CASE STUDIES OF WAYS OF WORKING WITH GENDER

Introduction
Tina Wallace

In this section, we look at a variety of ways of working with gender relations. To date, the focus has tended to be on women separately, in income generation or health projects. While these approaches are important, they do have their limitations. Projects where women are the only participants often fail because men do not understand them and do not give necessary support e.g. where men are excluded from nutritional training they often do not understand the need for a new diet so women are not able to introduce it. Or women may lack the necessary resources of e.g. land, access to markets or transport to make the project successful. There are other ways of trying to work with women, and we have tried to cover some of the most innovative and successful in this section.

Less has been written about working with women and men together, where women are fully incorporated into the project, because less work has been done in this area and there is not much experience to record. However, four articles do touch on this area (Watson, Burgess, Mathew and Oxby). Brian Mathew describes the problems that are faced when projects which directly affect women do not involve them in the planning, decision-making, and managing committees of the projects. His focus is on water, but the lessons are equally applicable to a wide spectrum of development work — in agriculture, pastoralism and health, for example. While
the women may well be seen as the target of the development, and provide the essential labour and time inputs, they are very rarely consulted, and are not trained in the use of new technologies. This often means that, not only does the project fail, but that women are further disempowered. They may actually experience a loss of control over water, land or animals with the introduction of a development project; and gender relations may be changed, to the disadvantage of women. Such projects are far from being gender neutral.

A number of articles in this section focus on work with pastoralist women in Africa. There are a number of reasons for this; first because until recently they were almost totally excluded from development thinking and development work which was all focused on the men. The women were virtually invisible and their often critical role in production as well as reproduction was overlooked. Second, some very interesting work has been undertaken recently in this area which illustrates both the problems and potentials of working with women who have always been neglected in the past. Many of the issues raised apply to women in agricultural societies and work with pastoral women was chosen as the main focus for some of the case studies because it is such new territory, and because their treatment in development projects highlights many important lessons which are widely applicable.

Cathy Watson's article on pastoral women in northern Kenya, illustrates the importance of research into the roles and responsibilities of women as well as men, before assumptions are made about appropriate development or welfare, particularly when working with societies where little is known about the pattern of gender relationships. Her research shows the critical roles, previously not fully understood, that women play within the Turkana economy, especially as the controllers of the food supply in the household. As pastoralist societies are undermined, the separate but complementary roles of men and women are changing, and women are taking on more work and added responsibilities. If agencies are not aware of this, emergency food and water supplies, and subsequent rehabilitation assistance, are distributed only to men, with profound effects on the relative positions of men and women and the success of the projects. Cathy Watson's research echoes that of Ann Whitehead (see Section One) on agricultural societies in Africa, and the conclusions they reach is that recent
historical changes have adversely affected the position of women, and positive steps must be taken to counteract these.

Pastoralist women in Kenya are also the subject of Clare Oxby's article. While she emphasises the need to understand the roles women play and their many and various activities, she points out that research alone is not enough. Pastoralist women have suffered from the failure of agencies both to realise their involvement in animal production activities, and to involve them actively in the projects. Clare Oxby describes two innovative and successful restocking projects where women heads of households, as well as men, were targeted by the development agency.

In her article, Doris Burgess writes about a situation in which a whole society decided to address the structural inequality suffered by the women, and devised a programme which involved changing the basic social and economic structures, and the attitudes which discriminate against women. The focus of her article is health provision in Eritrea, but it encompasses a number of other critical issues that have to be addressed if women's subordinate position is to be transformed.

The other articles in this section describe work with women alone. Three articles have income generating projects and women's groups as their theme. This approach has characterised most of the work with women in recent years; partly because of the growing recognition that, because women have responsibility for the family, money given to them may be the most effective way of raising the health, nutritional and educational status of children, and, indeed, of the whole family. Agencies have been increasingly concerned to be seen to be working with women, and in many countries income generating projects are a familiar and acceptable way of doing so. Linda Mayoux, using case studies from India, gives a comprehensive overview of the problems that beset such projects. They often add to women's workloads without bringing any significant economic returns; poorer women have no time to participate in them; there are difficulties in acquiring raw materials, meeting quality standards and finding suitable markets. However, they may have other benefits for the women who participate in them, such as an opportunity to meet together and find ways of challenging existing constraints.

In contrast, Ben Pugansoa writes of an income generating project in Ghana, which was economically successful. The project assisted
women to compete with large-scale male traders, who had previously bought produce at exploitative prices. This project was based on work the women were already involved in, and the market was known to be lucrative. It is important to recognise that some income generating projects can significantly improve women's income, and more work needs to be done to identify the factors that contribute to economic failure or success.

Betty Wamalwa looks at some of the political and economic issues around women's groups. She argues that these groups can only ever involve certain types of women — those with spare money and spare time — and will tend to exclude the poorest and youngest women; and that 'women's projects' per se are outside the mainstream of development, which goes on without regard to women. This theme is taken up again in the next section by Adelina Mwau. Women provide much of the work and energy on all projects, but they are effectively ignored in mainstream projects and are only targeted in women's projects, many of which are income generating projects, peripheral to their real needs.

The remaining articles look at a variety of different ways of working with women. There is research (which can be informal, participative and quick, or more detached and long-term); networking; drama and popular education work; counselling and group exploration of feelings and needs; management, literacy and business training; training in gender awareness; and training in new skills, previously reserved for men. Several of the articles in this part of the book are drawn from Latin America, where a great deal of innovative work, especially in popular education, awareness building around the issues of class and gender, and networking has been done.

There are accounts of two different awareness raising groups — one working through popular education using drama (Les esclavas) and one growing out of the mass movements around the church and the trade unions which organised mass meetings for women for study and recreation (MOMUPA). A testimony from Francesca in Brazil highlights the critical importance that women's groups based within the trade union movement can have for women.

Claire Ball's article describes a very different way of working with refugee women from the familiar one of seeing them as the recipients of food in refugee camps, images seared on to the minds of most people. She tells the story of a group of refugee women in
Mexico, working together to understand their history and to make sense of their present situation so that they can cope with the very difficult and painful conditions in which they find themselves. It touches on the vast subject of the psychological needs of refugees, and provides an example of how one group of women are tackling their problems together.

The section includes a case study from India, where women have been trained for the more lucrative jobs that are usually done by men. Many women work as building labourers in India, and this project aimed to give them the skills to work as masons and so earn higher wages.

The final example is drawn from Kenya: it is a graphic account of networking at the grassroots with pastoral women. Women were brought together to explore their cultures, their beliefs and myths about themselves; to look at their role in the economy and their place in development. There are other examples of networking in the book, both at the international level and the national level. It is a new and very powerful way for women to work together to explore their problems and also, more importantly, their potential.
Women are the principal collectors and users of water in the rural Third World. Indeed, the collection of water for domestic purposes is almost universally associated with women. Val Curtis in her book on women and the transport of water states: 'Water collection is an activity particularly reserved for women and children; in many countries for a man even to be seen collecting water would bring shame' (Curtis, 1986, p.8).

Yet the trend in much of the Third World has been that where technologies have been introduced they have been male-dominated. In effect a male monopoly of technology has developed which has excluded women. Thus water technologies have often been monopolised by men rather than the principal users. It is important that the water planner manager has a grasp of this so that he/she does not perpetuate the imbalance. This is especially important in water development because the success of any rural Third World water project rests on acceptance and understanding of the technology by the people who are going to use it. Therefore it is important that women are educated about the use and maintenance of the technology, and that they are freed from the widely held self-assumption that such work is somehow above or beyond them. This is not an easy process because women’s access to resources, technology and literature is often restricted by culture, tradition, the attitude of their menfolk, and lower literacy and education levels than men (due to restricted access to school when children).

The exclusion of women from water projects

In many cases women have had little or no involvement in the implementation or planning phases of water projects. Of 18 randomly selected USAID water and sanitation projects in Carloni’s 1973-1985 survey of USAID’s experience with women in development over that period, the results show two things: firstly, that the projects showed a very low level of women’s involvement.
Third World water projects

(a criticism that could be levelled at many aid agencies); secondly, that they shared, with the energy sector, the lowest level of women's involvement of all sectors surveyed. Carloni's report mentions that a strong positive correlation was found between women's level of participation and the achievement of project objectives. Where women were involved, projects were highly successful; where they were not, projects failed to reach their objectives (Carloni, 1987). In this case women became involved in some of the projects, despite not being included in the initial project designs.

Other examples of the failures of water and sanitation projects to achieve objectives, resulting from the non-involvement of women, are numerous. One such was a water and sanitation programme in Tonga; this project, which claimed to be based on 'community involvement' principles, only involved the men. The project initially failed, but when women were involved, success followed (KPP and IDRC, 1985, p.13). In a similar project in Indonesia, women were excluded from the planning of a water scheme but were involved in the implementation (i.e. did the labouring). Here, too, the project failed. In this case the design of the water supply system was unsuitable for the needs and cultural habits of the women (KPP and IDRC, 1985, p.70).

An example from Iran shows the need for the involvement of women in the design of additional washing facilities. In rural Khuzistan, new communal laundry facilities were built with large rectangular sinks which rose to adult waist height. Iranian women, however, traditionally wash clothes in a squatting position, and as a result the new laundry basins were not used (Jahan, 1975).

In South India, a village level maintenance scheme for hand pumps on deep wells was initiated. Two years after the project began, 620 young men had been trained as caretakers. However, problems resulted because the women did not know who the caretakers were; and as the young men themselves did not collect water, they did not know when there were problems to sort out (Yansheng and Elmendorf, 1984).

Development projects can also act directly against the interests of women. In the case of a chicken farming project in Zaire, the project failed to recognise that water was scarce, that a great deal of water would be required, and that it was the women's job to collect the water. Thus the women had several hours of additional water carrying added to their daily duties (von Harder, 1975). This example,
though not directly of a water project, illustrates the pitfalls that a project can encounter if women are not considered, consulted, or involved in the planning.

Where, in the past, water was drawn from an unprotected hole in the ground, it had a low status as did the women who collected it. A water project is more than an operation of installing new facilities; it is, or should be, a consciousness-raising process. If it is not, it will fail. Installations will become dirty, buckets or other parts will be stolen, broken parts will not be repaired, no one will feel responsibility, and the village women will return to their traditional sources for water. This sorry situation has been repeated too many times, purely because communities in general, and women in particular, have not been involved in the planning, implementation, management and maintenance of water facilities intended for their use.

(Extracts from A Planner Manager's Guide to the Socio-Economic Issues Involved in Rural Water Projects in the Third World, Dissertation, Reading University, 1988.)

References


KPP and IDRC: Women's Issues in Water and Sanitation: Attempts to Address an Age-Old Challenge, Ottawa, Canada: Kabalikat NG Familyang Pilipino Philippines, and International Development Research Centre.


Yansheng, M. and Elmendorf, M. (1984), Insights from Field Practice: How women have been and could be involved in water and sanitation at the community level, International Task Force on Women and Water of the Steering Committee for Cooperative Action of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.

Brian Mathew has worked on development projects in Central America, Southern Africa and the Sudan. At present he is an independent consultant based in Somerset.
TURKANA WOMEN: THEIR CONTRIBUTION IN A PASTORALIST SOCIETY

CATHY WATSON

Pastoral development has been one of the priorities for Oxfam’s Kenya programme for several years. If this programme is to be effective, however, an understanding of the traditional social and economic structures, and the changes they are undergoing, is vital. Research, therefore, has an important role to play in pastoral areas. This is particularly true with regard to the status of pastoral women, who have frequently been overlooked in development projects.

In Turkana District, in northwest Kenya, women have on the whole been excluded from development planning (as indeed have Turkana men in many cases), and little is known of their needs and the effect which the many development inputs in the District are having on their lives. A research project was therefore established by Oxfam in September 1986, to examine the social and economic status of a sample of Turkana women. Oxfam provided funding and transport and work began in late 1986, continuing until May 1988.

A sample of 15 women was selected from three areas: Lokitaung settlement; a food-for-work camp; and the pastoral sector, in order to highlight the changes affecting the women and their families, particularly as a consequence of famine or settlement. The topics covered by the research were household economics; food supply; labour; society; and women and the law.

The research methodology involved the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data: three research assistants worked closely with the author throughout. One very important aspect of the work was the good personal relationships between the research team and the women in the sample, which enabled the latter to express their views freely. A second was the close contact the researchers maintained with a development project, the Turkana Water Harvesting Project. Many of the suggestions and recommendations arising from the research have already been incorporated into this project.
In this article the importance of women’s labour in pastoral work and the critical role of women in controlling food supplies are highlighted.

Background

Turkana District is a semi-arid region in the northwest of Kenya covering an area of approximately 60,000 square kilometres. It experiences variable and erratic rainfall, with a high evapotranspiration rate and low humidity. The Turkana people, part of the Nilo-Hamitic Karamojong cluster, first moved into the District from the Ugandan escarpment some 200 years ago (Gulliver, 1951), and now number approximately 200,000. They are by tradition semi-nomadic pastoralists, herding a combination of animals (cattle, goats, sheep, donkeys, and more recently camels), although they have developed other strategies, such as sorghum planting, hunting and fishing.

Although cycles of drought and famine continually affect Turkana pastoralists, the worst crisis in living memory was the famine of 1980-81, called lopiar (‘the sweeping’, since it swept so many families clean of livestock). In response to this crisis, the European Commission, together with the Dutch Government, set up the Turkana Rehabilitation Project in 1981. After an initial phase of famine relief, this project established food-for-work schemes for the many Turkana who were in the famine camps.

The effect of this massive influx of food-for-work maize into the District cannot be underestimated. The economy, which had hitherto been principally pastoral, with a cash system operating in the settlements, was turned upside down, and maize became local currency, with which goats were bought and sold and social networks strengthened. A few family members stayed with the remaining livestock, while as many as possible worked in the food-for-work camps for maize, which they invested in more goats, and which also supported those herding the animals, so that the herds could be strengthened.

The level of food-for-work started to drop in 1985 and continued to decrease through 1986 and 1987, and increasing numbers of people returned to the pastoral sector; although some have been unable to return to pastoralism, because they lack either viable herds or the important social links. They have moved to towns in search of work. Most, however, rejoined their families or relatives.
who had been herding their remaining livestock. In 1988, there are some signs that the Turkana economy is returning to 'normal'; however, it is clear that the famine has left its mark, particularly on the marginal pastoralists, from whom the pastoral sample was selected.

**Women's labour**

In the pastoral sector, the family works hard as a unit, as all the family members are involved in the care of the livestock. In this way they share the workload more or less evenly; the workload lightens considerably in the wet season when herding and watering become less intense. The most arduous tasks for the pastoral women interviewed were building houses and *kraals* (enclosures), and watering the livestock.

In contrast, the food-for-work sample families appeared to work less cohesively as a unit. This is clearly shown in the difference in the workloads of the men and the women, the latter doing over 1000 hours per year more work. Since, in the traditional division of labour in the pastoral sector the men are responsible for herding the livestock, while the women are in charge of the food supply, when there are few or no livestock (as in food-for-work communities for example), some men leave the responsibility of providing for the family completely to their wives. In addition to this burden, women's work in the food-for-work schemes is generally more arduous than that of the men.

This fragmentation of the family unit, which is becoming a feature of some food-for-work communities, is seen clearly in the towns. Domestic labour requirements are on the whole lower in the settlements, so a man rarely provides for more than one woman (his current wife), as her labour is sufficient. Unaccompanied girls or poor women may be employed by wealthier households, to assist in the home: this is an example of the cash economy taking the place of traditional social systems.

The following extracts from case studies of women's days highlight the involvement of women in pastoral work, where men and women work equal amounts of time, and women's increasing workload in food-for-work settlements.
Women in the pastoral sector

Alim’s day (dry season)

Alim rises just before dawn in the early dry season, and sits in her day hut churning milk. This process can take up to an hour, although as the dry season progresses and milk yields decrease Alim does it less frequently.

When the milk processing is completed Alim, with the help of her teenage daughter, goes into the kraal and milks the goats. Alim takes the milk to the day hut, where it is stored, so that it can sour ready for churning in the evening or next morning. She then shares the milk that she churned that morning, among the family members.

When the milk has been consumed, Alim and her elder son release the goats, and the boy sets off with his father to the grazing. Alim’s daughter unties the cow-hides and goatskins from the roof of the night hut and arranges them on the floor of the day hut for sitting on. In the meantime, Alim is helping her younger son and daughter to release the kid goats, and, giving them each a small container of water, she sends them off with the kids.

In the dry season the goats are watered on alternate days. This is a watering day, so Alim and her daughter leave home at around 9.30am, and set off for the well; Alim carrying a large and a small sufuria (metal cooking pot) and her daughter a jerrycan. On the way to the well they join up with the women from a neighbouring home, whose goats will also be watered today.

The women arrive at the well before 10.30, and wait their turn while the previous people water their goats. This is a deep well (15ft), which requires at least three people to lift water from it, so Alim and her daughter team up with their neighbours to water first their own and then their neighbours’ goats. Alim begins work at the bottom of the well, passing the water up over her head to another woman perched above her. After half an hour her daughter takes a turn at the bottom, and Alim sits on the lip of the well tipping the water into her large sufuria from which the goats drink. Alim’s husband and son stand with the goats some way off, and release them to the well a few at a time so that they do not crowd. The younger
son and daughter are on the other side of the riverbed, waiting with the kidgoats, which are to be watered next.

When the watering of the goats is complete, the donkeys of the two families are watered. The women then fill their containers and jerrycan and set off for home. The men and boys have already gone with the goats to find more grazing.

Alim reaches home at around 3.30pm, and rests with her daughter in her day hut. She sleeps for an hour, and then goes out with her axe to chop a new gate for the goats’ *kraal* (the old one is very worn). As this is the dry season the goats do not return home until it is almost dark, by which time Alim has rebuilt the fire, and started to cook some maize she had bought the day before. The kid goats arrive first, and the children sit and drink some water while the elder daughter drives the kids into their *kraal*. When the goats arrive, Alim and her daughter again milk them, while her husband rests and takes some water. The younger children drink from the teat, and then tend the cooking fire, while their older sister arranges the hides on the night hut. When the maize is ready, the family eat together outside the night hut, before settling down to sleep.

The task of herding and watering livestock is both more intense and time consuming in the dry season months and is shared, with gender- and age-segregated tasks, by all the family. Men undertake fewer jobs which last for several hours at a time, while women’s work is made up of many more fragmented tasks. Women are responsible for milking, milk processing, collecting domestic water, cooking and preparing food, building the enclosures, huts and fences at each encampment, collecting wild fruits and firewood and making utensils and leatherwork. Some women are also involved in agricultural work and a little food-for-work, though these patterns of labour vary between families of differing circumstances. Some women have taken up charcoal-making and selling, both non-traditional tasks, in order to make money to buy cereals.

**The Kariwareng food-for-work camp**

**Akal’s day**

Akal’s day begins at dawn, when she rises and, in the wet season, processes the previous evening’s milk, before entering
the *kraal* to milk the family's few goats. (In the dry season she does not process the milk, but gives it to the children to drink fresh.) When the family have drunk the processed milk, Akal helps her two children to dress, and then sends them off to nursery school in the centre of Kaalin. Akal's brother arrives from his home close by to collect the goats, which he will herd during the day with his own.

Akal and her husband, Loresi, set off at about 8am from their home to walk to the food-for-work site, about 6km away, where they are helping to build a sorghum garden. They work until 12.30, and then set off again for home. On the way, Akal gathers branches of dead wood, which she carries home on her head.

The children are already home from nursery school, and are playing with friends nearby, under the eye of a neighbour. Akal cooks some maize meal that she had bought the previous day into porridge, calling the eldest child (a girl of six years old) to come and tend the fire.

After the meal, the family rest a while, and then Loresi goes to visit one of his friends and drink beer. Akal takes her bundle of firewood into the centre of Kaalin to sell to one of the schoolteachers for Ksh2. She then walks to the other side of Kaalin, where her brother-in-law lives. He earns a salary as a school cook, and since it is still near the beginning of the month, Akal hopes that he will not have spent all the previous month's wages. She spends over an hour at his home, talking to his wife and drinking tea, before leaving with a gift of Ksh50. On her way home she calls at the shops and spends Ksh5 on a kilogram of *posho* (maize meal).

When Akal arrives home at 5.30pm, she cleans some maize and puts it in a tin of water, which she places on the rekindled fire. Her eldest child tends the fire, while Akal tidies the home and herds the goats, which have just arrived under the care of her brother, into the *kraal*. This done, she milks them and closes them up for the night.

The data from the Kariwareng food-for-work sample showed some seasonal variations, but these were on the whole less marked than in the pastoral sample, reflecting the latter's greater dependence on livestock. At Kariwareng, the men have a smaller workload than the women, a characteristic of sedentarisation, where the burden of
providing for the family may be placed increasingly on the womenfolk, while the men chat and drink beer in the absence of livestock to herd.

**Women's control of food supply**

A woman is responsible for feeding her husband and children. The control she exercises over the food supply varies with the lifestyle/location. In the pastoral sector, and in the settlements, cash itself is controlled largely by the men. Their wives either request cash to buy food, or ask their husbands to go to the shop for them. Small amounts of money earned by the women (for example from charcoal making or selling skins) are usually spent immediately, even if the husband is not present. The women then report to their husbands on their return how much they earned and what they bought. In such instances, they often buy some tobacco for their menfolk as well as food for the family.

In contrast to cash, most foodstuffs fall directly under the control of the women. This applies equally to purchased cereals, food-for-work, and food gifts. Women are responsible for storing and preparing the food, and also make the decision of what to cook and in what quantities. They control the distribution, serving out the prepared food to their husbands, children and visitors.

Each adult woman in a pastoral home has milking rights over certain goats in the herd. She, or her children, milk these goats, and she processes the milk and distributes it amongst the family: the husband, wife and children all have a separate *akurum* (milk container), in which their allocation of milk is stored in the woman’s day hut. Apart from the children, who may enter and help themselves, no-one touches the *akurums* except the woman. If a man wants milk for himself, or his visitors, he calls his wife to serve him.

Control over livestock products, milk, blood and meat — and purchased food — is largely in the hands of the women, whereas any decisions regarding the stock (slaughtering, sales, purchases) depend ultimately on the men. However, the greater the influence of cash on the household food supply, the greater the men’s power, as is seen clearly in the example of the town women below.

As there are no livestock, a large proportion of the food supply for the town sample is obtained through cash purchases. As described above, cash is controlled on the whole by men. Small amounts earned for firewood or charcoal sales are exchanged
immediately for food, but the women in town explained that if a wife receives a regular salary each month, the husband usually takes it from her, and she has to ask for it back, bit by bit, whenever she wishes to buy food. This causes many quarrels, they claimed, especially if the husband uses his wife's salary (or indeed his own) to buy beer instead. Several of the women present at this discussion said they preferred to live alone for this reason.

This shift of power into the hands of men has other consequences for the women. A woman who is largely dependent on her salaried husband for her income, is dependent on his goodwill to provide sufficient money for her to feed her children. If he is a fair man, there is no problem, but if he is not, and chooses to finish his salary in the bar on the way home, she is powerless to stop him.

Once food is obtained, town women exercise the same control over it as do the pastoral and settlement women, being in charge of the preparation, cooking, and distribution.

The status of women
Pastoral women can, through their husbands, have considerable influence in the home and in the pastoral community outside their own specific areas of responsibility, such as food supply. In the towns, women experience a loss of power: those with husbands or partners have little security or financial power; and those living alone, whilst having full control of their own (usually rather limited) income, have no social power, and lack the means to influence events through their husbands.

Turkana women have also been powerless (as have many Turkana men) in most of the development projects in the area. With the exception of the Turkana Water Harvesting project women have not been considered nor consulted and even those projects geared towards women have been conceived and organised by outsiders.

In addition to failing to transfer power, and consequently encouraging dependency on outside resources, most development projects have completely ignored the social and cultural setting in which they were established. This has meant that traditional knowledge, and in particular traditional institutions, have been overlooked in favour of imported systems and techniques, which are alien to the Turkana. Consequently, the projects' beneficiaries (men and women alike) have not been able — nor have they been encouraged — to take over the development process themselves.
References


Cathy Watson has worked in Turkana for four years doing research firstly for the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) and then for Oxfam. She has a MA in Social Anthropology from Manchester University and is currently Sector Social Scientist in the Agriculture and Fisheries Sector of ITDG.
The involvement of agropastoralist women in livestock programmes

Clare Oxby

There is an increasing realisation that women play an important role in animal production: not only in dairying, but also in the marketing of dairy products, and in a whole range of animal husbandry activities, including the herding and watering of livestock, and caring for sick and young animals. The sexual division of labour, however, varies considerably from society to society: amongst the Twareg of Central Nigeria, for example, milking is seen as a man's job. In agropastoral societies, women may be performing duties related to animal production in addition to much of the agricultural work.

When planning interventions in agropastoral societies, therefore, it is of vital importance to know about the local division of labour; firstly, in order to target programmes to the people who are used to doing the job, and secondly, in order to gauge the impact of the programme on all members of the community, not just the participants. Specifically, we need to ask if women in the community are being expected to take on increased duties in addition to their normal routine of childcare, domestic water and firewood fetching, and, in many cases, animal production and agricultural chores; and are these extra tasks manageable?

There is plenty of rhetoric within non-governmental organisations (NGOs) about the need to involve women in all their programmes, at every level of decision making, and at every stage in the process of programme design and implementation. Some NGOs specifically mention agropastoralist women in this respect but, despite the rhetoric, the impact so far in terms of carrying out interventions is meagre. If agropastoralist women are involved at all, it is usually not in relation to animal production activities, but to other activities, such as primary health care, literacy, and handicrafts. For example, a consultant's report on the involvement of agropastoral women in Oxfam's Affolé Project, Mauritania, proposes project components for women, not in livestock-related production activities but in literacy,
human health, and improved stoves — even though it is clear from the same document that women play an important role in animal husbandry (Oxfam Mauritania, 1988, p.24-27).

The main exception to this is dairy projects; in Western eyes, milking and the processing of milk products is an acceptable, even traditional, occupation for women. This attitude on the part of donors and planners is being reflected in a few African NGO programmes for agropastoralists. For example, ACORD’s Mali programme has involved some women in the Unité Laitière Coopérative de Tin Hama. On the whole, however, such projects involve women as workers rather than decision-makers; the latter are nearly always men:

If the impact of the rhetoric on the type of projects which are being implemented is meagre, the same cannot be said about data collection in connection with NGO programmes. A number of NGOs are attempting to fill their information gap on agropastoralist women by commissioning special studies, with a view to using the findings in the planning of a further phase of programme activities: Mali: ACORD programme (ACORD, 1987); Sudan: ACORD Red Sea Hills Programme (McEwan, 1988); Kenya: Oxfam and ITDG Turkana Waterharvesting Project (Watson, 1988); and Mauritania: Oxfam Affolé programme (Oxfam Mauritania 1988).

In addition, Oxfam’s Gender and Development Unit (GADU) has issued several articles by Oxfam staff on agropastoralist women in a number of the countries in which Oxfam operates: Erigavo, Somalia (Sulekha Ibrahim, 1987a; 1987b); Central Somalia (Graham, 1988); Turkana, Kenya (Watson, 1987; 1989); and Eritrea (Burgess, 1987). ACORD organised a workshop on Pastoral Systems and Social Change in Mogadishu in October 1988 at which two relevant papers were presented: one on the situation of ex-herder women in settled areas of Somalia (Fouzia Mohamed Musse, 1988); and the other on women’s role in the Somali pastoral economy and related development issues (Amina H Adan, 1988).

There is thus increasing evidence that in agropastoral societies, women may be performing duties related to animal production, in addition to much of the agricultural work. Moreover, the by-products from their agricultural work may provide valuable nutritional supplements for the household animals. While not implying that we have sufficient information on such issues, this is one gap which is beginning to be filled.
The situation with regard to involving women in the subsequent processes of project planning and implementation, however, is far from satisfactory. One explanation is the inevitable time-lag between the data collection stage and the planning and implementation stages; and one can only hope that the next generation of livestock projects will reflect more closely, and build upon, knowledge of the division of labour operating in these societies which has now been collected. Another reason is the cultural constraints operating on many individual donors and planners. Although they may hold the most open-minded and radical views on other subjects, some people have, at the same time, highly unrealistic and stereotyped ideas on what women's role in society is and should be. They react in a deeply conservative and negative way when it comes to absorbing and acting on the results of recent research about women's roles in agriculture and animal husbandry, proposing and implementing improvements to women's lives, or even merely counteracting the damaging impact on women of recent changes in society.

One way to combat this is to create or strengthen special units (e.g. Oxfam's Gender & Development Unit) or special posts (e.g. ACORD's Women in Development Officer) at the NGO headquarters, and to ensure that the organisation gives them wide support in translating the results of research on women's roles in agricultural production into project activities for women. This means encouraging such staff to comment on projects which do not have a special women's component, not just on those which do; for it is precisely in the former that gender issues may have been overlooked.

Following are brief descriptions of two rare NGO projects which have attempted to involve women in animal production activities. Both are restocking projects, and further project details are available in the full reports.

**Kenya: Restocking projects (Wajir, Isiolo, Turkana and Samburu Districts) Oxfam**

In Wajir, the restocked families were all headed by women; either widows or women whose husbands could not support them. In Isiolo, 8 of the 36 beneficiaries were women heads of household. In addition, there was a stipulation that each married man receiving stock would brand 10 for his wife or wives, who would retain this
share in the event of divorce (this was not enforced by project staff). In Turkana District, 14 out of 50 beneficiaries were women; and in Samburu District, 17 out of 53 were women (10 of these were actually Turkana women, but living in Samburu District). In other words, about a quarter of beneficiaries were women in Isiolo and Turkana, and about a third in Samburu.

Although people said how well the restocked women were doing, in fact the flock performance figures do not show any statistically valid difference between the restocked men and the restocked women. The projects' evaluator explains this attitude to women’s performance as surprise that women are performing well at all. She does point out that many women are in a more vulnerable social and economic position than men, particularly women who find themselves without a husband for a variety of reasons.

Mali: Programme d’apui aux actions associatives et coopératives (Timbuktu and Gao Regions) ACORD

The latest phase of this programme is targeting women for some of the restocking activities. In Gourma Rharous Cercle, Timbuktu Region, 30 of the 85 families restocked by September 1988 were female-headed. In Gao Region, there are separate restocking initiatives for men and for women; women beneficiaries are members of already existing women’s groups in Menaka Cercle and in Bourem Cercle. So far, two women’s groups in each district have been allocated small stock, together with a fund to contribute towards animal health and herding costs (ACORD 1988). Restocking is carried out in these projects in a rather different way from most other restocking projects, since the animals remain in a collective herd until they are fully repaid, rather than being transferred to the beneficiary’s herd at the time the loan is agreed. ACORD has also taken the important step of recruiting a local coordinator of all the project components affecting women, in both regions where the programme is operating.

Recommendations

There is a continuing need for more data on the role of women in animal husbandry in specific societies and regions, and the impact of programmes on the community as a whole, not just the participants. For example, are some responsibilities in animal husbandry being taken away from women as a result of project
activities directed towards men? We are starting to get some of this data, but the need is still great.

A distinction needs to be made between women who are dependents in households, as wives, daughters, mothers, or other relatives, and women who are heads of households. They are likely to have different roles in animal husbandry, and to need different types of support from NGOs. Female-headed households are becoming increasingly common, and especially so in some of the deprived communities in which NGOs find themselves working; men may be absent for long periods, or permanently, when they take up paid employment in the towns or when they are involved in fighting civil wars. Refugee camps are notorious for the proportion of female-headed households; husbands and fathers may be away tending livestock, on paid labour elsewhere, fighting, or dead. In Sablaale Settlement Scheme, Sablaale District, Somalia, for example, 25 per cent of households are female-headed. In such circumstances, women may be taking on extra responsibilities in animal husbandry, and this should be taken into account when planning livestock programmes.

The water-harvesting project, Turkana District, Kenya (Oxfam and ITDG) aimed to improve local techniques of rainfed cultivation through the construction of earthworks with draught animals. Initially, the project worked with men only, but after realising that women were in a majority in the food-for-work groups from which participants were recruited, the balance was redressed; by 1987, the majority of those selected for training in water-harvesting were women. The work of women was no longer limited to earth-moving, but included also surveying and construction control; and a quarter of the project staff were women (Cullis, 1987:6).

It makes sense to focus project activities for women around the more productive activities in which they are already involved. This should apply whether women are taking major herd management decisions as female heads of households, or helping with subsidiary tasks such as the care of young or sick animals. Supporting their contribution to animal husbandry will probably do more to revive the local economy than teaching new skills such as embroidery or even horticulture. Furthermore, it is often inappropriate to direct such activities as literacy, human health and hygiene, and family planning, exclusively to women: men may also be involved in taking decisions about such subjects and therefore the activities
should in many cases be directed to men as well. All too often such activities are seen as the obvious means for NGOs to support women, whilst more productive activities are reserved for work with men. The time has come for a change, in response to the actual roles of men and women.

When introducing new technology in animal husbandry, for example in animal health or dairy processing, it is important to teach women as well as men, so that women do not end up being excluded from such activities, or merely providing the labour while the men take the decisions. Women should be involved, where appropriate, in decision making and managerial work.

The phrase 'cultural constraints' is often used as an excuse for not directing project activities towards women. One should ask what are the specific cultural constraints in the community in question and, at the very least, try to tackle them. One should also remember that many African societies are undergoing profound changes at the moment, including cultural changes, and attitudes to women's roles may also be changing. One should also ask who precisely feels these constraints, in order to make an appropriate response: is it all of the community, or is it particular individuals? Could it be some of the project personnel?

Depending on what exactly the problem is, and who feels it, different measures may be adopted. Would special women's projects be more acceptable than trying to involve women side by side with men? Would recruiting female project staff help? Would clearer messages to men about proposed activities with women help? Would a concentration on what are locally considered to be subsidiary animal husbandry activities rather than major herd management activities make a women's livestock programme less threatening? Or a concentration on small stock rather than large stock? The programme should be flexible enough to adapt to the particular local situation.

Existing women's groups may be used as an institutional channel for project activities with women. This is the approach that has been taken recently by ACORD in their Mali programme, so far successfully. It is also possible that ACORD's Sablaale Settlement Scheme for agropastoralists in Somalia, may be able to work through established groups. Surveys have pinpointed two types of groups which may be of relevance for future programme design: labour groups for agricultural operations, and savings groups to
pool money (Spooner, 1989; El Bushra 1986).

Traditional women's livestock inheritance mechanisms may be used as a model for stock loans to women. In many livestock-keeping communities, women may hold stock in their own names, and pass the progeny down to their children. Some of these forms of ownership and inheritance have been eroded in the past few decades, as a result of the emphasis put on 'Western', male-dominant patterns. Even if these female-focused institutions are no longer operating, members of the community are likely to remember them. The Twareg are familiar with such a form of matrilineal inheritance of livestock, which was widespread until recently, and is still practised to a limited extent in some communities to this day. It is known by different names in different Twareg communities: one name is *akh-idderan* or 'living milk' (Oxby, 1987). In the area where ACORD is operating in Mali, this same institution is known as *ebatekh* (reported by Halatine, 1989). ACORD is considering this inheritance mechanism with a view to using it as a model for their women's restocking programme (Roche, 1989).

References

ACORD (1987), 'Note sur le volet d'appui à des groupements féminins dans le domaine du petit élevage', Annexe III of the Mali programme's 1987 Annual Report (Gao Region).


Roche, C. (1989), 'Note on ACORD's experience of the role of livestock within the household: lessons from the Mali programme', May 1989, Memo to ITDG.


Acknowledgements

Thanks to the following, who made valuable comments on an earlier draft: Fatimata Oualet Halatine, Co-ordinator of the Women in Development component of ACORD’s programmes in the Timbuktu and Gao Regions, Mali; Judy El Bushra, ACORD’s Women in Development Co-ordinator, London; and Nicky May, Oxfam Country Representative, Kenya.

This paper is an extract from the monograph ‘African livestock-keepers in recurrent crisis. Policy issues arising from the NGO response’, prepared for ACORD (Francis House, Francis Street, London SW1P 1DQ) and published by the International Institute for Environment and Development, September 1989. (French version available shortly.)

Claire Oxby is a freelance development anthropologist, and a member of the Africa Committee at Oxfam.
WOMEN AND HEALTH IN ERITREA

DORIS BURGESS

It is no simple task to initiate a health service when the majority of the population is scattered, rural, and impoverished. Certainly, the isolation imposed by a 29-year-old war is immobilising; families have been separated, formal education interrupted, and the majority of the population has been displaced. War has become almost 'normal' — the core around which everything else revolves: it is in this context that women's worth is being reassessed.

The long-term effects of war and recurring drought leading to famine could have deterred any initiatives to improve the health of women in Eritrea, yet paradoxically the war seems rather to have focused energies and encouraged substantial progress in both health care and the position of women. For the Eritreans, it seems that war has created an agenda for mobilising the society around a recognition of the essential equality and value of human lives. The odds against survival and the primary need to keep up societal strength and numbers have generated the very conditions from which a system for meeting basic human needs can spring, reversing the cycles of poverty and degradation imposed by the war.

How has it been possible for the Eritreans to begin the slow process of developing the potential of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society? One, moreover, in which not only the needs of the people are taken into account but an overall 'strategy' addressing those needs is formulated? Because of the necessity of winning the support of the people, grassroots-based initiatives have been developed in which health and education campaigns have become vital ingredients. The war and the consequent need for (wo)man power have provided the vital impetus for the empowerment of women themselves.

The initial advances in health care have been in the treatment of the many thousands of war injuries: burns from napalm, the devastating effects of cluster bombs, the loss of limbs, sight and hearing — all in a society that was already malnourished and suffering from the long-term effects of disease. The list of obstacles to developing health care and services were endless, yet out of this
situation is emerging a thoughtful, integrated system which encompasses health and education geared to harness the potential of the people. It is as if the momentum and adversity of war have become the engine for building a meaningful and accessible health service.

Background

Eritrea is divided into eight provinces: Sahel, Senhit, Barka, Dankalla, Hamasien, Seraie, Semhar and Akele Guzai. The latter four are mainly highland areas while the first four comprise midland and lowland areas that are peopled by agropastoralists. The current (1987) survey gives a total rural population of around 2,500,000 of whom perhaps 60 per cent are agriculturalists who mainly live in the highlands, 30 per cent agropastoralists and less than 10 per cent pastoralists, living in the lowlands.

Briefly, the agriculturalists' livelihood depends primarily on the cultivation of crops; livestock are sometimes kept and oxen are used for ploughing. For the agropastoral people, crops together with livestock — including often camels, goats and sheep as well as cattle — are both essential to their livelihood. For the pastoralists, camels, cattle, sheep and goats are the primary means of livelihood, yielding milk which is also exchanged for grain; although occasionally some crops are grown.

'Conditions differ between lowlands and highlands. The lowland areas are inhabited by pastoralists who travel with their herds of camels, cattle, goats or sheep usually carrying all their belongings with them; women and children sleep in tents while men sleep outside... in some areas 80 per cent of the population have malaria. Families and livestock use the same water sources, often badly contaminated. The staple food is a porridge made from sorghum and salt, a little milk added by the better off.. vegetables are rarely included. The men eat first; the women and children eat what is left and when food becomes scarce, they are inevitably the first to suffer.'

'In the highlands, people live in settled villages of mainly subsistence farmers. Their diet is largely a fermented bread made from local grains. Vegetables and fruit are unavailable except near towns and irrigation schemes.'
Mobilisation of women

Most of the population of one million in the three largely liberated provinces are either pastoralists or agropastoralists and are Muslim. In each of the twelve villages which I visited in the Sahel, Barka and Senhit provinces and which form the focus of this article, there were a minimum of two cadres (political workers) in each, with special responsibility for coordinating activities amongst the women with the Department of Mass Administration. Recently, however, cadres responsible for women’s activities have been placed directly under the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEWmn). The cadres, usually Christian and from the highlands, are sometimes considered ‘foreigners’ in these localities and this makes the role of mobilisation and popular education often difficult, but it is crucial to the expansion of health care and health education. The programme of ‘people’s participation’ is quite sophisticated, efficient and flexible and it is beginning to overcome the cultural gap between lowland and highland people; in each area traditions and cultures are studied so as not to offend local customs.

There are normally three steps taken within the guidelines for ‘popular participation’ — the process involving people in the democratic process. The first step involves the creation of People’s Committees. These are generally formed on the initiative of the cadre sent to the area, but elected by the community, using customary methods, and hence are usually made up only of men. This confirms the position of local notables. At this stage, discussion about the participation of women usually goes on at the same time, but quite separately from the men’s group and always with a woman cadre, usually meeting with women in their own homes. At first, in almost all cases it is the women themselves who are the most reluctant to step outside their cultural traditions, being seen very much as chattels to both their husband and children, and this initial contact with them is often the most difficult.

In one village, for instance, it took six years to get from the initial stage of a People’s Committee on to the next one of the Challenge Committee. At this stage, villagers are encouraged to choose representatives from different levels of wealth and poverty, not just the traditionally influential. It is only at this point that women begin their direct participation with men in organising their villages. Throughout the process, the cadres are present to suggest what is possible, what support they can give and what the prospects are for
overall development. Discussions around the need for and establishment of village clinics start at this stage, along with the education of women and children, which is particularly important in reducing the maternal and infant mortality rate. This constitutes the beginning of the village health programme.

Initially, the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) send their own cadres into the villages; it is at the second stage that village cadres are elected and selected with the support of the EPLF. According to the NUEWmn, this is done on a regular basis, selecting women from various villages and districts. Courses are then held in political education, village administration, health care, and elementary agriculture; leadership and decision-making skills are also taught before the women return to their home areas. Priorities initially are education and ‘consciousness-raising’.

When the cadres feel that the community as a whole is ready to administer the village themselves, they move them on to the final stage, the People’s Assembly. According to Kaddija Ahmed, an elected member and organiser for the NUEWmn, it took four years to convince the men who made up the People’s Committee that women were to be ‘allowed’ to attend the Challenge Committee and another two years for women to finally become part of the ‘government’. This was the culmination, Kaddija said, of years of gentle persuasion, consciousness-raising, criticism and self-criticism, beginning with the women themselves who, at the outset, were extremely opposed to any outside interference: ‘women should stay at home and look after their husbands and children’. But with the introduction of schools and clinics into the region, and during the process of educating the women — whose very customs made them the most disadvantaged — problems of resistance to change began to diminish slightly. Women still get shouted down by men during meetings, but at least they have the beginnings of self-confidence and the support of the women’s association to start to answer back and not be silenced: to feel their equality.

In the People’s Assembly, rich, middle and poor peasants are represented separately; the latter two groups are predominant so that their interests will come to the fore in the land reform programme which is introduced only at this third stage. The procedures for ‘people’s participation’ are ultimately geared to a land reform programme designed to give more equitable access to land and also to provide the first stepping stone to improved
agricultural practices and nutrition. Between 1976-1981 there was land reform in about 10 per cent of villages, affecting about 50,000 people. Of these, about a quarter received land for the first time; a tenth of these were women who had never had land of their own: 'if women are to be free they must be economically independent'.

The programme for women's self-reliance

It is within this third stage structure of the People's Assembly that women generally begin to play an increasing role. Nevertheless, as of January 1989, the proportion of women in these assemblies was still only 30 per cent.

In 1987 at the EPLF's Second Congress, eight women were elected to the Central Committee. This was no mere token gesture but had evolved out of the democratic process of 'nominations' and 'elections' taking place in the grassroots-based People's Assemblies. Given this opening, women have begun to take advantage of the commitment by the male leaders to enable women to participate fully, but as they themselves admit, they still have a lot of work to do. Being literate is not a pre-condition to being elected or participating in village organisation; women are helped to develop literacy skills while working within this structure. The political processes have enabled women to become involved in many ways: to learn the alphabet, have access to medical facilities and participate in the running of their village. But this hasn't happened overnight and in many areas is still in the embryonic stage.

Changes in the (self)-organisation of the village community and the awakening of the women within the village represent part of a broad, new emphasis on women. Prior to 1970, women in Eritrea were not organised in any formal sense. But as the war escalated in 1970-1974, a few women started to join the military, initially washing clothes or providing food for the fighters. Between 1976 and 1978 the Eritrean Women's Association was formed and in 1979 women began to organise on a national level and the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEWmn) was set up.

In 1984 the NUEWmn produced a 30-page document on 'Study and Research on Women'. The introduction states that 'the goal of this study is to unearth and know properly the development of Eritrean society and the past and present social and economic condition of women so as to be able to place the current struggle of the founding of a new society on a scientific level'. There then
follows the list of topics specifically on the agenda for research: the birth of a female and her upbringing; marital relations — betrothal, marriage, wedlock, pregnancy and delivery, rearing a child, divorce; production (work in and out of the home); handicrafts, religion, inheritance; death; the struggle waged by women going back to the Italian occupation of Eritrea during the Second World War. This extraordinary document is a clear example of the Eritrean women now setting their own agenda.

The consequences of the breaking down of the feudal structure, which had hampered the participation of all the people, include the growth of self-reliance, especially for women. The political processes together with the grassroots-based programmes have enabled many women to reconsider their worth. The responsibilities they are given by their peers to deal with the day to day running of their villages and to participate on a more equal footing with men, have been a crucial factor in rural mobilisation.

A springboard central to much of this activity has been the literacy campaign — for both men and women, separately to begin with — which can lead to advances in social services such as health care schemes. Because of the diversity of Eritrea’s eight ethnic groups and geographical development, this process has been very uneven, reflecting the different needs of women from region to region.

**Health**

The health service that the Eritreans inherited was set up by the Italians in 1889 when, as Basil Davidson says, ‘there was a European scramble for African colonies’. The Italians arrived and in 1892 drew up boundaries for what is now Eritrea, with the Emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik, who was then expanding his domain. The Italians wanted to develop the fertile areas for distribution to the newly-arrived settlers, using Eritreans as a cheap source of labour. They also built and controlled the ports, manufacturing, roads, railways and shipping. To service the increasing numbers of Italians, a health service was begun to protect the newly arrived from ‘tropical diseases’ but to provide only a limited service to ‘indigenous’ populations — ostensibly so disease would not be spread into Italian households. A hospital was built in Asmara and several small district hospitals and dispensaries were established in Italian settlements.

In 1941, the British ousted the 60,000 resident Italians; during
Case studies

their 50 years in the country, virtually no training had been given. The emphasis had been on the Eritreans learning Italian, Italian history and the basics of arithmetic. The health service that existed was staffed by Italians and closed when they left. With the arrival of the British as a transitional occupying force, only a few Italians remained to continue the day to day administration of Eritrea.

During the 22 years of Haile Selassie’s over-rule, medical facilities for the Eritreans disintegrated amidst military atrocities. The health facilities were not servicing the rural civilian population but were confined to the cities and expensive private practices, supported by various aid programmes and staffed by foreigners — inaccessible to all but the privileged. The military takeover by Haile Mariam Mengistu in 1974 eventually diverted resources into a massive military campaign; the hospital staff changed and the emphasis on the surgical services increased to handle battlefront casualties. The exploitation of the rural population by successive forces left the Eritreans with the massive task of building a viable public health programme with their mobile teams.

The primary health care programme in Eritrea began in 1974 with an emphasis on the well-being of the rural population rather than on military injuries: it was a ‘needs-based’ health care programme. The aims were: promotion of proper nutrition; provision of adequate and safe water supplies and basic sanitation; promotion of mother and child health (MCH) activities including family planning and immunisation; provision of health education and curative services; and control of endemic diseases. The emphasis was clearly preventive rather than just curative. To this end much energy has also been devoted to feeding people during the successive famines that have occurred since 1974.

According to Dr Nerayo Teklemichael, Director of the Eritrean Public Health Programme, ‘health planners in Eritrea have come out with a scheme that is considered appropriate for the prevailing situation: Community Health Service (CHS) for the village; Health Station (HS) for the sub-district and Health Centre (HC) for the district’. These units are backed up by regional hospitals and the central hospital at Orota where all the data is collected and assembled from outlying units. This ‘pyramidal’ structure is at its broadest in the least accessible areas with 40 mobile health units, hundreds of community clinics, 45 health stations (15 in 1986), 21 health centres and 25 regional hospitals.
Women and health in Eritrea

The main hospital is at Orotta; mostly built underground and into the rocky hillsides. It has the capacity to treat 1200 patients. While there I observed and photographed a thyroidectomy, intricate brain surgery for the removal of a bullet and an operation on a 45-year-old man who had walked all the way from Sudan to have his varicose veins removed. There are facilities to carry out reconstruction surgery, operating theatres built out of shipping containers, teaching facilities with increasing use of audio-visual aids, the planning of a ‘herbal remedy’ garden, a solar-powered blood bank, laboratories for making ointments, infusions and tablets, and a mother and baby unit.

The Health Stations are units which aim to reach about ten villages or about 10,000 people. Each one would be staffed by four health workers including a laboratory technician.

At the district level, the Health Centres would serve 50 villages and be staffed by 15-20 people, including two or three nurses. They would deal with ante-natal, post-natal, and delivery services as well as immunisation and health education programmes.

This health care does not rely solely on the western pharmaceutical industry for basic drugs. The Eritreans are manufacturing over forty types of analgesics, vitamins, antibiotics, antimalarial tablets, anti-tuberculosis, anti-intestinal parasites, vitamins, syrups and IV fluids. There is also a sanitary towel factory. Dr Nerayo goes on to say:

'Traditional medical practitioners could be the main competitors to proper PHC service... this does not seem to be the case in Eritrea... at present traditional medicine is widely practised by both the people and healers. However, it is recognised that there are some harmful practices and it is the policy of the Department of Health to identify the useful and harmful and to develop the useful and integrate them into the comprehensive health service. Re-training traditional birth attendants (TBAs) is a positive and practical example.'

By January 1987 there were about 309 TBAs, and the administration of their role is being increased to keep pace with the Eritrea Public Health Programme. Women are selected from their villages to train to be TBAs; the qualities being looked for are good health, energy, experience and the trust of the village. The number in each teaching group is 11 and classes are conducted in an informal manner.
Case studies

Usually classes take place in the morning; the afternoon sessions are usually in the form of a tutor 'observing' the women discussing what they had learned in the morning. The course runs for five weeks and during this time some sessions are used to re-educate older midwives on 'inappropriate practices'. Because many of the women are not literate, they use visual teaching aids, for instance, in teaching anatomy. Hygiene and nutrition are also part of the course. They learn how to detect anaemia by looking at the eye, nails and gums. During this period, continual checks are made on their progress by the 'barefoot' midwife or doctor.

Since 1979, reports and records have been kept and are now designed in such a way that even illiterate women can document the sex of a child, and whether it be healthy or stillborn. There is a statistical increase in the birth rate, which might be due to more pastoral women giving birth in clinics or under the care of TBAs. Monthly reports of all births are sent to the Central Hospital at Orotta. The maternal mortality rate is dropping but the infant mortality rate is the same as it was in 1984, due to gastro-intestinal infections, malaria and pneumonia as well as malnutrition.

Concluding comments
Within the structure of the PHC programme, Dr Nerayo discusses the target population that should benefit the most:

'It is generally accepted that children and women are the most vulnerable groups in any community and much more so in the developing world... in the case of women the most important step is to institute basic services of delivery and essential ante-natal and post-natal care. For children, revolutionary changes in health status could easily be realised if the six killing diseases of childhood are controlled by a vaccination programme.'

References

Food and Agricultural Production Study (1988), University of Leeds.


EPLF, National Democratic Programme.

Doris Burgess has spent ten years in Africa and has worked as a consultant for Oxfam and ACORD. She is a writer and editor and is currently Managing Editor of the Review of African Political Economy.
THE POVERTY OF INCOME GENERATION: A CRITIQUE OF WOMEN'S HANDICRAFT SCHEMES IN INDIA

LINDA C. MAYOUX

Over the past ten years Indian Government pronouncements have expressed a substantial change in attitude towards women's employment policy. Particularly in the last two Five Year Plans, the proposals are quite ambitious: measures include the modernisation of industries preferred by women, the promotion of self-employment through expanded credit and training schemes, and the breaking down of barriers to women entering new occupations through special training facilities. Nevertheless, women are still largely ignored in general development programmes. In practice, employment development for women has been mainly limited to 'income generation' in handicrafts and cottage industries through encouragement of self-employment or various types of small-scale organisation.

The aim of the research on which this article is based was to investigate a number of issues involved in these types of income generation schemes in the context of one particular area: Bolpur and Ilambazar Thanas in West Bengal. The schemes have largely failed in this area as elsewhere. The reasons for the failure were examined; in particular whether or not it was because of problems of design and/or administration of the programmes (which could be rectified), or a result of the socio-economic system in which the programmes were implemented (not soluble by changes in the schemes). Did the schemes have a positive effect on the position of the women involved? Possible solutions to some of the problems and the implications of the research for development programmes for women are discussed. Although the article only discusses research in India, other research has indicated that these schemes and problems are by no means unique and some of the solutions proposed may be applicable elsewhere.
A story of failure

The area was chosen firstly because it has a long history of handicraft development and rural extension. It is a popular tourist spot because of its association with the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, and there is a flourishing and growing market for handicrafts. Secondly, previous research in the area indicated that unemployment and underemployment here are severe problems for women, as in the rest of India. There are few industries in the area apart from handicrafts. The economy is mainly agricultural, depending on monocropped rice cultivation.

There have been many attempts to develop handicrafts for women, going back to the 1920s. These have included training courses, bank credit and the setting up of women's organisations.

As in many other parts of India, there has been little attempt to diversify the types of training available to women, despite the stress on this in the Five Year Plans and other official policy statements. Training courses aimed specifically at women are in skills such as bag weaving, tailoring, and embroidery which are seen as particularly 'female' skills. Women also take part in mixed-sex courses in weaving, bamboowork, leatherwork, batik and other handicrafts. A number of courses are also run in villages at the request of women's organisations, including papad-making, blockprinting, hobbyloom and handloom weaving. There are in fact ample opportunities in the area for women to get training within a narrow range of handicrafts, provided they can either attend the centres or apply for training in their village through a women's organisation. A total of 146 out of a possible 618 trainees on four of the main courses were interviewed. Only 12 of them were found to be working in handicraft production after training.

Bank credit is provided under two all-India schemes — the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and the Differentiated Rate of Interest Scheme (DRI) — which were introduced to enable the poor, both men and women, to get subsidised or low-interest loans for productive purposes. A number of women have obtained credit for handicrafts and livestock under these schemes. Loans are also given by some of the governmental and non-governmental organisations after training or as part of setting up women's organisations in the area. Out of a total of 205 IRDP and DRI credit beneficiaries on lists supplied by the banks, 100 were interviewed, only 10 of whom were found to be repaying the
loans and working in the industry for which they received the loan.

Some women’s organisations elsewhere in India, of which the Self-Employed Women’s Association in Ahmedabad (SEWA), Working Women’s Forum and Annapurna Mandal are the most publicised, have been reasonably successful in mobilising women and, to some extent, raising their income. In the area studied, however, there were no innovative organisations of this type at the time of the research. Instead, they were of the standard sort found in the rest of India:

- Multipurpose small village organisations mostly dependent on the voluntary work of their members and operating with very low funds. Most of these have at some time tried income generating schemes and many have arranged training.
- Co-operatives set up after training.
- Larger organisations which are only concerned with handicraft production.

There were a total of 43 women’s organisations in the area, though a number of others had failed to survive for more than a very short time. Apart from one hobbyloom co-operative and two embroidery production organisations, none of them led to any sustained economic activity. The only successful organisations provided women with reasonably regular employment but at low wages (Rs50-100 a month or Rs2.50-3.00 a day). Although these organisations had received government funding, they differed very little, if at all, from private establishments in the same industries in terms of pay and employment.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the schemes have largely failed. The sample of trainees and credit beneficiaries was limited because many of them had moved, married or addresses were incorrect. A lot of time was, however, spent tracing beneficiaries who had been said to be working. Although it is probable that of those not interviewed some were working, they would have been picked up in the course of the rest of the research if the numbers had been significant.

There were 35 successful loan and training beneficiaries. The majority were involved in tailoring and bamboowork, most of whom reported earning Rs50-150 per month on average and five over Rs250 a month. All those with the highest levels of income had
been very poor prior to receiving the facilities and the schemes had obviously been of great help to them. These few cases indicate that poor women are capable of using credit and training of certain kinds for self-employment. The policy implications of this are discussed in more detail in the final section.

**Reasons for failure: socio-economic structure or bad planning?**

The failure of these types of scheme is not unique to this particular area. Self-employment schemes in handicraft and small-scale industry have had limited success for men as well as women. One must therefore ask whether the schemes are a complete waste of resources and should be abandoned to enable funds to be spent on some other approach, or whether their rates of success could be improved by certain changes.

It was often asserted at the local level that the problem was lack of funding and resources. However, although, as with most poverty alleviation schemes, the amount of resources involved is inadequate to the scale of need, amounts were not negligible. Expenditure on training was quite substantial, as was expenditure on credit, given the high levels of debt outstanding, and on some of the women’s organisations. Greater resources are certainly needed for women’s programmes and poverty alleviation schemes but it is not necessarily the case that merely providing more resources will improve the situation.

The failures were attributed by the administration to two main factors in the wider socio-economic structure and therefore not amenable to change. The position of women was seen to impose constraints on the schemes, and the nature of the particular handicrafts being developed — and indeed of handicraft development in general — was seen as uneconomic because of lack of markets. There was, however, no explanation of why, if this was the case, these particular schemes were being continued. On further investigation, neither of these two factors was found to be a major obstacle.

**Women’s position**

As in the rest of India, most of the bureaucrats in charge of the design and implementation of income generation schemes at the local level are upper-caste, upper/middle-class, urban men. The few
women involved also come from this background. They design the schemes based on two main assumptions about women's needs: firstly, they aim at work which can be carried on in the home because it is assumed that women are subject to restrictions on their movements outside the home. Secondly, income earning is seen as only a part, and often only a minor part, of women's activities. The assumption here is that women have to spend most of their time in unpaid work for the family, and also that there is a male wage which is more important to the family, and hence to women, than the female wage.

These perceived social factors make outworking in handicrafts appear the only viable employment for women, but are also seen as constraining their ability or their need to earn more than a minimal income. In consequence, women's schemes were often expected to fail. Women are indisputably disadvantaged in many ways, because of discrimination in the labour market and the family as well as by the bureaucracy. This certainly affects their earning ability, particularly because of their lack of experience of marketing and of the world outside their village or particular urban area. However, both the above assumptions were found to be out of date, and suffering from middle-class and Hindu upper-caste bias.

Restrictions on women's movements outside the home are changing rapidly. Even in the past, Bengali women have played an active role in grassroots political activity, which led them to breach the norms of seclusion. In any case, the restrictions do not affect all women equally and have always tended to be less stringently observed, from necessity, by lower caste and tribal women and the poor, particularly older women, widows and divorced, or abandoned women in upper-caste and Muslim groups.

More recently a number of factors have led even undistressed upper-caste and Muslim women to question the traditional restrictions. Firstly, the increase in female education, particularly as much Bengali literature deals with various aspects of women's oppression, has led the best educated families to change some of the norms. Secondly, the increase in dowry payments has meant that there are a number of women (e.g. in families where the father is dead or disabled, or where there are many girls) whose families are not able to afford a traditional arranged marriage. This leads to an increase in love marriages, and also to certain women needing to find full-time employment to support themselves, and in some
cases their families as well. These women are often leaders of change in their village. Thirdly, the extension of village bus services has been fully exploited by women of all ages to visit relatives, for other traditionally sanctioned activities, and for newer leisure pursuits. Fourthly, the Communist and other political parties have increasingly mobilised women for fund-raising and other activities and some women organisers have now begun to question their traditional role within the parties and in society in general. Over the past ten years the pace of change has gathered momentum.

The amount of unpaid work for the family is also very variable, depending on a woman's marital and social status, the number, age and sex of her children, and her family's economic status. Although women in all social status groups have to perform 'core household duties' — childcare, fetching water, cooking, washing, cleaning and mending — the amount of time needed is very variable, depending on the above factors and also the availability of resources. Landless Muslim women, for instance, generally only cook once a day because they have to save fuel, and the time required for their other tasks also varies. Women in small cultivator families, particularly from the lower caste and tribal groups, are overworked and perform tasks in cultivation, etc., which are an integral part of family production. These women do need part-time work. Landless women, however, have fewer tasks which cannot be substituted for if other opportunities are available. Even in the case of lower caste and tribal women, although their many gathering activities are essential to family survival when income is low or non-existent, many of the items collected, e.g. vegetables and fuel, can be substituted by purchased goods if the income is available. What these women need is full-time work at adequate levels of pay.

It was possible to identify four possible target groups of poor women whose needs differed, as summarised below. The only group for which the assumptions about women's need for part-time work held good was women in poor cultivator families where there was a male household head and a shortage of female labour, or where there were very young children. In no case were constraints on women's movements outside the home important, although women's lack of experience was a more significant difficulty.
The four groups were:

Educated women from poorer households. Some of these women are trying to support their families where the father is ill or dead. Many are unlikely to be able to marry because there is not enough money for a dowry and they are not able to secure well-paid professional employment but are available for any non-manual work in or outside the village.

Landless women from upper-caste and Muslim households. These women have little housework and few traditional means of employment. They also have a number of handicraft skills. They could take full-time non-manual work outside the home.

Landless women from scheduled-caste and tribal households. These women would need manual or non-manual work to give a higher income than the work they are already doing, or employment at times of the year when other work is not available, particularly February to June and August to October.

Women from poorer cultivator households in all groups. This is the only group where the main demand is for part-time work in the home. Even in this group, full-time work outside the home can be taken by women from joint families or where there is another relative to do the main housework.

Because of the assumptions made in the design of the schemes, and the lack of seriousness in their implementation they have failed to involve those women most able and motivated to use the facilities for production, i.e. landless women. The women from the poorest groups were the most likely to use both training and credit for production. Of the twelve trainees who were working, ten were landless and levels of outstanding debt were lowest for landless women.

The numbers of landless and non-upper caste women in the schemes were disproportionately low. The IRDP and DRI credit schemes and a Block Development Office (government rural development organisation) tailoring course were the only schemes explicitly targeted at the poor. Only a third of all trainees were landless, and even in the tailoring course less than half were from the poorest group. In the credit schemes only half of beneficiaries were from the landless or low-income urban families. Only a
quarter of women’s organisation members covered by the research were landless, although there was some variation between organisations. The majority of beneficiaries of all the schemes were from the upper castes, although these form only a third of the total population in the area.

This was an important element in the failure of the schemes since a great many of the better-off beneficiaries had no intention of working in production afterwards. Many had taken the courses, for example, in order to gain an advantage in the marriage market or a certificate for professional work. Some had simply wanted the stipend.

This failure to reach the poorer groups cannot be blamed on their lack of participation in handicrafts. Of the sample in the study of the private handicraft industries the majority were landless, 23 per cent were Muslim, 39 per cent scheduled caste and 12 per cent scheduled tribe. A number of other reasons were responsible, which may be acting separately or together in specific cases. Firstly, women from the target groups have difficulty in getting access to the facilities because of administrative barriers and discrimination, particularly when there is a high demand from more privileged groups. Secondly, specific features of the design of the programmes make them inappropriate to their needs.

It is important to point out that this does not imply that middle-class women have no problems. The increasing incidence of dowry deaths and other forms of discrimination facing them contradict such an assumption. However, it is not clear that handicraft schemes are the best way to improve their position. Other measures such as changes in the educational curriculum, legal aid services to enforce property and other rights, and the extension of professional employment for women are desperately needed and would probably be a better use of resources.

**Economics of handicrafts**

The second factor mentioned by the administration was ‘the uneconomic nature of handicraft production’. There are undoubtedly problems with a focus on self-employment in handicrafts and small-scale industry as the major means of poverty alleviation or employment creation, and in many areas of India the prospects for this type of employment are certainly not bright for women or men. However, in this particular area the failure could
not be explained by lack of market or expansion prospects for handicraft production in general, or for the specific industries introduced.

Four industries were studied in detail: bag weaving, embroidery, bamboowork and tailoring. All were found to be reasonably successful in the private sector. The area is unusual, though by no means unique, in offering local marketing opportunities for self-employed producers as well as organisations. The tourist market is expanding, with close to 200,000 visitors a year, 1,000 a day during the tourist season, to one tourist site in the town. In addition, there is a large middle-class population attached to the university which forms an important market for handicraft products. Entrepreneurs reported no lack of a market and shopkeepers complained of problems getting goods rather than of marketing problems. Many of the tourist products sold are mass-produced imports from Calcutta or Darjeeling but, as most tourists wished to buy ‘Santiniketan goods’, it would be possible for local produce to be sold, even at higher prices.

Although earnings are generally low, a few women in all four industries were able to earn enough for a minimal level of subsistence for themselves and their families by working eight hours a day or more. A very few self-employed women reported earning Rs7-9 a day in bag weaving. Tailoring was the most lucrative industry and some male tailors were earning Rs400 a month. No women were earning this level of income, although two women tailors reported earning Rs7-10 a day on a fairly regular basis. Incomes and conditions in the private sector are better or no worse than those achieved in all but a handful of cases by the income generation schemes.

Administrative problems and bad planning

Neither of the main reasons cited by the bureaucracy for the failure of the schemes was found to be a major explanation. The most immediately obvious problems were bad administration and planning which led to ineffective targeting even in targeted schemes, and irrelevance in the context of the industries concerned. Many of the schemes are introduced in an ad hoc manner and it is not surprising that they fail.

The tailoring training course was a particularly glaring example of bad planning. It was aimed at tribal women, but it started just
before the rice transplanting season in which these women are a major part of the labour force. Consequently, many of the trainees had to leave and did not return to the course. The lack of tribal applicants led to a number of richer educated women, with contacts in the bureaucracy, entering the course, resulting in a class of forty to fifty trainees with only one trainer and four machines. It was not therefore surprising that none of the women learned enough to work after the training, or to take advantage of the bank loans which were available. The costs of this scheme were not negligible and it was a total failure, but it is still being continued.

The bamboowork training course, although partly successful, was not immune from bad planning. The course taught bamboo and cane work, despite the fact that cane was not readily available in the area. For much of the course there were problems of supply, whether a result of mismanagement or general supply problems was not clear. Consequently, the trainees had either to supply their own materials or, if they could not afford this, sit idle for about three months; they had to turn up to collect their stipend. In this situation it would have been much more sensible to place greater emphasis on teaching with plastic, which was the material the most successful trainees used after the course.

Credit schemes

Administrative problems accounted for a major part of the failure of the credit schemes. An important factor was the failure of the institution arranging the loan to provide subsequent employment. Sixty-six loans had been arranged for bag weaving by employees of Visvabharati after a training programme. Employment was offered but for various reasons this was on an irregular basis and at a very low level of income (Rs2 per day), and most of the women stopped work after a couple of months. They did not repay the loans and the banks were not pursuing the matter. The training had not equipped them for self-employment.

A second important element in loan repayment was found to be the relationship between the bank or intermediary organisation and the beneficiary. Interviews showed that a number of beneficiaries could have repaid without significant hardship, and much of the low repayment could be blamed on the banks' inefficient collection methods. This is partly understandable in view of the large amount of work involved in lending to 'weaker sections' and the high
The poverty of income generation

It is unlikely, however, that beneficiaries will repay without either more effort by the banks or some incentive, e.g. the prospect of a further loan. Members of one bambooworking community were not repaying their loans because they could see no benefit in doing so, though they were repaying another loan arranged by someone they respected in the community because they did not wish to betray his trust. Members of another bambooworking community at a similar level of poverty were repaying their loans because they had been promised a repeat loan if they did so.

Thirdly, bank loans are used by the major political parties as a means of patronage, and political leaders are in fact plagued with demands for such arrangements. The selection of beneficiaries for their party political affiliation rather than their productive capacity and motivation to repay is obviously not likely to lead to satisfactory repayment levels, particularly when people are specifically told by certain political leaders that they will not have to repay. This aspect of loan usage was very much resented by the banks.

Women's organisations

Most of the women's organisations in the area were village organisations dependent on voluntary management. The more recent Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) and other schemes elsewhere in India also envisage reliance on voluntary effort. However, unpaid organisers rarely have either the time or the expertise to do the marketing and organisation of production efficiently, and even the gram sevikas (women village workers) operating from local government headquarters lacked the facilities to keep in adequate contact with individual villages. Given the problems and the lack of entrepreneurial expertise on the part of the women involved, it is not surprising that most of these organisations fail.

The failures, therefore, in the area studied were not due to aspects of the socio-economic environment blamed by the administration, but to specific cases of administrative failure and bad planning.

Effects of the schemes on women's position

It is relevant to ask whether the schemes have nevertheless led to positive changes in women's position which could justify their
continuance even in their present form. Although there is generally no explicit mention in the official policy documents of any aims of women's equality, freedom to decide their own future, etc., it is assumed that some improvement in their position will automatically occur as a result of the provision of income generating projects. The research took two indices of this: access to the world outside the home, and control over economic resources in the family.

The restrictions on women's access to the world outside the home are both variable between women and changing in the area studied. Employment in private handicraft enterprises had a significant impact on women's lives in many cases, although they were low-paid and exploitation was often apparent. Although they worked at home many of them went to collect orders, raw materials and finished products from the entrepreneurs or from the market, often because there was no male relative to do these tasks. It was obvious from the interviews that this had led to a change in their confidence and knowledge of the outside world.

A particularly striking example of this was in the lives of Muslim women embroidery workers in one village who worked for a middlewoman in Santiniketan. Village women who a few years ago were in purdah are now using the buses and walking long distances to town to fetch their work. Initially the work had all been brought by a man and a divorced woman in the village; but it was subsequently found that they were not handing over all the money, so more of the women decided to breach tradition and fetch the work themselves. At first they were criticised in the village but gradually as more women began to take part the criticism became less.

To the extent that most of the training programmes and banks required women to go to the town, they can be said to have added to a change which was already occurring. Where training courses and women's organisations already existed, this required much less of a change in women's attitudes. However, these changes have been small and other developments such as education, improved bus services, and cinemas, have been more influential.

The degree of control over family income was in fact very variable but did not depend on whether or not a woman was working for a wage. It was more common for women to decide how the household money was spent in poorer households, particularly
in non-upper-caste groups, regardless of whether they were employed in waged work or not. Women, however, were not free to spend more on themselves, although they were more aware of how money was spent and thus more able to voice their opinion. Most of the women reported spending the majority of their income on the family, as dictated by their poverty.

Thus, although the current schemes have had some impact, this is not significantly more than that from employment in private industry. Other factors such as education and improved communications have probably been more influential. Several studies of large organisations elsewhere in India report quite marked changes in women’s self-image, attitudes to social issues like caste, family planning and their status in the family and community, where this is a stated aim of the organisation. Other data suggest that many large women’s organisations elsewhere may in fact merely replicate the class and gender hierarchies in society at large.

Women’s programmes tend to ‘mollycoddle’ women more than private industry does. This is not necessary for poor women and it is in fact extremely unlikely that income generation schemes can yield women any significant income without challenging their subordination. The paternalistic model of altruistic social workers fulfilling all the difficult tasks accomplished by middlemen/women often means that the organisations collapse once the social worker has got tired or has been forced to take up some more lucrative activity. The assumptions about women’s needs have to be changed, otherwise the failures will continue, reinforcing prejudices and cultural stereotypes about women’s capabilities.

Possible solutions: greater commercial orientation and relevance

The research found that the schemes were largely irrelevant within the context of the industries at which they were aimed. They are introduced without sufficient technical knowledge and there is a complete lack of commercial orientation. Specific commercial changes might include the following: firstly, there is a need for more information on new designs, products and technology to permit greater diversity in the industries and products promoted. A great deal of variability was found in levels of profit between different items and designs. Some research is conducted in certain urban centres like Calcutta but the extension work is inadequate,
particularly as far as women are concerned. Secondly, there is a need for major changes in the design of training courses. The main focus has been on basic skills training. In fact, this sort of training is largely redundant and frequently leads to serious oversaturation of skills in certain industries. Women often teach each other skills or learn traditional caste skills from male family members, and in many cases this informal training, even in tailoring, is better than that given by the courses.

What is needed is serious skills-upgrading courses to allow existing workers to produce a wider range of products; training for new industries and on-the-job training in commercial and marketing aspects of production as an integral part of both the above types of training. In the present courses on offer there is no training in marketing or linkage with organisations which could help with marketing or supply of raw materials. It was noticeable that many women (and even men) working in the industries studied had no knowledge of how to assess profit and loss or the relative profits from different types of articles. Equally important, women need to be shown the possible markets for their products, to learn about the variation in pricing, and to be encouraged to gain experience and confidence to go to new places and develop new contacts. Thirdly, the provision of bank credit needs to be more flexible to take account of the reality of the lives of poor self-employed workers.

Credit should take account of certain consumption needs. The main purpose of credit schemes has been to help workers obtain capital assets for production and raw materials. However, this is not necessarily what is needed by the poor to set themselves up in self-employment and in some industries these requirements are in fact quite low. In many cases studied, even where beneficiaries were working and repaying the loan, they had not used the bulk of the money for production needs but for basic consumption. Certain types of consumption expenditure are in fact a very rational use of resources, e.g. purchase of stable foods in bulk just after the harvest when prices are low. The money thus saved can then be invested in production or used as a buffer to prevent distress sales of produce, thus increasing income.

There is also a need to counter a certain amount of seasonality in the handicrafts market. Also, since shops often do not pay until the produce has been sold, capital is needed to tide workers over this
period. Lack of capital has meant that workers' bargaining power is weakened *vis-a-vis* the shops and they cannot hold stocks to bid for the highest price. Lastly, capital is needed to enable producers to take risks in, for example, design innovation and to develop new markets.

Repeated injections of capital may well improve repayment levels. A new loan should only be given when the previous loan has been repaid, not to cover bad debts; but people would be likely to improve repayment levels if the loans had been sensibly allocated in the first place. Not only are poor workers more likely to use their first loan productively when they may get further finance if they repay it; it also improves their image of the banks and this is crucial in motivating them to repay without being pressured by expensive investigations and prosecutions.

It is more difficult to specify the ways in which women's organisations could be improved. A lot more research is needed on the types of organisation most economically appropriate in specific market and production situations and on how safeguards could be built in to prevent the corruption, mismanagement and exploitation which are currently so frequent.

**Targeting poor women**

The issue of targeting is far from straightforward. Poor women have a number of other requirements which need to be accommodated in the schemes if their participation is to be increased; particularly their need to improve their generally low levels of education, though not necessarily of skill; the need for income generation schemes to integrate with, or be sufficiently remunerative to substitute for, work they are already doing; and their need for more resources. These have implications for the design of the different schemes, in particular for higher levels of stipend and credit, and more flexible timing.

Higher levels of stipend and credit are, however, likely to aggravate the problem of targeting because of their attractiveness to women from the better-off groups. A possible solution is to try to make schemes 'self-targeting', i.e. attractive only to those groups for whom they are intended:

The present emphasis on work exclusively in the home which does not require women to engage in marketing and mixing with
men should be reconsidered since the restrictions on these activities do not apply to poor women.

Targeting women already working and helping them to improve their income would reach more women from non-upper caste groups and also significant numbers of landless women.

Integrating income generation training, marketing, credit, etc., with other targeted schemes such as literacy, numeracy or health projects would be likely to improve both women's ability to earn an income and their position in the family, and also would be unlikely to attract the better-off, better educated women.

Conclusions and implications for women's development programmes

Although the changes outlined above are necessary to improve the success of the schemes, they can be only part of a programme for women's development. Handicrafts can have an important role in employment creation but this sector alone cannot solve the unemployment problem for women, any more than for men. Even in the area studied, with its potentially favourable environment for handicraft development, there is a need to diversify the industries in which women are involved. There are also limitations on what can be expected from self-employment and employment in small-scale industry, and the desirability of confining women to these sectors is open to question.

It is unlikely that the changes required in these schemes can be made without quite far-reaching changes in the attitudes of the bureaucracy towards women's issues and poverty alleviation in general. Although the cases described above can be seen as specific instances of administrative failure, poor planning occurs fairly systematically and the problems are intrinsic to development planning in India as elsewhere. They are even more pronounced in women's programmes because of the lack of seriousness with which these are generally treated. A new degree of flexibility and sensitivity is required on the part of bureaucrats to the local needs both of small-scale industry and of poor women — a transformation which would demand profound changes in their training and incentive structure.

Successful implementation of the schemes also requires the target groups to be more aware of and empowered to demand their rights,
both as women and as workers. The wider women's movement, the education system, political activists and non-governmental organisations have an obvious role to play here, as well as the government administration. There is a need for income generation schemes and poverty-alleviation measures to be seen in this wider framework and for possible roles of these agencies to be more fully considered. This is particularly the case with women's programmes because of the importance of social and ideological factors to the success of the programmes, and the prejudice which exists at all levels.

(Note: this article is based on research done during a three-year ODA-funded research project in 1984-7. The research was supported by the Department of Anthropology, University of Cambridge, UK. The views expressed are, however, those of the author.)

Dr Linda Mayoux is a researcher on issues of women and development and small-scale industry policy. Her other work includes research on women in co-operatives in Nicaragua and Africa. She is currently based at Glasgow University, working on problems of development in the Indian silk industry.
RESOURCES FOR WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF THE OXFAM SHEANUT LOAN SCHEME IN GHANA

BEN PUGANSOA AND DONALD AMUAH

The Oxfam loan scheme for women’s sheanut purchase in the Northern region of Ghana was instituted in August 1986. Loans of various sizes were distributed to existing women’s groups. The philosophy of the scheme was in line with the overall philosophy of Oxfam, which is to work with the underprivileged with a view to raising their quality of life and promoting greater social justice. The motivation for the scheme was a strong desire to encourage women to stand up for themselves in the face of what looked like an organised and determined attempt by local businessmen to dislodge them. The rural women required credit to enable them to assert their traditional role as pickers, processors and users of sheanuts and shea-products. It was anticipated that increased off-farm income would lead to increased consumption of goods and services, better nutrition and consequently overall improvement in family well being.

After the scheme had been running for eighteen months a workshop was organised for the resource persons and the participants to learn from each other. Attendance was better than expected, and the gender representation was 3:1 in favour of women. This paper highlights some of the issues discussed and some resolutions made to improve the scheme. It also includes the findings of a rapid field survey conducted among seven women’s groups, all but one of whom were beneficiaries of the scheme.

Background to sheanut picking

The year for the rural women in the Northern and Upper East Regions of Ghana is divided into four production periods; sowing (April/May); weeding (June/July); harvesting (September/October) and the fallow period from November to March which is devoted to construction work and off-farm income generating activities. All women’s income generating activities have to fit into this production
cycle. Sheanut picking reaches its peak in the heart of the 'lean season', the hunger gap spanning February to early July, and so is of crucial importance to the survival of the family.

Sheanuts may be picked by women from their husband's cultivated plots — the oldest wife regulates access where the husband is polygamous. Fallow plots (land abandoned temporarily because of soil exhaustion) are open to the wife or wives of the previous owners. Sheanut picking on uncultivated plots is open to all women. Late in the day, after the main picking is done, women, especially the old and widowed, glean the fields for any remaining sheanuts.

Sheanut picking is arduous work, requiring muscle, stamina and courage. Pickers wake up at dawn and trek distances of up to ten miles. Sheanuts are carried in pans or headloads of about 20kg from the bush to the house. After a suitable accumulation of several day's pickings, the nuts are parboiled, dried and processed into sheabutter or sold. The work is also dangerous. The main hazards are accidents associated with stumps and bites from snakes and insects, including scorpions; the women wear very little protective clothing. A survey carried out in the middle of the picking season found that anti-snake serum had run out about six months previously.

Recent government policy in Ghana, giving monopoly to the Cocoa Marketing Board (COCOBOD) for the handling of sheanuts and sheanut products, has made the sheanut industry very lucrative. Women who undertake the heavy workload and run all the risks deserve to benefit; however, it is not easy for women to obtain a license to trade with COCOBOD and the bulk of the profits are taken by urban-based men with influence. Local business men invariably employ women to purchase sheanuts from other women at small village markets and to take the nuts to bigger villages for bagging and transport to Tamale, the regional capital, where they are sold by these men to COCOBOD at great profit. The bad state of the roads and transportation means that the women undertaking sheanut collection also have to take personal risks.

**Other income generating activities**

Women are engaged in other productive ventures, financed partly from the money from sheanuts. The main activities identified were charcoal making, cutting firewood, local craftwork (mainly weaving
straw baskets and hats), farming of groundnuts, maize and vegetables and trading in food. Women may also own small livestock and poultry. Several groups carried out some form of agro-processing such as groundnut, sheanut and vegetable oil extraction, or spinning. Oil extraction was undertaken all year round depending on stocks of raw materials. The problem of vegetable oil production and craft work is essentially one of the availability of raw materials; credit is needed to build up stocks at the time when materials can be bought cheaply.

In certain areas where land is abundant and accessible, women have increasingly taken on the role of independent farmers, in addition to their other roles. Many women are in fact heads of households. The burdens on women have increased in the context of static or inappropriate technology and policy frameworks that still consider women as mere appendages to men.

**Disposal of women’s income**

Women’s income is critical to the overall quality of life and standard of living in the family. It is mainly used to provide food (in times of scarcity), soup ingredients to complement the grain that is normally provided by the husband, cooking utensils, clothing for themselves and the children and to help with dowry requirements. Any spare income is invested in small livestock, and used for purchasing grain, seed and sheanuts for retail or production later.

Women have a large measure of control in the disposal of sheanuts. In one area, sheanuts picked on cultivated or fallow plots are shared with the men. Those picked from the ‘wild’ may be disposed of as the women please. In the disposal of the sheanut income, top priority is accorded to the food security needs of the family. Sheanuts are sold off, often cheaply, to buy food for the family. Women in better family circumstances have more choice in the disposal of sheanut income whereas those families at the margins of existence will normally sell sheanuts off very fast to buy food. It is in this context that the sheanut scheme provides an opportunity for women to hold sheanut stock as a group, as well as to purchase from the village market to retail later through COCOBOD, or to process into oil for retail and family consumption.

Most groups used the income from sheanuts to purchase and store grain which operates as a buffer for the rest of the village. As one woman said, ‘Because we have corn in our group barn the
village do not have to walk to Walewale to buy grain. Our only remaining problem is how to grind the grain, we have no cornmill. We have, at times, slept with hunger when we were not able to walk to Walewale to grind grain.'

Involvement of men

The women said that men had a genuine interest in the off-farm income generating activities of women and must be consulted if the cohesiveness of the family unit was to be preserved. Men often contributed the initial capital and also provided labour for the harder tasks, though women have to pay men to undertake such vital activities as weeding, digging and fencing. There were traditional arrangements whereby men’s projects enhanced the income earning potential of women; for example, it was common practice for a man to make a plot available in his garden or farm for the women to cultivate food for the kitchen or the market.

As managers of the main production cycles, the men’s management and timing of agricultural work determined what time was available to women for their income generating activities. The women felt that it was often necessary to consult with male members of the community when designing projects for women and that it was not unreasonable to try out pilot projects with the family unit as the major focus of attention.

The goals and aspirations of groups

The major concern for individuals and groups was for food security, shelter, clothing and health. Groups had to reinvest money quickly in order to make sure that their initial capital was not lost. Additional income would be used to provide the means to reduce the drudgery associated with women’s activities. Donkey carts, grinding mills, oil extraction machines and even tractors were mentioned. There is also a quite legitimate long-term vision for the acquisition of bicycles to help mobility.

Women often have to travel long distances to reach cornmills (on average about five miles), and in six of the seven groups surveyed, they expressed the need to have their own cornmill for grinding grain and other food items used for the making of ‘tuo saafi’ (thick porridge). Women did not think it was beyond the ability of their groups to manage such facilities effectively.

Money was not the only form of support that they needed; small
livestock, poultry and groundnut seed could all contribute towards greater self-sufficiency for women and be used as back-up security to be easily disposed of in times of pressing need. Discussions with women during the field survey suggested that, although the women were generally aware of the opportunities for generating more income, they could still benefit significantly from inputs on animation, credit extension and credit management. Such inputs should be seen as complementary to the provision of credit.

Generally, women appreciated the need for some protective clothing and equipment for sheanut picking, but they did not know where to buy gloves, and wellington boots seemed too heavy for the distances they had to walk. They said that they would be willing to buy appropriate protective clothing at reasonable prices. Lamps and torch lights are available but are very expensive and many women did not even know about them.

Profile of women in their groups
In the rapid field survey it was found that most of the women belonging to groups were aged between 25-60 with the majority around 45 years old. Births to younger women averaged four; older women had seven or more deliveries. Marriage is valued and most women were married; over 50 per cent were involved in polygamous marriages. About 30 per cent were unmarried, mainly widowed. Women's burdens increase with the size of family. In polygamous families, resources are stretched thinly and women have to assume greater responsibility for feeding and clothing children, and meeting medical bills and school fees. Widowed and other single women faced even greater economic problems. The profile suggests some relation between membership and marital status or circumstances, though this finding must be treated with caution due to the small sample size.

Most group members were virtually illiterate; well over 90 per cent of the women had never set foot in a formal classroom. All the group secretaries except one were male. None of the women, either as individuals or as members of a group, had previous experience of credit with a bank or similar formal financial institution.

Group structures
For five of the rural groups surveyed the sheanut scheme had contributed greatly towards food security for the whole community.
The other two groups organise production on a collective basis and whatever income is generated is ploughed back in a bid to build social capital; for example, one group had used some of its profits to put up a shed to house a cornmill provided by UNICEF. It is the consensus among members of these two groups that the loan scheme has not yet benefited them personally. Members expressed a desire to operate as individuals within the group framework so that they would be able to derive appropriate benefit from personal business initiatives.

Logistics of the scheme

Women have frequently demonstrated that they can be safely entrusted with productive credit. Banks, however, have been constrained in their ability to make loans to rural populations because of massive loan default rates by urban dwellers. Banks are mostly located in towns and lack understanding of the situation of rural people. Banking procedures are unfamiliar to rural people, and the requirements for collateral cannot be easily met.

Oxfam supplied a grant as a loan portfolio to the Bank for Housing and Construction (BHC) who administered the scheme. A Small Project Committee, which included representatives from the National Council on Women and Development, acted as a management committee, and was charged with legal title to the money in trust. The scheme was administered on normal banking principles with an interest rate of about 23 per cent. It was thought self-defeating to subsidise the scheme, which should at least cover its operating costs and also allow for moderate growth over time in order to extend its benefits.

The sponsoring agencies introduced clients to the Bank but further screening and selection were the responsibility of BHC. Clients had to be registered with COCOBOD and have a licence for sheanut purchasing. They were required to open an account with BHC into which payment by COCOBOD was made. BHC recovered the loan and interest from such payments. Coordination was achieved through periodic review meetings, seminars and workshops.

The role of the bank

The sponsoring agencies all considered it important that the bank administered the scheme. This left them free to concentrate on group development and the provision of extension support. It also
insulated them from the tensions and temptations associated with giving and recovering loans. They felt that credit administration was a specialised field which required broad experience.

The women's groups complained that banks were inaccessible and women had therefore to travel long distances and incur other costs in order to secure credit. They also claimed that the banks were insensitive to their lack of familiarity with banking procedures. (They agreed that the intermediaries did a lot to minimise their inconvenience, and experience with other banks indicated that BHC was very accommodating.)

BHC decided to deliver services more promptly by appointing a Field Officer. A scheme to provide mobile support to supervise intra-group administration of loans was also under active consideration. This would provide an opportunity for BHC project staff to supplement the extension efforts of sponsoring agencies in the area of credit management. It was felt that this outreach should take place at least twice a year, at the beginning and towards the end of every loan season. The mobile banking service could also provide basics like rubber boots, hand gloves, torches, cutlasses, etc. for sale to women.

With regard to the question of the readiness of groups for self-management status and independent standing with BHC, it was contended mainly by the sponsors and BHC that, as groups established their credibility with the bank, BHC would not need to use the Oxfam loan portfolio as a security. A maturity period of 3-5 years was proposed but rejected by many groups who contended that credit was a way of life and could be extended to worthy members of the family through generations. It was decided not to press the issue of maturity for groups too hard as it might affect loan recovery. Groups might decide to build private capital at the expense of loan repayment for fear of losing continuous support.

The first loan season
Once a loan facility was granted, intra group distribution was effected in three ways. Some immediately shared the money among group members. In other groups individuals drew on the loan according to the amount of sheanuts they had purchased. Other groups spent the money on joint ventures. Most groups initially used the loans for purchasing sheanuts to sell to COCOBOD. Some of the most efficient groups quickly arranged for the collection of
their purchases, got paid and bought more sheanuts which they resold. They turned the cash into grain or groundnuts for retail later on the open market. Two groups used some of the sheanuts for extracting oil which had a much higher value.

The scheme was instituted late in the sheanut season, so most groups missed the windfall profits that could have been reaped earlier in the season. There were also delays in the collections of purchases by COCOBOD resulting in losses from spoilage by rodents and over-drying of nuts. The next loan season was instituted earlier and COCOBOD said that they would try to solve the transport problems. Warehousing was recognised as a key to the success of the scheme: the groups requested COCOBOD and Oxfam to help them put up simple sheds from local materials.

**The bank’s view**

*As stated in the BHC report to the Oxfam Loan Scheme seminar in March 1988:*

'The operation of the scheme for the first loan season has been successful. A loan recovery rate of 99.98 per cent was recorded. Delays and short repayment of outstanding loan balances were the result of failure of BHC counter staff to advise clients of interest charges. These issues were resolved at the First Review Meeting of the Scheme held in April 1987. That review meeting also provided an opportunity for group leaders, sponsoring agencies, CMB and BHC to assess the performance of groups in respect of application of loans, to educate womens’ group leaders on how interest charges could be kept low and interact generally to resolve outstanding issues...

From the perspective of BHC, the scheme has been immensely successful. We also have taken notice of and approved of the flexibility with which some groups applied loans for activities other than sheanut purchases. It enabled some groups to make a turnover of over 300 per cent.

It is also our opinion that groups that were closely supervised and benefited from educational inputs from sponsoring organisations performed better. We recommend that sponsoring agencies intensify this aspect.

Advancing loans to groups rather than to individuals within groups has kept our administrative costs low.'
Some conclusions and recommendations

The loan scheme has been beneficial to precisely those women who need support most. It has contributed significantly to the needs of participating groups for productive credit which was otherwise not available. Loan repayments have been extremely high, and group turnovers healthy. The scheme has provided women's groups with the opportunity to build 'buffer' food stocks which are essential to food security; this has extended the benefits to the whole community. The women's groups are unanimous that Oxfam should increase the loan portfolio, gradually expand the scheme and start pilot schemes in other regions.

Women should be allowed to use the money to take advantage of other business opportunities not related to sheanuts. An extension programme of credit management should support such a Rural Women's Loan Scheme. The agencies should enhance the systematic growth and development of women's groups participating in the scheme. Field animation support could act as a catalyst for a wider programme of conscientisation of women. In the meantime the groups' development should be encouraged through training via conferences, workshops, meetings. The meetings that had been held had been a very important element in improving the scheme; resource persons and women's groups had learnt a great deal from each other; problems and misunderstandings had been discussed and solutions proposed.

Case study compiled from the following reports:


Ben Pugansoa is Oxfam's Project Officer in North Ghana with a particular interest and involvement in this project. Donald Amuah is the Secretary of the Small Project Committee.
There was a time when development experts were satisfied with very little in terms of concrete Kenyan Government policy with regard to women. Researchers concerned with promoting the ability of women to participate in the development process could state:

'It is noteworthy that a token sum of £10 has been set aside in the 1975-76 financial year for activities pertaining to women in development. This is significant as an indication of Government recognition of the women’s programme. It will now be possible to submit budget requests for expanding women’s programme activities in this and subsequent financial years if convincing proposals are made.' (Pala A.O. et al (1975), A preliminary survey of the avenues for, and constraints on women in the development process in Kenya, IDS.)

During the 1970s the Kenyan Government placed greater emphasis on women’s activities in the agricultural sector. Women’s role in food and cash crop production was now officially recognised and explicitly associated with the country’s economic development. Women’s groups came to be seen more and more as the key to empowering women, particularly at the grassroots level, in the development process.

Women’s groups: a history

Women’s groups as an institution trace their roots back to traditional society: the ngwatio among the Kikuyu, the risaga among the Gusii and the saga among the Luo. In the traditional setting, they were concerned with mutual aid efforts. Through them, women engaged in joint agricultural labour, social welfare activities and recreation and entertainment.

It was on this foundation that the earliest formal, government-sponsored programme aimed at promoting development for
women was based. This programme, started in the early 1950s, involved the organisation of a national body called *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake* which co-existed with the traditional base community self-help groups. As an organisation, it was a reflection of the view held in the colonial era that women in particular should contribute to improving the welfare and well-being of the family. *Maendeleo* functioned in the form of ‘women’s clubs’, with primary emphasis on domestic crafts such as embroidery, and improving the family diet particularly for the children. This can be seen as a reflection of the concerns and preoccupations of the initiators — the wives of European colonists — who attached great importance to these activities as being conducive to raising the African family’s living standards. Within the national historical context the ‘women’s clubs’ are a reflection of one of the ways in which African women were to be ‘domesticated’ while being displaced from agricultural production.

With a new appreciation of the crucial role played by women in agriculture, activities in women’s groups came to reflect this new vision. In the 1970s the Government initiated the Women’s Programme in six of the Special Rural Development Programme areas. This represented the first attempt by the post-independence Government to link women actively to the development process. The programme functioned by building on the foundations provided by existing indigenous groups and, to some extent, *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake*. It served to initiate a new orientation for women’s involvement in development. It did so by beginning to institutionalise the women’s groups as the channel for information and material and technical resources to women who had hitherto been neglected. In an overall positive review of the programme, A.O.Pala *et al* found the major flaw to be that it ‘generated new orientation but did not generate resources towards the groups and women to meet new expectations’. (Pala A.O. *et al* (1975), *op. cit.*)

The most important era for the women’s group began in 1975 with the formation of a government agency charged with dealing with women’s issues in Kenya; the Women’s Bureau. With the formation of the Bureau, we see greater policy commitment to women when measured by relative material, financial and informational resources made available to women through women’s groups.
The Women’s Bureau

The Bureau had a mandate to focus on the development and integration of women in national development. Over the next ten years or so, the Bureau initiated the formation of an enormous number of women’s groups. In 1976 there were 4,300 registered women’s groups with a membership of 156,892; by 1984, the number of groups had risen to 16,500 with a total membership of 630,000.

The principal objectives of the Women’s Bureau as identified in the 1979-83 National Development Plan were the formation of relevant programmes to meet the needs of women, and the coordination of all women’s programmes in the country. Most specifically, and in accordance with the women’s development programmes in the Department of Social Services (of which the Bureau is a division), the Bureau was to involve itself in the encouragement of women, through women’s groups, to engage in income earning opportunities in agriculture, small industrial and commercial business; and the provision of relevant training in leadership, craft development and other special skills as a requirement for a successful women’s programme.

In view of the above stated policy, it is not surprising to find that, although the Bureau had four articulated programmes, namely, research and evaluation; communication and liaison; assistance to organised women’s groups; and training and education of members of organised groups and government extension, the assistance programme received the bulk of the Bureau's financial resources. Of the K£ 1.19 million available in development funds during four financial years, about K£ 1.03 million, representing 87 per cent of the available funds, went to organised women’s groups. Furthermore, in accordance with the implicit view that income generating projects were best, 76 per cent of these funds went to such projects. The other programmes therefore received very few financial resources, despite their stated importance.

An assessment of the women’s group movement

Women’s groups are evidently seen as the principal vehicle for the involvement of women in the development process. The viability of this form of organisation must, however, be examined from three perspectives to determine the potential of the movement for the empowerment of women in the development process. For this
purpose, the three following perspectives have been identified: women’s groups at the local level; factors determining women’s participation in women’s groups; and the women’s group in the national development context.

The women’s group at the local level
The women’s group movement is widespread in Kenya. Through these self-help groups, women are able to assist one another in times of need, such as during illness or childbirth; with agricultural work and major tasks such as thatching of houses; and in other social welfare efforts by which individual group members can benefit directly from a reciprocal relationship.

Women, through these groups, are also engaged in ‘social investment’ in education, health and the provision of social facilities. Although this category absorbs rather than generates resources in the short term, the long-term investment can be viewed as the creation of a community with increased productive potential. Women’s groups have, in addition, become engaged in income generating projects and activities. These are projects aimed at generating further resources in a self-sustaining process. The projects include animal husbandry, handicrafts, agriculture and so on.

Women’s groups have been particularly important for the women of Kenya because they have replaced traditional women’s organisations. It was through these organisations that women expressed themselves on a social level. Of greater importance is the fact that the groups are viewed by women as a means through which the individual member can appropriate resources for immediate transfer and use within her household. Thus, 88 per cent of all group activities are aimed at the generation of rapidly distributable and disposable resources to individual members. It is fitting, then, that the most widespread activity among the groups is the ‘merry-go-round’ or rotating loan fund.

Women’s groups have also helped to give women in Kenya an unprecedented visibility on social, cultural, political and national economic levels. Hardly a week goes by without women, through their groups, being mentioned in some context by national leaders in the press. On national television a programme called ‘Women in Development’ has devoted a substantial amount of time to the presentation of women’s groups’ activities.
Women's groups can further be of great importance in the local political equation. In electoral campaigns in some constituencies, their support, or lack of it, can mean the success or failure of a candidate. For example, in Kiambu, where women form a significant majority, their votes are obviously important and more so when their votes are organised. These groups can empower women to participate in public life by giving them collective confidence, bargaining power and pooled resources.

**Who participates and why**

Despite the national scope of the movement, total membership covers only a fraction of the eligible women in Kenya. The tremendous growth of 68 per cent experienced during the 1978-1983 period suggests a great potential when taken at face value. But when we examine what can be called the 'anatomy' of the women's group we see that this growth may not be sustainable. The sociological composition and finance and resource capability of women's groups suggest that over 60 per cent of the women in Kenya will be excluded. The distribution of benefits to members further suggests that only the social welfare type of project benefits members directly.

**Sociological composition**

A sociological investigation of the women's groups is particularly important because it indicates who participates and why within a given community. Further, it can help in determining the possibility of expanding participation to those excluded. It is thus important in gauging the viability of this particular approach to development, for the women in Kenya.

The typical group member is a middle-aged married woman from the middle peasantry. To participate in a group it is evident that a potential member must have certain minimum resources i.e. financial, labour, time, material, social standing, independence and so on. It was estimated in 1984 that, for effective participation, the minimum resources were Kshs.45 per month and five days per month. This automatically precludes the 60 per cent of women who live well below the officially defined poverty line. The majority of those excluded for lack of the above resources are young women, whose exclusion is further compounded by the peculiarities of age hierarchies found in most African communities. These women make
up the highest percentage of the labour force and so are most in need of the organisation. In the final analysis, only 9 per cent of the female labour force is involved in groups.

**Financial and resource capability**

Women’s groups rely primarily on members for raising financial and other resources in self-help endeavours. Contrary to popular belief, only 1.1 per cent of financial resources are generated from outside sources. Groups engaged in income generating projects and social investment activities (building halls, schools, dispensaries, etc.) are heavily dependent on outside assistance in direct contrast to those undertaking mutual assistance self-help activities. Very often investment capital in the form of land or machinery will be provided by donations and grants from local councils, government and well-wishers.

**Group benefits for members**

The distribution of financial and other resources is in two principal areas, namely, servicing members’ direct individual needs, and investments in group projects (some income generating and other social investment projects and savings). The first category reflects very closely the reasons for initial group formation for the women in cases when they have initiated its formation. Various researchers have found that these groups do provide real and tangible benefits. In the second category, however, the potential benefits are rarely realised because of factors already enumerated.

**Women’s groups, harambee and development**

The women’s group movement in Kenya can be seen in relation to the national harambee movement. Harambee (which means ‘let’s unite’) has been defined as the process whereby rural development projects are undertaken by communities on the basis of some sort of community or group consensus and initiative. Harambee, as an ‘alternative’ approach to development, becomes important in a country such as Kenya because of the inadequacies of the prevailing institutional mechanisms for generating growth and development. Harambee cannot, however, be expected to replace these institutional mechanisms. And in most cases it does not — except when it comes to women. In this case it can be seen that although policy holds that the economic position and status of the Kenyan woman has to be
improved, it must not be done at the expense of groups that have already attained some degree of prosperity or status. Policy has accordingly placed emphasis on that which the women can undertake together, in groups, on their own initiative, with little or only token assistance.

Through the women’s group, women’s ambiguous status in the development process is played out most eloquently. The average rural woman in Kenya is a farmer producing subsistence and cash crops. However, conventional wisdom reinforced by the prevailing new ‘cultural’ attitude, finds it difficult to reconcile itself with this scenario. It prefers to see women as domesticated, dependent consumers. Channelling women’s development through the women’s group can be seen as a way of satisfying both the real role of women and the imaginary one. On the one hand, mobilisation through women’s groups serves to recognise the important place women have in national development in their own right. On the other hand, emphasis on the women’s group as the primary channel of mobilisation for women, secures their marginalisation and prevents them from participating as equal partners in mainstream development.

Conclusion
Women’s groups are viable institutions for women at the local level. They offer members opportunities which can only be obtained when resources are pooled. At this level, women through such groups can even be an important part of the equation in the local politics of development. They can be the backbone of Kenya’s harambee self-help movement, and hence catalysts for rural development.

At the national level, however, the anatomy of women’s groups presented indicates that this institution cannot be the principal vehicle for the empowerment of Kenyan women in the development process. Socio-economic factors preclude 60 per cent of the women in any community from participating. The peculiarities that govern women in most African communities exclude the young and the poor woman. It is only those women who are able to command a certain accepted social status and who have also the finances and time, who are able to participate.

The women’s group is voluntary and self-help in nature, using meagre locally available financial and material resources. The
implication, then, is that the women of Kenya are gaining very little from the formal economic sector which they help to build through their productive and reproductive efforts. They are therefore being shunted into an alternative form of development which should and can only assist institutionalised official avenues, not replace them.

References


Women’s Bureau Ministry of Culture and Social Services, Annual Reports from Districts, 1985.

Betty Nafuna Wamalwa is a freelance consultant with a research background in environmental affairs, resource management and women and the law. She has worked mainly in Kenya, although she has also studied in the USA and Norway. Her recent work has been for Oxfam, NORAD, the World Bank, Clark University and the African Centre for Technology Studies.
La Romana is one of the largest states in the Dominican Republic, growing sugar cane for the international market. The production of sugar cane started in the 1950s and has brought with it extensive socio-economic and cultural disruption. La Romana became a Free Trade Zone in the mid 1980s for the production of electronics, clothing and tertiary industry. The workforce (15,000-20,000) is composed mainly of women in their early twenties, with no formal organisation. Popular organisations face overt repression and there is opposition to workers' unions from employers, multinational corporations, landowners and the state.

'Las esclavas del Fogon' started nine years ago as a cultural group of women from the popular sector of La Romana trying to redefine and recover their national and local culture, which was threatened by foreign cultural products and customs. They felt the need to go back to their own roots in music, painting, dancing and poetry and translate these into 'popular art', incorporating the demands and needs of the community. In spite of many problems they have managed to establish themselves as a respected and legitimate group working for the popular arts in La Romana.

They are organised as a collective of eleven women. They define themselves as feminist and recognise the need for women to come together and work out the nature of their oppression. They feel that a collective provides a structure in which women can work together, respecting ideological differences and establishing relations which are truly democratic and non-hierarchical.

Since the start they have decided to work as a women-only group which, in a small rural, Catholic town, has posed some problems. The local press and church groups have labelled them as 'lazy, lesbian and anti-men'. Las esclavas del Fogon feel that their group represents an important space for women to grow and develop consciousness since women have only a limited or token presence in
other organisations in La Romana. Their group is unique in the
town in promoting women’s rights, discussing women’s status and
linking these issues with other forms of discrimination, particularly
that of racism against Haitians. At one stage they tried to work in
the Bateyes (areas for Haitian workers only) but they faced
repression by the local multinational employer and suspicion from
the workers both because the group members were Dominicans and
more especially because they were women. The management of the
multinational initiated a campaign against the collective and they
had to withdraw.

The group is organised in four areas: publicity, general
coordination, popular education and finances. The popular
education group works on cultural events in the barrios
(neighbourhoods), preparing two jornadas culturales each year (large
cultural events usually in the town centre aimed at the whole
community), running workshops and training courses on popular
and folk music, dance and poetry, organising campanas de rescate
cultural (campaigns to reinstate traditional culture) and joining in
the celebration of festivals and the carnival. The group is financed
both by NGOs (especially for specific projects) and by the
community through raffles, donations, etc. The group is just about
self-sufficient and has three part-time employees. The other
members of the collective work as volunteers, with the support of
the membership and 14 committees in the barrios.

A number of unsuccessful projects have been an important part
of the group’s learning process. ‘Only through many mistakes and
failures can one build the necessary experience and learn how
difficult it is to work in an organisation’, explain members of the
collective. They learnt that the group needed to go out and work
closely with the communities themselves; they needed training in
popular education techniques; to develop more campaigning and
communication skills and to have a more complete understanding
of their social environment. They redefined their strategies in terms
of promoting organisation and decided to concentrate initially on
women.

They started by organising committees of five women in each
neighbourhood to celebrate ‘Mother’s Day’. They also promoted
exchanges between women of different communities and friendly
discussions about women’s issues and the aims and nature of the
group. Currently they have approximately 200 members who are
Las esclavas del fogon

working in 14 barrios, most of them from the popular sectors (housewives, workers and some professionals and university students). They also have nine cultural groups for young boys and girls who are working on folk dance and music. They organise a monthly cultural event in each barrio. This event takes place on the streets and uses the techniques of popular theatre, ensuring a high level of participation from the community. They present activities devised by the cultural groups and, with the use of improvisations, engage the community in singing and responding to songs which are based on issues of interest to the community. They also provide courses on poetry, dance and theatre to its members.

A street play, created during a one-month course on participative theatre and based on the life and hardships of peasant women, represents the most important activity for the group. Using the results of a study by Centro de Investigacion para la Accion Femenina (CIPAF) on women in rural areas, they produced a 90-minute play based on Boal’s techniques of the theatre of the oppressed. A peasant woman from the South was invited to participate in the experiment and to have the role of main actress. The group feel that the course has provided them with new tools, revitalised them, and gave them the opportunity to become professional artists. It was a very successful experience, with enormous participation from the community. They will start using this experience in their own workshops and courses and share it with other groups in the Dominican Republic.
WOMEN ORGANISING THEMSELVES

AUDREY BRONSTEIN

The story of MOMUPO illustrates a process of discovery experienced by hundreds of poor urban women in Chile from the early 1980s to the present date — a process that has come to be called 'popular feminism': an awareness of the condition of double oppression of the pobladora (the shanty town of Santiago are called poblaciones, and the residents, pobladoras), as a member of the working class in a capitalist economic system and as a woman in a patriarchal society. This process has developed slowly, overcoming many obstacles, not the least of which are fear and repression, two of the most effective tools used by the Pinochet regime to crush popular resistance to the military dictatorship.

How MOMUPO started

A small group of socially committed and politically conscious working women were involved in a church-initiated popular education workshop with trade unionists in 1980. The aim of the workshop was to examine the needs of the workers, and the urban poor in general, within the context of the military dictatorship, then seven years old. The women, a minority in the predominantly male group, suffered constant frustration at not being able to discuss in any meaningful way with others in the group, the specific problems and needs of poor women. Most of the participants were union leaders and political leaders, and the discussion always centred on traditional political issues. In an attempt to establish their needs as a priority, the women formed a 'comision femenina' (women's committee), and not finding much response within the main workshop, they began to contact other women from other groups, both union and non-union oriented. A number of activities were organised over the next year or two, ranging from discussion groups to arts and crafts exhibitions of items produced by the women. Gradually, and with the continued rejection of 'women's issues' by the central workshop body, the initial group of women, and the others who had joined them, became increasingly more
They formed a coordinating committee with the objective of involving more women, particularly those who were not involved in any kind of community organisation. On the basis of their own experience, the founders of this coordinating committee realised that few women were going to get involved in groups that concentrated on global political concepts and showed little interest in the specific problems and needs of poor women. They also realised that if the popular movement for social change in Chile were to grow both in numbers and strength, efforts would have to be made to move beyond those who were already socially aware and politically committed. As the leaders of MOMUPO say:

‘They [the union leaders] never understood the work we wanted to do with the ordinary woman, the ordinary housewife... we wanted to get them out of the house... have them take that first step, and then develop an awareness of themselves as people, as women and pobladoras, of the working class. After that, to work with them to develop a political and social consciousness. We were working towards developing a space where the pobladora could achieve an awareness of her identity, not just a class awareness, but also a gender awareness, through a process of personal and social development, and through looking at her own daily life.’

How MOMUPO functions now
MOMUPO was officially constituted as a movement in 1982, and still maintains its original structure: a loose federation of 12-15 base groups (about 25 women on average in each group), with each group maintaining its own autonomy and programme of activities, as well as forming part of MOMUPO. Most are subsistence oriented, including ollas comunes (small community-based kitchens which operate in people's backyards at lunch time) and small scale productive workshops (sewing and handicrafts). Each group elects a representative to the coordinating committee of MOMUPO, which meets once a week for general discussion, planning and evaluation. In addition, a five-person executive, elected from the coordinating committee, is responsible on a day-to-day basis for general management of MOMUPO's activities (including financial control, communications, public relations, etc). MOMUPO operates with
minimal funding, the major expenditures being the cost of public transport for the members, and the rent and upkeep of a small house where they meet (funded by Oxfam).

**Examples of MOMUPO’s activities**

Every few months, MOMUPO organises ‘ampliados’, which are mass meetings for the members of the affiliate base groups. The focus of these events ranges from the educational (health, legal rights, political analysis, theories of feminism, women’s identity) to the purely social and recreational. In addition, they organise campaigns (usually once a year) on a specific theme:

- **1984** Against Hunger and Cold, including both the setting up of _ollas comunes_, and educational workshops analysing the structural causes behind the growing poverty in Chile. A number of marches to local municipalities and health authorities were also organised.

- **1985** Health (mental health problems, public and family hygiene, women’s health problems).

- **1986** Women’s Reproductive Rights, both to teach women about the reproductive process and family planning, and to expose increasingly common birth control abuses by the Government (e.g. forced removal of IUDs in state clinics).

- **1987** The Law in Chile Today, women’s legal rights and the political context of the new Chilean constitution. Emergency aid programme due to heavy rain and wind storms (funded by Oxfam).

In addition, MOMUPO organises a 2-3 week summer school every January for its affiliate groups. Contents usually focus on three basic themes: popular feminism; the current political/economic situation; and practical skills (e.g. carpentry, appropriate technology, crafts and sewing skills, use of medicinal plants, etc). External workshop leaders are invited to cover those areas which the MOMUPO members cannot cover.

**Achievements**

MOMUPO’s major achievement is its continuing survival as an independent grassroots women’s movement within the context of a
military dictatorship. Work with unorganised women is slow under the best of conditions, but it is made that much more difficult where there is a generalised fear and rejection of anything considered 'political'. MOMUPO has managed to create a recognised and legitimate space amongst those groups working for social change in Chile, where the pobladora can develop her understanding of the structures of society, and her own role within that, from the dual perspectives of class and gender.

**Difficulties**

It is in fact the success of MOMUPO which has brought them to a point of redefinition and analysis of their role. With the increasing politicisation of the popular movements in Chile, and the re-emergence of political parties, along with the effectiveness of MOMUPO's own work in class and gender consciousness, a number of external and internal pressures and conflicts began to appear in 1986. MOMUPO now has within its ranks women of varying levels of consciousness of gender and class, with some of the more advanced wanting to take MOMUPO more and more into the overtly public political forum, rather than reinforcing its work with unorganised and less aware pobladoras. At the same time, external pressures have been felt from political parties, middle-class feminist groups and professional development institutions, attempting to take advantage of MOMUPO's poder de convocatoria (pulling power), thus putting both their autonomy and self-sufficiency at risk. Along with this, there have been many demands for MOMUPO's presence in a great number of social and political coordinating bodies which began to appear in 1984/5. Attending to these requests has occasionally led to neglect of MOMUPO's own work as a movement, producing highs and lows in both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of their activities.

Having identified some of these problems, MOMUPO has dedicated a substantial amount of time during 1987 to a systematisation of their experiences since 1980. Helped by an external facilitator (funded by Oxfam), they have tried to produce a clearer definition of the movement, its objectives, structure, etc. Part of their recent difficulties is also due to a tendency to operate spontaneously, with little recording of discussions, activities or decisions. This system worked reasonably well when the group was small and relatively unknown but as they have grown in size and public profile,
their former system (using the term loosely) is no longer sufficient.

Out of this process of analysis has come a declaration of principles and a clear statement of their objectives as a movement. They continue to work on finding the kind of organisational structure which is best suited to their needs.

12 November 1987

Postscript
From September 1973, to early 1990, Chile was run by a military regime notorious for its general abuse of human rights, and, more specifically, repression towards independent community activities and community leaders. MOMUPO was established in the early 1980's, partly as a response to a severe economic depression, and partly through the growth of a broad-based grassroots movement for social change. Now, with the change to a freely elected, civilian government, with relative freedom for almost all traditional political parties, and a state that would appear to be promoting independent community activity, MOMUPO must continue to adapt to the changing situation, as must many other organisations, born out of repression. This is not an easy process given that MOMUPO must take account of the dramatic shift in the socio-political context, but at the same time, recognise that the needs of the poor continue to be substantially neglected as a result of the classic free market economic model, introduced by the military regime and strictly maintained by the new government. MOMUPO's activities have grown in number, and they now provide a focal point for hundreds of women during any given year. Even so, they continue to work with the same outside facilitator, examining the issues of internal leadership and structure, and their role as an organisation within the new political context, but within the same structural economic constraints.

August 1990

Audrey Bronstein has worked for Oxfam since 1982, first in the Andean Regional office covering Oxfam's programme in Paraguay and Chile. Since 1989 she has been based in the UK, as Acting Area Coordinator for the Latin American desk, Acting Head of the Public Affairs Unit, and now as Deputy to the Communications Director. She is the author of a report on Latin American peasant women for the UNDP which was published by War on Want under the title The Triple Struggle.
FRANCISCA: A TESTIMONY FROM A WOMAN RURAL TRADE UNION LEADER IN BRAZIL

INTERVIEW BY EUGENIA PIZA-LOPEZ

‘When I discovered myself it was like maize growing in the field. First you have the leaves, green, tender, so timidly emerging out of the heart of the plant. Then the whole plant is geared towards producing la mazorca (maize cob), strong, bright yellow. It’s a process I’ve gone through.

‘I decided to open my eyes, to go out of this house and the fields five years ago. When I first went to meetings I sat at the back, embarrassed to talk or even look people in the eye. It was such an effort to speak, I felt so uncomfortable. My husband has been a trade union leader for a very long time, he encouraged me to participate in the union. Then we had our first women only meeting. I learnt a lot. We all talk the same language. It is so easy to say “we talked about being women” and yet it was such a difficult process for all of us. Any change in this world starts from the inside. How you value yourself and respect the dignity of a human being. Recognising your right as an individual to exist is so important as a starting point to join in the struggle.

‘It was a total reversal of my feelings towards myself and the whole world. I learned to fight and engage in a struggle which will bring respect for the peasants. I want to be treated with respect myself, and any form of exploitation goes against our dignity as individuals and peasants. That’s why I have been so involved in land issues. The land belongs to those who work it, not to the absent landlord.

‘You see, so little has changed in my everyday life, and yet I am a totally new person. I still cook and clean and do most of the housework. But at least, at the very least, I and my children know the value of that work. No-one takes it for granted any more! I have had more than ten pregnancies and that is very hard work. I work the land about eight hours a day. Sometimes I even forget to have lunch! When I’m back at home I cook, do the washing, prepare the beans, play with the children. In addition twice a week I fetch
firewood to make charcoal. I do it with the older kids. Those are the two hardest days of the week. We go to bed about one in the morning. When I prepare charcoal I don’t wash the clothes, you see it would be too much work.

‘Water? Water is so precious in this place. After years of drought we have to look after the water! It only takes us 40 minutes each way to fetch the water. Sometimes I do it myself, sometimes I send the girls. The girls are my extended hands. They work at home and in the fields. They are strong. I sometimes feel sorry for them, following the same pattern. I have tried, and will keep trying, to involve the boys in the housework. That is hard — they don’t like it. They feel embarrassed and uneasy. My husband is setting an example. He now takes on some of the domestic chores. It’s taken years for this change!

‘Perhaps the most radical change is in his support for my development both as a woman and as a peasant leader. He knows that my heart is in the struggle. Although he used to push me to participate in meetings, when I first began to develop my own ideas independently of him he did everything to restrain me. He even forbade me to attend meetings. But I decided, with other women, to challenge these attitudes both at home and in the community. I believe in our organisations and I feel women are reshaping them quite drastically. It’s just a question of giving us a chance.’
WHEN BROKEN-HEARTEDNESS BECOMES A POLITICAL ISSUE

CLAIRE BALL

(revised by Barbara Harrington)

There are currently some 200,000 Guatemalan refugees in Mexico, of whom only a quarter are legally entitled to be there. The other 150,000 are scattered throughout the country. Many end up in Mexico City, a bewildering and often hostile environment for undocumented refugees who are trying to battle with the paradox of having to conceal their nationality, their language, their traditional dress and yet desperately needing to seek out fellow Guatemalans with whom they can share, and try to make sense of, their experiences in exile.

The Comité del Distrito Federal (CDF) was formed in 1982, with the dual purpose of responding to the needs of Guatemalans in Mexico City and of collaborating in projects in the southern states of Mexico. Since then, more of the CDF's work has been directed towards helping people inside Guatemala itself. Oxfam has supported the work of the CDF, providing grants for salaries and for specific projects such as the House of Hospitality and the training of Guatemalan refugee women as community mental health promoters.

The House of Hospitality in Mexico City, set up in 1982 by the CDF, can only touch the tip of the iceberg. By 1987 it had provided temporary accommodation for about 200 refugees and their families. The House can receive up to 25 refugees at a time for temporary shelter. But those who have lived in the House and participated in the projects initiated by the CDF are in no doubt about the crucial contribution being made there towards understanding and interpreting the experience of the refugees and enabling them to channel those experiences actively into the process for change in the immediate circumstances of their lives as refugees in Mexico, and in the longer term to create conditions suitable for their return to Guatemala.

In September 1984, the CDF decided to include, for the first time,
an explicit focus on the perspective of women. The people working with the CDF had long recognised the particular needs of Guatemalan women refugees as victims of the type of repression operating in the country through counter-insurgency programmes. But the way that this interlocked with the other systems of patriarchy which controlled the women’s lives had still to be explored.

A group of twelve women — Indians and *latinas* (mixed Spanish and Indian descent); peasants, workers and housewives — came together in October 1984 to help each other find ways of dealing with the problems facing refugees in Mexico City. It was difficult for the women to trust each other, since distrust had been used as an instrument of repression in Guatemala, but they were determined to break through the distrust. In forming an action and reflection group they wanted not only to help each other but eventually to communicate with other women in the same situation. First, they had to overcome their communication problems within the group. Speaking in Spanish was not easy for the majority of the twelve, for whom it was their second language. However, with 22 different indigenous languages in Guatemala, the majority of Indian women were obliged to speak Spanish even with each other. The difference in levels of fluency and confidence in Spanish between the Indian and *latina* women further complicated communications problems within the group.

The women spoke about the contradiction of becoming invisible and concealing their identity for security’s sake while also needing to become visible to give testimonies and to receive economic aid from agencies and charitable organisations. They were further pressed into hiding by having to become ‘another’, abandoning their traditional dress, which in Guatemala identifies them as a member of a particular village or community.

Having to grapple for the first time with unfamiliar zips and fasteners and cumbersome city dress; having to twist their bodies to carry babies across their breast instead of on their back; carrying bundles under their arms rather than on their head; are only the physical manifestations of the trauma of not recognising oneself and feeling as one who has no rights; of the total loss of cultural and personal identity which Guatemalan women refugees experience in Mexico City.

Talking about shared health problems, not the least of which is the gastro-enteritis associated with the high levels of air and water
When broken-heartedness becomes a political issue

contamination in Mexico City, was the catalyst which eventually broke down the communication barrier within this group of women. One particular symptom which they all recognise and immediately identify with is ‘tristeza de corazón’ — literally, broken-heartedness. This is the most tangible and persistent characteristic of their experience as refugees, forced to flee their country, often having had to leave family and friends behind to an uncertain fate. Barbara Harrington, a North American Dominican sister working with the refugees used this identification of ‘health’ problems engendered by their situation to encourage the question ‘Why?’:

- Why are we poor?
- Why do we get sick more easily than you, who came to be with us?
- Why are we malnourished?
- Why was our land taken from us?
- Why did the Army burn our village and all our crops?
- Why did we have to flee our country?

By beginning to analyse their poor health in the context of repression, the women started to question the reasons behind their present situation. They looked for constructive means of action, rather than seeing themselves as helpless victims. Identifying so many shared fears and anxieties, as well as tangible health problems, fostered a growing confidence. With this grew the women’s realisation that, far from going quietly mad in isolation as many of them feared, they were in fact reacting and behaving normally under incredibly abnormal circumstances.

Wanting to translate these experiences into constructive help for the large numbers of refugees still coming into Mexico from Guatemala, the women decided to produce a booklet ‘Sharing our Lives’. This not only suggested ways of dealing with the problems they were facing in adapting to life in Mexico City, but also broadened the definition of the ‘political’. It gave the women’s perspective on the need for change in Guatemala and their own role in that process. They divided their work on the booklet into three different aspects of their experience:

- the events that had prompted them to leave Guatemala;
- getting out of the country and crossing the border;
the problems that they found in adapting to life in Mexico City, and solutions.

There was much discussion about the repression in Guatemala and the women’s perceptions were very different. The differing interpretations of the situation in the country and the feelings associated with their leave-taking provided insight into the specific problems of adaptation to Mexico. For example, when one woman living in Mexico City in a huge apartment complex spoke of missing her flowers, gardens, Guatemalan food and being at ease with her neighbours, another promptly retorted that she didn’t miss Guatemala at all. She had had to flee the invasion of the Guatemalan army into her village: she saw it burn, spent weeks crossing the mountains to reach Mexico and lost members of her family in the brutal ordeal. To her, Mexico meant life!

Work on the project was slow. It took eight months to produce a 12-page booklet. Many of the women were illiterate and had to learn to use the alien medium of pencil and paper. By depicting their experiences in drawings the women recalled the trauma of the time. The project, as it existed at that time, was not geared to cope with the psychological consequences of this. The trauma had to be relived and assimilated rather than suppressed before the women could incorporate and use their experience effectively. They needed to articulate and use their experience, both for their own well-being and as a contribution, providing a women’s perspective on the situation in Guatemala.

In taking part in any process of change, mental health is of fundamental importance. We need to suspend temporarily our own concepts of psychiatry with its emphasis on ‘mental illness’ and to consider instead the need of people in exile to be ‘mentally well’. They need to be healthy in the broadest sense in order to be able to participate actively in a struggle of liberation, in which the rhetoric of the left is sometimes intolerant of any sign of psychological ‘weakness’. The project committee thus initiated a training scheme for mental health promoters. It was anticipated that this would develop women’s perspective on their own ability to participate in the process and to further the participation of other men and women.

The mental health promoters’ project was written up in the summer of 1986, after consultation with the Guatemalan community in Mexico. The aim of the training course was to develop a
core of eight to ten mental health promoters who would work specifically with Central American women refugees and their children. This core group would be composed of refugee women themselves. Integrated into the course were women, endorsed by organised groups of Guatemalans, who recognised the need, had a constituency, and were respected by the organisations committed to the liberation of their country. In this way the training was assured of a multiplier effect.

The course, first envisioned as a year-long process, now encompasses five distinct phases. The entire cycle is completed within a year and a half to two years. It relies on the participants using their own experience, group work and psycho-social and political perspectives. The women are finding healthful ways to help reconstitute what repression seeks to destroy: the joy of working for a just society.

Now, three years later, the original group of women is working not only with other refugee women but also with children, parents' groups and small community gatherings. They have been invited to work in the Guatemalan refugee camps in Chiapas and Campeche and also to give workshops for Central American refugees in the United States. The women continue to meet regularly in order to receive supervision, mutual support and feedback as well as to develop methodologies appropriate to the people with whom they work.

A second group of eight were introduced to the programme last year. They are currently developing a second booklet which deepens and broadens the analysis of the previous one.

This is a significant project in that it represents the determination of the women refugees not to be defeated by their circumstances. They learn not to let the horror stories control their lives but to exercise their own control over the stories; how to assimilate and use their experiences to provide practical help for others living through similar situations. Their stories and the exploration of their own mental health are making an important contribution to the political analysis of what is still happening in Guatemala, the country where their broken-heartedness began.

Claire Ball worked on Oxfam's Central America Desk from 1986-89. She is currently Assistant Desk Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean at Help the Aged and is particularly interested in the issues affecting older women in the region.
BREAKING THE MOULD: 
WOMEN MASONS IN INDIA

RENU WADEHRA

In India's construction industry the strict division of labour means that women do the unskilled, tiring and backbreaking jobs of lifting and carrying concrete, mortar, bricks and sand and breaking stones whereas men do skilled work as masons, technicians, etc. Women never get an opportunity to upgrade their skills, therefore the myth that 'soft hands and nimble fingers' cannot do complex jobs needs to be changed.

According to the Indian labour law, at least 20 per cent of the labour force involved in the construction industry should be women, and as a step towards achieving this goal the Dutch Environmental and Sanitary Engineering Project set up a project to train women construction labourers in masonry work. This was the first attempt of its kind in the area. Under the Ganga Action Plan considerable construction activity was anticipated but the requirement of a minimum of 20 per cent women would be only a slogan unless women were properly trained. Otherwise, as soon as a skilled labour force was required, women would be out of work. The sanitation component of the plan, undertaken by Sulabh International, an implementing agency for low-cost sanitation, was found to be a suitable entry point for skill training since it was a long-running project. Applying their skills in this programme would give the women practical experience, confidence and credibility to take up work outside the project in the future.

The training was planned for fifteen women of Jajmao, Kanpur and fifteen women of Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh where the Indo-Dutch plans were to be implemented. The three week training programme was planned to include one week's training in the classroom and two weeks on site, with further on-the-job training for three months.

Women for training

It was decided to select women who had experience in working on
Construction sites and were able to understand and speak Hindi. They should be residents of Jajmao, where the project was in operation and should be between 25 and 40 years old; priority would be given to women heads of households, widows and married women.

General group meetings were organised with women construction workers at the construction sites themselves after 6.30 pm, since the women left their homes during the early hours of the day to reach the construction site and normally returned after 6 pm. Initially, local men and women volunteers and ICDS teachers were also involved in locating women. No women were excluded from taking part in the meetings because it was felt important that as many women as possible should understand the issues and become supportive.

The intention was to select women from different areas but during the course of the selection process it was decided to restrict the selection to a couple of areas only — the reason being that meeting too many women would raise hopes and expectations. Moreover it was thought that the women would find it easier to be supportive and encourage each other if they all came from the same area.

The men of the community had reservations about women being trained as masons. ‘Why don’t you give them sewing machines or introduce cottage industries for the women?’ was the general opinion in the slums. Others simply laughed.

After the first round of discussions with the community, a second round was initiated with the women who were willing to work and a third round was with the selected women only. As the rapport increased and the selected women became acquainted with each other, it was decided to hold meetings every week.

We could not expect the women construction workers to be literate but many could write numbers and their name. Those who could not were asked to learn the basics and were advised to attend an adult literacy school in the area run by local men. Later, in consequent meetings we learnt that some had learnt from their school-going children, one had learnt from the ICDS teacher of the area, and one woman had learnt from her co-worker during the free time at work.

Among the women a ‘we’ feeling emerged very strongly. For example, one of the women said that she had forgotten how to write her name because she had only learnt it as a child. The immediate
reaction of the women in the meeting was: ‘How can we make the programme a success if you don’t put an effort into learning?’ All women learnt to write their names and read the measuring tape — these were the minimal skills required for the training. Everyone came prepared for each meeting, having made necessary arrangements for their family’s food the day before.

The discussions in the meeting were not only centred around skills training; various issues emerged such as the status of women, and the question of equal wages. Films on Ganga pollution and Jag Sakhi (women’s awakening) were also shown and discussed. It became clear that women were certainly fed up with unwanted children.

During the meetings, we learnt a lot from the women — their determination to learn, and their openness; and that they knew a lot about masonry. They had been working with the masons at the construction sites but had never had the opportunity to implement their skills. The confidence and determination of the women gave us courage.

**Formal training**

In November 1988 the training programme was started, led by a team of Sulabh personnel; one engineer, two supervisors and one mason. They also prepared the training materials, including an instruction video on latrine construction and visual aids which were displayed at the training venue. The classroom and demonstration training was conducted on the premises of a school where the trainees went on to construct three latrines as part of their training. Today all the three latrines are functional and elegantly made by women masons.

**On-the-job training**

The three months on-the-job training was on a low-cost sanitation programme undertaken by Sulabh. All the fifteen women started construction work on individual latrines and slowly some of them moved on to the construction of community latrines in Jajmao. Throughout the training period each participant’s performance was assessed both through supervision on site and through group discussions at the meetings which started to take place every fortnight. Each trainee worked very hard and wanted to prove herself to be a good mason.
Although all the women showed encouraging results, nine proved to be excellent masons; their work and speed were good. They had had an opportunity to work in the individual latrines as well as the complexes where they learnt to plaster, fix doors and lay the floors and roofs. The plan was to enable all the women to work on the construction of complexes after they had learnt to construct individual latrines. Four complexes were to be constructed but unfortunately land problems meant that work on two had to be stopped. Since the remaining two did not provide enough work or space for fifteen women, six had to continue to work in the individual latrines. Towards the end of the training programme a third latrine complex was begun and the six women were placed there. It was agreed that the training period for these women would be extended by one month.

From the end of the planned on-the-job training period, all women were paid a stipend by Sulabh International; the nine fully trained women were paid Rs40 per day (this being the rate of a mason) and the six who remained under training were paid Rs20 per day until their training ended. After that they were to receive the same rate as the others if they proved satisfactory.

The plan was that fortnightly meetings should continue to discuss the formation of a formal group; to review the work and working problems on site; to discuss the health problems of the women and to look at informal education. It was important for the women to share each other’s views, learn from each other and gain experience. Many issues which could not be solved individually, could be solved collectively. It was expected that once they had proved their credibility as efficient masons, they would be in a position to find work on the open market. Future work possibilities were discussed with the women at length during meetings, with government officials and Sulabh personnel.

Life for the women after training was not smooth. Three women moved out of their home town, leaving their families behind. They managed to get work in this male-dominated sector on an ad hoc basis, but this was not because of their skills but because of my pressure on the employer. After three months, these brave women had to return back to their homes.

Having initially found work for the women, I moved out of the project. This was a testing time. I had initiated the whole programme, and the women relied a great deal on me. Suddenly the
group was shaken; meetings did not take place regularly and the work was not up to standard. Sulabh's construction work then stopped because of paucity of funds due to bureaucratic difficulties. The trained women could neither work as labourers as they had done prior to the training, nor could they get masons' work. There were exceptions; two women did manage to get masons' work on the open market. During this period an effort to form an official women's collective was made and finally the collective was registered.

Eventually, the project managed to secure a contract from the local municipality; the women now construct latrines in the urban slums.

The women have been trained; now it is time to discover how women will be treated in a man's domain.

Renu Wadehra currently works as a freelance consultant advising on women in development issues, particularly those relating to rural water and sanitation. She has worked with tribals in coastal Andhra Pradesh and also in the urban slums improvement programmes in Kanpur. She is an active member of Women and Environment Group of IUCN, Geneva, and the founder of SHACTI, a grassroots NGO in the Kumaon hills of north India working with women for environmental conservation.
PASTORALIST WOMEN'S WORKSHOP

CANDIDA MARCH

In May 1989 Oxfam hosted a three-day workshop for pastoralist women from Turkana, Samburu, Massailand and Somalia. There was a mix of women; young and old, Kenyan and non-Kenyan, rural and urban.

Most of the pastoralist women were illiterate and spoke their indigenous language; few had travelled outside their own area before and rarely or never alone. Songs, pictures, case studies, role plays, traditional artefacts, video, and discussion around, for example, the meanings of names and proverbs, were all used to explore the position and problems of women in pastoralist society and their role in development.

The purpose was to build an understanding of what development meant to pastoral women; to discover what kinds of projects lead to this development; and to hear women's hopes and worries. It was also intended to look for ways in which women could work constructively together to develop confidence, solidarity and faith in women's own worth and ability. The participants visited a project where women masons, plumbers and brickmakers building a meeting centre showed how much women working together could achieve. The workshop also helped to break down the isolation of the women and allowed them to share experiences and learn from each other.

The following exercise illustrates one of the methods used: proverbs were shared to begin exploring the traditions, myths and attitudes which hindered development. The proverbs and then their analysis came from the women at the workshop.

The women went into groups, according to which pastoral society they came from, to find examples of proverbs about women. One group was made up of non-pastoralist women including a European. Some proverbs which encouraged women are:
Woman is the home.

Children are their mother.

When you are a girl, help your mother to build a good house, so that the sun will not scorch her, since she gave birth to you.

Behind every successful man is a good woman.

You can never achieve like the man who has a better wife than you.

A man is only as good as his wife.

The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

Women hold up half the sky.

You have struck a rock.

If I leave, you will really look for me (telephones will ring).

Turkana songs praising women, their background and origin, were also shared.

There were other sayings which the women also thought encouraged women but on further discussion it was seen that instead they simply kept women in their place. It was hard to find proverbs that really encouraged women as people in their own right rather than just encouraging them to bear their burdens.

If a woman wants anything at home she must do it herself.

An elephant never fails to carry its tusks.

Have patience for the sake of your children, who may change the situation.

You can't leave troubles behind because of your children.

In a home where there are sons, troubles will only last a short while.

Don't take shit with one hand, seize it with both hands (you agreed to be married, see it through).

A lazy woman gains nothing.

If you will not be advised, your shoe will break.
Finally, it was easy to find proverbs that oppressed women:

The body that holds milk cannot hold intelligence.

The neck can’t grow past the head (women are the neck, men are the head).

A woman without a husband can’t think for herself.

You are so stupid you can even be misled by a woman.

Women will say nothing of meaning at a baraza.

A woman’s work is to be pretty, not to think about serious matters.

A woman should stay by the store and produce children.

A woman is like the shaft of a spear.

Women can’t make decisions in the home.

A woman can’t build a home without a man.

A woman can’t get satisfied with what she has to beg from her husband.

A woman doesn’t know how to solve a problem, but only how to cut her throat.

If you praise a woman, she becomes useless.

If your wife dies, don’t cry, it’s only the house fallen down (you can easily marry again).

If you are ‘proud’ your husband will not lie with you again (men don’t want educated women; ‘educated women are prostitutes’ but also, until recently, boys who were educated were seen as having been thrown away).

You are frightened like a woman.

You left but you came back (women have nowhere to run to).

A woman’s work is never done.

A woman owns no wealth.

A good child is praise to the father, a bad child shames the mother.
Discussion: How do these sayings affect women?

'They cause us not to believe in our own abilities, and prevent us from making progress. We kill ourselves with work, it breaks our backs, yet it is as though we have done nothing, we get no benefit ourselves from our work. We have nowhere to go, and lose hope.'

And to the question of who perpetuated these myths, the women answered — both men and women; men to maintain their position and women because of fear:

'Because of fear we don’t ask ourselves questions, challenge our situation or defend ourselves. We fear that if we challenge these myths we will get worse problems; if we challenge and are chased away, another woman won’t refuse to take our place. We do on despising ourselves and have no time to sit together and discuss these problems. We also perpetuate these myths because of conflict between women. Men don’t accept things from women, and we don’t challenge this.'

The women realised that they shared things in common:

'We are kept down in all our cultures, for example we cannot own homes or animals. We are taken as nothing, kept at home and not allowed to speak in public. Even the son we suffered for will grow up to look down on us; our problems will continue as our sons follow the examples of their fathers. We thought that it was only Turkana women who were beaten, but we see it is true everywhere. What has kept us back was staying isolated — now we have a chance to meet together and speak out.'

'We need to see what we, as women, can do to change this situation — but slowly, slowly we will fill the gap... We can’t go back from this seminar and start accusing — we will be beaten.'

At the end of the workshop the women were asked how they would use what they had learnt and what would happen:

'We have seen how we are chained. But the chains are of steel, they have existed in our culture for so many years, so these three days are not enough to cut them. We must work for change slowly; if we try to change quickly, we will be beaten and what
development we have so far achieved will also be taken away."
'We need to deal with our fear, and start with what is in our
power to change. We could start by educating our children to cut
the chains.'

Since all felt that they needed more time it was agreed to arrange
more workshops; each should be five or six days long, in pastoral
areas and when the children were home from school. Workshops
were also needed for the other women at home so that they could
keep up.

A second workshop, six days long, was held in December 1989,
bringing most of the women together again. In one session the
women discussed their involvement in development:

'We can see that women are beginning to come together in
groups to determine their own development. Those of us who
are beginning to develop understanding can help to light the fire
of development for other women, but we must be careful that we
don't cause too many problems. Together, women have strength.'

'Women have great spirit for development — far more than men
do. Development helps the community, men included, but it is a
burden which is placed on women.'

The women separated into groups to discuss the activities that they
were involved in which helped 'make the tree of development
grow'. Their answers included: agriculture; buying, selling and
looking after animals, including veterinary care; making, buying
and selling beads, hides, skins, food and utensils; setting up stores;
health and adult education; skills training e.g. technicians,
ploughing with draught animals.

The Samburu gave an example of a development project in their
area:

'In Latakwen, men and women joined together in a development
project. Each provided two goats and 200sh; the money was used
to buy skins and the goats were exchanged for food for sale in
the store. The men said they would do the work, and they would
meet with the women every Friday to discuss the business and
share the profits. Each Friday they put the women off with the
excuse that there was too much work at home... all the food and
skins were sold and the men had the money in their hands but
the women saw none of the money. On top of this the men had failed to pay the rent of 100sh per month for the weighing scales, and the owner finally came to the women after 6 months and forced them to have a harambee to pay the rent. The women did not follow this matter up with the men, but they themselves met again and this time kept the men right away from their group. They are now carrying on, but they have learnt the importance of being together as a group of women: from working together they have been able to push up the price of skins so that it is fair — and everyone has benefited from this. As a group they also visit and help each other — they have saved lives; and have helped each other to pay school fees for children.’

From the discussions held over several days the participants concluded:

‘We see that all women are doing important work to help the tree of development to grow.’

This report was compiled by Candida March from reports by the facilitators: Rose Akobwai, Rosemary Benzina, Rhoda Loyor, Nicky May, Rhoda Mohamoud and Adelina Ndeto Mwau.