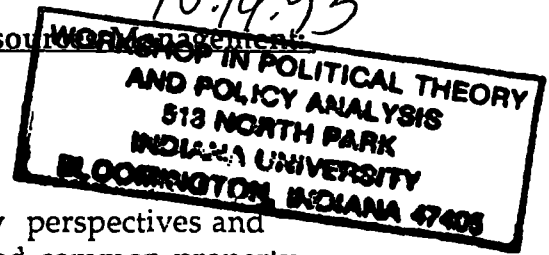


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The Role of Women In Common Property Resource Management
Experiences From India



Introduction

1. This paper attempts to analyse the contemporary perspectives and experiences of women in the management of land based common property resources, consisting of wastelands, privately and communally owned, as well as government owned degraded forest lands. A common property resource can be defined as a source of goods for income generation as well as subsistence for individual households, but one that is not subject to the ownership of any one individual. This characteristic separates such resources from those that are individually owned and exploited. CPRs as such resources have come to be known, stand to lose their unique characteristic if their use and exploitation are controlled by any individual or group, to the detriment of other individuals/groups, that may have had traditional access to these, and those that depend on such resources for their survival.

2. Access to CPRs in India have in the past been determined by a mix of traditional norms, as well as legality. Prior to the British occupation, the Mughal state in Northern India and the Gangetic plains was deemed as the owner of all lands that were unallotted i.e. uncultivated lands. The state had the right to allocate such lands under zamindari and jagirdari allotments to select individuals, who were charged with bringing in lands under cultivation, and pay revenue to the state for such lands on an incremental basis. Under this system, landlords claimed to be owners of entire villages, and surrounding lands, for which they paid revenues to the state. The uncultivated part of the lands became the common resource of the group that claimed ownership of the totality. Over time, there emerged several branches of the same family, claiming ownership over the common lands. The landlords could settle tenant cultivators on cultivated and fallow lands, and these tenants had the right to graze their cattle in the untilled lands around the village where they lived. The tenants had to pay customary cesses for the heads of cattle that they grazed, and also for the upkeep of CPRs. The pressure on land was however nonexistent, and landlords had to make special attempts to attract tenants. Village systems of management of local resources were in place, whereby the local village headman played an important role in regulating the extension of cultivation, as well as the relations between the village community, and the landlords.

3. In tribal areas, the system was of communal ownership of all land, including lands brought under the plough by individual cultivator households. Every year, the lands were transferred back to the common pool, from within which reallocations were done on the basis of locally identified needs. The control of the lands were vested in a local representative council, made up of the elders of the village.

4. In other parts of India (West and South), where semi autonomous village communities consisting of individual cultivator households controlled by a local

headman existed, uncultivated areas were usable with the consent of the headman. There were no problems in the use of such lands by individuals, so long as they were subject to the overall control of the local authority based on the community.

5. After the British settled down to governance, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, two systems of land control were evolved, based upon the earlier prevailing systems. The Zamindari system under the Permanent Settlement was continued with significant changes in the eastern region. By the mid nineteenth century, pressure on land mounted owing to population increases, and deindustrialisation. The landlords who under the Permanent Settlement did not have to pay increased revenues to the colonial state for increases in cultivated area, started treating their right of allotment of uncultivated lands as a source of uncontrolled rental income extraction. Then began the weakening of the community based systems of use of the untilled areas of land, as well as the reduction of the authority of the headmen who till then were important in regulating local land use patterns. The uncultivated lands in these parts were settled as part of the estates of the landlords, who could settle tenants on them and charge rent. They continued to charge cesses from tenants for the use of uncultivated lands used by the villages for grazing.

6. The Ryotwari system which was applied to southern and western India, recognised the common grazing lands attached to particular villages as the property of the village. All other uncultivated lands were government property, retained for future allocation for cultivation.

7. In the nineteenth century upto two thirds of all land in India was under community control, although in large areas, the right of the superior authority (zamindar, jagirdar, ijaradar, etc.) to receive a payment in lieu of such use rights as the community exercised, was recognised. Government interventions and privatisation acted to reduce such lands drastically. When the state began to control lands under newly emergent forest laws, the village commons consisting of such untilled lands which were under other uses by the villages were left out of the process of extending government controls. Lands which were untilled as well as without any identifiable 'owners' were declared as government lands, and then reserved according to the forest legislations. Wherever people had usufructuary rights to forest lands classified now as government lands, such rights were recognised by the colonial state. Even when the pressure to bring more and more lands under state controls increased, the use rights of people to such government lands were recognised, e.g. the right of shifting cultivation was recognised in large parts of North East and Eastern India.

8. After Independence, in the North and East, the uncultivated lands were vested in the state. Wherever there were large tracts, they were handed over to the Forest Department, while the rest were handed over to the village panchayats, under the supervision of the Revenue Department. Their use by the Panchayats was regulated by a host of local acts and regulations. However since Independence,

survey and settlement operations have drastically reduced lands under communal ownership. While communities continue to exercise use rights to government lands, there is no recognition of such rights on community basis. Whatever recognition does exist, is of the rights of individuals belonging to identified settlements.

9. Again, the programs of the allotment of unallotted lands to the rural poor since the 70s has further reduced such lands as may be available for the exercise of usufructuary rights. Whatever has not been legally allotted has been illegally encroached upon by individuals. What remains is usually land subjected to severe degradation and low productivity, and which cannot be cultivated without very high investments.

CPRs Today

10. Common lands today should be defined differently from legalistic definitions regarding uncultivated lands near the village, which may be under the legal control of the Panchayat. Common property resources in land today from the point of the rural population consists of all those 'open access' lands which exist near the village, and to which no individual can lay a legal claim. Even government owned lands which are not allotted, come under the category of 'open access' lands. Such 'open access' lands are subject to a variety of uses. CPRs are extremely important today for ensuring the viability of rural poor households faced with a shrinking land base, and reduced availability of fodder and fuelwood.

Linkages Between CPRs and Land Use Patterns

11. The characteristics and role of CPRs are to a large extent determined by the surrounding agro ecological and social systems. These influence the relationships between CPRs and private property resources, and the extent of dependence of different socio economic groups on CPRs for subsistence. The major factors affecting land use are patterns of rainfall and soil moisture availability, private land ownership, patterns of land access and deployment, patterns of ownership and access to other kinds of productive assets, population and migration patterns, extent of development of the markets for different kinds of factors of production and commodities, availability of technologies. CPRs in dry areas being smaller than in wet areas, the extent of goods available from them are also smaller. Essentially their role is complementary to that of production on private land resources, yet the extent of dependence on CPRs in times of shortfall in production from private resources is high. Inevitably conflicts over the rights of access to CPRs arise during periods of reduced output from privately controlled lands. Such instances were reported from Gujarat during the drought years of 1986-87, when poor women reported harassment and clashes with better off men on questions of their rights to collect fodder, water, and fuel from CPRs. Traditional jajmani arrangements also broke down with richer farmers refusing to allow access to landless women to collect crop by products after the harvest. With the increasing population pressures

and high animal to land ratios, the CPRs are important in the maintenance of the animal stock required to sustain dryland agriculture. During times of distress better off farming households tend to monopolise the harvest and use of CPR resources.

12. In hill areas while CPRs vary considerably in terms of vegetation, there are similar patterns of complementarity with patterns of land and other resource use, and social stratification. For most villages in the Himalayas and the Shivaliks there is close interdependence between household production and reproduction systems, and CPRs. Although in legal terms, the control of the Forest Department has increased over such lands and their produce, CPRs still comprise all lands under the control of the village panchayats, as well as Forest Department lands not under 'intensive management'. In such areas, CPRs are a major source of fuel, fodder, manure, water etc.

13. In these regions, women play a very important role in the collection of products mainly for sustaining household and farm based economic activities. With the migrations of men to the plains for employment, women's work in these areas has increased tremendously. Studies show that women have to travel for an average of five hours a day for the collection of fodder, fuel, water, and other CPR based products. The increasing population pressure, reduced availability of CPR products due to declines in productivity, inroads made into community based rights through new land laws, and the increasing workloads of de facto female headed households have endangered the viability of rural poor households in these regions.

14. In the tribal areas of Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa, CPR management existed in all areas contiguous to the forests. Under the Zamindari system in operation here, there were both state owned as well as private forests. Women in tribal areas used the forest lands as well as lands near the villages as CPRs. These were important as sources of subsistence during normal times, and for survival during 'hunger' times. These were sources for fodder, fuel, small timber, leaves, roots, seeds, fruits and nuts, herbs and barks for medicinal uses, lac, honey etc. Tribal women raised silk cocoons on forest trees, and collected a large variety of items for consumption and sale. Tribal women's approach to CPRs was a composite one. They looked upon CPRs as resources which were essential for their activities, but were to be used judiciously so that they were never overstretched. In tribal communities there were systems of community control over the harvest of CPR resources, and these were strictly enforced by the lineage, tribal, or clan group. Women had rights of collection of food, and non timber forest produce in lands 'owned' by the community, as well as in village forest lands and state owned forest lands, both protected and reserve.

15. This important role of CPRs as the suppliers of such subsistence goods for tribal households in this large belt continues in present times, but with great difficulty. Tribal women who constitute a large percentage of the rural poor and migrants in this region depend on such CPRs for nearly fifty percent of their

income. However all policies of the state appear to be calculated to reduce their access, and thereby their productivity and viability. The state has regarded non timber forest produce as a source of revenue rather than as providing subsistence and income to the tribals and the poor. Nationalisation of these products has led to increases in revenues, without positively affecting the incomes of the collectors of these resources.

16. The National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector reported that in these areas the most common occupation for landless women during the agricultural off season is to take up the collection of NTFP from CPRs. Most of these women reported exploitation by traders in the sale of their produce. The Commission noted that the Forest Development Corporations were set up to eliminate middlemen in the collection and sale of forest produce. In practice however a contract system prevails. The tribal women who work for ten to twelve hours a day are unable to earn a minimum wage. Payments for NTFP are often routed through the agents. Some NTFP items have acquired importance for industry, such as resin, tendu leaves, bamboo plantations, thereby reducing their availability for local people. This region thus experiences the greatest conflicts between state claims to a large portion of CPRs and the livelihoods of people, as NTFPs comprise major portions of Forest Department revenues in the states.

17. What is clear from this examination of the relevance of CPRs in different agro ecological areas is that with increasing landlessness, and reduction of the land base of peasant households, as well as the breakdown of systems of sharing of the agrarian surplus that existed traditionally in villages (jajmani system), the resource-poor households are increasingly dependent upon CPRs for a variety of purposes. Among the resource-poor households, gender plays an important role in determining extent of dependence, and involvement with CPRs. Poor women are dependent on CPRs for a variety of subsistence and income earning activities, upon which the survival of their families are significantly dependent. While the nature of the activities, and the role of CPRs change from area to area, it is an absolute fact that poor women's dependence on CPRs is high everywhere.

Problems of Control , Management, and Access

18. Increasing governmental interference with land control, and categorisation of land into certain legalistic and watertight categories, led to the blurring of local distinctions in land classifications so that often local resources were categorised as government lands. Remaining CPRs have often become sources of conflict between government departments, communities, and within villages, between the rich and the resource poor households.

19. While forest and revenue lands have historically been CPRs, the status of use rights has varied from time to time. While the right of the state, and private landowners respectively, in government protected forests, and trees on private

lands are legally clear, there is often a lot of use rights that continue to prevail on such lands, exercised by entire communities, or by groups of people. Again, while colonial policies recognised such use rights as the collection of woodfuel, small timber, fodder, fruits, seed and other by products, and there is policy level continuity since Independence, the situation on the ground is as earlier mentioned, adverse for the exercise of such rights by the resource poor groups.

20. There are several factors that have led to the erosion of use rights of rural poor to CPRs. Deforestation is a major factor, which is responsible for the rapid reduction of usufructs required by women for their daily chores. It means the requirement of greater effort to procure the minimum resources from forests that would earlier have been available closer home. This has been brought out by several studies on women's work and time allocation patterns. In addition to this, large areas have been planted with trees for industrial use, ignoring local use requirements and rights. Competition among various claimants leads to unnecessary degradation of areas.

21. Nationalisation of Minor Forest Produce while done with the intention to protect the primary collectors of MFP from unscrupulous traders, has adversely affected the interests of these people, mainly poor women, by disrupting the trade and reducing their incomes. Increasing extension of Central Government controls over the use of forest lands for planting of 'non forest' crops, as well as on the allotment of forest lands to non government/ private agencies, has also created problems for the availability of many of the usufructs which come under the category of non forest species. There are also restrictions applicable to felling of certain species on private lands, as well as defining access to unclassified forests, which are often village or community used forests.

22. As mentioned earlier, there are state owned revenue or khas lands which are owned by the revenue departments of state governments, and 'common lands' owned by local panchayats. The distinction between these in the minds of local user groups is unclear, and these are all treated as open access lands. All such lands are severely degraded, and low value producing. There are also different sets of rights which exist at different levels governing access and more importantly control over all such lands. This leads to conflict and deprivation of those that are most dependent on these resources.

23. Again while conventions define access, and local village bodies such as panchayats may be vested with the management of these lands, several factors impede the use of these lands under such mechanisms. First and foremost, panchayats are generally resource-poor organisations, with neither the capacity nor the will to safeguard the commons on behalf of the poor. Secondly, except in a few states such as West Bengal and Karnataka, panchayats themselves are not the popularly elected bodies they are meant to be. They have become the repositories of vested interests. Panchayats, unlike gaon sabhas, do not represent single villages,

but several, and conflicts over CPRs which are defined on a village basis are difficult to be resolved by the authority of the panchayat.

Gender Perspectives on CPRs

24. Poor rural women's outlook on CPRs is based on the important role played by these in their daily lives, for survival. They regard them as sources of natural resources essential for the maintenance of their households. It means not just trees, grasses, etc. but fuel, fodder, water, fruits, seeds, leaves, flowers, small wood and timber, building materials, and a lot of other things. Poor women use these for production and processing into consumables and saleable items, for scarce income earning, and household survival. Several sources show the increasing dependence of poor households, and of women among poor households, on free collection of goods from all categories of CPRs. From poor women's point of view, all open access lands, as well as privately owned lands to which access by poor women particularly may be governed by tradition, are important for such free collection.

25. The decline of CPRs as a whole has created acute shortages of fuel for the poor. While several supplementary sources of fuel such as crop residues, dung, leaves, grasses, bushes, etc are used (their availability is also dependent on land ownership, and access to open access areas), the absolute gap between fuelwood requirements and availability creates enormous pressure on the CPRs, leading to enhanced rates of extraction, often by women themselves, both for consumption and sale.

26. The decline in the availability of fuel from forests and commons also leads to the poor households either reducing their consumption of fuel, and or consuming inferior types of fuels. This affects the kinds of food being consumed, involving a shift to less nutritious ones which take less time and energy to cook. " Many lean season foods, like forest roots and tubers, may have to be abandoned because they can be made edible only by long cooking; this in turn reduces the forests' important role in providing the poor with a security buffer in periods' of unemployment or food shortage." (Bennett et al, 1989).

27. The government response to the all round crisis in the availability of products from CPRs has consisted of the following:

- (i) social forestry programs consisting of farm forestry on private lands,
- (ii) extension forestry on village and community woodlots, and afforestation along public spaces,
- (iii) rehabilitation of degraded forests for fuel, fodder, and usufructs to neighbouring communities, as well as,
- (iv) tree tenures to the rural poor.

28. Farm forestry programs did not benefit the rural poor women, who do not have land to spare for such purposes. Even when land was distributed, it hardly ever went to women. For poor women to make forestry viable on dry, degraded soils, investments needed in terms of resources, extension, technical, and marketing supports, were not made available. The program could work only to the detriment of the interests of the rural poor by the diversion of agricultural lands to farm forestry, thereby reducing employment availability in agriculture, and by replacing foodcrops (CWDS, 1987.)

29. With community forestry, evaluations have found little evidence of the involvement of the community in the protection and management of the plantations, and the ability of the local panchayats to manage these. In rural areas the panchayats as the locally available organisations have been directly and indirectly involved in the programs in most states. In some of the SIDA assisted social forestry projects, local village forest protection committees have been formed. An evaluation report shows that such committees become extensions of the panchayats, because those who sit in on the panchayat committee are also the ones to become members of the VFCs.

30. Given the fact that panchayats in most states are non participatory bodies, in which underprivileged sections including women are severely underrepresented, the VFCs cannot be expected to act as genuine channels of popular participation.

31. The constraints to women's participation in CPR land development and management programs are several:

- (i) women's lack of access to land and other productive assets: not having legal titles to land, and other property affects their capacity to obtain credit, raw material, technology, training and market space. Land reform policies, privatisation of tribal land giving land titles to men, have eroded women's customary rights to common lands, and have strengthened barriers to women's access to resources, and land based programs;
- (ii) token or non representation of women in the local decision making bodies; lack of poor rural women's organisations which can empower them through training, to take part in community decision making structures;
- (iii) credit and extension services remain male oriented and male dominated;
- (iv) lack of poor women's awareness of their legal rights;

- (v) problems with species selection for plantation under state programs of afforestation and land reclamation: women have everywhere shown their preference for multi cropping with species matched to local use patterns, whereas state departments have encouraged monoculture with commercial species, which require clearfelling after maturation, and do not generate subsistence benefits during the growth period.

32. Many of these concerns have emerged from experiences of implementation of state supported programs for watersheds development, wasteland development, and afforestation on Forest department owned lands. In recent studies conducted by Bank staff and consultants, it was found that women in hill regions as well as in tribal areas have clearly defined functions related to CPRs which satisfy both consumption needs, as well as income generation through agriculture, animal husbandry, NTFP processing and sale. Despite the existence of women's organisations at village level in one instance, and government instructions for inclusion of women from all member households in forest protection committees, the forest departments in both cases had not made much headway in bringing women into the management and decision-making for CPR rehabilitation. In one case there was an almost total absence of people's participation at all.

33. In a recent meeting of tribal women, and other poor women in three states of West Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, the women identified several areas for action. These were the involvement of poor women, and the need for effective mechanisms to make their participation effective. Certain socio political and organisational questions have to be answered if such programs are to become sustainable through women's participation. It is essential to take note of the socio economic realities of rural societies and acquire adequate understanding of various forces which deter women's participation. Poor rural women are the most powerless in rural society. The only way in which they can overcome caste, class and gender hierarchies is when they do not identify as members of a household but of a larger collectivity which provides them with strength, articulation, and an instrument for participation. The Bankura experience of fairly homogenous organisations of poor women involved in the reclamation of wastelands, has demonstrated that poor women once organised, can also successfully enter elective bodies through elections.

34. From the women's discussions on structural mechanisms for poor women's participation and control over produce, it emerged that insecurity in land tenure, legal problems in harvesting of produce, absence of marketing infrastructure, selection of species, and the need for planning budgetary support in the early stages were other problems that need to be tackled. Land remains a critical aspect in expanding women's involvement in afforestation activities. Rules about non transferability of vested lands, need to be carefully examined. Since 1988 all remaining vested lands in West Bengal have been brought under the operational control of the Panchayats. All unproductive lands have been given by the Land Revenue Department to the Panchayats for being put to community use. While such lands themselves cannot be transferred to private ownership, there is no

restriction on giving usufruct rights to groups including women's groups. Under the Panchayat act the ownership of such lands remains with the Revenue Department. The women recommended that on the question of transfer of such lands to women's groups, an amendment in the rules regarding vested lands under Panchayat management is needed. Panchayats may be given rights to lease such lands to registered women's groups. In order to rehabilitate the CPR lands, and create sustainable management arrangements, it is essential the concept of popular participation, women's participation, be spelt out clearly in terms that will enable the rural poor, particularly women, to participate meaningfully in planning, decision making, asset building, and control. Promotion of women's organisation and other people's organisations should become part of the programs, irrespective of the ownership of the lands involved in the programs.

35. Concern over the rapid marginalisation of rural poor women, due to privatisation and state controls over CPRs, and their lack of access to resources and decisionmaking, has led to attempts by non governmental organisations, international agencies, as well as governments, to create self sustaining organisations of rural poor women, with the purpose of empowering them to obtain access and exercise control over resources. Two such experiences will be examined here, with a view to understanding the processes involved in empowering such poor women, as well in extending their access to and participation in the management of CPR land resources. One is an effort in these directions in West Bengal, built up on highly effective collaboration between a women's research organisation, poor tribal women, the state government, as well as an international agency. Another is an account of efforts made within a Bank assisted watersheds development project in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

36. In the Bank-assisted Himalayan Watersheds Development Project, to begin with, no concepts of popular participation were envisaged in the project. The state watersheds development team working in the hill areas of the state, was supposed to undertake a variety of rehabilitation activities, on public as well as well as community, and privately owned lands. There was no concept of cost sharing with the community for activities on community lands. The only role of community based institutions, panchayats, and gaon sabhas, was to pass resolutions in their own councils, for the handing over of lands to the government teams, for rehabilitation activities. Thereafter, once the rehabilitation activities were completed departmentally, through contractors who brought in outside labor, the government employed watchmen for two years for the purpose of guarding. After the two year period, the plantations would be handed back to the panchyats, without any further arrangements for their management.

37. During this period all activities were heavily government dominated, with little interest being shown by the communities in the activities, except to receive subsidised inputs and services. The levels of success were also mixed. In several instances, panchayats refused to take the responsibility for the management of their grasslands which had been rehabilitated at project expense. These plantations which

had been developed for cut and carry systems, with regular protection and maintenance requirements, declined in productivity due to lack of protection from grazing, and routine maintenance activities.

38. In these hill villages, as discussed earlier, women play a very important role in the use of land based CPRs, and have a much closer interaction with them than do men. Their interest lies in the prevention of overexploitation, and the perpetuation of fodder and fuelwood species, as well as fruit bearing plants. Women spend several hours every week in these lands, carrying out a variety of activities. They are ideally suited to participate in rehabilitation activities, as well as in protection and maintenance. Women also play extremely important roles in maintaining agricultural production in the regions, and work at all agricultural operations except ploughing. The close relationship between agriculture on privately owned lands, and CPRs in this case is typified by women who collect green manure from CPRs for application in their fields. Despite their positive relationship with the CPRs, the project did little to involve them in planning, implementation, and management. Women were not much represented in the panchayats, and given the caste based kinship structures, were virtually debarred from participating in any public meetings where men were present. The project did little to change all that as far as CPR based activities were present. Where agricultural and horticultural activities were concerned, women on the whole were neglected by the agricultural extension staff. Here too socio cultural biases were operative, and prevented the integration of women into the extension system.

39. Somewhere towards the later part of project implementation, changes took place in the orientation of the project towards people's participation, micro planning, women's participation, and questions of future management of rehabilitated CPRs. A new management team took over both within the Bank, as well as at field level. This was also the time when new concepts of people based planning, women's organisation and participation, sustainable management of the natural resource base, cost sharing between government and communities for greater beneficiary responsibility, NGO participation in project implementation, etc, were gaining acceptance.

40. Several changes were introduced into planning, implementation, management plans for rehabilitated CPRs. The emphasis was on community participation, with special emphasis on women's participation. Village based micro planning was introduced, which required project staff to work closely with the communities for developing people based micro watersheds development plans. This involved frequent interactions with villagers, and planning based upon people's real needs, and acceptable and feasible interventions by the teams with new technologies, and management regimens. These interactions for planning purposes were institutionalised with fixed schedules of village meetings being communicated at regular intervals to the panchayats. On the basis of these meetings, action plans for designated micro watersheds were finalised.

41. These micro watersheds plans were also meant to include management arrangements for community management of plantations. The duration and quantum of financial assistance to be provided by the project after plantation were spelt out. Thereafter it was mentioned in all the micro plans that the lands would be handed back to the panchayats for their maintenance as per an agreement to be drawn up with the government. Such agreements would specify the sharing of all benefits between the government and the communities.

42. However, there remained two drawbacks in these plans. Concrete management arrangements, going beyond the handing back of plantations to the panchayats, were not envisaged as part of the planning exercise. This led to considerable lack of concreteness, and serious commitment on the part of the local people towards the efforts and resources required for management. Women who should logically have formed the core of the effort to maintain and protect these assets, were still being ignored in the entire process. They were not being involved in the grassroots planning exercises, and were out of the decision making for implementation and management.

43. In the meantime, in many villages in the project area, the state department of welfare had taken the initiative to organise mahila mandals, or women's groups. These mahila mandals had no access to resources, and were not envisaged as having anything to do with the subsistence and resource requirements of the rural women. However, wherever the mahila mandals became active, they certainly facilitated the get together of women which was otherwise restricted to social gatherings. At such meetings women often discussed their problems of getting access to adequate fodder, fuel, etc. and the related problems of low agricultural productivity, and degradation of lands in the area, both private as well as 'public'.

44. The Bank staff in conjunction with the project teams, used these mahila mandals as entry points to facilitate interaction with the women. Such interactions proved extremely valuable insofar as they provided information to the project management about women's perceptions regarding the project, and their keenness to participate, and take responsibility for maintenance and protection. The women also conveyed their difficulties regarding non availability of support, from extension staff, for their routine agricultural activities, except in exceptional cases where women landowners had been assisted with water harvesting structures, and horticultural inputs.

45. The women of the mahila mandals also conveyed their dissatisfaction over the manner in which they were being ignored by project staff regarding micro planning meetings. They were not being informed, and they felt that since they were mainly interested in the grasslands, they should be involved in the decision making. In many instances, local conflicts between the panchayats, and the mahila mandals, which were seen as a threat by many headmen, led to their non involvement. The women were very keen on becoming involved, and were willing to take up the responsibility of managing the lands, and protecting them. In

several villages they had already established informal systems of protection and maintenance, which were being ignored by the project.

46. Based upon these interactions with the women, several steps were taken:

- (i) The training and sensitisation of project staff towards participatory approaches, and gender sensitive project planning, and implementation: staff were trained through workshops, and study tours to NGO projects. In the course of such training, the staff prepared their own workplans which were to be brought back by them after three months, to another refresher workshop, and assessed for success and failure. These workshops as well as the personal action plans became dynamic tools for self evaluation by the staff, and helped in implementing the new norms for women's involvement.
- (ii) Involvement of local NGOs in building up community participation, and women's participation in the rehabilitation of grasslands, their maintenance and protection, promotion of specific activities like nurseries, energy efficient stoves, through women's organisations; NGOs were involved in training women in villages to participate in planning and decision making structures, despite resistance from men.
- (iii) Certain mechanisms for ensuring women's participation, were put into place in project implementation. Micro watershed planning meetings became institutionalised, with a regular schedule of activities, being communicated to the local community bodies, as well as the mahila mandals. This improved the participation of women in larger numbers in such meetings, and they were able to contribute to the ongoing discussion on CPR management. The mahila mandals in several instances reported important improvements in their awareness of project activities, and their willingness to participate in long term management. In the regular activities of extension, the extension workers were instructed to meet regularly with the members of the mahila mandals, for technology transfer, and helping with agricultural activities which are managed by women during the larger part of the year. This helped in bringing women into the extension net, although a lot remained to be achieved at the time of project closure.
- (iv) In order to make women dynamic and equal partners in the longer term management of CPRs, camps were initiated in the project villages, where plantations had to be handed back to the village communities for maintenance. These camps had the objective of facilitating consultations with the mahila mandals, panchayats, to determine the best institutional arrangements for handing back the rehabilitated pastures. The Bank provided a specialist in WID to help the project staff in facilitating the process.

47. The people responded extremely keenly in the camps, as they regarded them as opportunities for arriving at lasting arrangements. In most instances, the people agreed that women were already heavily involved in working on the CPRs. In many cases they had informal systems of sharing the management responsibilities. In all the villages where the camps were held, the mahila mandals gave written agreements to take up the responsibility, and were willing to contribute resources in terms of time and money, to provide protection. The panchayats were agreeable to help raise necessary resources to help the mahila mandals.

48. As a result of all these initiatives, in many villages in the project areas, the mahila mandals have become the recognised institutions for CPR management. They are evolving systems of sharing the work among all the members, and are raising voluntary contributions from all user households for protection costs. Their members have to be trained by the project staff in silvicultural operations required for maintenance, and rotational harvesting produce.

Women's Action Research Group: Centre For Women's Development Studies

49. The Centre For Women's Development Studies (CWDS), came into being as a result of several influences in the 1970s. The key figure behind the effort to set up what was the first research organisation with the manifest objective of carrying out critical research on women's issues, was Dr. Vina Mazumdar. She was a member of the Committee appointed by the GOI in 1974 to examine all aspects of women's situation in India. She was also instrumental in the setting up of the Women's Studies programme within the ICSSR in 1975. In 1980 she along with other colleagues, set up the CWDS.

50. CWDS saw itself initially as a research centre, specialising in gender specific studies, and doing advocacy. However this was not to be. Its role came to be tied up with the development of poor tribal women in West Bengal. West Bengal had voted in a communist government in 1977. Their first priority was to provide security of tenure to the poorest people in the rural areas of West Bengal, the sharecroppers, or bataidars. In order to mobilise the sharecroppers to come forward, and identify their plots of land for registration, the government organised rural camps for the sharecroppers to participate in. In these camps, the sharecroppers were provided with title deeds to the lands they tilled, homesteads, and institutional credit for agricultural improvement. In addition, the government over a period of time enforced land ceiling laws, and was able to mobilise agricultural lands, which were distributed to landless households.

51. The programme was successful over a period of time, insofar as it was able to generate security of tenure for the substantial portion of the landless rural workers in the state. Along with security of tenure, the bataidars were given support for agricultural development by the state. These policies have changed the configurations of agrarian relations in Bengal. There however remained a gap in

development, the gender gap. The state government was worried by the non participation of women in the camps for rural workers. When the time came for the programme to be implemented in the districts where tribal communities were present in large numbers, the government took a decision to organise a camp for rural women workers.

52. This was easier said than done. The government, faced with the earlier non participation of women in camps, played safe. They requested the CWDS to act as facilitators for women's participation in the camp. This invitation coincided with CWDS 'internal dilemma over its role. There was a realisation that a lot of research findings were being generated through the Committee's work, as well as through the researches supported by ICSSR. The issue was of how to bring about change in women's situation. The answer was also clear, to organise women who had hitherto not been organised by trade unions or political parties, and whose problems were those faced by the large mass of women, the issues of poverty, powerlessness, and persistent subordination based on gender, within the family, community, and by the state.

53. Given this search for a role that would combine research capacity with pushing forward women's organisation, and improved access, the invitation by the state government came at a suitable time. However even at this point, CWDS did not foresee a long term involvement for itself in the process of mobilisation and organisation of the rural poor women in the area.

54. CWDS agreed to act as facilitator for the camp. The women came to the camp but initially remained silent. The camp was repeating earlier patterns of the "outsiders" sitting as experts on the dais, while the women sat huddled in groups on the floor. The ice could not be broken. It was only after the first day had passed without evoking any open reactions from among the women, that one of the resource persons brought in by CWDS, a very experienced anthropologist, appealed to one of the women present, the one that had appeared to listen carefully to what had been said the previous day, regarding the objectives of the camp, and her face had shown that she was reacting; yet she had not spoken. Once he appealed to her in familial terms, the flood of unspoken experiences, and sorrows, could not be stopped.

55. The woman, Bari, a tribal woman, who had been married early, and had one day quietly returned to her parent's village, had never spoken to anyone about her problems. Once back in her parent's village, she was provided a small hut by her brother, where she lived. She worked as an agricultural labourer, and as a gatherer and seller of forest produce. She also participated in repeated migrations, in order to fill the substantial employment gap that existed for tribal households that had lost their lands, and their forests.

56. Bari told the gathering at the camp of all the problems faced by the tribals, and the rural poor in the area. She spoke with a tremendous sense of history, about

earlier times when the communities had paddy land and forest resources. While rents had to be paid to the landlords, the community was the arbiter of all village related matters. Collection of forest produce was restricted to household's requirements, and no unnecessary cutting of wood was practised.

57. In the late 19th and early 20th century, there was an influx of outsiders into the areas due to commercialisation of the forest production, and the demand for timber generated by railways and roadworks. With Independence came the prospect of the abolition of private landownership under the Zamindari system. At this point the landowners sold the privately owned as well as the community forests to contractors, who indiscriminately felled trees. The local people had been gradually losing their agricultural lands to the settlers from the plains as a result of unequal trade relations, and increasing indebtedness of the tribal communities to these people. Now they lost their forest wealth which was as important for their existence as was paddy production.

58. Faced with loss of their asset base, these communities were caught up in a spiral of indebtedness, poverty, and underemployment. Early migration was to the city of Calcutta, and to the coal belt of Asansol, for work in the coal mining operations, as well as in the brick kilns. With the spread of the Green Revolution in Bengal in the late 60s and early 70s, migration to the Green Revolution districts of Hoogly, and Burdwan became a way of life. Several trips a year left women tired, unstable, and as poor. 'Namal', or migration is very harsh. We earned Rs. 5/- for 14 hours work on the jotedars' (big cultivator) wet paddylands. Two of my daughters died of exposure," grieved one of the camp participants. Migration of women brought untold difficulties in its wake, with no healthcare, or education for the children who were uprooted during every migration. Incomes from migration were also low to expenses incurred during the period of migration, as well as ripoffs by the labour contractors.

59. To be assetless, unemployed, illiterate, destitute, yet overworked, tired and weak; this defined the state of the rural poor women. The women existed a lifetime in this situation, practising ad hoc methods of survival. They despaired when food ran low, and migration was the only answer.

60. Prior to the camp in 1980, no government or non government organisations came to find out their problems. When at last the women got a chance to break the silence, they told the camp, that they had lost their lands and forests which gave them food, fodder, fuel, and livelihood. They demanded land for the women, homesteads in women's names. They wanted local employment so that they could get out of migration. They wanted control over their forest lands, so that they could plant trees which they found useful, instead of the government supported plantations of eucalyptus, which were of no use to them except as deadwood.

61. The CWDS team present at the camp, after learning from the women about their problems, put across to them the need for them to organise themselves into

organisations which would end their isolation, and allow them to work with each other, with government, to change their situations. The women were invited to form village level organisations, hold meetings, and discuss among themselves how to proceed.

62. The officials noted all the ideas which the women had generated, but could not find any immediate ways of translating them into government supported programmes. The Minister for rural development, who had been personally involved in the camp, and had been instrumental in inviting CWDS, now asked them to continue their involvement for some time, in order to ensure that the women's demands were met by the government.

63. There arose a question at this stage for CWDS. As a research organisation would it be feasible for them to get involved? The conclusion was that it could be a good opportunity to demonstrate that a women's economic project could act as a catalyst for women's organisations to become empowered. It was also considered by Dr. Mazumdar and her team that it would be impossible to withdraw in the face of such need.

The Process

64. Anticipating some action from the CWDS, and the government, the women who had attended the camp, and had derived one message, to organise into groups, did so. Women from three villages formed themselves into informal clusters. CWDS sent a field team to work with the women. The women's groups were registered under the Societies Registration Act, as Gramin Mahila Unnayan Samitis, GMSUS, (Rural Women Workers Advancement Society). There was one organisation for each of the village clusters.

65. The team initiated discussions on democracy within the organisations. The women held elections, and put in an executive committee and office bearers from among women who were deemed to have better understanding of women's problems, and who could deal with the didis (sisters) and the dadas (brothers) coming from Calcutta and Delhi to work with them.

66. Then came the question of activities for the women to take up. Migration as a survival strategy was rejected by women during the camp. They decided that they should generate local employment, with help from the government, and CWDS. Forest based activities appeared as the first solution to the women. Their problem was that although they worked in the collection of forest produce (NTFP), they were exploited by middlemen and contractors in the process of trading. Even the trading cooperatives set up by the government were functioning as private contractors. The representatives of the women's groups went along with the CWDS team to Calcutta, to meet the Chief Minister, and impress upon him the need to give the women's groups the sole right to collect forest produce and sell to the cooperatives. The CM agreed. The women went ahead with great enthusiasm, only to realise that rate

setting for purchases were being made by the corrupt cooperatives. They then started a widespread campaign in their own as well as in other villages, to inform women of the rate actually set by the government, and how the cooperatives were taking a cut. All women collectors were told to only sell to the GMSUS, which then insisted on the right price being paid by the cooperatives.

67. This involved them in headlong conflict with local vested interests who controlled these cooperatives. The CWDS team and the women realised that unless women were members of these cooperatives, they could not hope to influence its functioning. The women's organisations decided to take affiliation with the West Bengal Tribal Development Corporation, and gained access to the local cooperatives dealing with forest produce.

68. The CWDS team and the GMSUS also took a decision to try to gain access to new technologies for processing of forest produce, such as for rope making and leaf plate making. This would help the women to increase productivity, incomes, and provide diversification of employment. Over a period of time, the GMSUS have established links with appropriate technology institutions, and have been able to set up technologies for these activities, which the women have been trained in. The GMSUS have also taken to share alike all employment being generated, as well as to carry on their work regardless of delays in receiving support from outside. These principles have been consistently adhered to within these organisations.

69. CWDS needed support for its own presence in the area, as well as for the women's activities. Government support came for women's organisations to build up their own infrastructure, as well as to build up technical capacity. CWDS also invited the ILO to participate in the project. ILO was selected for garnering support due to its mandate to work with rural women workers organisations, and to facilitate unorganised women workers to form their own organisations. ILO support came in the form of finance for the CWDS team as well as for technical and financial support to activities to be determined by the women's groups.

70. The major breakthrough made by the GMSUS was in their quest for land for the women. The area was full of wastelands, both privately and government owned. Privately owned wastelands were mobilised by the GMSUS, using a single argument. Men had not been able to put these lands to any productive use. The women would like to try. The men agreed, albeit a little hesitantly. This was also possible because in tribal society, women traditionally played important roles in land based activities, and had access and control over a variety of lands.

71. The women initially got a plot of 9 acres. They decided to plant host species for silk worms. This was against technical advice from sericulture technologists, who felt the soil was not suitable. The women thought otherwise, and decided to go ahead. They were proved right. Not only did the plants survive, but they were able to raise silkworms successfully. They learnt the scientific methods of rearing, and in turn taught others in horizontal transfers of knowledge.

72. In the meantime, seeing the success of wasteland development through women's organisations, there were outpourings of offers by villages to donate their wastelands if similar groups were formed in their villages. There was another channel of transfer of knowledge, through married daughters of the pioneering villages, who helped to spread the message to their in-laws' villages. Today the GMSUS own more than 500 acres of land, under silk rearing, mixed plantations, and nurseries. Sericulture has become a way of life, and the women are moving into the neighbouring state of Bihar, to teach their tribal sisters how to use their resource base for their development.

73. In terms of organisation, the GMSUS formed a federation, Nari Bikash Sangha, NBS (Women's Development Federation) in 1987, with the objective of transferring the management of common issues from CWDS to the grassroots organisations. Activities such as training, raw materials procurement, marketing, transportation, dialogue with outside agencies etc. have been progressively transferred to the NBS.

74. CWDS has been able through participatory processes, to build up a committed leadership among the women. Through democratic functioning, leadership has devolved over different sets of women, thus broadening the base. CWDS has also been extremely aware of the need to monitor its own role vis a vis the grassroots groups, in order to progressively yield spaces to them as they became more confident. CWDS' association still continues, but on a changing and adaptive basis. The older GMSUS which had initially shown hesitation when CWDS wanted to distance itself from them, are today quite independent in terms of their activities, ranging from economic activity management, to elections, accounts, etc. Wherever new women's groups are coming up, the CWDS team is more closely involved there. The CWDS cannot leave the area in the short run. It still has to provide support to all the GMSUS, in terms of negotiating outside support, doing advocacy etc. and just being there, to provide a sense of confidence to the newly emergent women's organisations.

75. Today the more experienced women from the GMSUS are acting as spearhead teams, working horizontally to facilitate the transfer and replication process in other parts of the state, as well as in Bihar. They have also established contact with rural women workers's groups in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and have participated in international and national conferences and seminars on poverty, gender, and the environment.

76. Training has played an important role in developing the capacities of the women of the GMSUS. Training has been provided on organisational functioning, group dynamics, leadership development, management of enterprises, technical knowhow for various activities, financial management, accounting, raw materials procurement, and marketing. From the start, the women were extremely serious about their training programmes, and did very well. This gave them the confidence

to self manage their own enterprise, and helped the process of transition from daily wage earners to workers/ managers/ owners/ of collective enterprises.

77. Two other aspects that are of interest in this case study relate to the relations between the GMSUS and the panchayats which have been made the pivot of rural development efforts by the state government, and the role of the ILO which has consistently been behind the efforts of CWDS and the GMSUS.

78. In the early days of the development of the GMSUS, the panchayats regarded them at first as temporary institutions which would not remain for long. When they found that the GMSUS intended to remain, and they were able to mobilise the collective efforts of the women in ways that the panchayats had not attempted, there grew a feeling of hostility and rivalry. The panchayats regarded the CWDS and the GMSUS as outsiders, agents of the Delhi Sarkar (GOI). The GMSUS had also made the mistake of not conceding an umbrella role to the panchayats, which were after all statutorily formed bodies for rural development and local self government. This phase ended in 1986 when Dr. Mazumdar tried to forge links with the panchayat leaders who were well thought of by the local women. Collaboration was the result, and thenceforward, the GMSUS and the panchayats started working together on issues which concerned development for the area as a whole. Joint programmes were organised on wasteland development by women's organisations, forestry through people's participation, women's education, access to social support services, training programmes. The GMSUS provided training to government officers, panchayat members, on gender and poverty issues.

79. The GMSUS have been able to act in the social sphere, and have been able to create spaces for themselves to intervene into issues of women's social abuse, problems of alcoholism, dowry demands, desertion, etc. The self image of women in the area has changed, and so have the perceptions of the community of the poor women workers, who were earlier regarded as kamins or workers who did not even deserve to be called by their names. Today the women's organisations enjoy a high status, and are consulted on all local issues by the bureaucracy, panchayats etc.

80. The role of the ILO has been one of imaginative, and sustained support. The approach was never one of "WE know better!". In this case, there are several aspects that need to be noted. Firstly, ILO came in only after the initial organisations had been formed, and the women had broadly chalked out their own priorities. Aid from ILO came as a follow up rather than as the initiator of the process of organisation and prioritisation. Secondly, CWDS provided the contact, through which ILO advice and aid flowed to the GMSUS. The high stature of Dr. Mazumdar and her team, and the respect paid by women's studies and activists to them, also protected them from being treated in any unequal manner by any outside agency. Thirdly, ILO played an unique role in the sense of furthering the cause of identifying these women as workers, which was the way in which the women identified themselves. Given this aspect, and the fact that ILO is mandated to promote and work with workers' organisations, the relationship between the two was equal.

81. While ILO did provide technical backstopping, it always was guided by the advice of CWDS and the GMSUS in the manner in which it regarded the problems and solutions, and provided its advice and aid. This created a good basis for exchange of information and adaptation of new modes of working. There was always a participatory approach used both by ILO and CWDS, which helped the mutual learning process. The monitoring of activities was done at different levels. The women's grassroots organisation carried out the first level of monitoring through regular meetings where stock taking was done on a routine basis. Whenever there were any particular situations demanding rethinking, meetings were held where members attempt to come to grips with the problem, and decide on ways to tackle it. At the second level, the representatives of the CWDS would hold meetings with the representatives of the GMSUS, and come out with solutions. The consultation process was based on common concerns, and mutual respect. In addition to regular consultative monitoring CWDS also initiated repeated studies to look at various aspects of the lives and work of the women. These were carried out jointly by the CWDS team and the GMSUS representatives. The studies themselves became learning and empowerment processes for the women.

82. At another level, information based on such participatory monitoring was provided to the financing agencies, as part of the move for self evaluation. Even during times of external evaluation, the process was entirely participatory, with the outside "experts" continually participating in meetings with the women's groups and CWDS. Findings and evaluation results were discussed with the women and CWDS, and conclusions mutually agreed upon would be accepted as final.

83. ILO regarded this experience of working with the GMSUS as a very valuable one, and it has tried to replicate it with other organisations. Certain basic approaches have also been carried over. These are in essence, a.) equality in relationships at all levels, b.) rural poor women's knowledge needs to be respected and carefully listened to, c.) building of rural poor women's grassroots participatory organisations, d.) building up rural women's capacities by training and support, e.) strengthening women's collective access to productive resources, f.) building horizontal linkages with other popular organisations and movements.

More on Strategies for Working with Poor Women

84. The experiences of catalytic agencies working with poor women in India, as well as in other parts of South Asia hold out certain basic lessons. These can be summed up as follow:

- (i) Facilitating awareness among poor women of a range of issues, of factors leading to women's growing poverty, need for mobilisation and organisation, organisational functioning, and helping to strengthen their information base;

- (ii) The organisation of homogeneous groups of the poor women at village level, to improve their access to resources required by all of them through collective action;
- (iii) The mobilisation of savings to support the economic and social development activities, build the asset base, and facilitate collective borrowing;
- (iv) The introduction of strategies for the productive and sustainable use of the natural resource base in the area;
- (v) The introduction of new activities and knowledge to expand incomes, and improve the asset base;
- (vi) Integrate the survival and social needs of the poor women into the total development process; and
- (vii) Ensure that the participants are the really poor women.

85. Further characteristics are the following:

- (i) The activities are implemented at two levels, by the catalytic NGO and by the village level women's organisation. The process of implementation is by the new kinds of poor women's organisations, where the poor participate in decision making and in implementation.
- (ii) The participatory process, the open management style, continuous dialogue, at village level all help to take corrective action as the process evolves.

Why NGOs?

86. NGOs are institutions which are primarily service oriented in terms of humanitarian or cooperative values. Women's NGOs are driven by the felt needs of the poor women, for support from educated catalysts, who can help the process of questioning, and working out of alternative structures in society, and the economy. Why is it crucial that international efforts to support women's development in India, should establish linkages with NGOs with strong proven commitment to WID issues?

87. The answer lies in the very nature of women's NGOs and in their proven contribution, to the process of bringing to attention poor women's exploitation in society and the economy, and demonstrating alternate modes of equitable development. NGOs contribute both to the theory and praxis of development, by identifying issues, promoting initiatives, experimenting and testing new

approaches, and initiating policy change by creating awareness and building a new consensus.

88. NGOs usually choose to work with the most disadvantaged sections of society, in this case the urban and rural poor women. They are able to reach groups and areas largely ignored by government development initiatives. They are concerned about the impact of their work on the poorest, rather than on the all the people, which is the concern of government departments. This helps the direct outreach to those who need it the most. NGOs as stated earlier, clearly pursue a different strategy to that of government, in building up peoples' organisations, and facilitating participation, through which process the poor are able to dialogue on the development process, and acquire effective voices.

89. Finally, NGOs are cost effective in implementation of development programmes owing to their commitment, and low administrative costs, due to their small size and their manageability, their freedom from bureaucratic processes, and delay. Their capacity to respond to changing situations among the "target " groups also makes them specially equipped to improve the quality of the activities themselves.

Lessons

90. From the case studies discussed in the paper, as well as others which have been documented elsewhere (Bhatnagar, 1991; Pandey, 1991), certain lessons for future action may be drawn:

- (i) The women's movements in India and elsewhere in the Third World have focused upon the issues of poor women, and have been trying to work with their organisations to address their problems. National governments have attempted to initiate policies and programmes to reach poor women with goods and services they require. International donor agencies have supported programmes aimed at creating new political and economic spaces for poor women to be able to act. All the various agencies concerned with the process of women's development, have entered into the process through various entry points, such as employment, credit, education, health, among others. However all such programmes are entry points, through which women can be mobilised, and around which they can be organised. The programme has to be based upon the generation of awareness among the women regarding their rights, and responsibilities, the nature of the structural factors responsible for their problems, and their role in bringing about change. The process may start with a specific activity the choice of which itself is based upon the priorities of the women. It then evolves in a comprehensive manner through a participatory process and moves to other social, political, and economic activities. The process can be multiplied, depending on the available political space. The

political space itself can be extended by advocacy, by creation of other organisations of the poor in general, and of poor women in particular, and by building horizontal linkages with other countervailing organisations of the poor. The support of sensitive donors can be very important in this process.

- (ii) In developing such a programme, innovation is the key. An innovative approach is linked to both the past developments, as well to the initiation of new processes. Building up the capacity of the grassroots organisations to self manage is a key aspect of such developments. Self management involves evolving participatory and democratic forms of evaluation, which facilitate the learning process, and also help the replication of the approach in a sensitive manner.
- (iii) Groups being organised at grassroots level must consist of homogeneous groups of the poor. The gender issue needs to be seen in consonance with class, culture, ethnicity, and equity issues. Lack of proper attention to these issues can lead to problems of new differentiations emerging within organisations, and may lead to greater returns for the better off, thus defeating the better purpose of organising.
- (iv) Programs should be designed in a flexible manner, in order to respond to the different, yet allied aspects of poor women's lives. The women themselves have to determine their own priorities. The support programme needs to be built around the maintenance and protection of the economic, political and social spaces which poor women may have access to, and then to expand their resource base through activities to be planned and carried out by the women themselves, with the help of the catalyst organisation.
- (v) In order to achieve the objectives in a participatory manner, it is essential that institution building at all levels be supported as part of the programme. This entails the creation, and sustenance of such participatory, mutually supportive organisations at all levels, from the village up to the central level. This does not mean merely the creation of organisations, but a process of mobilisation, which can result in social mobilisation, across classes. While homogeneity is extremely important in organising at the local level, it is also important to draw in like minded, committed activists from among the middle classes. As shown in the case studies, committed political activists, academicians, can aid the process of self development among and by poor women.

Through such a process of mobilisation at various levels, reorientation of government programmes for the poor can be brought about in ways

that they fit in with the priorities set by the women for themselves. The government does not have the capacity to respond in such ways to the processes ongoing at local level. The NGOs have to provide this reorientation to the bureaucracy, through advocacy, dialogue, and sensitisation.

- (vi) Facilitating poor women's access to resources which are controlled by the bureaucracy, entails the building up of partnerships with the development bureaucracy, through a process of sensitisation, and training. With such initiatives, development bureaucrats can become catalysts for change in their own right, facilitating the access of poor women to resources such as credit, land, technology etc.
- (vii) For the multiplication of the process of self reliant development for poor women, it is necessary to support institution building at several levels, and to have continuous dialogue between all levels. This kind of development necessitates a major role to be played by a support organisation which can be an NGO , a government organisation, a bank , among others. several institutions and agencies need to work together, in a mutually reinforcing process, with a new kind of motivation for poverty alleviation. This requires new forms of communication and support between all involved, from the start.

In each instance, committed individuals are required to develop and support the process at all stages. as the grassroots organisations of the poor women evolve to new strengths, these facilitators need to withdraw, and start a similar process elsewhere.

- (viii) Training in innovative approaches for poverty alleviation is a crucial aspect of institution building, for replication. New programmes for training and sensitisation need to be built, to change existing attitudes towards the poor, and women, from top down bureaucratic ones to dynamic, participatory attitudes based on respect for the poor, and their knowledge.

Groups/ individuals who may require such training are the following: a.) catalytic agents who will work at local level; b.) high level government officials who are in charge of policy formulation, as well as of the management of institutions for poverty alleviation and development; as well as c.) local level officials who manage the routine implementation of programmes; d.) staff of donor agencies who may need considerable amount of reorientation on how to support these new approaches.

- (ix) The donor agencies have to change their attitudes towards the poor. To a very large extent, the international development assistance is not

very well equipped to support participatory development from the grassroots up. When we come to issues of gender and equity, while there is a good deal of interest and sympathy, the methodology for the design and evaluation of programmes has yet not been fully understood and reflected in the approaches of the donor agencies.

91. Like national governments, sensitive and aware donors can only extend support to innovative programmes to the extent that the people at the local level determine. While there is a widespread recognition of the need to work with NGOs, it is still not clear as to how this relationship should be in terms of who leads, and who follows. Donors will have to retrain their staff in the recent innovative approaches on gender based equity issues, and lessons emerging from them in terms of methodologies. They will have to learn to appreciate and collaborate with new kinds of support organisations emerging in Third World countries.

92. To summarise, the old models of development have been shown up to be extremely limited in their capacity to reach the poor and marginalised groups. Despite this, they remain deeply rooted in the thinking of those who control resources which the poor require. This needs to be totally reversed. Any strategy of development involving large numbers of poor women has to start with their own unity building. Disunity may be caused by patterns of unequal dependence on the rich. The patriarchal system of control creates dependence on males. Such contradictions have to be resolved among homogeneous groups of women through dialogue, and training. The dependencies which poor women have at different levels have to be gradually reduced by increasing their self reliance within a conflict ridden environment. For poor women, the poverty issues as well as the issues of patriarchal gender ideologies will need to be confronted.

Recommended Strategies/Approaches

93. The steps towards such innovative, participatory development can be summarised as follow: a) develop an understanding of the socio economic and political contradictions within the given social environment; b) separate out the groups of poor women, with a clear understanding of the contradictions between them; c) develop mutual understanding, and interdependence among them, by stressing on commonality of issues, and the wider structural and attitudinal factors responsible for their lack of development; d) build up grassroots leadership, and cadres, to carry forward the task of articulation and prioritisation, as such peer group based efforts have the greatest chances of success; e) initiate group activities, building poor women's organisations in the process; f) create horizontal linkages with other organisations of the poor, in the process expanding the scope for participatory dialogue on development and equity issues. These steps taken together, can help lay the base for self reliant action by groups of poor women, helping them to break from patterns of dependency, towards their own creativity, and self-management.

94. In this effort, the concept of participatory action research (PAR) can have a lot of relevance and long term implications for sustainable development. The fundamentals of the approach are that in many developing societies, the poor are locked into several contradictory relations with the rich, the state apparatus is not uniformly developed, and thus it may be possible to create spaces for poor women to renegotiate priorities, and access to resources. It may be possible to undertake small actions for specific developments at local level e.g. food production, smallscale manufacturing, irrigation projects, health etc. These grassroots organisations can also pressurise local powers that be, to negotiate a better deal for the poor.

95. In carrying out these limited, local tasks, poor women through their organisations, can acquire better understanding of the wider structural factors related to poverty, and inequity, as well as build up their own knowledge base. They can build up self confidence to take up issue with the higher bureaucracy and other structures of state and society. They can also break out of their isolation and build up peer group solidarity. Ideas for the upgradation of indigenous technology, and help in conceptualising experience can be provided by a new kind of catalytic agent, participant action researchers, who while working side by side with the poor women in their struggles, can also interact with their creative ideas, and help the women conceptualise lessons learnt during the entire dynamic process.

Steps towards PAR

- (i) Poor women's creativity is the starting point. A meaningful development process must unleash the creative potential of the poor women.
- (ii) The process should transform the object and subject dichotomy and replace it with a relationship where both are knowing subjects, resulting in a dialogical process of creating change.
- (iii) Investigation and analysis of their situation by the poor women themselves: poor women are aware of their situations. This awareness has to be translated to a dynamic level, in order to form the basis for conscious action.
- (iv) Joint processes of exploration of possibilities of action will have to be carried out, to provide the basis for informed actions by the poor women. This is a process of poor women's own planning at grassroots level.
- (v) Poor women need to organise themselves for action. They need to build separate organisations initially, to take care of the double burden they face, and then link up with general organisations of the poor.

- (vi) Poor women need to initiate action on the basis of resources which can be mobilised within the community, through collective actions . Success in such limited actions gives them the self confidence to take up more actions, involving external, larger resources. They can at this stage claim other kinds of supports, such as training, credit, social support services etc. which help them build up their own capacities, and their access to resources, while continuing to mobilise their own.

Reflection on actions as a regular practise is an important element in PAR and development. This is needed to reflect on mistakes, for early correction, to identify problems and constraints, as well as ways of solving them. This will build up people's knowledge base, and strengthen the quality of their actions.

- (vii) Diversification and multiplication of actions will take place through the increasing experience gathered in planning and action. While this will lead to the emergence of new issues for the older groups, their experiences will demonstrate to potential groups in other locations to take up the task of organising and development. The net result of this process is expected to be the empowerment of poor women, the development of their capacity for self development, and their emergence as a counter power within the socio economic system, capable of bringing about change in directions determined by them.

96. The role of the external support/intermediary agency, in this entire process, consists of two linked aspects. These are the aspects of animation and facilitation. Animation is a process of helping the poor investigate their own situations, and analyse them. Through this process the poor, in this case women will develop an understanding of the factors creating poverty and deprivation, and also see the possibilities for their initiating a change process. Teaching, instruction, transfer of skills will get replaced by discussion, dialogue, self reflection and shared analysis, and sharing of experience and knowledge. The animator has to stimulate/provoke the people to come out with ideas, issues and factors, that they perceive as problems in their access to means of production, and resources.

97. Through the dialogues with the animators, the poor are able to absorb the knowledge brought by the animators. The outcome is a synthesis of their own knowledge, and formal knowledge, which can form the basis for self action.

98. Facilitation is often required to assist the poor women to initiate actions to change their conditions. Here the animators' education, wider knowledge, and links with external agencies (governmental, and donor), should be able to assist the people to cope with practical problems.

99. As the self reliance of the poor women's organisations progressively increases, the external catalysts should be able to gradually reduce their role to a

somewhat distant, yet supportive one, from that of guides to that of supportive friends who can be called upon for help when the poor women's organisations regard it as necessary.

100. Lastly, the entire process of participatory development requires regular evaluation which is based on the same criteria of participation, as is the process of development itself. In such evaluation, certain indicators need to be developed and used to measure extent of development, and draw lessons. These can be grouped together as follows:

- (i) Sense of solidarity based on mutual affinity and support;
- (ii) Democratic values;
- (iii) Spirit of cooperation which works not only within the group, but may extend itself to other potential groups whose inclusion remains an objective of the process;
- (iv) Collective spirit helping the emergence and understanding of the common interests of the group;
- (v) Creative spirit involving new kinds of actions, to experiment, and solve problems; and
- (vi) Spirit of collective self reliance.

101. In terms of economic benefits it is important to look at the distributional equity, collective resource build up, horizontal expansion, and development of linkages. While the process of development should bring about economic benefits for the poor, these cannot be looked at in isolation from other factors related to the development of self confidence, and horizontal solidarity. Other aspects for evaluation should include criteria for nutritional status, education, health, life expectancy at birth. The capacity development for self reliant development needs to be mapped by systematically documenting experiences in economic and social administration that the process generates. This can be done under two heads, generation of internal cadres, and the internal momentum in material, institutional, psychological, and leadership terms. No progress in any other sense can be considered fundamental if the process suffers a serious setback due to withdrawal of external resources and initiators.

Conclusion

102. Poor Indian women have to grapple with the twin problems of poverty and gender-based inequities. In an extremely hierarchical society such as in India, poor women receive a very small share of what they help society to produce. We have attempted in this paper, to show women's high rates of contribution, to national

production, in agriculture, and non agricultural sectors, both as paid and unpaid workers. Women here as elsewhere, also bear the major responsibility for household work. Women's work, and their economic contribution, both inside and outside the household, is subordinated to the control of the male head of household. Their access to the external sphere, both in terms of their ability to get resources, and employment opportunities, depends strongly on the preferences of the male family members. Such preferences are not determined autonomously, but very much influenced and controlled by the prevalent gender ideology.

103. Now there is a growing consensus that poor women need unmediated access to development resources, education, training, health, credit, land, and employment opportunities. This consensus has emerged among development workers in government, voluntary organisations, international development agencies. Such a consensus has emerged thanks to the researches of critical women researchers, and active participation by poor and middleclass women in struggles to bring out the realities of poor women's situation, and obtain control over their own lives.

104. A lesson that has emerged from the process of women's participation in struggle, is that poor women are isolated from sharing the commonalities of their experiences as workers both within and outside the household. Their identity as workers thus gets clouded by other gender roles of wife, mother, housewife. This fragmentation of their identity also prevents effective organisation, and participation, and aids social control of their labour. Therefore, an effective cross-sectoral strategy for poor women's development, is for the recognition of their identity as productive workers, requiring full access to resources, and their organisation into their own associations, for the purpose of self articulation, and empowerment. The process of bringing poor women into their own groups is powerful in breaking down the conflicts associated with women moving from the domestic into the outside sphere. It also helps such women set their own priorities, and pick up the knowhow required to deal with external structures.

105. In this process of organisation, poor women require the help of external catalytic agents, whom we have grouped under women's NGOs. As discussed in the paper, the catalysts can have varied backgrounds, trade union, action researchers, among others. The organisational strategies and methodologies also may vary from situation to situation. The common thread that runs through the entire gamut of such efforts, is the need to build strong demand groups, and adapt the relationship between the catalyst and the grassroots groups in accordance with the developing strength and articulation of the latter.

106. The role of international agencies needs to be supportive to local efforts by catalytic groups to develop grassroots initiatives among the poor women. The needs and priorities of the groups should be determined by them, and not by the international agencies providing resources. Support or projects for such grassroots groups should come only in areas determined by the local grassroots groups. The international agencies should be able to help bring in new ideas through providing

opportunities for learning and exposure through study tours, workshops etc. Technical expertise can be transferred through the learning process. However the decision to implement new lessons/ideas should be left to the local catalysts working with the grassroots groups to arrive at decisions through discussions. Whenever the grassroots groups are capable of arriving at their own decisions after being properly informed about the possibilities, they should do so.

107. The need to build greater responsiveness to local requirements and to the special priorities of poor women needs to be clearly understood. All development calls for an enlightened transfer of power that will help poor women become independent socio economic beings. The formation and support of self determined local groups is one of the most significant steps in that process.

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