

## **NOTE ON WOMEN THROUGH THE PLANS FOR DISCUSSION ON 9TH FIVE YEAR PLAN, 1997**

**By  
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### **II. DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH FIVE YEAR PLANS**

The approach to women's development in the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) was not clear. The women's question was perceived as primarily a social one by the major section of the political leadership and the bureaucracy and the role of the State in 'social' issues was viewed with great hesitation and caution. Significantly, issues identified by the National Planning Committee's Sub-Committee on Women ("Women in a planned Economy" 1941) were not considered by the official planners a decade later. Instead women were projected as beings in need of education, health and welfare services only.

However, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB), set-up in 1953, faced the problem of absence of any governmental machinery at most levels for welfare related activities, and undertook to promote a number of welfare measures through voluntary organisations, encouraging women's organisations to take up such activities in partnership with government. Promotion of organisations of women at various levels but especially at the grassroots was at the heart of this strategy. Mahila Mandals were promoted as 'delivery mechanisms' for essential services like education, health, especially for maternal and child health etc. both by the CSWB and the Community Development Programme through the first and the second Five Year Plans.

This combination of institution building and human resource development was also expected to prepare women to participate in the political and developmental processes. Thus though the language of these strategies reflected contemporary meaning of 'welfare', there was a conceptual thrust (even though inadequately articulated) towards actively involving and stimulating the participation of women's organisations in the processes of change. However, increasing bureaucratic control, top-down designing and streamlining of programmes and declining resource support to organisational and institutional development from below both reflected and contributed to the low priority and non-serious approach to basic issues in promotion of gender equality.

The Third, Fourth and Fifth Plans, including the four years of Plan holiday before the Fifth Plan continued the same approach, with declining support to the strategies of organisation building and human resource development. Some priority was accorded to women's education after the Report of the National Committee on Women's Education (1958-59). Planners, however failed to address the major problems of poverty, illiteracy, non-enrolment, dropout etc. that affected the large majority of girls and women. From the Third Plan onwards, the issue of population control acquired increasing priority. Family Planning services were introduced within the health services, but very quickly and increasingly dominated the health services, with separate allocations and staff. Repeated directives from the Planning Commission, from the 4th Plan onwards to integrate Family Planning with MCH were not implemented. Programmes for supplementary nutrition of children and nursing and expectant mothers from poverty groups were introduced by the Welfare Department but received far less priority and resources and no integration with MCH.

## **THE CSWI'S CRITIQUE, PARLIAMENTARY MANDATE AND THE EMERGENCY (1974-77)**

These negligent and instrumentalist approaches came-in for severe criticism in the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI, 1971-74).

The pre-independence planning document had addressed women's economic, civil and social rights. Economic rights and needs were not really built into the first five plans, Labour laws, valid only for the organised secondary sector, had incorporated most of the ILO Conventions before planning started. Maternity benefits were enacted in 1961, but not equal remunerations. Interestingly, however, both these principles were incorporated into public service rules (with a few exceptions), apparently in Compliance of Articles 16 and 15 of the Constitution, but no one thought of child care support for women in these services. Service rules were the responsibility of the Home Ministry, Labour laws of the Labour Ministry. Some sectors of government (eg. Railways, Defence Services, Insurance, Mining) continued discriminatory and exclusionary practices against women because there was no comprehensive policy or laws applicable to all categories of women workers and very little awareness of the implications of the constitutional mandate for economic and social organisation and laws. On the other hand, the growing emphasis on population control highlighted women's reproductive, rather than their productive roles, influencing a populationist approach to women's development needs.

The Committee was of the view that the Indian State had failed in its constitutional responsibility of not discriminating on the grounds of gender. Plans for development of agriculture, industry, fishery, livestock etc. and other major sectors of the Indian economy contained no acknowledgment of the millions of women involved in these sectors for a livelihood. In fact women had been increasingly viewed by the planners as not in need of an independent livelihood, to the point where women's decreasing work participation rate and share of employment, increasing poverty and insecurity in sectors of the economy in which they used to dominate earlier (agriculture, forestry, livestock, cottage industry, sericulture, fisheries, retail) were not even viewed as unfortunate problems of change. This process of marginalisation of the large majority of women in the economy and their consequent neglect and devaluation by the society and the state, were demonstrations of gender, class and urban bias.

Treating the declining sex ratio as a composite indicator of the worsening situation of the majority of women, the Committee demonstrated that this process, begun much earlier, had been accelerated during the period of planned development. The increasing investment on education, health and the opening of opportunities for public employment had benefitted a small minority, widening the gap between this minority and the majority of women. Even amongst the privileged minority, the promise of gender equality was threatened by escalation of social practices like dowry, continued inequality in personal laws (including Hindu Law which had been 'reformed' after independence), non-enforcement of existing laws, which sought to offer some protection to women (e.g. labour laws or criminal law), and the 'invisibility' of women's needs, concerns and perspectives in the planning process.

Though the Parliamentary debate on the CSWI's report concluded in a very wide mandate to the government :” to remove all disabilities that Indian women continue to suffer from”, the declaration of National Emergency within a few weeks relegated any serious action on most of the Committee's recommendations to a distant future.

## **CONCEPTUAL ADVANCE AND THE POLITICS OF PLANNING WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT (1977-80)**

It was only with the change of government in 1977 that some serious exercises in policy review were taken up between 1977 and 1980. Amongst these, the three most significant exercises were the Report of the Working Group on Employment of Women, 1977-78; Report of the Working Group on Development

of Village Level Organisations of Rural women, 1977-78, Report of the Working Group on Adult Education Programmes for Women, 1977-78 and Report of the National Committee on the Role and Participation of Women in Agriculture and Rural Development, 1979-80.

These exercises definitely marked a watershed in conceptualising basic problems and strategies for women's development in India. Instead of the United Nations Agenda for the Women's Decade influencing Indian planning, it was the Indian Agenda that got incorporated into the United Nations mid-Decade Programme of Action - through the mediacy of the Non-aligned Movements, special Conference on Women and Development (Baghdad, 1979); and India's Membership of (i) the Commission on the Status of women (1978-80) and (ii) the Preparatory Committee for the Mid-Decade Copenhagen Conference (1980) and Programme of Action. The Secretary General of the Mid-Decade UN Conference acknowledged India's contribution to the emphasis on third world perspectives on development and the adoption of employment, health and education as a sub-theme of the decade's agenda.

The conceptual approach evolved through these few years identified women's developmental needs as having multiple dimensions - cutting across economic, social and political sectors - requiring explicit examination of women's situation in various sectors (agriculture and allied fields, industry, labour and employment, power, environment, energy, science and technology as well as the social and infrastructural sectors. Such explicit examination called for three operational strategies:-

- a) of establishing cells within various sectoral development/planning agencies at different levels;
- b) earmarking of a share of various sectoral allocations for investment in women rather than relegate women to only women specific programmes and women specific agencies; and
- c) promoting rural employment and development through women's own collective organisations, at the grassroots. Spontaneous indigenous models of c) had already emerged in SEWA, WWF, Annapoorna Mahila Mandal etc. The economic, social and political dynamism they displayed offered hopes of empowerment for others, elsewhere.

The Sixth Five Year Plan prepared by the Janata Government (1979-84) and released in Dec. 1979 contained definite admission of failure to remove disparity and injustice in both social and economic life. It also stated that the objective of population control could not be achieved without bringing about major changes in the status of women. Including women within the chapters on employment and manpower and rural development this document made a definite departure from earlier plans where women had been mentioned only in the chapters on the social services. In suggesting the need for "administrative innovation" and "collection of sex wise distribution data on development assistance", the plan acknowledged the previous neglect, the need for better information flow and new mechanisms to ensure women receiving their "due share" of governments' attention and support, and "equal opportunity for growth and distributive justice". Support for organisation of rural women was suggested on the same principles as organisations of the rural poor - to improve their "bargaining power and access to development assistance".

This conceptual advance however was not matched by prescriptive measures. With a change of government in 1980, this document became inoperative. A new Planning Commission was appointed. It however remains significant as a stepping stone to later stages of women's development - from 1980 to 1995.

#### **THE SIXTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (1980-85): PRESSURE FROM THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

The Framework for the 6th Plan, released by the new Planning Commission in August 1980 reverted women back to the social services and did not reflect any of the home work undertaken by various official

expert groups between 1975-80. Nor did it reflect approaches and perspectives advocated by Indian delegations to international conferences of the UN or the Non-aligned Movement.

It was from this point that intervention by national women's organisations began to make some impact on the planning process. It began a period of partnership and alliance between the few cells on women created within the Ministries of Labour and Employment, Social Welfare and Rural Development, and the growing women's movement and women's studies scholars. A memorandum submitted jointly by seven women's organisations in 1980 and support from women members of Parliament persuaded the Planning Commission to incorporate, for the first time in India's planning history, a chapter on Women and Development.

The Chapter (27) acknowledged the continued low status of women as a result of inadequate opportunities of 'independent employment and income', referred to demographic trends (higher mortality, lower economic participation, literacy, sex-ratio etc.) as issues of serious concern and went on to define a multipronged but inter-dependent strategy for women's development which by its very nature 'would be dependent on the total development process'. Emphasis on the 'family centred' poverty alleviation strategy, (which invited attacks from WID scholars through the 80s) was qualified by the statement that "economic independence would accelerate improvement of women's status".

A marked improvement in the redistributive policies of government was the promise that 'in cases of transferred assets such as agricultural and homestead land, government shall endeavour to provide joint title to husband and wife.

Strengthening of voluntary organisations of women at the grassroots was advocated "for creating a proper climate for the introduction of social legislation as well as for its effective implementation and the provision of legal aid". Such grassroots organisations were also necessary 'as channels for women to participate effectively in decisions that affect their lives and for promoting adequate development efforts for women at different levels'. There were definite suggestions for active promotion of such collectives by the government and linking them with institutions which could provide support in various forms.

For education the emphasis was on special support services to expand women's access to all types of education. The need for child care services as a support for education of girls as well as for working mothers of different classes was acknowledged, and public services requested to provide them for their women colleagues. However, the Labour Ministry's innovative plans for a National Programme for Child Care and Maternity Benefit in partnership between the Government and all other employers (which had received verbal support of national trade unions and women's organizations in 1979) was not taken up.

The institution of a women's quota and the magic formula of one-third made its appearance within the TRYSEM programme. There was a general statement that it would be better to expand co-educational institutions rather than promote separate women's polytechnics. Similarly, instead of relegating women's employment to some women-prone sectors, the Sixth Plan proposed "corrective measures" in sectors where 'women's employment is low or on the decline'.

**THE SEVENTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (1985-90): PLAN PROPOSES, GOVERNMENT DISPOSES:- INCREASING PERSONAL POLITICS WITHIN THE STATE AND GROWING POLITICISATION OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

With the twin emphases on employment and productivity in the Seventh Plan, the Approach paper highlighted the strategy of a direct attack on the problems of poverty, unemployment and regional imbalances with "accelerated development of human resources". There was greater emphasis on the provision of gainful employment to the unemployed - particularly women and youth. The strategy of organising women around socio- economic activities was reiterated, for the twin objectives of making

their projects economically viable and adding to their social strength for overall enhancement of their status.

The Chapter (14) of the Actual Plan document demonstrated some advance in the use of feminist language (the role of “the predominantly patriarchal order in confining women in an oppressive environment”); a substantive acknowledgment of women’s important role in agriculture and allied sectors and the existence of a gap between the actual social reality and its perception by society at large. However, in identifying concrete strategies there was a tendency to slide back into women specific sectors and a refusal to extend the quota or the special component plan approach.

The Plan exercises, and the document had been completed in 1984. The handful of officials engaged in these exercises had been told, in no uncertain terms, that government was not “prepared to consider ‘any changes’ in policy”, so they had contented themselves with a “tinkering” approach. The tragic assassination of the Prime Minister brought changes in the government. A young Prime Minister, riding the crest of a massive people’s mandate - which was openly reported to have gained greatly from the women’s vote, announced his intention of major policy changes regarding women, education and the efficiency of administration (President’s Address to Parliament, Jan. 85). The atmosphere created by the President’s address was optimistic for the supporters of the women’s cause within the government.

Outside the government also, women’s organisations and WID scholars were reviewing the changes since 1980, and pooling their ideas and demands to place before the government. Preparations were on for the end of the Decade UN Conference at Nairobi, and an international group of feminist scholars from the 3rd world (DAWN - initiated by some Indian women) was hard at work to develop an alternative approach to development strategies, at national and international levels. The Government of India was playing host to the 2nd NAM Conference on Women and Development to offer inputs to the Nairobi meet. In 1984, in an ILO sponsored Afro-Asian Conference on Rural Women’s Organisations and Development, India’s approaches and experiments - official and non-official - had received encouraging appreciation from both Asian and African participants. The report, titled Women, Resources and Power contained many of the lessons of possible generation of employment, reduction of poverty and education, improvement of productivity and women’s empowerment through the strategy of increased investment in collective organisations of poor rural women, building on their existing expertise and skills at the initial stage.

These background events, encouraged the Depts. of Rural Development and Women & Child Development, and the Ministry of Labour and Employment to adopt some bold measures. They represented greater clarity and commitment on the part of those Ministries/Departments which had undertaken some serious rethinking, information gathering and investment efforts and their expectation of a distinct change in political priorities.

Despite the Plan document’s refusal to adopt the “special component” or the quota approach - the Department of Rural Development announced a 30% quota for women in all anti-poverty programmes for the rural areas, in addition to the women - specific experimental programme (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) introduced midway through the 6th Plan Concurrent evaluation of all these programmes by independent research institutions began a periodic monitoring and regular reporting to Parliament of progress of achievement in the women’s quota. Steps were initiated to begin gender sensitisation as a mandatory part of training of rural development officials.

A special Task Force appointed by the Department of Rural Development recommended that such mandatory inclusion of gender sensitisation was necessary for all training of public servants of all categories. This recommendation - supported by the Departments of Rural Development and Women and Child Development - appeared to have evoked a positive response from the Department of Personal and Training.

Another thrust, emerging from some experimental training programmes sponsored by the Departments of Rural Development and Women and Child Development was an attempt to make organisation of beneficiaries a central and common element in all programmes targetting poor women. Innovative, flexible programmes with this aim were introduced by the Department of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Labour.

A final attempt by the Department of Rural Development, to introduce the 'special component' approach by earmarking 30% of the allocations for anti-poverty programmes - to match the 30% quota of beneficiaries however, ran into resistance from the Cabinet. This decision had to wait till the 8th Five Year Plan. In the absence of such instructions, many State Governments sought to meet the 30% target by reducing the quantum of assistance to be offered to women individually or as a group - thus making many projects non-viable. Committed serious officials in some states however - interpreted the 30% quota as inclusive of a similar share of the allocations - thus achieving a quantum jump in available resources.

The new government had also converted the Division for Women's Welfare and Development, till then a part of the Ministry of Social Welfare - into a full Department of Women and Child Development - transferring it simultaneously to the newly created Ministry of Human Resource Development - which included the Departments of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth Affairs. Since preparation for a new Educational Policy were on the anvil - there were high expectations of close collaboration between the two departments, on the same lines that had evolved with Rural Development.

The collaboration worked during the preparatory work on the Policy. Women's organisations and women's studies groups mounted a systematic pressure from outside. They enrolled persons interested in educational reform - even the University Grants commission - to lobby for a new role for educational institutions - as conscious promoters of the value of gender equality. To play this role effectively, teachers, students and educational administrators needed greater exposure and involvement in women's struggles to change their marginalised, subordinate and oppressed status - which could eventually change their perceptions and views about women's actual roles, contributions, burdens and oppressions. This mental transformation could make conventional instruments like curriculum change, research and training powerful ideological tools to alter the mindsets of future generations.

These ideas had been evolving since the ferment of reactions to the CSWI's Report - through various experiments and conferences organised by women's studies scholars. Two successive National Conferences, and several smaller meetings had contributed to refining theories, tools and strategies, to achieve a major step in educational development - by correcting its earlier neglect and distortion of women's life experiences, concerns and rights - to justice, dignity and fair treatment from society - especially from the privileged intelligentsia dominating all power structures - the products of the education system. As the Secretary, Social Welfare, searching for new major policy breakthroughs in the wake of the President's address in January '85 commented in an informal discussion - "This is a very long term and very complex strategy. Its not going to be easy, but I'll buy it".

A year's efforts - through pressures from the women's movement and internal struggle within government resulted in the incorporation of two paragraphs on Education for Women's Equality within the National Policy on Education. For the first time it carried the message that alongwith expanding women's access to all kinds of education, the system - with all its institutions, had to shoulder a major responsibility for genuine empowerment of women, by changing the social construction of gender. Conceptually it was a breakthrough, but the changed political and resource situation by '86 left it - like many other policies - a pious statement of intentions. The will was lacking.

Another breakthrough was on the issue of effective representation of women in Panchayati Raj institutions. The CSWI's recommendations in this regard had been shelved. Efforts to resurrect them to start a debate were, initiated by the same Secretary, Social Welfare from Jan. 85. Its first results became visible two years later.

Government of India's decision to prepare a National Perspective Plan (NPP) for women began a flurry of activities under the aegis of the Department of Women and Child Development. A parallel move was the appointment of the National Commission for Self-Employed Women (NCSEW) - to help articulate the problems, needs and aspirations of working women in the poverty sector - many of them still missing in national statistics of workers and economic activity.

The NPP (1988) wanted increase in women's participation and presence at decision-making levels - in local self-government bodies, State Assemblies and Parliament. Suggesting a 30% reservation at all these levels, NPP proposed that the seats may have to be filled by nomination in the early years.

The Movement's critique of NPP made members of the political establishment hesitate. The document was therefore not placed before Parliament. Nor did it contribute seriously to policy formulation. What was picked up by Government of India and some opposition parties was the recommendation of women's organisations for a substantial expansion of women's participation in local government bodies - but through election and reservation of seats. It still took three bills and two changes in government ('89 and '91) before the 73rd and 74th (Constitutional) Amendments 1992. Conferred constitutional status on these bodies, mandated regular elections and wider powers/resources, and reserved 1/3 of seats for women, including among the already reserved categories of SCs/STs and office-bearers at different levels of the local bodies. States which have held elections since 1993 experienced no difficulty in obtaining women's response, as voters and as candidates. In the General Elections of 1996 - most political parties conceded women's demand for reservation at State and National levels also. The new coalition government has placed this in the Common Minimum Programme. Follow-up supports will have to wait for the Ninth Five Year Plan.

Dissatisfied with the NPP's basic approach, the women's movement identified many gaps between the data presented and the strategies advocated. On the issue of reservation for women, the women's organisations adopted a distinctly different approach. Firstly, they rejected all the suggestions of nomination to build up a critical mass as undemocratic and subversive of the constitution. Secondly, they rejected reservations for women in State Assemblies and Parliament. But in cases of Panchayats and Municipalities, they demanded clear reservation for a critical mass to be achieved, through election "in the hope of throwing up new leadership and new concerns from the sections getting marginalised by existing approaches to development".

#### **EIGHTH FIVE YEAR PLAN (1992-97)**

The shift in economic policy made the Approach paper and Policy Framework very different from earlier documents. Though human development was stated as the objective, the discussions reflected the difference with previous plans. In Part I therefore women are mentioned only in the context of the need for population control.

In Part II the sectoral chapters do not mention women except in the context of women-specific programmes. The principles of a women's quota, or a ear-marked share of allocations are not mentioned - even in the Rural Development of Poverty Alleviation Chapter. This is significant because Rural Development used both (40% of beneficiaries and resources).

Women's development is reverted to the chapter on Social Welfare - though the emphases remain on employment and education.

The new features of the section on Women's Development are a paragraph on violence against women and a two-page "situational Analysis" - which highlights the problems of higher mortality, lower education and increasing unemployment of women, "the conceptual, methodological and perception" biases regarding value of women's work, compounded by women's concentration in the informal sector,

resulting in casualisation, non-protection of labour laws and inaccessibility to credit, technology and other types of development assistance.

“The strategy in the Eighth Plan will be to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors do not bypass women and special programmes are implemented to complement the general programmes”. The strategy of formation and strengthening of grassroots organisations to “articulate local women’s needs and play an important role in decentralised planning and implementation” is reiterated. Convergence and integration of services offered by health, educational employment and welfare programmes at the grassroots level is promised.

The girl child gets a paragraph for the first time, with the promise of ‘special programmes’.

Education and nutrition are still advocated on instrumentalist logic, but legal literacy and ‘changes in societal attitudes and perceptions in regard to the role of women’ are mentioned as essential for ‘empowerment’. Being placed at the fag end of the document - the lack of relationship of these strategies with all that has gone before - tend to stand out.