

## RURAL WOMEN, THEIR CONDITIONS OF WORK AND STRUGGLE TO ORGANISE

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The situation of women and policies to improve their employment and standards of living need to be viewed in the over-all context of deteriorating conditions of rural workers and in particular the conditions of the landless and near-landless rural households. The situation in rural areas in developing countries is being dramatically affected by world crisis, such as growing external national debts and deteriorating North-South trade relations, emerging monetarist state policies leading to the break-down/entailment of social services, the food and agriculture crisis, especially in Africa and the increased concentration of the poor in the informal sector where incomes are uncertain and irregular.

For both sexes, low wages, unemployment and poor living conditions are a familiar part of daily life. At the same time, in most of these societies, women bear the worst consequences of poverty and exploitation, suffering as they do from a triple oppression, based on sex, class and race. As stated in the Indian feminist magazine, "Manushi", "the traditions built into male-dominated society force women to think that virtue lies in self-sacrifice, leading to the slow starvation of the woman when the family is living at a bare subsistence level".

With the deterioration in living standards in rural areas, traditional patterns of family life are becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Under the strains of extreme poverty, the household itself often begins to disintegrate, with male members of the family being

forced to migrate in search of paid employment, whilst females remain behind and head the households, which consist mainly of old people and children (1). In more and more situations women are forced by economic circumstances to seek wage employment outside the home and/or to undertake home-based income-generating activities, either because the male members of the family have migrated in search of cash employment (without necessarily sending back remittances) or because men have lost their jobs due to the adoption of capital-intensive techniques of farming. In many areas also non-farm artisanal rural crafts have declined because of competition from factory-made products, which has also affected male/female employment.

Chronic distress is a powerful inducement to women even to defy cultural norms against seeking work outside the home, in their efforts to ensure family survival. The general availability of a vast pool of female labour, which has been augmented by women from pauperised artisanal classes, leads to low wages and exploitative working conditions. Low female wages have lead in certain cases to decision by land owners not to mechanise tasks performed by women. In many parts of the world agriculture is reported to becoming increasingly dependent on low paid female labour.

In their world of work, rural women are handicapped in different ways, amongst others by limited access to land and related resources ; by lack of control over their own labour and the fruits of their labour; and lack of mobility due to social and cultural restrictions as well as the responsibility women bear for family survival and subsistence. While it is recognised that many men also face the two first constraints, women's work situation is made worse because of cultural and other constraints to their mobility and choice of work (2).

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(1) N. Youssef and C. Hetler, *Rural households headed by women : Priority concern for development* (Geneva, ILO, 1984, World Employment Programme Research working paper ; restricted).

(2) More details provided in an article on "Rural Women's Work : Dependence and Alternative for Change" by Zubeida M. Ahmad, *International Labour Review*, Vol. 123, n° 1, jan.-Feb. 1984.

## 2. FEMALE WORKERS IN THE RURAL SECTOR

### 2.1. Types and Categories

Although statistics are not readily available for all countries on the percentage of women either among the total agricultural labour force or under each category of worker, there is evidence from case studies that in many countries women constitute an important element of the agricultural workforce and the main providers of food. The contrast between official figures and the situation as it exists can be illustrated by the example of Egypt, where the 1960 census counted women as only 4 percent of the total agricultural labour force whereas a detailed rural record survey indicated that about one-quarter of all non-domestic productive work in farm households was done by women (1). Obviously women's economic contribution is grossly under-estimated in official statistics.

Studies from several other countries equally confirm that rural women participate extensively in agriculture/food production, either in the fields or within the confines of the compound, depending on the degree of their seclusion. Their share in agricultural operations is substantial in respect not only of food crops, but also of those non-food commercial crops that are labour-intensive and do not necessarily involve the use of mechanical implements. In the Syrian Arab Republic, for example, an International Inter-agency mission on rural women's participation in development found women to have major responsibilities especially for planting, sowing, harvesting, threshing, hoeing, ploughing and the grading and sorting of produce, with young girls in particular, doing almost all the work during the peak agricultural seasons. The women's workload was found to have become even greater owing to the prolonged absence of adult men who have migrated in search of employment either to urban areas or abroad (2).

Aside from women's extensive participation in the subsistence sector, they also work for wages in agriculture, being compensated often in kind, but sometimes also in cash. The trend for women to work outside the family farm is rising with the increase in landlessness. As more rural families find themselves without any ownership or use rights

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(1) ILO, 1969, *Rural Employment Problems in the UAR*, Geneva.

(2) FAO/UNESCO/ILO/WFP/ECWA, Mission Report on Rural Women's Participation in Development, Syrian Arab Republic, 28 Aug.-12 Sept. 1979.

in land, the family's need for cash income increases, and both men and women are forced to contract themselves out as seasonal and casual labour. Women are generally paid 40 to 60 percent of the male wage and given the more labour-intensive tasks like weeding, transplanting and harvesting.

In addition to working as seasonal and casual labourers in agriculture generally, women also work on plantations, either as members of a plantation worker's family or as labourers in their own right. On plantations in India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka, for example, contracts are often signed with the male head of the family, who is frequently required also to provide the labour of his wife and children. A recent study of plantation labour in Malaysia reports that women provide 50 percent or more of the labour force on rubber estates (1). They work mainly as tappers and weeders, with the help of their children. Their wages, which are calculated as part of a "family" wage, fluctuate with the weather (rubber tapping is impossible on rainy days, which are frequent during monsoons). The women's employment which is frequently of a casual nature, is being adversely affected by the declining international demand for rubber and the resulting trend towards the conversion of rubber estates into oil-palm holdings, where labour requirements are much lower. Indeed, it is reported that women plantation workers all over the world are facing serious employment problems as a consequence of falling over-all demand for labour. Technological advances in field operations are increasingly enabling plantations to maintain or even to expand their output with fewer permanent workers. Part of the field work is becoming semi-skilled, requiring training in machine operation, normally provided only to males. On some of the plantations there appears to be a classification of jobs by sex, women being assigned to jobs with lower pay and poorer conditions of work. On the Sao Paulo coffee plantations, for example, the most labour intensive jobs, which are paid at piece rates, are reported to be reserved for women. In Brazil, again, women are being increasingly used only for seasonal or casual work. Women workers on plantations are sometimes employed under

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(1) Noeleen Heyzer, "From Rural Subsistence to an Industrial Peripheral Work Force : An examination of Female Malaysian Migrants and Capital Accumulation in Singapore, *Women and Development*, 1982.

"verbal contracts" or as "casual labourers", working on a day-to-day basis with little employment security or access to worker benefits.

In most developing countries women are active, along with some men, in rural home-based industrial production : the biri-making industry in Northern India, which mainly employs secluded Moslem women (biri - also written bidi and beedi - is a cheap substitute for cigarettes), and the lace-making industry of Narsapur in Southern India may serve as illustrations. Work on biri production is often done at home by women who are paid at piece rates under a contract system. The contractor, who provides the raw material and collects the finished products, is frequently a powerful landowner and/or money lender, while the women are poor, illiterate and tradition-bound. The relationship thus becomes highly exploitative, the effective piece rate paid to women being less than the minimum wage prescribed by the Department of Labour (1).

### 3. WOMEN WORKERS AND THEIR NEED TO ORGANISE

#### 3.1. The Purpose of Organisation : To Act

Working on a one-to-one basis women, like men, will continue to be exploited. They need to come together to initiate viable economic activities as well as to take advantage of government programmes, especially those set up with the specific objective of assisting the rural poor. The purpose of organisation/formation of groups, however, is over and above the purely economic motive i.e. to generate and increase income earning opportunities. The decision to get organised and to act is a response to feelings of helplessness and lack of control over one's life. Getting together with other women in participatory activities builds self-confidence and gives women a say in their own fate. Such popular participation constitutes a platform against all forms of exploitation and to empower women (and men) so that they gain control over their own destinies. It implies the eventual breakdown of traditional relations of submission, exploitation and oppression, both within the family as well as the community.

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(1) Zarina Bhatti, *The Economic Role and Status of Women in the Beedi Industry in Allahabad* (Geneva, ILO, 1981, World Employment Programme Research working paper ; restricted).

The term participatory organisation, when used in this sense, implies a collective effort by the women concerned, in an organised self-deliberative framework, free and independent of outside control and manipulation, with the voluntary pooling of efforts and resources to attain objectives the members set for themselves. Not all organisations at the grass-roots level are participatory, even though they may be altruistic "voluntary agencies" (1).

### 3.2. Obstacles to Participation

Women, especially from the working classes (agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, those from poor peasant and landless households) face tremendous barriers to effective participation in organisations which represent their own interests. These obstacles include ideological, cultural and institutional factors, some of which are general to both men and women. At the same time, women even more than men, face a variety of specific problems in their attempt to organise. Very few women actively participate in public bodies, whether they are of an economic or political nature. Their representation is strongest in social/religious/traditional networks, which seldom influence policies and programmes at the national or even local level.

Clearly the fact that women often occupy a dependency status vis-à-vis men and the community generally, makes it more difficult for them to organise to defend their interests. Moreover, the discrimination they face in their world of work (lower wages, job insecurity, dependence on home-based production at piece rates dictated by private contractors, a heavy workload, resulting from their dual role at home and on the work sites, in the productive and reproductive process) creates serious barriers to their getting together to organise. In most situations, they have little time to attend meetings. These difficulties were faced even by Chinese women in the immediate post-revolution period, when they benefited from the full backing of the party in power as well as support from a strong and active national women's organisation (2).

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(1) Internal ILO Paper on *Guidelines for Supporting Participatory Developments Among the Rural Poor*.

(2) Elisabeth Croll, *Women in Rural Development, the People's Republic of China* (Geneva, ILO, 1979, World Development Programme Research working paper ; restricted).

It is obviously more difficult when such support at the highest level is lacking.

Aside even from the heavy workload which precludes women from participating, in many cultures seclusion is practiced and women have little freedom of choice in participating in organisational activities of a public nature. Often they do not control their own movements, even their decision as to where to work being controlled by other household members - father, husband, mother-in-law. Moreover, in most traditional cultures, women seldom dare to speak in meetings when men are present, so that their views are frequently not taken into account in arriving at decisions. This is re-enforced by women's perception of themselves, conditioned by their cultural and social environment, as being inferior to that of men. All of this means that women are heavily exploited : whilst being badly in need of group solidarity, they face serious obstacles to organisation.

#### 4. FORMS OF PARTICIPATORY ORGANISATIONS

In spite of obstacles, authentic participatory organisations as defined have emerged amongst women which can be identified to include indigenous traditional networks, formal organisations of poor rural women, trade-union type organisations, and women's active participation in peasant organisations and movements.

##### 4.1. Traditional Women's Networks

Before attempting to analyse the emergence and development of more formal rural women's organisations, it is important to recognise that women's solidarity and mutual aid networks, often with somewhat limited/specific aims and objects, do exist in most traditional rural societies. In Africa and Asia there are numerous examples of traditional saving societies or "chit funds" which enable women to accumulate small amounts of money for initiating income-generating activities, meeting social needs or merely purchasing consumer goods, otherwise out of the reach of the poor. In Africa, such mutual aid networks are more in evidence amongst women engaged in marketing and petty trade. Similarly, there are "burying societies", where the women get together to help each other when death or some calamity hits the family. Africa in particular has many such traditional groups or networks and some of the governments

are using these as a basis for extending development assistance to women. In Zimbabwe, for example, the idea of rural women organising themselves into groups is not new, since especially the poor are traditionally socialised to share responsibilities e.g. forming teams to work in each others fields or to get together and provide labour on social occasions, like weddings, funerals, etc.

In Asia, it is reported that there exist loose associations or informal support groups of women who continually work together in transplanting rice or harvesting crops. Maria Mies, in a still unpublished study on rural women in Andhra Pradesh, India, undertaken for the ILO, describes the collective nature of certain types of women's work in farming, especially transplanting and harvesting (1). The women are reported to form themselves into groups of 10-30 women made up of small teams of neighbours, relatives and friends, developing in the process a spirit of solidarity and mutual help which transcends the confines of the more limited family circle. This collective spirit among the women has been strengthened by the fact that the landlords are traditionally required to bargain wages and conditions of work with the women's groups collectively. They cannot recruit these women individually, but are forced by custom to negotiate with the spokeswoman who, in turn is controlled by the wishes of the other women labourers. Moreover, the necessity to recruit large numbers of women during certain periods of the year, constitutes the basis for the development of women's collective spirit and organisational skill. The agricultural work process itself, e.g., rice transplanting and weeding, its regular rhythm of body movement, strengthens their feelings of togetherness. The songs sung by the women as they work together relate to their problems, including man-woman relations and feudal oppression. The songs generate a feeling of collectivity, in opposition to atomisation, giving the women a sense of human and personal identity and dignity. The women who know long historical ballads of peoples' struggles and tribulations and sing well, are famous in the area.

The question is whether these and other similar indigenous traditional networking could constitute the basis of more formal womens' or-

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(1) M. Mies, *Indian Women in Subsistence and Agricultural Labour* (Geneva ILO 1984, World Employment Programme research working paper ; restricted).



ganisations. The answer is obviously different for different situations. In the case of Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, quoted below, these existing traditional networks/mechanisms could be taken advantage of, to build more formal structures, but this may not always be possible, especially when the traditional networks are either class dominated, being strictly hierarchical in nature or controlled by older women/persons in the community and thus even resented by the young or working members, who have their own problems to resolve, often in confrontation with the old.

#### 4.2. National Womens' Organisations

Most countries have national womens federations which include amongst their members, women coming from all different sectors of society. The form of such organisations ; the extent to which the poorest amongst the rural women participate in the management and control of the activities of such bodies ; the priority given by such institutions to issues of particular importance to poor working women in rural areas; all this, varies considerably from situation to situation. In highly hierarchical societies, such bodies are initiated and controlled for the most part in urban centres by better-off women and wives of highly placed government officials. By and large, therefore, national women's associations are seen to suffer from a middle class bias, considering women primarily in their role as home makers, whilst ignoring their active participation in production and their crucial need to earn an income for family survival. Frequently national womens' organisations breed within the movement itself the germs of class antagonisms amongst the members. As recent studies have shown, even wives of workers in the organised sector, tend to exploit poorer women as domestic workers.

It should be recognised, however, that there are exceptions to the above generalisations, especially under more egalitarian conditions, where class distinctions are less rigid. In this respect the situation in Africa appears to be different from that in Asia, and even in Latin America. One exception which immediately comes to mind is the Tanzanian Women's Organisation UWT (Jumuiya ya Wanawake wa Tanzania), which works closely with poor women in rural areas, encouraging them to engage in income-earning activities on a collective or cooperative basis. Similarly, the OMM in Mozambique is committed to changing the traditional roles of women, encouraging them to assume more important roles in village collectives, whilst securing for them the same rights and respon-

sibilities as men. In China, the National Women's Organisation, whilst succeeding in presenting a united front for women belonging to all classes and constituting a formidable pressure group at all policy-making levels, recognises that the interests of certain less vocal categories of women i.e. rural women, are sometimes liable to be neglected by a centrally managed national institution.

The principal which needs to be firmly established is that the institution at the village level should reflect the felt needs of the majority of the members and that it is they, the rank and file members, who determine the priorities set by the organisation.

#### 4.3. Organisations of Poor Rural Women

Beginning from such informal networks, more formal women's organisations have emerged which concern themselves both with immediate economic issues, such as higher wages and better conditions of work, as well as acting as pressure groups to protect the over-all interests of the members. One such organisation, although functioning on a very small scale, is the Women's Transplanting Organisation, Makulamada, in the Matale District of Sri Lanka. It was started in Sri Lanka in 1950 by 15 women who formed a voluntary group to jointly engage in transplanting for the purpose of obtaining additional income. Although the organisation has no written constitution, it has a tradition of joint action, developed over a number of years. The women as a group enter into contracts with landowners who are required to provide minimum facilities, including transport, medical services and some advance payment when the women enter into a contract of work. The members, in turn, work as a disciplined team and thereby achieve a higher level of productivity. In Africa, in Zimbabwe for example, there are traditional savings clubs, estimated to be 4000 in number, with a membership of 100,000, which operate in rural areas, pooling and loaning money on a weekly or monthly basis. The Government is now encouraging the members of these clubs, through extension workers, to take on income-generating activities. Activities, thus started, include vegetable gardening, poultry raising, making of pottery and basket weaving.

In Bangladesh, the experience of two grass-roots organisations, Nijera Kori (Do it Yourself) and BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) is promising from the point of view of helping poor women obtain improved levels of living. The two non-governmental organisations

have concentrated exclusively on poor women, whilst emphasising self-help and collective investment activities. In fact, Nijera Kori only allows the accumulation of group profits (in contrast to individual profits) from members' activities, which in turn strengthens group rather than individual action. By emphasising self-help, particularly in the form of active labour inputs by the members themselves, a self-selection mechanism comes into operation, to automatically eliminate participation by the richer households who refuse to be involved in the organisation for reasons of prestige (1).

Organisation of home-based workers in rural areas needs special consideration, in view of their atomisation and higher levels of exploitation (earnings per hour or per day are much lower in the case of women who work at home and sell their produce to private contractors). The very fact that these women lack contact and mutual support amongst themselves makes organisation more urgent. There is a clear need to organise production and marketing so as to release the women from the uncertainties and exploitative practices of middle men traders. In spite of the difficulties encountered, organisation among home-based workers is developing. For example, a branch of the Working Women's Union (WWU) in the West Godavari District in India has succeeded in forming 700 groups of over 7000 lace makers with 10 members in each group. Through these groups lacemakers have been able to obtain credit from the State Bank of India. To the astonishment of the Bank the recovery rate has been close to 100 per cent. The entry point used by this organisation is credit, the strategy being to increase workers' access to credit and production inputs, with a view to strengthening their negotiating skills and collective power. Group meetings are utilised as a vehicle of communication between the organisation and members, to resolve areas of conflict in the locality, and to generate awareness/consciousness on a variety of issues. The smallest organisational unit of the Working Women's Union is the loan group, consisting of 10/20 members. Each loan group is required to elect a group leader, according to the pre-requisites of the members. The group leader is responsible to the group for communicating organisational matters, organising group meetings, pro-

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(1) Saleha Begum, Study of the Institute of Development Studies, "Women, Employment and Agriculture".

cessing loans of members. The group members also depend on their leaders for a wide variety of services, such as health care, night schools, technological inputs, besides credit facilities at low cost. In the WWU, group leaders are supervised by area leaders who have risen in the hierarchy, from being group leaders (1).

Whilst it is not easy for the self-employed, men or women, to form trade unions, at least one illustration of a registered union of self-employed women can be provided. This is the SEWA in Ahmedabad, India, which set itself the task to organise the poor, self-employed women who constitute 94 per cent of all working women in the area, with a view to getting them a fair deal for their work and contribution to the economy. SEWA has been organising urban and rural self-employed women to help them become visible, to get better incomes and to have control over their own incomes. The work SEWA has been doing amongst poor women has led to a confrontation with big business, traders and middlemen. This confrontation and the difficulties put in the way of the women in obtaining required credit and marketing services, has led to SEWA's entry into higher level development activities, including the setting up of a cooperative bank, providing trading information, technical inputs, legal aid, maternity benefits, health, social security, skill training, marketing services, etc. They are now in the process of identifying income-generating activities and other supportative measures for income enhancement for their rural members. SEWA has been demanding also a change in the definition of "worker", to include the self-employed.

SEWA reports that all the activities in which it is presently engaged have emerged in response to the felt needs of its members. There is a very high level of participation of the members in policy decisions. Since the members are self-employed persons, there is no employer-employee relationship. By organising these women, SEWA provides a forum for them to develop a lobby and demand a fair deal from policy makers(2).

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(1) Nandini Azad and Research Team, "The Working Women's Forum : Dindigul Dairy Women's Project and Adiramapattinam Fisher-Women's Project". Documentation ILO Project on Successful Grass-Roots Initiatives.

(2) Proposal submitted by SEWA to the ILO on "Issues of Poor, Self-Employed Women - An Action Research Proposal".

Similar examples of spontaneously started organisations of poor rural women no doubt exist in other countries and regions. However their experiences have not been written up, possibly because the organisations concerned are spontaneous, operate on a small scale and have not as yet been documented by outside researchers.

#### 4.4. Womens' Participation in Peasant Movements

The role played by women in actively initiating and participating in peoples' struggles for control over their own destinies has been very much under-reported. Unpublished information available with the ILO indicates that the consciousness of oppression and the desire to join together to fight oppression (whether it consists of high costs of living, low level of wages, the struggle against forest denudation) is often even stronger amongst women than men, because of their basic concern with family survival. Printed material is lacking, however, and more attention needs to be given to such research. The ILO is now in the process of reconstructing the role of women in an almost continuous history of struggle waged by dispossessed tribal and non-tribal peasants and workers in the Chota Nagpur region of the State of Bihar in India ; the material already gathered clearly establishes the active participation of women in the movement, women being proved to be responsible for the success of several campaigns. Belonging to the same class of poor peasants and landless labourers, they were being heavily exploited by landlords, merchants and usurers. Class consciousness was equally developed among men and women, who struggled together. Women's participation was not only in a passive form i.e. aiding the men, but active participation in armed struggle against landlords and the colonial powers (1).

#### 4.5. The Trade Unions and Rural Women

Trade unions with the experiences gained in striving to improve wages and conditions of work in the organised sector, can play an important role in the development of rural workers' organisation, involving both women and men workers. If the trade union movement is really to

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(1) Unpublished research on "Women and Class Struggle : A Study of Tribal Movements and Women's Participation in Bihar" by Manoshi Mitra.

become a mass movement in developing countries, representing working people in all ways of life, it will need to cater to women as well as male workers in rural areas. Trade unions in developing countries are becoming increasingly conscious of this need to work in rural areas amongst both men and women.

In spite of this increased consciousness, however, trade unionism in most developing countries at the present time has hardly gone beyond the plantation sector, with its semi-industrial setting. From studies undertaken by the ILO on plantations in Malaysia and Sri Lanka, it is evident that even when women constitute a majority of trade union membership, they seldom participate in decision-making. For example, in Malaysia 40 per cent of the workers in the plantation sector are women, but only one per cent are active in trade union activities (1).

Clearly, there is need for women to increase their participation in trade union activities in sectors, like the plantation sector, where trade unions exist and where women constitute a substantial percentage of the labour force. Whilst trade union federations are in fact sincerely committed to increasing women's participation at all levels, the progress is slow, both because traditional male attitudes towards women change only gradually and because there is lack of awareness even amongst women themselves of their need to participate more fully in trade union activities with a view to improving conditions of work and life.

Women's involvement in trade unions appears to be greater at the grass-roots level in comparison to higher levels, presumably because of lower levels of education as well as cultural constraints to women's mobility. The women representatives at the Malaysia and Sri Lanka Workshops, organized jointly by the ILO and IFPAAW (International Federation of Plantation and Agricultural Workers), made a strong plea for workers' education programmes for women trade unionists. They said there was need to form women's groups and committees to facilitate discussion and identification of issues important to women in the plantation sector. The Workshop in Sri Lanka recommended the organisation of group meeting to increase awareness amongst women (and men) of issues of concern to

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(1) Report of the ILO/APDC/DANIDA Workshop on "Strategies for Improving Employment Conditions of Rural Women", Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 14-18 November 1983.

women, the sharing of information and experiences as well as generating pressure for national trade union federations to take up women's issues at the planning and programming level. Starting from a low level of awareness or resignation about their own situation, the women representatives who participated in these Trade Union Workshops articulated a number of problem areas for action, including unequal remuneration, allocation of hazardous tasks, unpaid holidays, management established shops deducting credit first from women's wages (rather than men's), poor educational facilities, the need for crèches, maternity care, but above all, the women's long hours of work and their desperate need for men to share some of the household tasks. Such meetings provided the means for establishing a dialogue between women plantation workers, high-level trade union officials and government representatives. It also resulted in starting action at different levels. For example, in Sri Lanka an action committee with representatives of all major unions was set up to follow-up action with high level union officials . In Malaysia, the Trade Union Confederation is pressurizing the Ministry of Labour to set up a special cell in the Ministry for implementation and enforcement of legislation particularly relevant to women workers in the rural and urban sectors.

##### 5. THE ROLE OF OUTSIDERS IN WOMEN'S STRUGGLE TO ORGANISE

In highly exploitative situations, and also where the people lack education and access to political, economic, and bureaucratic processes, concerned outsiders have an important role to play in the emergence of women's (and men's) grass-roots organisations. An external 'catalyst' can be defined as someone who has a genuine concern for the situation of rural women, a commitment to their struggle, and a faith in people's capacity to develop themselves, and who possesses relevant skills to motivate and stimulate people (women) to organise themselves. However, such 'outsiders' need always to be aware of the danger of reinforcing or creating any type of dependency, and should seek to destroy and prevent the emergence of a one-sided dependency relationship between the outsiders and the poor rural women who are struggling to improve their situation.

### 5.1. Participative Action Research (PAR)

There are several examples of women's organisations or, more informally, solidarity networks, which have started as a direct follow-up to participatory action research (PAR). Broadly speaking, PAR has been defined as a joint inquiry of outside researchers and the people, in which the distinction between the researcher and the researched is eliminated and the inquiry becomes an integral part of the people's (women's) own perception of their situation (1). PAR is not, in fact, research in the usual sense of the term. It is a process which includes adult education, diagnosis of situations, and critical analysis and practice as sources of knowledge and for understanding new problems, necessities and dimensions of reality. PAR presents all these aspects together as three momentums which are not necessarily consecutive. The approach is essentially oriented to the group as a whole, rather than to individuals : the input is from the communities, with the end product emerging from an exchange of views between the members of the group.

It is in direct contrast to research as understood in the academic world, i.e. collection of data on the basis of questionnaires without any systematic attempt to feed back the findings to the people themselves for them to pronounce as to their legitimacy. An important element in PAR is people's recovery of their own history and evolution. This is particularly relevant for women, who frequently perceive themselves as less important in the productive process.

This means that publication in the local language of the material thus gathered is of crucial importance to ensure community support and to instrumentalise their action and further their interests. It is part of the research procedure as feedback experience and impact. Under PAR, results should not be made public without clearance from the members of the group. The style of publications should be adapted to the level of literacy of the target groups, and by using simple terms known to the people.

One example of participatory action research is the ILO-sponsored study of the lacemakers of Narsapur, India, during the course of which the women themselves became conscious of the need "to have an organisation in order to be able to overcome their isolation and disunity".

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(1) Md. A. Rahman, *Grass-roots participation and self-reliance experiences in South Asia and the Pacific*, unpublished manuscript.



In effect, the researchers acted as a liaison between concerned members of the bureaucracy and the women struggling to organise. Another such example of participatory research acting as an initiator for organisation for action is that of women workers in the flower growing estates in Colombia. Here, the researcher, a young Colombian university graduate, whilst studying the condition of the women workers, became herself conscious of their need for organisation to withstand exploitation. The women who had previously passively accepted their hard conditions of work, now began to analyse their situation for the first time. They wished to come together to make a joint attempt at obtaining improved terms and conditions from the landowners. Subsequently, a team of concerned individuals (a lawyer, a social scientist, a physicist) has been formed to work with the women flower workers' committee in order to negotiate improvements, such as protection in the use of insecticides (1).

Other instances include the one in the Philippines, where as a follow-up to the survey and workshop organised amongst women working on sugar plantations (financed by the ILO and implemented by the Bureau of Rural Workers of the Philippines' Ministry of Labour), the women's consciousness of the need to organise, has surfaced.

## 5.2. Role of Animateurs/Animatrices in PAR

The emergence of a grass-roots organisation as a consequence of interaction with outsiders is of course not limited to participatory action research. Instances exist of *animateurs/animateuses* or catalysts who have deliberately set out to work and live with poor rural women, in an attempt to further participation in the development process of previously excluded groups. Such initiatives represent mostly non-government involvement in the development process. A good animateur is one who perceives himself/herself as ultimately becoming redundant and pursues a deliberate course to ensure that such a situation of redundancy is achieved as early as possible.

One such instance is that of an "animatrice" who started early in 1975 to work with fisherwomen in the village of Bontempo in North East

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(1) D. Medrano, *Efectos de los procesos de cambio social sobre la condición de la mujer rural*, paper prepared for the ILO Tripartite Latin American Regional Seminar on Rural Development and Women, op. cit.

Brazil. In this case, the process of conscientisation started very gradually with the animatrice spending the first months living and working with the fisherwomen, whilst being observed by them. She was then invited to fish with the women and in the evenings sat and chatted with them. The *animatrice* herself characterises her approach as having two main phases : "discovery", when she and the group established links between each other ; and "wake up" when the members of the group began to understand the basis of their miserable existence and determined to do something about it. The instruments used by the animatrice were group meetings and dialogue. Over a period of six years (1975 to 1981) the original group has increased in number and two other groups have been formed, responsible for diffusing knowledge among the local fisherwomen and encouraging new members. Whilst it is difficult to qualitatively analyse the results of this type of pedagogic work with the women, which is a slow process, it is clear that the fisherwomen now participate more actively in decision-making (two women's representatives have been elected to the Board or Committee responsible for managing the government controlled colony) and women now have greater access to the colony's resources. The women's are part of a wider movement of people engaged in fishing in North East Brazil, who have succeeded in introducing federal legislation to control the pollution that poisons the rivers where they fish (1)

A second illustration is from the Philippines and concerns the work of a community organiser (Anna, a graduate student from Metro Manila) who conducted a training/exposure/programme in a resettlement community/village at a distance of around two hours' drive from the heart of Manila city. She, with the other 'trainees', worked closely with the Parish priest and used Church programmes as entry points for their integration into the community. The trainees viewed their task as not to organise the women but to help them and the community to organise themselves and to discover for themselves how they would like to respond to their problems. The most significant turn in the women's organising efforts came with their decision to study deeply the social conditions in their community and their relation to national economic and

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(1) B. Guljart, "Counter development : A position paper" in *Community Development Journal* (Oxford), Vol. 16, n° 2, 1981, quoted in Oakley and Marsden, op. cit.

political concerns. As part of this programme of action, the group organised a project to develop skills in the use of acupuncture, acupressure, fireglass and moxibustian, as people's medicine. After 20 months of community work, there are now 13 full-time health workers for 34 blocks of the community, with the continuing process of conscientisation, mobilisation and organisation working out a dialectical relationship. After six months' training, all the 'trainees' left the area except Anna who came to be viewed by the community as a "reliable partner and friend" and who is now provided with free board and lodging by the community itself (1).

### 5.3. Role of Local Level Dialogues or Workshops

Yet another technique which has been instrumental in raising women's consciousness of their own situation and their realisation of the need to jointly resolve their problems, is through local level dialogues or workshops. Such 'interactions' at the village level can be initiated by governments, by NGOs, by international organisations, like the ILO or jointly by all three. A good example of such an approach is demonstrated in West Bengal, Bankura District, where as a direct consequence of a three-day Camp/Workshop organised by the government (Land Reform Commissioner) in 1980, as part of the programme for land distribution, the tribal women decided to organise themselves into a Women's Development Samiti (organisation). The Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), with some ILO funding, was coopted to assist the Samiti. Careful planning based on local needs and conditions and carried out in close consultation with the women themselves has had powerful demonstration and catalytic effect, resulting in rapid expansion of the benefits to many more women and their families. From a fledgling women workers' society of 34 members, within 18 months the movement now covers more than 600 members from 20 villages. The demonstration effect has been reinforced by the fact that, once organised, the women from very deprived areas have been able to get access to significant resources from government agencies and have been able to benefit from programmes which

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(1) *The struggle towards self-reliance of organised, resettled women in the Philippines* (Geneva, ILO, 1982 ; mimeographed World Employment Programme research working paper ; restricted).

had not previously reached them, including land, finance, seedlings, technologies, health care and nutrition.

The initial success of this organisation helped to create a demand from women in other villages for assistance in organising themselves and developing employment opportunities. Although women in this area have traditionally worked in teams, both in agricultural work as well as in the collection of minor forest products, it was found that the concept of team work differed substantially from the concept of collective organisation. Gradually, however, the women are coming up with collective proposals, i.e. small livestock and poultry projects, and are beginning to gain access to government funds previously under-utilised. Government support at the top has not prevented growing opposition from the established local power structure, the dilemma before the CWDS is to prepare field workers as well as the women themselves to successfully confront and deal with such deep-rooted opposition (1). Similar dialogues between poor rural women and those responsible for assisting them have been arranged through the good office of the ILO in Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.

#### 5.4. Government-Sponsored Women's Programmes for Group Action

Aside from concerned individual social scientists working at the grass-roots level, certain governments like that of Nepal, are actively encouraging, under the Small Farmers' Development Programme, the formation of poor women's (and men's) groups for collective action. The main aim of the small farmers development project is to increase the standard of living and economic status of small farmers, the landless and tenants by forming them into groups for improving their access to resources and services and undertaking common economic activities. It is also to strengthen the receiving and utilising mechanisms of the group so as to harmonise it with service delivery mechanisms.

Groups of women are thus gradually being involved in income-generating activities, which include livestock raising, paddy processing the production and sale of cottage industry products and handicrafts,

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(1) Draft Report on Proceedings of Consultation of National Consultants under the Project, Employment Opportunities for Rural Women through Organisation, Kathmandu, Nepal, 27-30 June 1983. Draft.

management of cooperative stores, health and nutrition education, etc. Over 2000 women's groups have now been organised, with a membership of 2300. Group organisers (GO) have been stationed in each district to play catalytic and monitoring role in the formation of "homogeneous, multifunction groups around a common-nucleus income-raising activity based on group work plans and group action, supported by an integrated programme of supervised credit, extension and technical backstopping" (1).

Government-sponsored programmes, like the one in Nepal raises the fundamental issue of independence of rural workers' organisations. In Nepal, for example, the aim was for the withdrawal of the Group-Organiser after two to three years, but in fact this has been only marginally achieved. The question to be considered is how this withdrawal can be accelerated, and whether the process of the people gaining self-reliance is slower in the case of government initiated programmes. There is also the further difficulty of training government employees to be self effacing i.e. withdrawing instead of actively themselves assuming control of operations at the grass-roots level.

## 6. SPECIFIC ISSUES AND PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

The issues we are discussing in this paper i.e. womens' organized efforts to come to grip with their problems of social oppression and economic exploitation, are new and very little has in fact been written on the subject. We are, therefore, treading new and unexplored territory. The available material on the subject is limited, as is the conceptualisation and analysis of the situations which emerge. Consequently there are no pre-designed formulas and/or criteria on the basis of which success and failure can be evaluated. From the pioneering work which has been done on the overall issue of organisation and participation, some relevant guidelines can be obtained on possible problems which emerge. Ups and down, cadres' defections, repression, conflicts, ebbs and flows should be expected and taken into consideration as integral part of participatory work, recognising its long-range and sensitive character.

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(1) Dharam Ghai and Anisur Rahman, "The Small Farmers' Groups in Nepal" *A Pilot Programme Development : Seeds of Change*, 1981 : 1.

## 6.1. Separate Women's Organisations

This is an issue which is immediately raised and which is of crucial concern to those who work with poor rural women as well as to the women themselves. It should be recognised that part of the struggle in which women are engaged is in opposition to the male members of their family, e.g. when women are being beaten up by men ; when men use up women's hard-earned wages on drink ; etc. In such circumstances, it needs to be considered whether separate organisations for women may not be the only answer, at least in the initial stage of organisation, before men's traditional attitudes to women undergo a change. This issue was forcefully argued by poor rural women who attended the national level "dialogue workshop" held in Khatmandu, Nepal. The women defended the continuing need for separate women's organisations on the grounds that the men drink and mishandle women in mixed village gatherings ; villagers gossip and ruin marriage chances of unmarried girls who participate in mixed groups ; and that women cannot speak openly if men are present. Thus, whilst recognising the value of unity in the struggle which involves both men and women, where women face special social, economic and cultural difficulties to effectively participate in mixed organisations, it may be necessary to think in terms of separate women's organisations, at least in the initial stages and at the village level.

According to many activists working at the grass-roots level with poor women's groups, the strength of the class struggle is doubled when women have their own autonomous organisations, which it is believed provides women with a power base from which they can then more effectively fight class exploitation, whilst at the same time struggling against sexual oppression (1).

This need for separate women's organisations is contested by the workers' movement as a whole, where it is felt that women's special interests need to be addressed within the framework of joint organisation, in order not to divide the workers' solidarity. It is similarly rejected by political parties and some national women's organisations allied to political parties. Thus, Glenda Monteracy, head of the Nicaragua Women's Organisation says it makes no sense to separate the women's struggle

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(1) M. Mies, *The Lace Makers of Narsapur*, a study prepared for the ILO (London ; Zed Press, 1982).

from that of overcoming poverty and exploitation generally. She insists that it is necessary "... to promote women's interests within the context of that wider struggle". Women in Nicaragua are reported to make up some 40 per cent of the militia forces and 50 per cent of the neighbourhood defence committees (1). Similarly, Domitile Barrios de Chungara, a leading militant activist from Bolivia, whilst fiercely defending women's rights, rejects demands for autonomous women's organisations as typifying the values of wealthy middle-class women(2).

The arguments for and against an autonomous women's organisation are obviously complex. The chief criticism against an autonomous women's movement is that it diverts attention from the class struggle, allowing women's issues to become compartmentalised, cut off from a broader understanding of the social, economic and political conditions in a given country. On the other hand, experience has shown that at least some level of independent organisation is vital for the true achievement of women's demands. The class struggle must therefore be accompanied by a continuous fight against feudalistic and traditional attitudes towards women.

## 6.2. Cadre Training

A crucial element in the growth and development of women's grass-root organisations is the training component. The issue of the form and content of training needs to be tackled at a fairly early stage in organisation if the movement is to continue to remain dynamic and spread both as concerns area of operation as well as scope of activities covered.

Clearly training of the participatory kind is quite distinct from normal training in formal institutions with their "pre-designed manuals, teachers with vertical and non-dialogical methods and pre-fabricated formulae". Training of the participatory kind needs to be based on the cadres' own experimental knowledge of local cultural traits and techniques. This may be done in encounter type seminars/workshops, combining theory and practice. Rural young people, including those who have migrated in search of urban employment but who have rural roots, are

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(1) Guardian Third World Review, Oct. 15, 1982, by Maxime Molyneux.

(2) Domitila Barrios de Chungara, "Women and Organisation, Third World-Second Sex.

among those qualified to be cadres in their own milieux. Change agents can be recruited from different stratas of society. In many situations educated young men from the rural milieux seem to obtain the greatest success working with rural women, even the elderly ones, who feel very relaxed and at ease with these young men whom they consider like their sons. In other circumstances, older women who have already worked for many years as mid-wives fulfill an important leadership function.

One such programme of adult education in El Regadio, Nicaragua is described in Orlando Fals-Borda's forthcoming study on Knowledge and Peoples' Power. It consists of an understanding of how people and their leaders can teach themselves without the negative intervention of teachers mal-trained in the past. The process is reported to be "essentially one of social change with the aim of giving power to the people and fostering social instruments of production and action like cooperative and mass organisations" (1).

A distinction needs to be made between the type of training needed to be given to members of grass-root organisations and that provided to outside cadres who form part of a larger organisational effort. In both cases, it is important that the training process combine practical experience with a commitment to the poor and their causes. This has been very effectively achieved in the highly successful Grameen Bank Project, which consists of 46 percent female members. The orientation, approach and human qualities of the Bank workers are reported to be a key factor in explaining the success of the project. The project has been able to inculcate these qualities among its staff through a training programme based largely on "learning by doing" (2). Such a programme of training requires from outside catalyst agents a strong sense of identification with base groups, while being incompatible with autocratic tendencies.

The process of working with poor women frequently starts with a socio-economic survey (PAR) made in simple, modest terms and with uncomplicated techniques, especially as regards the poverty syndrome, with very flexible use of standard academic research practices. It is impor-

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(1) Forthcoming ILO publication by Orlando Fals-Borda, "Knowledge and People's Power : Lessons with peasants from Nicaragua, Mexico and Colombia", Geneva, 1984.

(2) "An Evaluation of the Impact of the Grameen Bank Project", by Dharam Ghai, on behalf of the International Fund for Agricultural Development Marc 1984.



tant to do collective and dialogical research to validate the knowledge obtained and to plan and lead group activities ; to make a critical recovery of local and regional history from the standpoint of the common people's struggles, with the assistance of their own sages and data depositories ; and, to value and utilise popular cultural elements, norms and traits (beliefs, customs, herbology, music, story-talking, etc.) for the promotion of education and action.

For the rank and file members of the organisation, aside from leadership training and an increase in awareness of their socio-economic environment, they need to come to grips with, and acquire knowledge of the day to day management of group affairs. Such a training programme could be considered in the light of an update of the available management skills which the women already unknowingly possess and utilise in the everyday management of their affairs. This is being attempted in a somewhat original manner in West Bengal, in the ILO/Netherlands Project, Employment Opportunities for Rural Women through Organisation (1). With the help of a management consultant, the existing managerial skills possessed, but unrecognised by the rural women themselves are being nurtured and built upon.

Whilst illiteracy is by no means a bar to poor rural women taking control of their own lives and work through their organisations, it is essential that a conscious effort be made to eradicate illiteracy, in order to further the process of developing a more effective participation in the struggle for independence and self management.

### 6.3. Fostering Self-Reliance

Whilst conscious of the significant role played by concerned outside supporters/catalyst in encouraging rural women to undertake group action, the crucial importance of self-reliance needs to be again and again underlined. Several references have been made earlier in the paper to the need for fostering self-reliance. It has been said by those who have considerable experience in working with the rural poor that "success in the field may be measured in relation to the outside cadres

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(1) ILO/Netherlands Multi-bilateral project on "Employment Opportunities for Rural Women through Organisation, Evaluation Report, May 1984.

ability to become redundant in their work, because the base groups have been enabled to continue on their own, with the new intellectual and material resources at their disposal".

The importance of such self-reliance is obvious. The struggle in the rural areas with the prevailing power structure is often hard and leads to confrontation at various points in time, and with different categories of opponents. The people (in this case women) have to learn to depend on themselves and on the leadership they have been able to develop. Outsiders, unless they decide to settle down in the area, cannot be expected to be around always. Moreover, during the course of the struggle to gain control of their own labour and other resources (land, credit), the women face frequent occasions of confrontation, including sometimes with the police. They must be convinced of exactly what they are doing and why they are doing it. In such life and death struggles, rhetorics, by well-meaning outsiders becomes meaningless.

The concept of self-reliance has been described as the increasing control of toilers over their own lives and their movement, needing the conscious participation of the toilers and their representatives in all decision-making. It is recognised that leaders with non-toiler background can create problems with alien goals and conflicting methods of functioning. In other words, grass-roots self-reliance requires the emergence of a strata of "organic intellectuals" from among the toilers themselves, meaning that representatives must not rest content with receiving a mandate, but must involve as many of the masses as possible at every of the decision making process. It constitutes a form of direct democracy (1).

In actual circumstances in rural areas in developing countries, direct democracy is not easy to achieve. But it should be maintained as a goal for all organisations. It is also important to recognize the role of training in achieving self-reliance. Although external cataly-sists can certainly play an important role in providing such training, it is essential that the organisation itself controls what training is relevant and necessary.

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(1) "Grass-roots Participation and Self-Reliance : Experiences in South Asia and the Pacific", Edited by Md. Anisur Rahman.

#### 6.4. Establishment of Vertical Linkages

It is important for a variety of reasons, for women's grass-root organisations to forge links with established higher level workers structures. Especially when the initiatives at the grass-root level challenge the existing power base, particular vulnerability is experienced which may be possible to avert by linking up with other groups at whatever level it is deemed necessary. The need for such a link-up is also pertinent when larger issues are involved.

While recognizing the value of affiliating with higher level structures, there should be a recognition of the danger that such collaboration can imply in regard to the loss of autonomy of the grass-root organisation.

#### 7. AN ALTERNATIVE ACTION STRATEGY

A problem which concerns both men and women equally, is that conventional development approaches have generally speaking failed to reach the assetless poor in the rural sector. One such instance can be quoted here in the form of an illustration. This concerns the setting up of LAMPS (Large Size Multi-Purpose Co-operative Societies) by the Government of West Bengal, as a means for promoting economic development in tribal areas, for regulating trade in forest products and protecting poor tribal people from trader/middlemen exploitation. These laudable aims have not materialised in practice because a small elite section within the tribal community, possessing some assets and political power, have gained control of the organisation. An organised network of vested interests amongst the better off tribal people themselves has emerged to monopolise trading in minor forest produce, through the use of government subsidies (1).

Other similar experiences from different parts of the world can be quoted. Consequently more and more the development concept itself is beginning to be questioned and challenged by third world thinkers, and especially those who are directly involved in action at the grass-roots level. They see the need to de-mystify or totally break away from the

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(1) Taken from an unpublished paper prepared by the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi.

current "development" concept which implies that "development" or growth as it has taken place in the rich developed countries is the final point of reference. In reality after over twenty years of experience, it has to be admitted that conventional development strategy has failed to improve the situation of the poor. It is time therefore that serious thought is given to an alternative programme of action, which is concerned less with economic growth indicators and more with the issue of the transfer of power to the powerless. This change in optic can revolutionise the entire programme of planning by third world governments. The failure of past development strategies is directly linked to the absence of this missing ingredient - "participation" (1) which implies in essence transfer of power. Whilst it is not intended here to enter into the polemics of what exactly is meant by "participation", it is argued that participation in the true sense can only be attained by the poor through their own authentic organisations. "Organisation means *strength* and strength is a prerequisite of taking action ... (action which) generates countervailing power to confront the already well-established power configuration within any particular context... This process is linked more tangibly to the creation of *assets* ; ... building up of a minimal economic base for previously excluded groups ..." (2). Broadly speaking, therefore, the purpose of organisation of rural workers is to provide a continuing mechanism for the pursuit of the interests of its members as collectively perceived by them and over which they exercise effective control.

Experience reveals serious structural difficulties in most countries in promoting participation of poor (women) in development. In particular, since the poor, and especially women, need access to economic assets for their meaningful development, their organised voice has often pressed for redistribution of assets, particularly land. Resistance from vested interests to organised people's initiatives is, therefore, to be expected (3).

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(1) P. Oakley and D. Marsden, *Approaches to participation in rural development*, preliminary paper for Inter-agency Panel on People's Participation, March 1983, forthcoming.

(2) Oakley and Marsden, *op. cit.*

(3) Anisur Rahman, Internal ILO paper on, "The ILO in Promoting People's Participation in Rural Development".

Outsiders, international organisations (governmental and non-governmental) have an important role to play in this process involving a transfer of power and decision-making to the poor (women) themselves. It can be operationalised in several different ways. In addition to ensuring that the peoples' (women's) voice is present in programme planning, it is a question of transferring power and decision-making into the collective hands of the poor. In this connection the role of women's own organisations, already referred to above is of crucial importance. But perhaps the most fundamental and irascible obstacle to the full participation of women in arriving at economic and social decisions is their almost total lack of access to the use of land and the income generated by the agricultural production to which they have heavily contributed. A very preliminary attempt in giving women collective control over land and all that this implies, has been started in West Bengal and is attempted to be replicated in other parts of India (Gujarat, Rajasthan, and possibly Madhya Pradesh). It is illustrative of what is actually implied by transfer of power to the poor women and how this can revolutionise action strategies at all levels.

Giving women rights in land through their own democratic institutions has far reaching implications from the point of view of national policies and programmes. Poor working women are now responsible for making basic decisions as to what to grow on this land, decisions which can totally change the direction of the national economy from being export (growth) oriented to being people oriented. It is also directly linked to the present food crisis in the world : the expectation is that poor rural households, spearheaded by the women who have obtained collective rights in land will be in a position to take a balanced decision on what to produce on this land. Is it in their collective interest to use this land to produce food for local consumption and sale ? To produce fodder, feed and medicinal herbs which can be partly sold and partly consumed by the families ? It is by no means ruled out that the women's organisation goes in for growing a non-food crop, like sericulture (as they have in fact done in West Bengal) possibly even for export. The crucial element which is to be stressed is that the production decision rests with the poor women and is not taken by the local power structure, frequently consisting of large land owners, money lenders, traders. In other words, there is a clear transfer of power to the women.

The above is only one concrete illustration of what is meant by an alternative action strategy. There are many other avenues for action. What is needed is to recognise the failure of "development" programmes (national and international) to benefit the poor men and women and the political will to give the poor the necessary space to undertake their own initiatives which inevitably involve a transfer of power from the few to the many.

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## ABSTRACT

In her paper, Zubeida Ahmad has attempted to establish a link between women's predominant role in food and agricultural production, the tasks women are generally called upon to perform, the constraints under which they operate and their need to form solidarity groups for family survival and generating income-earning activities. In this struggle for family/local food self-sufficiency, women's rights in land (or lack of them), which in turn provides an access to credit, improved inputs, technical knowledge, is considered of basic importance.

## RÉSUMÉ

Dans son exposé l'auteur cherche à établir un lien entre le rôle prédominant des femmes dans la production agricole et alimentaire, les tâches qui incombent généralement aux femmes, les contraintes qui pèsent sur elles, et le besoin qu'elles ressentent de former des groupes de solidarité pour la survie des familles et pour obtenir des activités rémunératrices. Dans cette lutte pour l'auto-suffisance alimentaire familiale ou locale, les droits fonciers des femmes (ou leur absence), qui permet l'accès au crédit, aux intrants, au savoir-faire technique sont d'une importance fondamentale.