

RURAL WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT: STRATEGIES FOR PARTICIPATION

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Four terms require definition -

- A. Which rural women? Not homogenous - economically or culturally today - but certain common characteristics they share - a) numerical majority; b) maximum illiteracy; c) invisibility to development planners, social analysts and intelligentsia,-- undervaluation of their work/contribution to the family and national economy (in the home/outside); and d) inverse relationship between trends in development and their overall status - economic, social, political.
- B. What then does development mean? From rural women's perspective? Who is responsible, how to change in the direction that women want?
- C. Strategies - by whom, for whom, for what purpose?
- D. Participation - what does it mean? In what, for what purpose, in what manner? Who prevents? What is the history?

UN Expert Group's approach (74) Vs. CSWI's findings - declining economic participation, rising migration, changes in gender position in life expectancy, mortality, infant mortality, maternal mortality - old processes, accelerated since independence - why when constitution guaranteed equality?

Two basic questions - a) why had accelerated economic modernisation marginalised rural women? b) why had the data been ignored?—→ Inception of women's studies squarely rooted in social sciences. Gap between empirical reality and social scientists' perceptions—→ questioning theories, concepts, data and the established strategies for development —→ alliance with others (academics, bureaucrats, media) criticising development strategies - the anti 'trickle down' school, the poverty/unemployment! mortality debaters/investigators, the exponents of **target group oriented** approaches to development and finally the advocates of participatory approach to development.

Planning Commission: Working Groups (1977-78) re-examining all major policies - women's situation one of debating points —→ designing a package of **new strategies** for government - a) to arrest declining trend **by recognising women as a target group** for development assistance (along with others e.g. small/marginal farmers, landless, scheduled castes/tribes); b) to promote grassroot level organisations - as a delivery mechanism and a forum for services/support offered by govt. to encourage women's articulation (not only as beneficiaries but as agents of development); c) to institute cells/units/corporations to combat problems of invisibility, oversight and neglect.

Struggle to incorporate these into Sixth Plan - peasant women's demand for land rights - truncated entry in Plan. No special component (1980-1985) no quota except in TRYSEM.

Mid plan appraisal showed poor implementation - the slight rise in sex - ratio/economic participation rate (81) loudly acclaimed. We found higher economic participation only as marginal workers - failure of Equal Remuneration Act (1976) to penetrate rural society. Strategy of grassroot organization - greater articulation successful only in a large cities like Ahmedabad, Bombay, Madras because of very large numbers. Peasant women are very active in rural struggles for land, wages, agriculture deforestation etc. but somehow not effective in winning better deals for themselves.

DWCRA introduced in 1983 as sub - programme of IRDP in selected districts - 3 pronged strategy - (i) organisation; (ii) support services; (iii) consciousness raising.

Recognition by 1985 of the need for special component approach → 30% earmarking in 7th Plan anti-poverty programmes. Second step - retraining of government functionaries. Third Step - to project organisation/collective base for women's economic/social/political development as the critical strategy → rural women's empowerment. **Fourth Step** - recognition of traditional sectors especially primary sector - agriculture, animal husbandry, sericulture, fisheries and forestry as rural women's primary base and need to strengthen their participation in them with additional development support - to strengthen their participation in them with additional development support - **not only to assist women, but to arrest growing environmental and developmental crisis.** **Fifth Step** - recognition of need for intermediaries - who? In what capacity? Perceptual difference in interpretation of the intermediary's role, NPE and POA, Labour Ministry Scheme for assistance to rural women workers organisations, STEP & S&T for Women.

Convergence of Policies (see Conclusion Ch. KVIC Report, CWDS) result of 10 years research/pressure/sensitiation. But do not resolve (a) problems of implementation; (b) perceptual differences between different areas of govt.; (c) opposition/contradictions/resistance from other forces.

Strategies designed by small groups and manoeuvred through government - not yet well known to general public, women's lobby (which is fragmented) or the target group.

Long term changes require structural as well as attitudinal transformation - for structural.