EN**GENDER**ING DEVELOPMENT

LESSONS FROM SOME EFFORTS TO ADDRESS GENDER CONCERNS IN MAINSTREAM PROGRAMMES AND INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN
Educational Resource Unit, Jaipur
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In the last few years, the debate on the impact of women's development programmes, special women's components in ongoing development programmes, gender sensitisation of administrators and programme managers have attracted the attention of planners and policy analysts. While some eminent women's activists and feminists have argued for the need to intensify efforts to mainstream gender in development programmes of the government, there has been a considerable body of opinion which has cautioned against "tokens and show-pieces" which appropriate the vocabulary of the women's movement without genuine synergy. Recent debates on Women's Development Programme of Rajasthan, Mahila Samakhya [Education for Women's Equality] in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh and the Mahila Samakhya Component in basic education projects like Bihar Education Project, District Primary Education Projects and UP Basic Education projects have generated interest on the issue of mainstreaming gender in core programmes of the government. Similarly, gender-training modules introduced in training programmes for IAS officers, the police force and programme managers in multilateral organisations have evoked a similar response. Looking back at such pioneering efforts, it is possible for us to draw some lessons. This essay seeks to outline strategic interventions necessary to ensure internalisation of a gender perspective.

Reviewing the experience of the impact of women's development and/or empowerment programmes and modules for gender training, some critical issues became evident, namely:

** Gender sensitivity is not an add-on. It cannot be relegated to a "component", **it must be integral and central to the very plan itself,** and based on the principles enunciated in the design of programmes. If we do not integrate gender in the very conceptual framework, design, implementation, and monitoring of a process, this task cannot be performed by something as external and grafted-on as a "component". It is like cooking an entire dish without salt and sprinkling the salt at the table. How can the taste compare?[1]

** In order to make the process meaningful, gender issues need to be addressed alongside issues of community participation, reduction of social disparities and sensitiveness of administrative structures to people's existential reality. Experience has shown those women's groups or collectives invariably address issues of livelihood, water, access to forest produce, ownership of land, access to health alongside "women's issues" like status, domestic violence etc. All these are gender issues.

** For centuries now, men have had control over public spaces, mainstream organisations and social institutions. Women's access to such forum has been limited. As the women's movement gained strength, exclusive spaces were created, either in the form of departments, cells or projects. Their access to and control of such spaces is given publicity and special funds allocated. These "special spaces" cannot hope to correct centuries of unequal access. On the other hand, it has been observed that women

[1] Vimala Ramachandran, Renuka Mishra and Srilatha Batliwala, Conceptual framework and operational plan, Incorporating a gender perspective into core programme of UNICEF, India; UNICEF, New Delhi, 1994

who do enter the male domain rarely address gender issues because of the pressures to conform to the dominant work culture. In short the question is: who sets the ground rules? "WID experts" and women's activists would therefore have to make a conscious effort to enter mainstream institutions and debates such as structural adjustment and economic policies[2], livelihood, public distribution system, technology, energy, environment, population policy, education, health care, nutrition, housing, AIDS, urban development etc.

** Training of select officials or functionaries and sensitising them about the status of women, the indignities being faced by them on a daily basis, inter-relationship between status, employment, control over earning, access to education, health care, nutrition, and control over fertility, is not sufficient[3]. Trainees may feel confident to deal with inter-personal relationships within the organisation, need for day care centres, maternity benefits, sexual harassment in the work-place and introduce changes in vocabulary in day to day work, but fail to see its immediate relevance of a gender perspective to their work. This kind of paralysis of action is quite common.

** Training a group of people drawn from different departments or organisations has limited value because the trainees would have to go back and work among people who have not shared the same experience. They would feel isolated and could gradually lose their enthusiasm. Training programmes that involve a group of people who work together and have different responsibility in the same organisation has a greater impact. They not only reinforce and encourage each other, but also would be able to create a conducive environment for change.

** A significant number of engineers, doctors, demographers, family planning professionals etc. often see themselves as technical people addressing a technical problem which has little to do with social inequalities, leave alone gender relations. Technology is not value neutral. Its use in society is mediated through the community, inherent social biases and whether it is user friendly. The poor, the illiterate and among them women determine the nature and extent of its use. When programmes are designed, the technical component is left to "experts" because it is seen as being complex and beyond comprehension of ordinary people. For example, during the early research on the smokeless Chula, the fact that women use it was "discovered" last! If women were involved not only as users of the Chula but as theorists who designed it in the first place, the experience of the project would have been radically different. Such glaring biases would have to be brought upfront and the poor, including women made central to its conception and use.

Recognition of the marginal impact of gender sensitisation training led many practitioners to dwell into the reasons for such outcomes. Analysing the problem, it becomes evident that the fundamental issue is that gender sensitisation is not a one-shot event, but a long drawn out process. It may begin with a training programme leading to major managerial adjustments. Efforts to get an external group of consultants to conduct training do not leave a lasting impact on the organisation. It can, at best, change the attitudes of a few individuals. Lasting

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[2] Recently, there have been a series of meetings on the impact of structural adjustment on women, marginalisation of women in the organised sector and their relegation to the informal sector. While such debates are very important, it is rather unfortunate that meetings on the impact of new economic policies, organised by mainstream institutions, rarely address feminisation of poverty.

[3] Recently, a young officer, full of enthusiasm and commitment to change the world came out of one such training and exclaimed that the entire system would have to change and doing something in her little department would make no difference.

impact can be achieved only if planning, organisation and management issues across the board are addressed simultaneously.

Reviewing gender training programmes and women's development components or programmes within large organisations, it was observed that decisions about who would do the training often leads to selection of women who are seen as being vocal on gender issues. The general impression is that no special training or expertise is required to conduct gender training. Rather it is seen as a general subject which any woman with some feminist orientation or experience of working in women's welfare programme can conduct. The rigour, seriousness and resources made available for "technical training" is often absent in gender training - leading to a frivolous approach. There has also been a lot of debate on the usefulness of introducing a gender component within training modules as a session in a long programme, or as a chapter on women added onto a training module. For example, a few eminent women are invited to conduct one session with IAS probationers or to take one afternoon "lecture" in the training programme for police constables. Such efforts were welcomed in the late seventies and early eighties because at that time many feminists felt that it was a good beginning. Gradually the purposelessness of such a token effort was driven home. It is quite common to give less importance to gender trainers as compared to technical trainers, make available only limited organisational infrastructure, and allocate token financial resources, time and human resources. This, it was realised, cripples the process even before it takes off, leading to disenchantment and apathy.

In the last two to three years, there have been efforts to mainstream gender inputs by weaving them into other training programmes that address social disparities, community participation, environmental regeneration and access to common property resources by entering the mainstream instead of focusing on women-in-development alone. It is not uncommon to find WID experts consciously entering different disciplines[4]. This effort was visible in the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994.[5] A gender perspective was infused into the population debate. This was done systematically and with a great deal of professionalism and commitment. Women's organisations from across the globe highlighted the debate on reproductive health and reproductive rights. Similar efforts are visible within India, especially among groups lobbying for a rational drug policy, forest policy, housing rights, eradication of child labour, primary health-care and basic education.

Mainstreaming gender in development - critical steps:

One of the basic principles about gender sensitisation training is that it should not leave the trainees paralysed or limit their action to interpersonal relationships in the work place. It should involve the mind and the heart,

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4 In the seventies and early eighties, those who got involved in the women's movement focused their energies on creating women's studies units in universities and research institutions, lobbying for a women's department in government, a women's cell in the police force, creating women's programmes within the government and setting up women's groups. This was important and it created space for identifying issues, refining analytical tools, generating information and gender disaggregated data etc. However, towards the end of the eighties, many women's activists realised that this as not enough. Therefore they started entering mainstream institutions and debates.

5 This is of particular significance in India, because for a long time activists and women's organisations protested against family planning policies but consciously kept out of any forum that discussed or debated population issues. Their protest made an impact because they consciously functioned as informed critics. This approach gradually gave way to determination to enter the debate, generate alternative approaches and lobby for change. The NGO delegation to Cairo had a majority of women drawn from women's organisations and health groups. This led to an official from GOI to comment that women have taken over the conference! Being involved in the preparatory work leading up to Beijing women's conference, he commented that Cairo has stolen the thunder from Beijing.

leading to a resolve to bring about changes in the content of their core programme or managerial responsibilities. In order to be effective, the process of internalisation of a different value system must go hand in hand with appropriate structural changes, a facilitating work environment and affirmation of the importance and relevance of such an exercise in their daily work.

Gender sensitisation involves change in attitudes, work culture, organisational priorities, resource allocation and monitoring systems. Therefore, the word training does not adequately capture the range of issues that need to be tackled simultaneously. In recent years, "mainstreaming gender" has gaining wider acceptability - because it suggests a process that is not limited to a training situation alone. This process involves beginning with training but has to go on to tackling planning, management, resource allocation, appointment procedures etc.

At this stage, it is possible to identify stages through which such a process could be initiated, namely:

The training process[6]:

Training is often a good starting point. Programmes that involve a group of people working together has greater potential for success than putting together a group of officials from different parts of the country or from different departments. Sharing a common experience and working together enables a group to learn from each other and prevents them from feeling isolated. A group of officers from different department and from different parts of the county may go back with wonderful ideas. Most of them find it difficult to sustain their enthusiasm because their colleagues and superiors do not share it. Therefore, a training process must begin with careful selection of a group with a view to sustain the process.

The first step in a training process involves creating an atmosphere where the trainees talk about their work, reflect on their experience and begin to feel confident to discuss without fear of censure or evaluation, thus creating a climate for genuine exploration.

In conventional training programmes the trainer takes on the task of giving information. However, when we deal with attitudes, information transfer is not adequate and could lead to hostility. Information has to be gently encouraged from the group itself, giving the participants an opportunity to talk about their work, their family, and their community. The role of the facilitator (trainer) is to list the information, classify it, and involve the group in separating the "facts" from value loaded statements.

For example, statements such as women fetch water; fuel wood and forest produce like 'tendu leaves' or 'amla' would be classified as information. Statements like "women only knit in their offices" would be classified as value loaded statement.

This first step would have to done painstakingly, with the facilitator determined to keep his or her cool. He or she has to resist the temptation of quoting macro data on nutritional status, literacy, dowry deaths etc. It has been observed that macro data does not help at this stage. In most situations, eliciting information from the group throws up almost all the issues that need to be covered.

Once the information has been generated from the group, the next step is analysis. This prevents the most common reaction, i.e. "what you say does not apply to my region, my community, my work

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6 I have tried to spell out the steps for training of managers, officials, programme functionaries etc. Training of community based and / or village level animators (for example Sakhis or Sahayoginis of Mahila Samakhya) would involve a different approach. Training processes need to be specifically designed for a group.

place". Such reactions invariably put the facilitators in a defensive position, and often leads to indifference or apathy in the group. Analysing the information generated by the group leads to a high degree of involvement.

At the end of this process, the facilitator could share available data, case studies and other information. The group could be asked to work in small teams to analyse the information and make a presentation. At this stage, data assumes an entirely new meaning. It is not what the data says, but what the trainees wish to say with the help of data, which leads to a qualitative difference in the way information is used.

Transaction of information can thus become a creative exercise, where the "trainees" knowledge base is tapped enhancing their sense of self worth. It also enables them to identify with the training process and feel that they have shaped it. In short, the facilitator has to draw upon the collective knowledge of the group, give it an opportunity to articulate its opinions, and build upon this in subsequent sessions.

An experiential learning process involves both the mind and the heart. When the heart is convinced, the information is internalised immediately. For the heart to be convinced, the information must not only be authentic in the eyes of the trainee, but must be like a mirror that reflects the "truth" as perceived by the trainees. This is important in training programmes that seek to bring about attitudinal change.

It is also important to reaffirm the value of common sense and relate daily experience as citizens to working life. People have the ability to critically reflect on social relationships, dominant prejudices, public face of the government from a lay person's perspective (as manifested in their daily interaction with officialdom, be it the municipality, electricity authority, transport etc.). Training programmes that ask trainees not to mix a professional approach and common sense fragments the experiential reality. Building bridges between these two worlds invariably yields valuable insights.

Exposure to new ideas, a different vision of the world and encouragement to put new insights into practice, all need to go hand-in-hand with a conscious effort to unlearn. For example, sensitisation of the police force must necessarily involve a conscious effort to unlearn the conventional ways of dealing with people. Readiness to listen to problems and sensitivity to traumatised women cannot be reinforced without a conscious effort to understand and appreciate the shortcoming of conventional police training. This would have to be communicated by a person or in the words of a person who is respected in the conventional frame. The macho image of men has to be neutralised by images of sensitive and caring men[7]. This would have to be introduced in the training, but carried forward and reinforced at regular intervals. Similarly, communication for "safe motherhood" has to address the husband, his role in ensuring the safety of his wife through responsible sexual behaviour to prevent frequent pregnancies. This would create alternative role models.

Similarly, a change in the public image of the family planning programme, making it gender sensitive and responding to the needs of poor men and women has to include a conscious effort to unlearn, i.e. question the basic assumptions of the family planning programme. One of the underlying assumptions of the family planning programme is that population growth is the cause of poverty and that women are primarily responsible for high birth rates. Deep-rooted belief among service providers, administrators, policy makers, and donors that population growth can be arrested through birth control alone would have to be questioned. Without this, it will not be possible to en-gender population programmes.

7 It is common knowledge that in many parts of India, men associate virility with repeated pregnancy of their wives.

Therefore, introducing a gender training programme for select programme managers will not have any lasting impact, unless old ways of looking at issues and problems give way to new perspectives.

Internalisation of information to conviction for action:

The next step involves a giant leap. Internalisation of the information and shedding prejudices does not automatically lead to conviction. For instance, we may be aware of the effects of the dowry system, we may actually be convinced that it is evil, but this does not automatically lead to readiness for action either in our personal lives, in our family or as a community. On the other hand, there are those who feel compelled to act on that information. What brings about this change?[8]

Institutions, government departments or international organisations operate within a given mandate, a work culture and systems of rewards and disincentives. Certain kind of pioneering work gets support and encouragement, while others may attract hostility. Mainstreaming gender evokes very strong reactions. It would therefore be important to acknowledge the need to consciously create a conducive environment. This invariably stimulates confidence to act on one's conviction.

Periodic reviews of progress, achievements, organisational targets could be done in a gender conscious way. For example, review of immunisation could be done using gender disaggregated data to show difference between boys and girls, leading to a discussion on how gender influences access to services and resources. If this is done systematically and at all levels by officials who are in important positions, over a few years gender analysis of services would be internalised by all functionaries. Almost all "development goals" could be monitored in this way. However, it is important to acknowledge the fact that gender sensitive monitoring by senior civil servants can happen only if they are given a clear directive to do so and given the opportunity to participate in orientation programmes that give the necessary tools and skill.

It is important to recognise that movement from internalisation to conviction for action is not a linear process. It moves in a spiral fashion, where small steps taken by the organisation facilitate internalisation while creating a conducive environment for action. Creating supportive structure legitimises the process, which in turn internalises the process within the organisation.

On the other hand, ability of the organisation to seize the right moment or make the right intervention is important. A group may be de-motivated to address a specific issue or problem, and it may not be possible for a programme to tackle the issue directly. For example, over the years women's groups have realised that it is difficult to directly tackle dowry, child marriage, status of girl children etc. Therefore, a women's programme or a group may decide to approach the issue from a different stand-point, i.e. focusing on enhancing the self-image and self-confidence of women, providing support for victims, lobbying for changes in law and establishment of special cells in the police force. Sensing the pulse of the group, discussing alternative ways to enable them to move away from a passive acceptance of their situation and look beyond their immediate circumstances, has enabled many organisations to address sensitive issues from a different vantage point, leading to confidence within the group to act.

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[8] To recapture the three steps, namely:

- --- Internalisation of the information;
- --- Conviction to act on that information; and
- --- Confidence to act on one's conviction.

In 1983-84, a street play called "Om Swaha" became very popular because it highlighted the spate of dowry related deaths occurring in the country. It forced the attention of the media and administrators. A woman's college in West Delhi[9] invited the group to perform. At the end of the play there was uneasy silence. Teachers who had invited the group to perform could not explain the silence. Here were young girls from lower middle and middle-class families. Dowry was a major issue in their lives. After much prodding, some girls said that they had enough of this "Hai! Hai!". Yes the situation of women was bad, but what could they do? Was there a way out? This got us thinking. After almost six months of discussion, we decided to organise a workshop on creative expression ("Kachnar"). This, we hoped, would open a New World to girls who had studied in government schools where they had little exposure to literature, films, theatre, music and creative writing. This workshop was held during the October vacations and 125 girls signed up for it. Most of the participants felt transformed after that experience - they dared to explore new ideas and alternative career options, began to read more and many of them became determined to become well informed and confident women. The critical change was happened in their self-image and self-esteem. This gave them the confidence to act.

The long and the short of it are that one should be able to gauge the pulse of the organisation. Training and orientation programmes must be followed up with appropriate administrative interventions that create the climate for the conviction to be translated into action. In the absence of a supportive environment, such training programmes will rarely go beyond tokenism.

Structures that facilitate action:

In the late seventies and all through the eighties, some organisations, donor agencies and government departments set up cells for women's development. Others identified focal points for women and for the girl child. These individuals and units were an add-on to the system. They were responsible for "women's development" and they had to independently negotiate with each department, section, project or programme. Many of them did not have administrative authority. It was essentially a token to show the world that the organisation thought that women mattered. As a result, many of these consultants and units could not make a dent in the mainstream. They confined their work to women's programmes and projects. Over the years, it was recognised that such structures do not always facilitate action and it is therefore important to explore ways and means to make the system respond without marginalising gender or converting it into a showpiece.

On the other hand, without a focal point to push the organisation to act, nothing ever gets done. In one government department, any woman officer at the level of Joint Secretary was given the task of "co-ordinating women". As a result of this lack of ownership, most gender related issues, including parliament questions, were tossed around from one section to another, especially if they were outside the purview of her specific responsibility on which she had information. The question, therefore, is to find a balance between marginalised women's cell, and marginalisation of the issue itself. Each organisation has to devise ways and means to make gender a critical crosscutting issue in the very fabric of the organisation.

Between 1986 and 1992, UNICEF continuously monitored its WID strategy. "A significant outcome of the process was repeated emphasis on gender cutting across sectors and programmes, and the need to internalise a gender perspective in order to address inequalities across the board. To this end, the Executive Board took a decision to pursue a policy where the needs and concerns of women and girls would be made intrinsic to sectoral programme formulation. "Women Only" projects were to be

[9] Janki Devi Mahavidhyalaya, New Delhi.

supported purely as bridging strategies to bring women to the threshold of opportunity. To this end, the organisation phased out WID posts in country offices and the responsibility of keeping gender in view was main-streamed, i.e., shouldered by all"[10]

Reviewing the situation in country offices, 1987 Policy Guidelines issued by UNICEF observed that "the tendency still prevails in some field offices to regard women in development issues as separate and extra programmatic to the core country strategy rather than integral to the achievement of sectoral programme objectives and larger developmental goals which form the basis for UNICEF's collaboration with national governments. Intrinsic to this tendency is an underlying feeling among some staff members that women in development objectives are inimical to child survival and development goals." [11] The 1994 World Survey on Role of Women in Development brought out by UNICEF captured this shift:

> "Gender is the fundamental organising principle of human society and is the source for inequality. The concept refers to socially constructed relationships between men and women that are linked to the States, the economy and to all macro and micro processes and institutions. Policies that target women only cannot achieve the best results, nor can those that assume that public actions are gender-neutral in their effects. Hence, promoting gender equality implies profound change in the socio-economic organisations of societies: not only in the way women work, live and care for other members of their households, but also in the way men do, and in the way their respective roles in the family and community are articulated with the need to earn a living."

Such unequivocal policy statements have enabled UNICEF to set up task forces with reporting procedures on important cross-cutting themes such as community participation, reduction of disparities and gender. Gender checklists for each sector or programme is also being drawn up so as to integrate gender into the very fabric of the programme. It is too early to say whether this will work. At this stage, it is important to recognise the need to explore alternative systems to mainstream gender.

Organisations and government programmes could generate checklists that address the following issues in every sector or programme. Integrating them into organisational goals could legitimise the process. The following checklist could serve as the starting point[12]:

-- Has the policy identified gender gaps in each sector?
-- What is the underlying causes for these gaps? Have they been analysed?
-- What could be the best advocacy strategy to create awareness about gender inequality among policy makers, implementers and service providers?
-- Do welfare oriented and service delivery programme look at access and control over resources and enable women to understand the causes of subordination?
-- Does the implementation structure provide for equal participation?
-- Does the monitoring and evaluation system provide for integration of gender concerns?
-- Has every training programme or orientation workshop been used as an opportunity for gender-sensitisation of service providers and the community?

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10 V Ramachandran, R Mishra and S Batliwala: Conceptual Framework and Operational Plan: Incorporating a gender perspective into core programme of UNICEF, India; UNICEF 1994.

11 Implementation Strategy for UNICEF Policy on Women in Development, UNICEF, April 1987

12 V Ramachandran, R Mishra and S Batliwala, UNICEF, 1994

Such interventions go a long way in creating a supportive structure for the task at hand.

In 1988 when Mahila Samakhya was being formulated, debate on a facilitating structure started with a review of existing management systems for government programmes. After a series of discussion on the management of WDP, Rajasthan, DWCRA and poverty alleviation programmes, the following management issues were identified as non-negotiable:

--- The programme should be built on a partnership between the government and non-government organisations.
--- The management structure should be supportive and existing governmental procedures should not be the point of departure.
--- The implementation structure of the programme should be able to strike a balance between legitimacy, power and access of the government and flexibility and openness of a non-governmental structure.
--- Choice of programme functionaries, trainers and resource support should be made on the basis of commitment, aptitude and quality.

This led to the creation of Mahila Samakhya Societies as "autonomous" bodies at the start level. Efforts were made to devise suitable rules and procedures that would enable the programme to create and sustain an alternative work culture. Over the years, the programme faced different challenges in the three states. The most difficult struggle was in Gujarat, where the government was reluctant to appoint a "non-official" as the project director. The resulting tension has been articulated with great lucidity in the evaluation of Mahila Samakhya Gujarat conducted by GOI in 1993. The report observed - " Most of the important positions of decision making under the MSP, including the post of State Programme Director and District Programme Co-ordinators are occupied by government officers. The office space (at the state level), the rules and regulations, the mode of working are tinged with the government colour....Sahayoginis and Sakhis are expected to adopt participatory approaches (as per the spirit of the MS document) and are very often told to decide things for themselves. However government people come into the programme with their own ideas, which often contradict the spirit of the programme.....The two work cultures, viz.; the missionary zeal of the voluntary workers and adherence to rules and regulations in the government culture have always been at loggerheads....The structural autonomy is limited and there is a clear failure to synthesising the two cultures, resulting in bureaucratisation of the programme. This has created a lot of tension and confusion within the structure." [13]

Mahila Samakhya has been flexible enough to learn from such experiences and work towards solutions. In Uttar Pradesh, the struggle to create a supportive administrative climate went on from 1989 to 1992, and finally towards the end of 1992, the government agreed to appoint a non-official who was able to create a nurturing environment.[14]

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13 Dr Indira Hiraway, Dr Nira Desai, Dr Ila Patel and Dr Vijay Sherry Chand, Towards empowering women: constraints and possibilities - Evaluation of Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat, National Evaluation Report, Department of Education, GOI, New Delhi, 1993

14 At the national level, appointment of a professional as opposed to a civil servant has been debated since the inception of the project. In 1988-89, the formulation of Mahila Samakhya was entrusted to a Consultant (Women's Development). By definition, Consultants (euphemistically known as non-officials) do not have administrative authority. However, in 1989, a decision was taken to appoint a

Finance and administration:

DWCRA was launched by Government of India in 1982 with the objective of enabling women from poor households (those identified as being below the poverty line) to enhance their income, the chief innovation being the formation of women's groups as the nodal point for credit, marketing support and skill training. It was also conceived as a mechanism to enable women access state resources like credit, training, technology and schemes under the Integrated Rural Development Programme. Even though designed as a window for rural development, in actuality DWCAR is treated as a token welfare scheme. Recent evaluations of the programme highlighted the following bottlenecks:

--- No special training is given to officials on the objectives of the programme and formation of women's groups.

--- Budget provided for the post of APO for the scheme is seen as an additional post in DRDA and the concerned official (if the post is filled) takes on DWCRA as additional charge. Vehicles and other inputs provided are absorbed into DRDA. Officials in charge allocate very little working time to the scheme and have very little idea about the scheme itself.

--- In most project districts the economic activity is chosen without any survey of the market, its feasibility in that region or the aptitude of women.

--- Revolving fund of 5000/- is often released in instalments without any appreciation of the rationale behind such a fund.

--- Government functionaries are appointed as co-signatories rendering the group ineffective. Government officials at best "tell" the groups what to do when but most often are very suspicious of the groups ability to handle funds. Their primary role seems to be as guardians of the revolving fund, and not as catalysts in DWCRA.

--- Inability to appreciate the need to mobilise additional funds to move towards a viable activity.

--- Group formation is seen as a one-time input, with no effort to provide inputs for their sustenance and growth.[15]

The special needs of group formation, group credit and associated issues have been overlooked because IRDP itself works through the concept of credit for individual beneficiaries. Where there is a mismatch between the stated objectives of a programme and the implementation structure, administration and finance become major barriers.

"non-official" as the Project Director will necessary administrative authority. This was seen as a major breakthrough, where an outsider (meaning a person who does not belong to the civil service and a person drawn from the women's movement) was taken into the system. However, since 1993 consultants drawn from the women's movement are hired to provide "technical inputs", while the administrative authority has been retained by career civil servants.

15 DWCRA Pilot project review, Swayam Shikshan Prayog, SPARC, Bombay. 1994

Most organisations do not include their finance and administrative staff in programmes training. As a result they do not appreciate programme issues and go by standard interpretation of rules and financial procedures. In most cases, programme staff do not see their colleagues in finance and administration as partners. As a result, the attitude of the latter is not very favourable to the former, leading to innumerable bottlenecks.

Financial rules and procedures, budgets and pressure to expend funds stifle process oriented initiatives. In 1988-89, the budget prepared for Mahila Samakhya was based on the numbers of villages to be covered, number of learning centres, number of training programmes, and the pattern of expenditure for each of the above. When the budget was being recast for the Eighth Plan period, a conscious effort was made to identify the financial bottlenecks and work the budget around programme issues. As a result, the budget that emerged in 1991-92 was more open-ended with each unit having the freedom to set its own goals and determine coverage.

Such an open-ended budgeting system proved to be a problem in some situations where civil servants insisted on setting limits and financial guidelines based on existing schemes for Adult Education and Non Formal Education. Ensuring financial flexibility and sensitivity was a continuous battle. Wherever the programme director adopted a dynamic approach, many barriers were overcome. On the other hand, where the director was more interested in protecting her turf, or insisted on tying down the programme to government rules and procedures, creativity and dynamism gave way to apathy and inaction. This compelled some functionaries to fight for a change in leadership.

Leadership:

Every new initiative gets its initial momentum from leaders. Within a group, there would always be those who break the path and make the journey less formidable for others. It is therefore important to identify such leaders, encourage them, nurture them and create opportunities for experience sharing.

In the first two years of Mahila Samakhya a conscious effort was made to identify such leaders at all levels, and among trainers and partner NGOs and nurture them as individuals and as a group. This enabled them to break the path. In the formative years of the programme the National Project Director had to constantly meet project functionaries across the country, extend support, not just in their work, but also emotionally. It was a long process of crisis support.

Rape of a Sahayogini in one district, conflict between the district administration and women's group in a village, determination of a widow to harvest grain from land legally owned by her but controlled by her husband family, demoralisation of key district level functionaries, etc. had to be handled with sensitivity. This was given as much importance as formal meetings of executive committees. On many occasions the Education Secretary of GOI extended similar support. This kind of moral, emotional and official support created a nurturing environment. At that point of time, key officials in Department of Education, GOI appreciated this role and did not enforce conventional administrative norms on the National Project Director.

On the other hand, frequent change in the leadership of WDP, Rajasthan, affected the morale of the workers. Directors holding additional charge or given other primary responsibilities have crippled many programmes. Frequent transfers, aptitude of the leader and primacy of responsibility have been recognised as critical bottlenecks.

This is not specific to women's programmes alone, but is a generic issue. Review of a range of donor supported Area Development Projects [ADP] in Health and Family Welfare, observed - "The acceptance and setting of ADPs within the administration seems to affect their effectiveness: for example, the seniority of the project head, project location within the department, autonomy or lack of it, relationship with the main-line department, tenure, training and retention of the project head, and extent of powers delegated, all became major stress areas. In many cases, the appointment of the project head is seen as a routine posting and no mechanism has been evolved to assess the suitability and aptitude of the person."[16]

The importance of aptitude and commitment of the leader is of critical importance. Some organisations suddenly come alive with a change at the top, while some lose their creativity and vibrancy with a change of guard. It is therefore important to recognise the role of the leadership in creating and sustaining a climate for action. A sensitisation process should therefore involve the leadership in order to make the leap from conviction for action to the confidence to act.

Creating a core - taking the process forward:

Supportive leadership is also necessary to create a core that can carry the process forward within the organisation. External facilitation may be necessary up to a point. However, beyond a particular stage, the impetus must come from within.

For example, Mahila Samakhya, as a national programme spread over many states, could not have moved at the pace at which it did without the conscious effort to create a core group which identified with the programme, and therefore willing to take the process forward. This core group was created both within and without, i.e., a core team of functionaries who experienced freedom and authority to act, groups of trainers drawn from women's organisations and other institutions to evolve a dynamic approach to training and to keep the programme in touch with ground realities, a core group of supportive bureaucrats who identified with the programme even if it was not their administrative responsibility and a loose group of well-wishers who played a critical role in affirmation. The donor, in this case the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Delhi and their counterparts in The Hague, felt close to the programme, because there was a free, two-way flow of information. They were invited to share the ups and downs. In short, transparency helped in many ways. If the National Project Office had adopted a directive mode by giving orders from above, the programme would have collapsed. A conscious effort was made to transfer 'ownership' to the state, the districts, partner-NGOs, trainers etc. This involved a gradual decrease in the importance of the national project office in Delhi, and efforts were made to devolve authority to as many decentralised levels as possible.

Identify doable tasks:

During the sensitisation process, the first sign of resistance surfaces through some predictable and common reactions, namely:

--- It is not possible to bring about changes in ongoing programmes, we will try and build it in when we formulate our next project, programme cycle, or plan, as the case may be. Or better still, why not design a special programme that would be gender sensitive from the start.

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16 Donor assisted Area Development Projects (ADPs) in Health and Family Welfare Sector in India - Some lessons; UNFPA, New Delhi, 1993

--- We have so many targets or goals to achieve this year. Mainstreaming gender will distract the staff and we will not be able to do justice to our primary responsibility.

--- After all, each organisation has a limited role to play. This will not change the system. It will only lead to frustration. A national organisation would say the process needs to start from the State, the State unit would mention the district, the district functionaries would plead helplessness unless the line staff are involved and officers in multilateral agencies would throw up their arms and say: "we need to begin with the government".

These responses must be addressed seriously, enabling the group to spell out their specific role and responsibility within an organisation, and identify doable tasks. Sensitising a group of planners and administrators does not automatically lead to change. At the end of an intensive gender-training programme with educational administrators, the group was asked to evaluate the programme. One young officer, handling a department at the state level remarked - "what can I do as a department head, nothing will change unless the entire social fabric of our society responds. While the training was interesting and meaningful to me as a person, I do not know how this will help me in my work." This is a classic case of paralysis of action.

Training programmes and sensitisation workshops that revolve around the status of women, but do not dwell on how and where changes could be made in existing structures, lead to apathy. Therefore, it is important to set aside a large chunk of time to reflect on ongoing policies, programmes and work culture; identify areas for immediate action and list out doable tasks. However junior a functionary, however mundane the task, it is important to enable the group to work together to identify areas for action in the short-term, the medium-term and in the long-term. An orientation session, follow-up reflections and departmental meetings should review the doable and encourage the staff to explore more opportunities.

Anticipating and overcoming bottlenecks:

A few years back, Rajasthan Government initiated a campaign to enrol girls in school. At the end of the campaign the women's development department was shocked to note that many schoolteachers sent the girls back because of space and number constraints. Here was a doable task, i.e., mobilising communities to send the girls to school. But since they were not trained to analyse the situation, anticipate problems and strategies to overcome bottlenecks, unexpected reactions affected motivation. Two years down the line, the same officials were unwilling get involved in similar campaigns. Such experiences invariably dampen the spirit, making every new task more difficult. Anticipating problem areas, discussing them frankly and openly and working towards strategies to deal with them, all must be an integral part of the process.

For example, most organisations have their share of people who act as gatekeepers and turf-guards. Some may do so because they feel insecure, having slipped into routine mediocrity; some fear change and the impact it could have on the work-culture, and in some organisations staff unions and associations play the role of maintaining status quo. Arguments for not doing something invariably revolve around workload, time, territories, externally determined agenda versus internally determined priorities etc. This kind of subtle pressure often wreaks havoc on new initiatives. In many situations, bringing such tendencies upfront and placing them on the table could be the beginning of the process of reflection.

One of the major bottlenecks is the appointment of people without aptitude or interest into key posts. Many staff associations fight for promotion and growth avenues, without being sensitive to appropriateness of a given person for a particular post. In the corporate sector, there are cases where the management discusses promotion within the overall context of productivity. Unfortunately, in organisations dealing with development (either as implementers or donors), the notion of productivity is not build into organisational ethos. Executive heads plead helplessness even when they are fully aware of an attitude problem among key officials.

It will not be possible to initiate change unless such issues are addressed squarely. In one particular instance, the executive head of a large organisation initiated a dialogue with the staff union and negotiated appropriate staff selection for key posts.

Affirmation:

Creating a nurturing environment, giving positive strokes at the right time, reinforcing the objective of the effort to mainstream gender concerns, reiterating its critical role in achieving organisational goals, affirmation and friendly and constructive criticism - all these go into sustaining the process long enough for it to leave a lasting impact. We are so used to time bound or one-shot training processes that a long drawn out process seems unnecessary. It is therefore important to repeat, over and over again, that changing attitudes, work-styles and redefining priorities cannot be achieved overnight. Therefore reinforcement and affirmation needs to be seen as an integral part of the process.

Mahila Mahiti Mela, Bidar, February 1991: A women's information fair was organised by Mahila Samakhya, Karnataka to bring over 1100 women from the three districts to celebrate their newly acquired consciousness, reach out to others, access information and share their experiences. Women working in their villages and districts, rarely get an opportunity to come together. The most significant achievement of this fair was the opportunity to reaffirm, share and celebrate. "An interesting aspect of the 'mela' was that it was a test of how far the somewhat vague notion of empowerment had occurred in real terms: would women be able to leave their villages, homes and families for four to six days and travel the length and breadth of the state to attend a 'mela'.....To the extent that sheer physical mobility is an indicator of empowerment for women normally trapped on the treadmill of life, it was remarkable that so many women of varying ages were able to do this..."[17] Mahila Samakhya was noticed by the government and the media. This was a tremendous confidence booster. Women went back fully charged and with a resolve to work with renewed vigour. For a young programme, this was important.

Similar 'melas' and 'sammelans' organised by other states and in other programmes with a clear objective to reaffirm and encourage programme functionaries, partner organisations and the people for whom the programme or project have been initiated.

Many NGOs organise an annual reflection retreat where the staff talks about their work, relax with each other and celebrate. It gives them an opportunity to bond as a team and get to know each other's contribution. This is also quite popular in the corporate sector.

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17 Ms Ammu Joseph: Education as if women mattered, Economic and Political Weekly, April 6, 1991.

Is it possible to initiate such cumbersome processes in mainstream structures?

The first reaction of organisational heads and civil servants is that such a cumbersome process cannot be initiated in mainstream institutions. It would work in small organisations or in NGOs. While appreciating the need for such a thorough exercise, most organisational heads plead helplessness.

On the other hand, there have been instances where such processes have been initiated. In some cases, like Women's Development Programme, Rajasthan, it could not be sustained beyond a point and the programme ran into problems of insensitive administration, stagnation and inability to restructure the programme. The programme gradually lost its vibrancy. Will the same happen to Mahila Samakhya in a few years time? Will SEWA be the same in 2001? Will SPARC loose its dynamism? These questions are difficult to answer, but it is possible to list the essential inputs that made these organisations work. Perhaps this would trigger a debate on sustainability and replicability of such innovation.

Lessons from some pioneering efforts to en-gender development:

The decade of the late seventies and the eighties have seen a significant shift in the approach to women's development. The emphasis has shifted from welfare to empowerment, i.e., creating enabling mechanisms that would empower women to take control of their lives. Mobilisation and demand generation was seen as a necessary precondition to service delivery and welfare schemes. Many programmes for women's empowerment in the government and non-government sectors reflected this shift, some of which have been trailblazers in India.

What brought about this change? The starting point was the realisation that larger doses of welfare and service delivery have not altered women's status and that women need to be given the space and the opportunity to realise their full potential. The accent was on providing the right environment, stimulus, a collective identity, and tools to gain access to knowledge, skills and a management structure that would best achieve this goal. It is this fundamental shift that characterised empowerment programmes and set them apart from tradition welfare or service delivery approaches.

Some of them were labelled "innovative" because they seemed to grapple with fundamentals, something which conventional programmes were unable to do. People who had an exceptional understanding of ground realities designed such programmes. It is important to note that in most cases there was a dynamic relationship between theory and experience on the ground, in impacting each other on a continuous basis. They did not start with a magic formula. Credit programme of the Co-operative Development Foundation [earlier known as Samakhya, Andhra Pradesh], mobilisation of pavement dwellers by SPARC, Bombay, organising women in the informal sector by SEWA, and enhancing women's self-esteem and self-confidence as a first step towards empowerment tried out in Women's Development Programme, Rajasthan or Mahila Samakhya in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh are some examples of such innovations. People who had worked among poor women and had acquired an in-depth understanding of their life situation designed these innovations. It is very important to keep this perspective in view - i.e., it is a worm's eye view and not a bird's eye view that leads to successful innovations.

At the root of all such innovations was recognition of the dynamics of change and learning. They realised that the relationship between ideas and change is dynamic i.e., living through change is a learning process and this, in turn, provides new insights and new ideas for action. Action in turn propels change. How people learn, internalise what they learn and finally apply that knowledge to propel change is a fascinating process. Most innovative programmes are products of such insights.

This process is not a purely cerebral exercise. Knowing something is qualitatively different from internalising that knowledge. Many of us believe that consciousness precedes action. In conventional development jargon we talk

of training and sensitisation. Mechanical transfer of information does not automatically result in conviction, confidence to act on that conviction and motivation for action. An experiential learning process involves both the mind and the heart. People who initiated such processes have been an integral part of it, changing and growing with it. It is, therefore, important to bear in mind that people who are external to situations would find it difficult to intervene as effectively as those who see themselves as an integral part of it would.

Organic link between conception, birth and nurturance

This brings us to the **first principle** of innovative women's empowerment programmes - those who have successfully designed such programmes have been people who have been central to its conception, birth and nurturance. Bureaucracies do not see an organic link between the birth of an idea or plan and its implementation. In most governments and large organisations a planning wing draws up a blue print, the finance division the budget, while an anonymous structure implements. This separation is so generic to government programmes and schemes that it is not even acknowledged as a factor that could influence outcome. In India, a recognition of this fundamental principle made some government programmes for women's empowerment stand out in the early years, but as and when this was lost sight of and it was subordinated to the dominant administrative culture, they developed innumerable problems - mainly related to the mismatch between programme objectives [which was a driving force] and the implementation structure.[18]

Replication and acceleration of pace:

The **second issue** that has surrounded the debate on innovative empowerment programmes is the question of replicability. It is often assumed that the process of replication must somehow accelerate the pace of the original experiment. The time taken to carefully build the foundation of Gramin Bank in Bangladesh or SEWA in India is short-circuited when a similar experiment is tried out within government (for example, the Mahila Kosh programme initiated by Government of India). Similarly, if WDP, Rajasthan initiated in 1984 took five years to reach a given level, then Mahila Samakhya, 1989 was expected to take half the time and Mahila Samakhya Component in the Bihar Education Project, 1991 even less!

It is at this point that the first break occurs from the mother concept. One is left wondering how it is possible to build taller buildings with shallower foundations? When governments or voluntary organisations decide to replicate an innovative scheme or to go to scale, they need to acknowledge that an organic process involving human beings cannot short-circuit essential processes and is speeded up unnaturally. This is not to argue that we cannot learn from experience and that we should reinvent the wheel each time, but it important to acknowledge that some processes cannot be accelerated.

Appropriateness of replication:

The **third issue** is one of appropriateness of replication. Successful innovations are based on some basic principles, some specific factors and the people who made it happen. When we attempt to replicate innovations, it is important to separate the generic from the specific. This is essential in order to identify the elements that can be replicated and those that cannot. If a team of highly motivated women made SPARC's strategy stand out, it is important to recognise the importance of motivated leadership and team work. Mahila Samakhya was started in five different regions. The basic concept was the same. Yet, today the texture of the programme is different in the five states. This was determined by the nature of leadership, motivation of staff, quality of training, the nature of NGOs who were involved, supportive

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[18] Vimala Ramachandran: Falling through the gaps - Management of government programme for women in India, Indian Association of Women's Studies Newsletter, Autumn, 1994.

climate and the administrative and political ethos of the concerned region. In one region, benign neglect provided the necessary space for experimentation and innovation, while in another, government control stifled creativity.

Standardisation:

Most governments are keen to standardise models. Even when they genuinely try to replicate innovations, they expect to weave the innovation around the existing administrative structures. A thrift and credit group cannot be successful without the necessary inputs required to catalyse and sustain the group. It is possible to work towards the basic principles of a programme or scheme, but specific elements have to be designed afresh with each replication. Culture, social structure, religion, terrain, level of development, administrative ethos, political sensitivities - all these factors determine the outcome. Women's empowerment is a culturally sensitive issue, therefore it is not possible to standardise a design for the entire country.

Management:

The **fourth issue** revolves around the people who administer a programme. Most successful experiments attribute their success to careful selection of project functionaries, creation of learning opportunities, training, avenues for professional fulfilment and growth and above all commitment to work among the poor. Aptitude and commitment are taken as the starting point. Paper qualifications, seniority, political influence and the like find no room in such experiments. Most of us who have been part of the women's movement are aware that working towards women's empowerment requires a missionary zeal and it is this spirit that makes or breaks a programme.

When older innovations like Gramin Bank (Bangladesh), SEWA or Co-operative Development Foundation [nee Samakhya] gain wide acceptability and recognition, governments are eager to replicate them on a larger scale. Similarly voluntary organisations that have been working in other sectors decide to initiate new programmes. In India, the WDP approach was upscaled and redesigned in Mahila Samakhya and this approach is now being "introduced" into many mainstream programmes like District Primary Education Projects. Not all adaptations succeed and some of them even become strange mutants where the shell and the vocabulary are similar, and the essence completely absent.

Programme objective verses "reasons of state":

This brings us to the **concluding issue**, the basic objective of the programme should be the overriding goal of all its segments: the field functionaries, supervisors, office staff, finance, administration and support personnel. If the primary objective is to give poor women access to credit for their work or emergency consumption needs, and 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 schemes NGOs or governments cannot expect to take existing banking procedures as the take off point. Eligibility criteria and rules cannot be sealed in straightjacketed norms without any decision-making powers at the functional level. At the same time, poor women cannot be expected to understand and appreciate reasons of state. It is the state that should create the enabling conditions for the poor to access credit. There is a need to give precedence to programme sensitive management rather than ask that the programme be sensitive to management systems in government.

A women's empowerment programme that seeks to enhance the self esteem and self confidence of poor women would have to first empower its own functionaries to act. Administration of such programmes demands a qualitatively different degree of commitment and teamwork. While these issues are often appreciated by individual civil servants, they plead helplessness when it comes to giving official

recognition and legitimisation through appropriate rules and procedures. Similarly, many NGOs adopt the vocabulary without creating the necessary space for action. For example, some NGOs who initiated women's empowerment programmes refused to allow field level functionaries [mainly women] into decision-making positions of the project. They are expected to organise women's groups - but were asked not to take decisions without consulting the boss. In one particular case the women's group decided they wanted to first struggle for the rights to access minor forest produce like berries and firewood. This would pit them against the forest department. The boss turned down this plan and asked the field organisers to confine their mobilisation to "safe issues" like education and health.

Decentralisation coupled with strong accountability systems, with each unit of the programme working towards the primary objective, is the secret behind successful innovations. The overriding objective cannot be to safeguard a given set of rules or procedures, a cadre, the administrative culture or political sensitivities of the organisational head. Often decline begins when rules, procedures and power over assets and territories become ends in themselves.

This issue was discusses in the annual Mahila Samakhya Conference held in February, 1992 and a workshop on "Addressing demotivation and tiredness[19]" in July, 1992. The quintessential point that emerged was the inherent contradiction associated with a participatory management style embedded in a hierarchical system. This contradiction is not particular to government alone. Experience of the programme with some NGOs was not different. Essentially the consensus was that struggle is inevitable when we choose to alter the language and style of discourse. But the same group of individuals cannot continue to carry the torch ad-infinitum. A gentle turn over of staff, with the new group coming with higher levels of energy can take over where the tired one left off.

Frequent transfer of officers with administrative and financial responsibilities leads to a situation where the executive head knows very little about the programme. The task of communicating the project concept is then shouldered by the State Programme Director (SPD). Where the Director shares the basic tenets and values of the project, the communication is fairly easy. But when she is a relatively junior official herself, she approaches the executive head with the entire baggage of hierarchy. She cannot communicate freely. On the other hand, other functionaries who are not drawn from the civil service, speak with greater confidence. She therefore feels threatened by the outspoken and no holds bar approach of the non-officials in the programme. Finding herself alienated from her team, she can hardly defend the tenets and principles she does not share!

Being a project with an agenda to empower poor women, the Director has to walk a tight rope between different segments of the administration which become the target of anger or ire of the women. Simultaneously, she has to seek the support of other arms of the same administration. For example, when there is an incident of rape by forest guards / or police, the SPD has to weather the storm without letting her team down. In such a situation she cannot shrug responsibility. Similarly, when women decide to take on the health services, or the local schoolteacher, ability of an SPD to steer the programme becomes critical. At that point she cannot ask her team if their activity is "legitimate", i.e., ask for written sanction in the form of a government order. If the programme is to take off and truly respond to the needs of poor women, being rule bound can stifle growth and creativity. This discussion lead to a resolve

19 This meeting was facilitated by Mr Vijay Mahajan, Mr Gagan Sethi and Ms Laxmi Krishnamurty. We tried to grapple with organisational development issues alongside the issue of burnout faced by most programme functionaries.

among senior officials that an innovative programme like Mahila Samakhya needs dynamic leadership and that the needs of the programme should take precedence over conventional norms and rules followed by the administration over a hundred years.

Is there hope?

Can the dominant administrative culture in mainstream organisations: Government Departments, mega NGOs, multilateral agencies etc. initiate such processes? It is often said that the forces that actively work towards protecting status quo resist any attempt to bring about systemic changes. However, there are examples where strong and dynamic leaders in such organisations have been able to make a beginning. It all depends on our ability to build a strong pressure group to force the leadership to acknowledge the need for change in order to achieve their own stated objectives. Take education for example, it is widely recognised that India cannot achieve universal elementary education unless they squarely address social disparities, including gender inequalities. However, this has been the most difficult task, the bottleneck range from the politics of appointment, transfer of teachers and their motivation to region-specific school calendars and textbooks etc. A centralised system of policy formulation and prioritisation ends up supporting the very forces that block change. On the other hand, a decentralised system creates opportunities for successful transformation in some areas, while regional prejudices and administrative ethos block progressive interventions in others. Do we then settle for uniform mediocrity for fear of regional disparities?

The time is ripe for bringing about fundamental changes in the management of primary health care, basic education, natural resources management and the public distribution system. There is a considerable body of opinion in favour of decentralisation and creating opportunities for change. When the government has dared to introduce economic liberalisation, despite genuine fears about accelerating poverty and inequality - is it too much to ask for decentralisation in the social sectors? The Panchayat Raj system could create the needed opportunity - provided the all-powerful civil service and other vested interests do not block it.

We have reasons to hope, but wishing must be accompanied by intensive lobbying to create a large constituency to exert pressure. The struggle to en-gender development must be carried to the corridors of power by entering the mainstream and seizing every opportunity to initiate change.