access to safe water, sanitation, and housing. The situation is as grim. According to the Human Development in South Asia 1998 only 63 per cent of people have access to safe water and 29 per cent have access to sanitation. Even if women technically have access to safe water (piped water, hand pumps, tube well), the amount of time spent collecting and storing water is quite significant. The situation of Dalit women who are denied access to water sources in their vicinity because of continued practices of untouchability is rarely factored in. Experience of organisations working with rural and urban poor women reveal that almost two to four hours a day is spent on managing household water resources. This situation gets particularly grim during the summer months and also during the monsoon, Poor women in urban slums report that access to even a few buckets of water for basic necessities is a problem. Water contamination, pollution and indiscriminate waste disposal further compound the problem. Traditionally women have always borne the brunt of water scarcity. It is also said to influence girls access to schooling and their attendance. When water is scarce, daughters take over the load of fetching water, especially if it involves queuing up or walking long distances.

Literacy rates in select states, 1991 and 1994

State	% Literate - (Age 7+)Rural and Urban 1991 Census	% Literate - 1994 (Age 7+) Rural Only HDI / NCAER

[7] Source Annual Report 1994 of Registrar General of India, Quoted in Women in India – A Statistical Profile, 1997; Government of India 1997

	Male	Female	Male	Female
Haryana	67.85	40.94	69.4	38.1
Himachal Pradesh	74.57	52.46	79.4	57.0
Punjab	63.68	49.72	68.2	51.2
Bihar	52.63	23.10	56.6	28.8
Uttar Pradesh	55.35	26.02	62.0	28.3
Madhya Pradesh	57.43	28.39	58.9	27.1
Orissa	62.37	34.40	67.8	40.7
Rajasthan	55.07	20.84	60.4	19.0
West Bengal	67.24	47.15	66.3	49.9
Gujarat	72.54	48.50	71.3	46.7
Maharashtra	74.84	50.51	70.9	45.1
Andhra Pradesh	56.24	33.71	60.6	39.1
Karnataka	67.25	44.34	65.1	43.9
Kerala	94.45	86.93	93.0	86.5
Tamil Nadu	74.88	52.29	74.6	53.2
India	**63.86**	**39.42**	**65.6**	**40.1**

Women's access (or lack of it) to public resources determines a range of social indicators, like literacy, infant and child mortality, malnutrition and so on. All these indicators are closely linked, one impacting and influencing the other. In the last thirty years the Government has accepted these inter-linkages. For example, one of the most popular correlation made in recent times is the link between female literacy, fertility, child survival and child nutrition. As a result of intensive advocacy by women's organisations the Government decided to shift the focus of the Health and Family Welfare programme from method specific contraceptive targets to a more integrated reproductive and child health approach. Almost every development department of the Government provides for formation of women's groups at the village level (or in urban settlements) to ensure convergence of different social sector services. Similarly, many development programmes have tried to explore the gender dimension of access. For example, in the last ten years water and sanitation programmes, joint forest management programmes and primary education projects have tried to provide for the training of women to ensure they become active members of village level user committees. Pani Panchayas, Village Education Committee and the Van Suraksha Samiti are expected to ensure at least 30 percent women.

We can assess women's access to public resources using the following indicators.

- Education: literacy rates over a period, percentage of boys and girls finishing primary school, middle school and high school (Board Examinations), age-specific school attendance rates of boys and girls and percentage of men and women in post-secondary higher education by type of education. Calculating the gender gap in each of the above and plotting the trend over a period of time will enable us to understand the extent of women's access to education.
- Health: Age specific mortality rate of men and women in the 15-35 age group with causes of death will help us capture a wide range of health related issues including maternal mortality, death due to unnatural causes (dowry / domestic violence related). Under-5 mortality rate of boys and girls is again a very sensitive index of how much society values its girls and their access to nutrition and healthcare. Percentage of

sterilisation performed on men and women is again an effective indicator of women's status and taken together with family size and number of girls and boys in the family – it can give us an insight into the value society places on women. The Human Development Reports calculate "health services access" – the percentage of the population that can reach appropriate local health service by foot or local means of transport in no more that one hour. Juxtaposing this with mortality data can enable researchers and policy makers to get a better insight into access – physical and social.

- Water and sanitation: Access to safe water and availability of water source by type, distance and seasonal variations is again an effective indicator of women's access to public resources. This one variable is said to influence girls access to education and health status of the family. Micro studies done on household work distribution have shown that women and girls shoulder the major burden of fetching and storing water, with young boys playing a supportive role in some areas. Access to proper water disposal systems and toilets are again a sensitive index. These have been used effectively in the Human Development Reports to calculate the Human Development Index. The 1995 HDR has used this to analyse women's status.
- Percentage of women and men treated in hospitals and clinics – by illness (with the exception of deliveries, abortion and related problems). In the last twenty years micro studies have revealed gender differences in access to health care services. Women seem to have less access to hospital / clinic based care and greater access to traditional healers and local medical (traditional and RMPs) practitioners. Girls are often not brought to clinics and hospitals at an appropriate time, with the family first resorting to home-based care, local practitioner and finally (when it is perhaps too late) to hospitals. On the other hand son preference in India seems to positively influence health-seeking behaviour for boys.

Control over labour and access to income

Ask any woman what she urgently needs, the first thing that will come to her mind will be employment and income – even when she is already overworked and is shouldering the entire burden of family subsistence work. Innumerable micro studies and life histories have shown that when the family is on the verge of starvation, women take on the responsibility of ensuring survival. Poor women will tell you that children ask them for food, not their fathers. At another level, evidence has also shown that when the income of women go up there is an immediate improvement in the health, nutrition and education status of children. This does not always hold true when the income of men go up. Recent reports and documents on the anti-liquor movement in different parts of the country have focused attention on male alcoholism and family survival. Therefore, women's control over their own labour and the income earned by them is a sensitive index of women's status.

What are the indicators that help us measure labour and income?

- Women's participation in the labour market: this is captured in work participation rates (main and marginal workers, formal / informal sector / home based etc.). The methodology used to record work participation of women has been a very important area of work in the last forty years.
- Percentage of male and female non-farm workers among main workers and

percentage of male and female agricultural labourers among marginal and subsidiary workers will enable us to capture the economic status of women.

- Agricultural wage rates of men and women and non-farm wage rates of men and women captures gender differentials. The Indian Constitution guarantees equal pay for equal work – yet in reality the wage differentials are quite significant.
- Percentage distribution of adult wage earners by duration of employment disaggregated by sex could enrich the above information.
- Women's access to education and skill training: In the time of globalisation, women's access to appropriate skill training determines their ability to get employment. Again, the type of skill training made available to women (sex stereotypes) invariably push women into certain kinds of occupations and prevent access in others.
- Women's access to credit: In the last twenty five years, especially since the path-breaking work done by Self Employment Women's Association of Gujarat, Co-operative Development Federation of Andhra Pradesh and Working Women's Forum of Tamil Nadu – women's access to credit has been accepted as a important indicator of status.

Women's control over their bodies

"You ask me about my health - where do I start? I am ill because I do not get adequate food, adequate sleep, and the dust from the stone quarry settles in my lungs. I do not have water to keep clean. My children are exposed to the cold, the heat and to the rain. My husband gets drunk and beats me and I am bruised all over. I work from dawn to dusk. I produced more children than what my emaciated body could handle - yet I fear how many will actually survive. When I seek doctors, they do not listen to my story. They give me some tablets that make me sick. He never explains what is wrong. When I complain of exhaustion, he says women complain too much. The only time they seek me out is to persuade me to get sterilised. You still want to know what ails me - look at my life, it is the cause of my illness." (Stone quarry worker in the outskirts of Delhi[8])

"From the day I got married it is my husband who takes all decisions. I do not have the freedom or the courage to tell him that I do not want any more children. He wants at least three sons... Babies do not fall into our wombs on their own, why then are we women chased like animals? Why can't the nurse chase my husband? I have to undergo the pain of pregnancy and childbirth. Why can't my husband undergo the pain of sterilisation? " (Rural woman from UP Hills)

One of the most glaring dimensions of gender inequality is women's lack of control over their own body. Starting from age of marriage to access to contraception, abortion and healthcare, women's experience of gender injustice is closely linked to their ability to decide when and whom they marry, when and how many children they have, access to contraception, reluctance of men to take responsibility for their sexuality, sexual abuse and violence – and above all the vulnerability of women to Sexually Transmitted Infections including HIV and AIDS. Till recently the only data that influenced policy making was Contraceptive Prevalence Rates. The entire might of India's Health and

[8] Field Notes of Vimala Ramachandran, 1994-94

Family Welfare Programme was geared towards achieving contraceptive targets. The International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo 1994 signalled a major departure in this arena. Government of India took the initiative to do away with method specific targets and adopted a more holistic reproductive and child health approach. As a result, today we are more open to looking at broader range of indicators to determine women's status.

The indicators that can be used to measure women's control over their body are as follows:

- Availability of and utilisation of ANC and PNC services
- Percentage of Institutional deliveries and deliveries assisted by trained personnel.
- Contraceptive prevalence rates – spacing methods, male and female sterilisation and abortion.
- Fertility rate.
- Percentage of male and female sterilisation operations performed over a period of time and trends thereof.
- Prevalence of abortion and resultant mortality and morbidity. Access to safe abortion facilities.
- Maternal and infant mortality rate.
- Recorded numbers of domestic and sexual violence - including rape, sexual abuse, 'eve teasing' and other forms of gender violence. The number of convictions could supplement this information.

Physical mobility

It is quite surprising that until recently, women's physical mobility has not been used as an indicator to measure status. As Srilatha Batliwala succinctly puts it: "The sociological inter-relationship between caste, class and women's mobility is interesting. Patriarchal controls on women's sexuality are maximum in the case of upper castes. The fear of pollution due to inter-marriage or illegitimate sexual contact of their women with lower caste men, as well as the premium on family honour and avoiding shame in upper caste households, results in severe regulation and control… Apart from caste rules, menstrual taboos in many cultures and religious strictures also are significant determinants on women's mobility. The controls on physical mobility are maximum in the childbearing age… In fact, in India adolescent girls are almost always escorted by male or older female relatives because of the anxiety to safeguard their virginity… Control over mobility is a very sensitive and important indicator of autonomy as it debunks the myth that it is the poor and low caste women who have a lower status… Physical mobility, although a vital parameter of status is unfortunately a double-edged sword, since most societies seem to have little respect for women's bodily integrity. Free mobility makes women vulnerable to assault molestation and rape… Increased physical mobility cannot directly translate into higher status unless there is social transformation that makes free mobility a safe proposition for women."[9]

Mobility is a rather tricky issue. Government programmes and non-government

[9] Pages 37-39, S Batliwala et al, 1998

organisations working towards women's empowerment address this seriously. Increased mobility gives women greater access to information and knowledge and build self-esteem and self-confidence. The Pudukkottai Total Literacy Campaign (Tamil Nadu) enabled thousands of women to learn to ride bicycle. Just the very simple skill of cycling opened a New World to them. The Department of Education's Mahila Samakhya programme has build in field trips, melas, study visits and structured exposure to District administration. Similarly NGOs like SPARC, Swayam Shikshan Prayog, SEWA etc. create opportunities to learn from others. But, the basic issue is that, mobility and autonomy go together. As of now, the only indicator that could possibly be used is the development of infrastructure and public transport. As the Haryana and Punjab experience amply demonstrates, the mere existence of facilities does not automatically lead to greater use. But it does seem to have made a significant difference to girls access to schooling beyond the primary level.

Access to intangible resources

When we debate the relative strength or status of two groups of human beings we invariably use words like – self-confident, self-esteem, can get together and argue their point better, knowledge acquired in the experience of life, general family environment and so on. These are often dismissed as being intangible, something that cannot be measured or even defined! Therefore, when a Government programme known as Women's Development Programme of Rajasthan (1984) talked about improving the self-esteem and self-confidence of women, enabling them to acquire the ability to critically analyse their own life situation, using the information they have and moving from a sate of passive acceptance of their life situation to a more proactive mode – a lot of planners and administrators dismissed the programme as a non-starter. In a very short span of four years, the change was visible and the impact palpable. It was so effective that a significant section of Rajasthan Government and many political leaders wanted to close down or just render the programme ineffective. That is what happened in 1992 – for all practical purposes this vibrant programme lost out. The experience of WDP inspired others and in 1989 the Department of Education, MHRD launched Mahila Samakhya – a women's empowerment programme. Again, this programme has proved beyond doubt that such intangibles have to be addressed if we are serious about improving the status of women.

Creation of women's collective – Mahila Samooh / Mahila Sangha, raising consciousness, enabling women to reach out to information and knowledge, facilitating greater mobility and opportunities to meet and learn from other people – all these have now become accepted processes of empowerment. Essentially, what happens is that the programme removes the isolation women experience and enables them to come together and draw strength from each other. Even the simple act of acknowledging domestic violence as a larger societal issue and not a "personal shame" is a liberating experience. They also acquire education and community development skills. The programme helps them access other skills and see themselves as masons, hand pump mechanics, entrepreneurs, traders, farmers, teachers, social activists, forest resources manager and so on.

Again the indicators that could be used to record and may be even assess women's access to such intangible resources is by way of documenting the experience of women in forming groups / collectives, the kind of training they have received, exposure to the world outside and so on.

Law and mechanisms for legal redressal

Constitutional guarantee of fundamental rights and freedoms have meant little to millions of women all over India who have been subject to centuries of oppression and all forms of exploitation. Their secondary status in society, coupled with oppressive caste system and grinding poverty, has effectively robbed them of their rights and a life of dignity. Women have faced the brunt of atrocities and are subject to violence at home, in the work place and in society. Many of them become unwitting victims of senseless violence, leaving their lives scarred beyond human tolerance. Yet, women have survived and many of them have also mustered the courage to fight for their rights. The Government acknowledges that despite good laws and rules, their enforcement has been a major problem. Unless there is a social movement that can transform existing attitudes and behaviour patterns, the role of the Government is limited and active support of civil society is necessary. The Government can play a catalytic role in fostering a climate where women's rights, dignity and security are safeguarded.

Percentage distribution of various crimes against women in 1997[10]	
Molestation	25.30
Torture	30.30
Dowry Deaths	05.00
Kidnapping and abduction	12.80
Rape	12.60
Dowry Prohibition Act	02.20
Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act	06.90
Sexual Harassment	04.80
Others	00.10

Progressive laws and women friendly judiciary theoretically, provides women with the opportunity to seek redressal. It has been used by individual women and also by groups and communities. India is fortunate to have one of the most progressive Constitutions, which upholds the principle of equality and social justice. India also has a history of affirmative action, and in the last ten years we have made tremendous progress in this arena. On the other hand, we have not been able to enforce so many laws. Starting from the innocent sounding Prevention of Child Marriage act to the more difficult and complex inheritance laws, the mere existence of progressive legislation does not guarantee enforcement. In the last two years the Supreme Court Of India's directive on sexual harassment in the workplace and more some very hard hitting judgements in "eve teasing" has made some dent, but the majority of women are constrained by their own life situation and therefore do not have the confidence or the resources to complain.

[10] National Crime Records Bureau, New Delhi 1997 Quoted in Dr. R K Raghavan: Figures of crime, Frontline, July 30 1999

Notwithstanding the complex and often contradictory phenomenon, we need to systematically collect information on compliance. Some suggested indicators are:

- Women's access to legal aid and shelters: Number of legal aid units and their utilisation, quantum of national resources and development aid invested in them over a time period.
- Crimes against women and percentage of registered cases that have lead to conviction. Here we could include unnatural deaths, rape, molestation, abuse and so on.
- Documenting and compiling reported outcomes of Jati Panchayat (in recent times the media has been reporting horrible cases of handing out punishments to girls / their parents, even death sentence!) and other traditional forum.
- Civil and property cases against women, cited causes for divorce and desertion, case histories of women confined to mental asylums – systematically gathering information on these issues could be useful.
- Community survey information on prevalence of domestic violence, child marriages and so on could also be valuable – even though they may be from small studies done by feminist researchers.

Women's access to decision making forum and political spaces

India is one of the pioneers in the world to introduce legislation reserving 30 per cent of seats in local self-government institutions and municipal corporations for women. This, by itself, is truly a tremendous achievement. It is now widely acknowledged that this is the outcome of almost two decades of advocacy by the women's movement. The 73rd and 74th amendment to the Indian Constitution is a marker that will eventually have far reaching implications. However, evidence pouring in from different parts of the country show that the battle is far from over. The very issues we have discussed in the preceding sections of this paper prevent women from making full use of this opportunity. Women representatives need training and information support to function effectively and enter traditional male dominated spaces with confidence. Where they have done so, there is now some concrete evidence to show that men resort to no-confidence motions to dislodge the woman Sarpanch and elect a man. Many women have found it difficult to interact with officials at the District and Block levels – who come across as hostile. There have even been bizarre cases where they recognise the husband of the elected woman as the de facto representative!

Compiling information at the National level could, in the next ten years, become a very effective indicator of improvement in the status of women in India. At this stage, data on elections and subsequent development, case studies, information on training programmes and other forms of ongoing support across the country could help us map interesting regional trends. For example, it is said the experience in Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka is quite encouraging primarily because State Governments have played a proactive role in enhancing the capability of women to meet this new challenge. On the other hand, the experience of Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have been disheartening. The case of Tamil Nadu is of particular interest because it is fast catching up with Kerala on the demographic and educational front - but there seems to be a lot of resistance to

women's participation in Panchayats. A recent case study done in Dharmapuri District revealed that there was a lot of hostility towards women, especially Dalit women, during the elections. There were reported incidences of active obstruction by local officials who did not share information on the reserved seats[11]. In Rajasthan, a large number of women Sarpanch were removed by vote of no confidence. Frivolous financial misappropriation cases were used to remove women who tried to assert their authority[12].

Concluding remarks

Women's status influences access to a wide range of resources - both within the family and outside. It is now acknowledged that unless we recognise these linkages and design development programmes to ensure some degree of convergence, we will not be able to breakout of the current impasse. Even a cursory study of these linkages prove beyond doubt that when we lift the "statistical Purdah[13]" it becomes more than evident that women are productive workers whose contribution is tremendous in the national economy. The poorer the family, the greater is their contribution to the household economy. Recognising this elementary fact is a necessary step towards improving the economic situation of people below the poverty line. In the last twenty-five years it small and large scale research studies have shown that a major share of the income earned by women goes into maintenance of the family and even a marginal increase in women's income translates into better nutrition, health and education of children. Despite recognition of this fundamental truth, we as a nation are not yet ready to invest in improving the situation of women and enhancing their bargaining power in the family and in society. Women continue to have limited access to education, healthcare services, credit, employment, training and so on.

It is in this context that we can confidently argue that understanding women's status and developing tools to measure it is a good starting point. A clearer understanding and a more honest appreciation of ground realities have always helped policy maker and administrators reach their goals. Unfortunately, while we set idealistic goals, our experience of moving towards them, at best, has been quite tardy. This is not to blame one set of leaders or administrators, but experience of the last fifty years on many fronts have been far from encouraging. While there are significant regional variations, India's record in this sector is still less than satisfactory.

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[11]Vimala Ramachandran and Lucy Xavier, Internal Review of SEARCH extension programme, SEARCH Bangalore, April 1997.

[12] Information shared by Panchayati Raj Department of Government of Rajasthan, March 1999

[13] Gender and poverty in India, A World Bank Country Study, Washington, 1991

SECTION III

POLICY AND PROGRAMME INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE WOMEN'S STATUS

Let us now move from generalities to more specific analysis of the factors that determine women's status and whether and how the policies and programmes of the Government have made a difference in India. It is now well known that Government of India's own understanding of development has changed over the last fifty years. Beginning with a welfare approach in the 1950s, we gradually moved towards a "development" approach in the mid-1970s and to a "empowerment" approach in the 1990s. Scanning Government of India's policy documents it becomes evident that this shift was not confined to women alone. In many ways, the Governments policy towards Dalits, tribal communities and women – have evolved in roughly the same direction. However, in this paper, we will restrict ourselves to women.

In the first twenty years after India became independent the primary focus of political leaders and development administrators was on building a strong foundation for industrialisation. While the ideologues of the Congress Party were keenly aware of social and gender inequalities, it was felt that India should concentrate on industrialisation. As a result, in the 1950s we as a nation paid more attention to agricultural development, basic industries, power generation and higher education. This is not to say that we did not have any programmes for women. Rooted in a more traditional welfare framework, in the early years we focused on two areas, viz.: one, legal equality through constitutional guarantees and laws and two, welfare programmes. The early community development approach saw the family as an organic whole, but given the nature of Indian society, this approach was focused on the underprivileged sections of society. Affirmative action was not extended to women. This approach is quite consistent with global understanding of development issues.

The Community Development Programme (1952) was initiated to promote agricultural development and social welfare. The focus was rural India. In 1954 there was a realisation that women workers would be needed to reach out to poor rural women. As a result, each development block in a district was provided with two "Gram Sevikas" working under the overall supervision of one "Mukhya Sevika". This scheme also provided for the formation of "Mahila Mandals" which was to be the nodal point for creating greater awareness about health and nutrition among women. Women were not seen as workers and the urban middle-class influence was quite evident when women were described as "housewives". Welfare programmes for women were focused on widows, deserted women etc. With the creation of the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) in 1954, welfare extension services were introduced to provide "poor mothers" with supplementary nutrition, healthcare and so on. Some social education activities were also initiated and training programmes were limited to sewing, food processing, handicrafts and so on. The main objective of training programmes was to enable women to "supplement" family income. This approach to women and development continued almost uninterrupted till the 1970s.

Central Social Welfare Board

The CSWB was established in 1951 under the Ministry of Welfare. This autonomous institution established by the Government in every State has been the main vehicle for the implementation of welfare programmes for women and children. Funds received by the SCWB are channelled through NGOs across the country. Most of the programmes are run as grant-in-aid schemes. From 1951 to the mid-1970s this has been the most important source of funding for NGOs working with women and children. Starting with a modest budget of Rupees 235 Lacs in 1951 the annual budget 7828.12 Lacs in 1997. The CSWB manages a wide range of programmes, namely:

- Mahila Mandals
- Hostels for working women
- Integrated pre-school programme
- Condensed courses of education and vocational training
- Crèche, day-care centres for children of working / ailing women
- Awareness generation projects
- Field Counselling centres
- Border area projects
- Protection home / short-stay homes for women and girls
- Crèche workers training
- Holiday camps
- Legal literacy camps

The food crisis and famine of the mid-1960s came as a rude shock. In the first twenty years (1947-67) the main thrust was on basic infrastructure development, basic industries, higher education and irrigation. The 1962 war with China, 1965 was with Pakistan and the terrible food crisis in the mid-1960s marked a turning point. As a result in the next ten (mid 1960s to mid 1970s) the main thrust of our planning system was self-sufficiency in food and population stabilisation. Garibi Hatao - the popular slogan of Indira Gandhi and the massive mobilisation for population stabilisation stand out in the 1970s.

Winds of change started sweeping India in the mid-1970s. Politically, the “Emergency” and what followed was hailed as the turning point for Indian democracy. India was said to have come of age as a democratic nation. At the economic front the “Green Revolution” enabled India to attain some degree of self-sufficiency in food grain. At the regional level India’s role in the formation of Bangladesh followed by a more assertive foreign policy changed global perception of India. At the social front, the emergence of the Dalit and traditionally backward castes, especially in South India, was yet another watershed. The churning had begun.

It was in these momentous times that the Government constituted a Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI). Their report, “Towards Equality” was released and tabled in Parliament in 1974. This report, the first of this kind, compiled valuable data and information about different dimensions of women life - women as agricultural

workers, as daily wage earners, as primary providers in poor households and so on. Women's contribution to the household and to the economy was captured for the first time. This was juxtaposed to the prevalent situation of women - educational achievement, access to health care, mortality rates, intra-household food distribution and resultant poor nutrition status of women and girls and so on. The report also put together evidence on domestic and societal violence, laws and their enforcement and women's lack of access to legal or judicial protection. It can truly be said that this report changed the way women were looked at by many economists, planners and administrators. If the 1960s was called the "dangerous decade", the 1970s can be called the "contradictory decade". At one level the texture of the development debate changed in the country, our international profile as a aggressive anti-multinational and anti-imperialist was strengthened, we were among the first to document the status of women and the situation of socially disadvantaged communities. At another level, we were ourselves not convinced about our rhetoric. As the evolving contradictions in India's Population Policy shows, we said one thing and did something quite different. As we can see in the Box on population policy given below, it is indeed ironic that when we talk about education, healthcare, employment and other related issues, the poor status of women in Indian society is cited as a reason for non-fulfilment of our goals. But when it comes to birth control, policy makers and administrators conveniently forget that women do not have the freedom to decide when she should marry, how many children she should have or how her children should be brought up. Women are not autonomous entities. Husband, parents-in-law, other relatives, the immediate community and caste and religious leaders decide what women will wear, where she will go, whom she will marry, whether she will work outside the house, how much she can eat - the list is endless. Acknowledging the roots of women's poor status does not always translate into concrete policies and programme. The schism between Government policy, concrete programmes and their manifestation on the ground increased - creating a big gap between rhetoric and reality.

Women and India's population policy

India's population policy has been a contentious issue for at least thirty-five years. It is well known that since 1952 the rationale, thrust and objective of India's population policy has been population control and the main vehicle to achieve this has been family planning. The most important indicator has been couple protection rate and the most popular method is method specific family planning target - i.e. sterilisation. Till 1977 men were the main target but since then it has been women. We have gone through many ups and downs and this dilemma has been captured well in Eighth Five-year Plan document (1992) of Government of India. The "containment of population growth through active people's co-operation and effective scheme of incentives and disincentives" is identified as the sixth most important objective of government policy. The government aims to reduce "the birth rate from 29.9 per thousand to 26 per thousand by 1997." A reduction in birth rates is to be accomplished by a "holistic approach to social development and population control, integrated programmes for raising female literacy, female employment, status of women, nutrition and reduction of infant and maternal mortality. The younger couples, who are reproductively most active will be the focus of attention, with necessarily a greater emphasis on spacing methods, although the terminal methods would

continue to remain the important means of birth control. Medical termination of pregnancy will have to play an important role in the entire scheme of family planning in the Eight Plan."[14]

How did such a self-contradictory policy evolve in India?

1950s and 1960s: India's policy on population dates back to 1952 when the family planning programme was launched. In the early years, the poor (both men and women) were targeted and the mainstay of the programme was male and female sterilisation. Spacing methods were still not very popular and the pill had not caught on across the world. Sterilisation was the only option for couples who did not want any more children. While it was known that many women resort to abortion as a means of family planning, and that a large number of women died due to unsafe back-street abortions, we were still exploring the possibility of legalising abortion.

1970s: This decade started with the unprecedented initiative by the Government – the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act in 1971 was passed. India was one of the few countries that took this bold step.

India also was one of the few countries to take a firm stand in the Bucharest Population Conference. Dr Karan Singh declared "Development is the best contraceptive". Indian government rhetoric against the grand imperial design of the western block, the invasion of Coca-Cola and IBM and the population control conditionalities attached to international aid - catapulted India into the spokesperson of the non-aligned nations. However back home we were plunged into the emergency and the main slogan of Mrs Indira Gandhi was population control. The government targeted men. The vasectomy nightmare is said to have reversed Mrs Gandhi's fortunes in 1977. By the end of the seventies the climate changed dramatically. Targeting men proved politically expensive. By the end of the decade women became the target of population control. "Female sterilisation, which accounted for 45 percent of all sterilisation's in 1975-76 fell to only 25 percent in 1976-77, rose to 80 percent in 1977-78. Throughout the 1980s they accounted for about 85 percent of all sterilisation's, and in 1989-90, 91.8 percent."[15]

1980s: While female sterilisation remained the backbone of the family welfare programme, the Government acknowledged the need to address infant and maternal mortality. The maternal and child health programme was strengthened and made it a part of their overall strategy to promote family-welfare. By the end of the 1980s it started becoming quite evident that female sterilisation alone has not resulted in lowering fertility, spacing methods had to be explored. The Government started exploring long-acting hormonal contraceptives. Trials started on injectible contraceptives and implants, leading to an open confrontation between women's organisation and the government. Simultaneously, evidence from across the world and from some regions in India (the Kerala miracle) showed a positive correlation between female literacy and educational levels and small families. Therefore, towards the end of the 1980s India's population policy started promoting women's education in a big way.

1990s: This decade also started with yet another important legislation. In 1994 the Government passed the Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act. This was initiated by the Department of Family Welfare, GOI as a response to growing incidence of female feticide.

Economic crisis, balance of payments problems, increased external debt and the nascent

[14] Government of India, Eighth Five Year Plan 1992-97, volume one (1992) quoted in Shobha Raghuram and Anika Rahman (Editors) - rethinking Population - proceeding of a consultation on women's health and rights; HIVOS, Bangalore, 1995

[15] T K Sundari Ravindran, Women and the politics of population and development in India, in Population Policy and Reproductive Rights; IWID, Madras, 1995

liberalisation policy brought with it another sense of urgency to address the factors that result in high population growth. Demographers, population pundits and policy makers started arguing that women's education will bring down birth rates. Maternal and child heath advocated argued for expanding primary health care to ensure child survival and bring down birth rates. The family-planning advocates argued for a wider basket of contraceptives, including long-acting hormonal implants and injections. The women's lobby emphasised the need to alter women's status in society through empowerment and income generation programmes. In short, the early nineties saw a lively debate - different departments in the government argued for different strategies. Almost all of them agreed that contraception and sterilisation alone cannot turn the tide.

The Cairo conference held in 1994 signalled a dramatic shift from demographic targets to quality of life indicators. Government of India withdrew family planning targets in select districts in 1995 and on 1 April 1996 they declared the entire country "target-free". With substantial loan from the World Bank and aid from bilateral and multilateral agencies, the Government launched the Reproductive and Child Health programme in April 1997. The main focus is still on women, but with one significant difference. The healthcare needs of women in different age groups, especially adolescent girls, and the importance of male involvement and male responsibility in contraception is now an integral part of the new package. Promoting women and girls education continues to be an important aspect of the new policy.

The Sixth Plan (1980-1985) was an important landmark. For the first time the plan document introduced a chapter on women and development. This plan period saw the introduction of poverty alleviation programmes that concentrated on promoting livelihood programmes for the poor to assure employment in the lean season and promoting self-employment. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was introduced in 1979. Loans were provided through banks to families below the poverty line. This loan was expected to encourage self-employment among the poor through purchase of productive assets like cattle, looms, carts etc. 30 per cent of the beneficiaries were to be women. However administrators soon realised that availability of credit alone does not ensure optimum utilisation. Lack of bargaining power, illiteracy and the general vulnerability of the poor to unscrupulous middlemen and rural power brokers negated the benefits. Corruption and benami transactions were common. Developing entrepreneurial abilities and developing their self-confidence to negotiate a complex administrative system were identified as important inputs. It was also felt that groups of women might be able to function better than individuals. Therefore, the Government introduced three programmes, namely: Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas, Support for Employment Programme for Women (STEP). The presence of milk co-operatives and other collective forum, it was felt, could enable women to negotiate banks and middlemen from a position of strength. The 1980s also saw the introduction of a wide range of pro-poor programmes, namely Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY). The experience of these programmes has been quite mixed and it emerged that the most backward regions of the country did not record any significant progress.

Revamping DWCRA – The Andhra Pradesh Experience[16]

By 1992 DWCRA to become the vehicle for empowerment of the poor to manage resources and productive assets[17]. The State Government decided to promote self-help groups starting with savings and credit. A decision was taken to provide DWCRA revolving fund only to those groups who have successfully rotated their own savings for six to eight months. Older groups facilitated the formation of new groups and each village was encouraged to have as many groups as they wish. The objective was to ensure all poor women become members of a group. While revamping the programme some essential characteristics were spelt out, namely:

- Women should be able to come together in homogeneous groups - occupation, economic status and /or habitation being the common link.
- They must develop group synergy and identity and in the process enhance their ability to negotiate with the world outside. This will also usher self-confidence and collective strength.
- Women must be able to save for a purpose, not necessarily only surplus funds and make a conscious decision to set aside some money.
- Women should have the full freedom to decide who should get a loan, and for what purpose. If a group decides to give precedence to emergency crisis consumption loan, so be it. This "power" will build their self-esteem.
- The middleman should be eliminated, a government functionary or a NGO as signatory to withdraw DWCRA funds.
- The government should not promise anything. No lollipops, incentives or disincentives.
- The group should be given the right to determine its own criteria for membership.
- The government should build a good information system on the groups. Random sampling could be used to generate information. it is not necessary to generate detailed information on all groups.
- It is important to take the programme to scale and permit multiple groups in a village. Let women decide how many groups they want. Aggressive and sustained effort to take the programme to every single poor woman is the key.
- Administration should focus on social mobilisation and make a conscious decision to leave the rest to women."

This strategy led to a sudden spurt in the number of savings / DWCRA groups. In 1987-88 there were only 100 groups in Nellore District. But in 1996-96 there were 5872 groups and there has rotated 843.47 Lacs of Rupees! This was the only District in India where both DWCRA and IRDP funds were channelled through women's groups. The savings and DWCRA movement together formed an orchestrated development plan for the district. DWCRA become the nerve centre of the community mobilisation strategy. It provides a vital link between the people and the administration. It was hoped that women's involvement in development would change the texture of community participation and working towards sustainable livelihood for women would benefit the family with appreciable change in nutrition, health, education, economic and social status. This approach seemed to resonate global understanding that "development, if not engendered, is endangered"[18], because a gender sensitive development model widen choices of both men and women.

By the mid-1980s it became quite apparent that credit and employment guarantee

[16] Vimala Ramachandran: Critical Consciousness, Credit and Productive Assets – Key to sustainable livelihood, UNICEF Monograph, January 1996

[17] In 1992 established credit groups were encouraged by the government to form new groups leading to an organic expansion. There are around 6000 groups today out of which 3500 are said to be good.

[18] Human Development Report, 1995; UNDP.

schemes work better if women are organised. The importance of programmes that will help women come together in groups, become aware, gain greater confidence and enhance their ability to access information was acknowledged. So, in the mid-1980s policy makers and development practitioners started advocating education and awareness programmes for women. The Mahila Mandal scheme launched in 1954 under the Community Development Programme was evaluated. It emerged that a majority of these women's groups were inactive and the very fact that high caste women were in leadership positions effectively kept the poor out. Evaluations pointed out that this scheme did not really reach out to poor women. The composition of DWCRA groups was better because this was only open to women from families below the poverty line.

In 1984 the Government of Rajasthan introduced a novel programme – Women's Development Programme. "The broad aim of the Women's Development Project (WDP) is to operationalise the policy frame for women's development. In doing so it takes note of the fact that most government schemes are not accessible to women due to lack of receiving mechanisms and that it is possible to create such mechanisms through flexible and diversified structures backed by effective participation of women as the grass roots level. The WDP also takes note of the fact that for too long men have been entrusted the responsibilities of women's development - in the family, government and society - and that a decisive shift is necessary in order to entrust these responsibilities to women at all levels. Yet another aspect of the broad aims of the WDP is the need to encourage and create agencies, groups and individuals to articulate concern towards indignities and discrimination against women. In this sense, the principle aim of the WDP is to empower women through communication of information, education and training to enable them to recognise and improve their social and economic status."[19]

WDP was launched with a low profile training of Sathins in August - September 1984 in Padampura, Jaipur District. This training was a unique experience. "Conceptually development was understood as 'internalised growth' and therefore not a matter of handing down schemes. This growth demanded as its pre-condition a climate of hope and confidence, generating self-confidence and group effort. The main thrust of the programme for rural women, therefore, was for facilitating these 'conditions' through diverse processes. What these processes would be, was something which was continually to be discovered through experiments....The programme in a very real sense, had to be an ongoing exercise in learning organically by doing, based on the premise that a development programme has to **develop** rather than be **implemented**."[20]

The programme revolved around a highly motivated group of village level animators called Sathins, cluster level facilitators called Prachetas, programme staff, training and support teams in IDARA and a supportive network of activists and researchers. By 1987 the programme was extended to six districts. The process of periodic reflections enabled us to

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19 Women's Development Project, Rajasthan (Project Document, popularly known as the yellow book), Department of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Government of Rajasthan, May 1984.

20 Exploring Possibilities - A review of the Women's Development programme, Rajasthan; Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur, December 1986.

identify bottlenecks. However, with the withdrawal of external assistance (UNICEF) in 1992 the programme started floundering. By 1995 this unique programme faced stiff resistance from various quarters and today, despite repeated requests by Government of India and the National Commission for Women, the very essence of the programme has been scuttled. Today a mere shell of this programme exists.

In 1988 the Report of the National Commission for Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector (NCSW) was tabled. This landmark report gathered first-hand account of women at work, analysed the laws affecting women and made far-reaching recommendations. Ela Bhatt who had set up SEWA in Gujarat chaired this commission. The valuable data collected by this commission also highlighted the health hazards faced by women and advocated the importance of making women's work safe. It also argued for a more proactive role to promote women's education. Regional variations and the situation of very poor women were highlighted. Unfortunately, this report did not result in any concrete policy level or programmes for women. But what it did achieve was to enhance the visibility of women's work and their contribution to the economy.

Programmes for and Reports on Women in the 1980s and 1990s	
1979	Integrated Rural Development Programme – 30% beneficiaries to be women (IRDP)
1979	Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM)
1981	Application of Science and Technology for Women
1982	Support to Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
1982	Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)
1983	Non-formal Education exclusively for girls (NFE)
1984	Women's Development Programme of Rajasthan (WDP)
1985	Child Survival and Safe Motherhood
1986	National Policy on Education – Education for Women's Equality
1988	National Commission for Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector (NCSW)
1988	National Perspective Plan for Women (NPPW)
1988	Women's Development Corporations (WDC)
1989	Mahila Samakhya – Education for Women's Equality
1991	National Commission for Women
1993	Rastriya Mahila Kosh – National Credit Fund for Women
1993	Mahila Samriddhi Yojana
1994	Haryana Integrated Women's Development Programme
1995	National Crèche Fund for Childcare Services
1995	Indira Mahila Yojana (not yet launched)
1997	Reproductive and Child Health Programme

In the Seventh Plan period (1986-91) Women's Development Corporations were established in may States. The WDCs were intended to promote women's economic advancement. Again, like most programmes the impact has been patchy. States like Maharashtra, Kerala and Tamil Nadu took an early lead, while the most backward regions are yet to realise the potential of this institution.

The Mahila Samakhya programme was formulated in 1987-88 as an effort to operationalise a bold new policy statement. There was a feeling in administrative circles that the NPE (1986) policy document, especially the chapter on Education for Women's Equality cannot be implemented. Responding to this challenge, the Government initiated

a participatory planning process to develop a programme concept. Drawing upon past experiences the basic principles of a new programme were enunciated. The programme essentially revolved around the formation of women's groups (with a focus on poor women), their training in order to build self-esteem and self-confidence followed by concrete educational and other developmental inputs. One of the basic tenets of the programme was to respect women's existing knowledge and skill, build on their life experience and enable them to discover their strengths. Education, by way of literacy and other training inputs, was to be provided on demand. This programme is now being implemented in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Assam and Bihar.

Mahila Samakhya today[21]

- Recent evaluations and reports report that the programme today reaches out to poor rural women in 2500 villages in the UP, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and 1300 in Bihar (status as of July 1997). It is far less that what was anticipated in 1988. Formation and sustaining women's groups in the villages covered has not been easy. In some areas women leaders have emerged, but groups have not been consolidated. There is no uniform "model" and open-ended guidelines of the project were interpreted differently in different regions. For example Andhra Pradesh does not have any paid worker at the village level, and all the 252 villages covered so far have functioning women's groups.
- These women's groups or informal gathering around rural women leaders is the fulcrum around which the programme revolves. Information, real-life education, demand articulation, monitoring schools and other government services, struggles – all these happen at this level.
- Education is happening and it still retains the thrust of the conceptual framework of the programme. Acquiring self confidence, being able to deal with authority, knowledge of one's body and health issues, feeling more in command of one's situation (shedding helplessness) and some reading and writing – "education, viewed in this light, permeates all of the MS programme[22]". Mahila Samakhya has empowered women along the line, especially grassroots facilitators, women leaders and functionaries.
- In the last five years education of children, adolescent girls and women's literacy have intensified. Where feasible, the programme has plugged into the Literacy Campaign. But the experience of the programme with women's literacy has been mixed. In some areas like Sabarkanta in Gujarat literacy for women was taken up at an early stage. But in most other areas, women have come to appreciate the relevance of literacy and education, especially for their daughters. One can say with confidence that the programme has created a positive environment for education and learning.
- Mahila Shikshan Kendra (Women's Education Centres) – residential condensed programme for out-of-school girls and for dropouts has been a major success in the last five years. Adolescent girls, young women and women leaders have responded to this with enthusiasm. Despite increasing demand the programme has not been able to create more residential centres, and this has been acknowledged as a problem area. Recent evaluation reports point to the lack of sustained educational resource support for development of curriculum, teaching and learning material and training support. Nirantar – a Delhi based education resource group provides intensive back-up support to the programme in Banda. Similar support organisations do not exist everywhere.
- Mahila Samakhya has mobilised women to send their daughters to school and this is acknowledged as a very significant outcome. Non-formal education centres special coaching classes for girls and educational fairs for children – these are cited as highlights of the programme.
- One of the major outcomes is women's participation in local self-government institutions. Many women leaders across the country contested Panchayat elections and emerged successful.

The Rastriya Mahila Kosh formally launched in 1993. Inspired by the Gramin Bank of Bangladesh and also the experience of SEWA in India, this programme is intended to enhance poor women's access to credit. NGOs are encouraged to manage the identify

[21] Source: Annual Reports and Indo-Dutch Evaluation Reports, Department of Education, GOI 1989 to 1997

[22] Sharada Jain and Laxmi Krishnamurty, Mahila Samakhya Study, October 1996

women's thrift and savings groups, enhance their managerial skills and give them a revolving fund to be used by group members for self-employment. Since the inception of the programme 99,627 women have benefited from this scheme, In FY 1995-96 alone Rs 99,627 Lacs has been disbursed to 37,502 women in India.

"Women's component" and "Special Programme" approaches[23]:

Since 1951 India has adopted different approaches to development planning. Starting with welfare programme, we have experimented with introducing special women's components into existing programmes and also exclusive programmes for women's development. It is not uncommon, particularly in large-scale government programmes, to add a "women's component", in the belief that this will somehow take care of women's special concerns within the broader project framework. It is believed that adding a "women's component" to a project enable us to address women's special needs and concerns. For example, ongoing schemes in rural development or basic education provides for a women's component – either by way of a special cell or reserving a certain percentage of loans for women. Experience of many such programmes has shown that such programmes do not always achieve their objective[24]. It has been seen that the main concept and methodology of the project has been designed without a gender perspective and a "women's component" is added. A handful of staff (usually women) is recruited to work miracles and ensure gender impact. These staff members usually have neither decision-making nor policy-making power in the project structure, they are marginalised and treated as external to the main body, they are powerless in every sense, but are expected to ensure that women are empowered through the process. The "women's component" approach is therefore a paradox - gender concerns are neither central to a process or they are not, it cannot be actualised through grafted on components. As a result this approach invariably fails, even in its limited objectives.

Another approach that has been widely experimented in India is to initiate a special programme for women. From DWCRA to state specific programmes like Women's Development Programme of Rajasthan and Mahila Samakhya in select states, it is believed that this approach is more effective than the "women's component" approach. Such programmes are generally designed for women and they tend to be more gender-sensitive in conception, planning and execution. However, some cautionary notes are necessary: Firstly, the ultimate impact of a programme/project in empowering women and promoting gender equity, depends very much on the underlying analysis of gender, women's status and power. If they are mainly targeted at improvements in women's condition - viz., giving them access to a little more income, better health services, water

[23] This sub-section has been adapted from Renuka Misra, Srilatha Batliwala and Vimala Ramachandran: Integrating gender concerns into mainstream programmes – a conceptual framework, UNICEF India Country Office, New Delhi, 1994.

[24] Most recently the experience of the District Primary Education Project in many areas has not been encouraging. Gender units / consultants report that they are marginalised and rendered ineffective. Similarly, experience of water-sanitation programmes in different parts of the country provides for training of women as hand-pump mechanics. These women become tokens while the project itself fails to integrate women's interests. Similar experiences have been reported in the erstwhile Bihar Education Project.

supply, or child care, they are unlikely to empower women in terms of socio-economic and political position. Put simply, women's programmes designed within traditional framework of women's status in society (for example: the 1954 Mahila Mandal scheme), can reinforce rather than transform women's traditional position, even though they may enhance the quality of day-to-day existence. Thus, it is important to recognise the limitations of such programmes. On the other hand, programmes designed with a deeper understanding of gender and social power, and intended to simultaneously address both conditional and positional issues tend to have a more "empowering" and lasting impact, because they tackle fundamental social and gender relations head-on. Secondly, there is a fear that the "women's programme" approach isolates, alienates, or ghettoises women from their menfolk, causing divisions and fragmentation. Or that such programmes pit men and women of the same social class against each other. There is, of course, this danger. Once again, much depends on how the conceptual framework and long-term vision of the programme approaches these issues. But one fact must be clearly understood: any strategy that truly empowers women is bound to disempower men of the same group, at least at one level and in the short-run. This might well cause a negative reaction. In practice, however, experienced activists say that these effects are short-lived; in most cases, men do get involved in the processes and impacts of "women's programmes", simply because they are part of women's lives. There are always some sensitive, supportive men in every group who begin to support women's struggles at an early stage without necessarily taking over or dominating the process. Men also begin to perform new roles like childcare and housework as their wives/mothers/sisters become involved in collective action. Men have also marched with womenfolk organised by "women's programmes" in their demand for better wages, return of encroached land, improved prices for their produce, against ecologically destructive development projects, or better quality social services. In short, the success of the "women's programmes" approach depends very much on the conceptual framework, operational strategy and long-term vision which guides it. There can be very empowering "women's programmes" or very ineffective ones.

If we analyse the range of government programmes discussed above it is quite apparent that evaluations and reviews have not been used as tools for strategic thinking. New programmes and strategies are introduced without discontinuing the old. Even when the Government is not comfortable about a programme, it is rarely terminated. Let us take the case of the Rajasthan Women’s Development Programme. It has been under suspended animation for over five years because the State Government has not been in a position to take a categorical decision. Competing interests have effectively scuttled decision-making.

Concluding remarks:

From the above brief description of policies and programmes for women in India, it is quite apparent that wide ranges of strategies have been tried out. India is not only a vast country, prevailing diversity in the country and resulting complexity makes any national assessment almost impossible. While one strategy may have been effective in some regions, it fails in another. The classic example is DWCRA. There were 25,071 successful DWCRA groups in Andhra Pradesh and only 175 groups in Rajasthan, 371

groups in West Bengal, 900 groups in Bihar! (1995, DWCD, GOI) Similar experiences have been recorded in almost every programme. What this implies is that the mere introduction of programmes and policies is not enough. Commitment of the State Government and the general socio-cultural environment influences implementation. It is generally believed that women's status is quite good in Tamil Nadu, yet the Districts of Salem and Dharmapuri have become notorious for female infanticide. Rajasthan is popularly believed to be the most gender unjust society, yet this State has been home to some of the most successful innovations in women's development and primary education. Similar examples could be cited from almost any part of the country. The important issue at stake is that at we stand in the threshold of the new millennium we need to remind ourselves that unless we are willing to grapple with gender inequalities, Education for All will continue to remain a distant dream.

SECTION IV

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Visions of a gender just society[25]

A few years after participating in a women's empowerment programme of the Government (Mahila Samakhya, Tehri Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh 1991) a group of rural women came together to talk about their vision of a gender just society, This is what they listed:

- Women will be literate and more confident. They will walk upright. They will walk into the Panchayat office or village Pradhan's house without fear.
- Women will move around freely. They will dare to drink tea in the village tea-stall, read the newspaper and discuss politics.
- There will be a more equitable division of responsibilities within the household. Men and boys will also fetch water and fodder. Girls will go to school and boys will share household chores with girls.
- Women will not be beaten and abused. There will be no fear of rape.
- Women will get the same wages as men for the same work.
- Men will act responsibility, use condoms and we will not have to shoulder the entire burden of contraception and abortion.
- We will be able to get medical help when we want and women will not die during childbirth or after an abortion.
- Out family will celebrate the birth of a daughter and husbands will distribute sweets.
- Women will ride cycles and motorcycles. We will also drive buses and tractors.
- Husband will prepare the dough for roti and make tea for us.
- Our skills and our knowledge on animals, herbs, household remedies, plants, trees and land will be respected, and we will also be given the status of farmers.

Development is about people – men, women and children. It is about the quality of life of people. It is about ensuring that every citizen can walk with her or his head held high. It is as much about enhancing the capabilities of people as meeting their material needs. And, if this is what we all mean by development, we cannot but address the gender dimension of inequality, oppression and violence. We have seen that the deprivation faced by women in quite extraordinary. It is perhaps the most glaring failure of Independent India. Improvement in economic situation or the physical availability of health centres and schools does not lead to greater utilisation by women. It definitely does not automatically improve women's status. Therefore, empowering women to become active agents in their own emancipation is perhaps the only way out of this vicious cycle of poverty, powerlessness and gender discrimination.

It is here that education, meant in the large sense, can play a very significant role. Education in the real sense is about enhancing the capabilities of people to understand and deal with the world they live in. As the National Policy on Education (1986) states education can be used as an "agent of basic change in the status of women". In order to do that the system would have to "play a positive, interventionist role in the

[25] Field Notes of Vimala Ramachandran,1990-91

empowerment of women". This basically means that we have the mandate to use education as an emancipatory tool. Bur do we have the political and administrative will to do so?

In the last twenty years women's programmes and development groups working among the poor women have shown that empowerment does not "happen" automatically. The opportunity to come together as women triggers a process of self-reflection. Women also realise that supporting each other is necessary to breakout of the isolation they all experience within their homes. If this process is not supported and encouraged, if institutional mechanisms for meaningful education are not created, and if women's changed consciousness is not affirmed and supported at every stage, empowerment may never happen. It may just be a flicker of consciousness that dies quickly. Similarly, if mainstream institutions and programmes continue to be dominated by insensitive and hostile service providers, then despite becoming conscious and also despite being organised, they cannot access services like healthcare, education, credit and so on. This could lead then to frustration and ultimately undermine the transformatory potential of social mobilisation. Finally, avenues for sustainable livelihood is not created poor women will sink deeper into a vicious circle of poverty and deprivation.

Central to our search for strategies that could lead to women's empowerment is the need to address nature of bureaucratic compartmentalisation and control. Let us take a very popular strategy of the 1990s – credit for poor women's groups. If the primary objective is to give poor women access to credit for work or even emergency consumption needs in order to prevent them from getting trapped in the vicious circle of debt, then the mechanisms for making this work should start from an appreciation of their existential reality. While designing credit scheme the governments should not only address credit related issues, but should simultaneously plan for training of women members and group leaders for a wide range of skills necessary to run a successful credit programme. Starting with a participatory survey of the local market, to availability of raw materials and mechanisms to transport their goods; a credit programme should also plan for training in managerial skills. Exposure visits to the Block and District Headquarters, to Banks and also to local fairs and meals – all these should be seen as a necessary inputs to implement a successful credit programme.

What does this imply? Essentially this means that we cannot afford to plan for specific sectors. An integrated and holistic approach is essential for creating an environment for change. Will the prevalent administrative culture permit initiate such a process? It is said that forces that work towards protecting status quo resist attempt to bring about systemic changes. We all know that there are examples where strong and dynamic leaders have been able to make a beginning. It all depends on our ability to build enough pressure and force the leadership to acknowledge the need for change. The time has come to fundamentally alter the management of development programmes. We have to not only enhance women's access to credit and productive assets, primary health care, basic education, natural resources management and the public distribution system, we have to simultaneously enhancing their capabilities to negotiate this unequal world from a position of strength. The challenge before us is to work towards a strategy that draws

upon the wealth of experience of different sectoral programmes and move towards genuine synergy and convergence, not just of services but of approaches.

Education for All cannot become a reality unless we acknowledge this simple truth.

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