

# **Addressing Rural Gender Issues: A Framework for Leadership and Mobilisation**

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## **Introduction**

Despite the enormous problems of discrimination against women in developing countries, rural development programmes tend to be gender blind. Where gender concerns are recognized, programmes are usually more concerned with adapting the programme to the existing pattern of gender relations, rather than using the programme to address issues of gender inequality.

This is a problem area which needs to be better recognized and understood by feminists, as the basis for leadership and action to ensure equal rights for women in rural development programmes.

This paper sets out a series of conceptual frameworks for the better understanding of this problem area, for the analysis of gender issues, and for an understanding of the process of women's empowerment. Armed with such tools, we need no longer sit idly by during the planning and implementation of gender blind development programmes, but may instead take the lead in ensuring that development programmes conform to UN conventions on women's rights. We need to act to bolster the political will to implement gender policies, and to play our part in mobilising the sisterhood for gender oriented development.

## **Recognising the Problem Area**

Throughout the world, programmes for poverty eradication and rural development are complicated by the different social and economic position of women, relative to men. Women are typically less literate, less educated and more poverty stricken. They have less access to the factors of production – land, labour and capital. Development policies increasingly aim to take account of these differences with special strategies for women – to reach them in their more remote location, to provide them with the necessary information, to link them with appropriate information systems, and so on. More politically, development policies may be concerned with women's mobilization and collective action at the grassroots, to enable women to take action to recognize and address their own special problems and needs.

But there is a pervasive problem that development agencies and national governments exhibit a lack of political will in addressing gender policies. Instead there tends to be much vague lip-service, involving ill-defined phrases such as ‘gender-sensitive’ and ‘gender-aware implementation’ of development programmes, when in practice these programmes neither identify nor address the important gender issues which affect rural women. Instead they employ ‘watering down’ strategies that serve to overlook, sideline or compartmentalize gender policy imperatives. But if we do not have a clear understanding of what we mean by gender issues, and the process for properly addressing these issues in development programmes, then obviously we shall easily be deceived by ‘watering down’ and ‘window dressing’ tactics, and easily diverted by irrelevant strategies that can never address the actual underlying causes of gender issues.

Underlying this failure to properly implement gender policies is a quiet but determined patriarchal opposition to policies of gender equality that is pervasive within development agencies, and amongst the government bureaucracies of ‘developing’ countries. Only when we are able to recognize and analyse the obstructive strategies of patriarchal opposition, shall we be able to devise the alternative and counter strategies to deal with this sort of opposition. Otherwise we shall constantly be talking of the obstacles of poor communication, insufficient information, poor administration and organization, instead of recognizing the underlying political opposition that is the main problem that needs to be addressed.<sup>1</sup>

This is a situation where there is much need for feminist leadership and activism in the planning and implementation of rural development programmes. Equally at the grassroots level, there is need for better participation of rural women in recognizing and analyzing gender issues, as the basis for mobilization and action to overcome the many forms of gender discrimination which stand in the way of rural development. This is the context within which we need to understand strategies of information, communication and mobilization. For addressing gender issues, such strategies are relevant only insofar as they contribute to the process of women’s participation and empowerment, enabling women to gain equal control to obtain their fair share of productive resources. Intervention strategies cannot be ‘self-evidently’ useful, but need to be justified in terms of being effective and feasible means for addressing the underlying causes of gender issues, by a process of women’s empowerment. It is to these matters that this paper now turns.

### **Three Levels of Gender Issues: Technical, Social and Political**

It is particularly in the area of gender that we need to be aware of the *technical, social and political dimensions* of a problem. If a problem is tackled merely at the technical level when it also has important underlying social and political dimensions, then the intervention strategy is likely to be ineffective.

Here the *technical* dimension refers to the obvious empirical manifestation of a problem, and also how it affects *individuals*. In terms of gender issues, we might be looking at women’s lack of land (relative to men), their lack of literacy, lack of skills training, lack of access to market, limited access to agricultural information, and so on. If a gender issue is interpreted at this level,

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<sup>1</sup> For an exploration of patriarchal ideology of the typical development agency, see Sara Longwe, *The Evaporation of Policies for Women’s Advancement*, in Noleen Heyzer *et al* (Eds), 1995, **A Commitment to the World’s Women**, UNIFEM, New York.

a development programme may intervene directly to provide literacy training, or agricultural information, increased access to market, and so on.

But underlying the technical dimension there is likely to be an important *social* dimension. For instance, women's lack of access to various factors may be tied in with their more domestic location and duties, and the traditional culture of women staying on the farm; conversely males have more freedom of movement to access schooling, information, markets, and so on. If this is the case, then interventions to address the situation must take into account the social dimensions of the problem, for instance by adapting interventions to women's current pattern of social gathering and interaction (e.g. church meetings), rather than attempt new social forms (e.g. night school classes) which might severely contradict and upset the existing social conventions and values. Of course it may be necessary to break with tradition, and introduce new social forms, even new institutions. If so, the problem must be properly understood, and interventions developed with and for the community themselves, taking account of the political dimensions of the problem.

The underlying *political* dimension involves issues of power and control. This is especially so in the area of gender, where all countries – to greater or lesser extents – are patriarchal. There is a longstanding tradition that the man is the 'head of the household', and the wider political and administrative structures tend to be a reflection of this patriarchal pattern. This leaves women with little control over land and capital – or even over her own labour! It is therefore to be expected that men will resist any programme intervention that seeks to lessen men's privileges, and their power and control over women. Of course it may be that addressing important issues in rural development must necessarily address issues of women's oppression and subordination. But if so, development agencies must understand the problem area, and how to develop strategies for women's participation and mobilization in a process for empowerment and liberation. By the same token, if a development agency blunders innocently into this area, whilst not understanding the underlying gender politics, they may never understand the process by which their development programme collapsed and failed.

### **Recognising a Gender Issue**

If we are to understand where gender issues are important in a rural development programme, we first need to be able to recognize and analyse a gender issue. There is a pervasive misconception that gender issues in development are merely a matter of understanding the gender division of labour, and the gender division in social location and access to resources, so that a new development programme can properly 'fit' into the existing society, without upsetting the existing social order.

This is a very conservative and inadequate perspective. It is inadequate because the existing 'pattern of gender relations' includes much injustice and discrimination which stand in the way of programme success. For instance gender gaps and discrimination in access to land cannot be accepted as a given, but needs to be tackled if problems of poverty and starvation are to be overcome.

Furthermore, a rural development programme must not focus narrowly on technical objectives such as food production, but must also tackle wider social and political issues. Discrimination against women, even if not interfering with efficient food production, remains unacceptable.

Development is also about social justice, and therefore rural development programmes must follow principles of human rights. More specifically, in the area of gender, development programmes must follow the principles of equal rights for women as enshrined in UN Conventions, as well as in the development agency's own gender policy.

With this situation in mind, it is useful to categorize gender problems according to their level of severity, so that we can be very clear about how we recognise a *gender issue*. Here it is suggested that the following list is useful:

### ***Levels of Severity of Gender Problems***

General Development Needs  
Women's Special Needs  
Gender Concerns  
Gender Inequality  
Gender Issues

*General Development Needs* are here defined as those needs which affect women and men equally, so there is no sex or gender difference. This is the zero level for seriousness of gender problems. It is often claimed that such matters as the need for roads, transport, or water are general development needs. But given the severe gender differentiation and division of social and economic roles in most societies, it is doubtful whether any needs, with the possible exception of the need for air, can properly be put in the category of a *general development need*. Nonetheless, it may be said that some needs are *more* general than others, where gender differentiation and discrimination are less severe. For example, perhaps roads are more of a general need, by comparison with land. In Africa, access to land is an area where women have a much greater need, being the majority amongst farmers and food producers, but at the same time this is an area where women are severely discriminated against.

*Women's Special Needs* are here defined as those needs that arise from biological or sex differences. Of course these may be serious problems in the general sense, but they are not in themselves gender problems. Obvious examples are the need for maternity hospitals, ante-natal care facilities, and so on. But most childcare facilities are not in this category, because women's childcare responsibilities arise mostly from the gender division of labour rather than biologically given roles. (Of course gender problems may arise out of women's special needs, for instance where male control of the government budget leads to lack of funding for maternity hospitals).

*Gender Concerns* are those needs which arise because of the gender division of economic and social roles. Therefore examples of women's gender concerns arise from their more domestic location and their concern with child care and food production and preparation. Typically, too, women are more dependent on the natural environment, and with gathering of food and medicines from natural vegetation or forests. For this reason, too, women and men have a very different *perspective* on development problems, as well as a different *identification* of problems that need to be addressed. A development programme may *adjust* to gender concerns. But gender issues need to be *addressed*.

*Gender Inequality* is a more severe type of gender problem, because here the gender concern is *also* overlaid with gender inequality, typically because women have less access to facilities, opportunities and resources. Because of this inequality in present systems of allocation, women

have a greater need. Gender equality is here defined as a gender concern which also brings with it inequality in allocations and opportunities.

*A Gender Issue* arises when people recognise that a particular instance of inequality is *wrong, unacceptable and unjust*. This realisation is more likely where the gender gap is large, and where women are aware of their democratic and human rights. (It needs hardly be said that in the very patriarchal states of Africa, most gender injustice is perpetrated against women, rather than the other way round.). Of course, from a purely moral standpoint, it might be said that gender inequality is always unjust, and therefore an issue. But at the same time, it is difficult in political practice to make an issue of gender inequality if there is not a wide perception that this inequality is unjust.

### **A Framework for Analysing a Gender Issue**

If we are thinking of programme interventions to tackle any particular gender issue, then obviously we would want to identify the factors and causes which underlie the gender issue. Here it is suggested that the following headings provides a useful framework when looking around for the underlying causes of a gender issue:

#### ***Underlying Causes of a Gender Issue***

- Gender Gap
- Gender Discrimination
- Patriarchal Control
- Patriarchal Belief
- Coercion

*Gender Gap* is the observable (and often measurable) gap between women and men on some important socio-economic indicator (e.g. ownership of property, access to land, enrolment at school), which is seen to be unjust, and therefore presents the clear empirical evidence of the existence of a gender issue.

*Gender Discrimination* is the different treatment that causes a gender gap. A gender gap is never accidental, but is caused by differential gender treatment. In a patriarchal society, this is almost always the different treatment given to girls and women that cuts them off from access to opportunities, facilities and resources. Such discriminatory treatment may be part of social custom, or may be entrenched in government administrative rules and regulations, and even in statutory law. Even when residing in religious practice or custom, these discriminatory practices may well have the status of law in many countries.

*Patriarchal Control* is the system of male monopoly or domination of decision making positions, at all levels of governance, which is used to maintain male dominance and gender discrimination (for the continued privilege of males).

*Patriarchal Belief* is the system of belief that serves to legitimise male domination and gender discrimination. Typically it relies on patriarchal interpretations of biblical/religious texts, beliefs in male biological superiority (sexism), entailing claims that the unequal gender division of rights and duties is either natural (biological), or God-given, or too difficult to change (claimed to be hopelessly and irretrievably embedded in culture!).

*Coercion* is even more ugly side of male domination, relying on violence against women to keep them in their place. Such violence may be domestic, or institutionalised within schools, police, army, etc. Where women's acceptance of patriarchal belief begins to waver, physical and sexual violence is the fallback method of control and subjugation.

## **The Process of Women's Empowerment**

Given the dimensions of a gender issue, and their obvious embeddedness within a patriarchal system, it becomes obvious that interventions on gender issues cannot be dictated by 'top-down' planners. On the contrary, women's advancement involves the process of empowerment, which we may give the preliminary definition of the process by which women achieve increased control over public decision making. Such empowerment is women's route to changing the practices and laws that discriminate against them, and achieving an equitable gender division of labour and allocation of resources.

The male domination of government is preserved by men for the purpose of serving male interests, where women are given most of the work, and men collect most of the rewards. Where men have a vested interest in the continued subordination of women, it would clearly be folly for women to expect male leaders to suddenly 'realise' the value of gender equality, and to 'give' women an equal share of the cake. Past experience already provides plenty of evidence that men do not 'give' power to women. It is axiomatic in gender politics, as in all politics, that power is never given; it has to be *taken*.

Clearly, therefore, we need to understand the process of empowerment. It is here suggested that this process of empowerment may be better understood in terms of the following five 'levels' of a 'Women's Empowerment Framework':

### ***The Five Levels of the Women's Empowerment Framework<sup>2</sup>***

Welfare  
Access  
Conscientisation  
Mobilisation  
Control

*Welfare* is here defined as the lowest level at which a development intervention may hope to close a gender gap. By welfare we here mean an improvement in socio-economic status, such as improved nutritional status, shelter, or income. But if an intervention is confined to this welfare level, then we are here talking about women being given these benefits, rather than producing or acquiring such benefits for themselves. This is therefore the zero level of empowerment, where women are the passive recipients of benefits that are 'given' from on high.

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<sup>2</sup> This Women's Empowerment Framework was first introduced in Sara Longwe, *Gender Awareness: The Missing Element in the Third World Development Project* in Candida March and Tina Wallace (Eds), 1995, **Changing Perception: New Writings on Gender and Development**, Oxfam, Oxford.

*Access* is here defined as the first level of empowerment, since women improve their own status, relative to men, by their own work and organisation arising from increased access to resources. For example, women farmers may improve their production and general welfare by increased access to water, to land, to the market, to skills training, or to information. But were they 'given' information considered appropriate by 'higher authorities'. Or did they increase their own access? If the latter, then this suggests the beginning of a process of conscientisation – of recognising and analysing their own problems, and taking action to solve them.

*Conscientisation* is defined as the process by which women realise that their lack of status and welfare, relative to men, is not due to their own lack of ability, organisation or effort. It involves the *realisation* that women's relative lack of access to resources actually arises from the discriminatory practices and rules that give priority access and control to men. Conscientisation is therefore concerned with a collective urge to action to remove one or more of the discriminatory practices that impede women's access to resources. It is here that we see the potential for strategies of improved information and communication, as a means for enabling the process of conscientisation, but driven by women's own need to understand the underlying causes of their problems, and to identify strategies for action. Where many women accept patriarchal norms, the leadership of more liberated and activist women is essential at this essential phase of fomenting dissatisfaction with the established patriarchal order.

*Mobilisation* is therefore the action level which complements conscientisation. Firstly it involves women's coming together for the recognition and analysis of problems, the identification of strategies to overcome discriminatory practices, and collective action to remove these practices. Here communication may not be merely concerned with the mobilisation of the group, but also to connect up with the larger women's movement, to learn from the successes of women's similar strategic action elsewhere, and to link up with the wider struggle. Here communication entails joining the global sisterhood in the struggle for equal rights for women. It is in this area of conscientisation and mobilisation that the issue of leadership become crucial. Here leadership entails taking the lead in building the mobilisation process, providing the organisational space, adapting and redirecting the existing women's organisations, and taking the lead in connecting with the wider sisterhood engaged in similar struggles.

*Control* is the level that is reached when women have taken action so that there is gender equality in decisions making over access to resources, so that women achieve direct control over their access to resources. They have taken what is rightly theirs, and no longer wait indefinitely to be 'given' resources merely at the discretion of men, or by the whim of patriarchal authority. Here the role of information and communication is to spread the word on the development of successful strategies. For example, in the widow's struggle to retain title to her property after the death of her husband, strategies developed by women in Zambia may be equally useful, or open to adaptation, in all the countries of Southern and Eastern Africa. (It may here be noted, in passing, that 'property grabbing', or discrimination against women in the accumulation of property through inheritance, is a major factor in their poverty and marginalisation in the Southern and East African region).

Therefore these five levels are not really a linear progression, as written above, but rather circular: the achievement of women's increased control, leads into better access to resources, and therefore improved socio-economic status.

In rural development, this concept of women's empowerment is central to an understanding of their participation and mobilisation, which automatically brings with it the development of leadership for addressing and removing the many forms of gender discrimination which presently leave women oppressed and marginalized in many countries of the Third World. It is impossible for us to talk of 'women's participation in rural development' without facing up to the process of empowerment which enables and utilises this participation.

### **Gender Mainstreaming in Programme Planning**

It follows from the above analysis that any rural development programme must, as part of its basic process of planning and implementation, leave space for the participation and mobilization of women. This means leaving space for the process of empowerment, by which women can work within the programme for the recognition and analysis of gender issues, and their collective action to address these issues.

This is what we mean by *gender mainstreaming* within a development programme. Gender issues should not be treated as a separate issue, nor should 'gender orientation' be treated merely as a style of implementation. On the contrary, the identification of gender issues, and the formulation of objectives and strategies to address these issues, must be central and intrinsic within the development plan.

A development plan should typically present itself as a rational argument, pursued by logical connections along the following sequence:

#### ***Elements of a Strategic Development Plan***

Situation Analysis  
Policy Imperatives  
Problem Identification  
Formulation of Goals  
Intervention Strategies  
Implementation Strategies  
Objectives  
Implementation Sequence  
Management System  
System of Monitoring and Evaluation

In this sequence, it is common for a programme's interest in gender issues to be either *entirely missing* from the above sequence, or otherwise to *fade away* as the programme document proceeds from Situation Analysis in the direction of Implementation and Management. Therefore, it is important that gender orientation should be found at the beginning of a development plan, and that this interest should be properly and rationally maintained throughout the planning and implementing sequence, without fading away or suddenly disappearing. (In terms of the above Women's Empowerment Framework, one type of 'fade-away' can be seen in a programme plan where goals are clearly concerned with increasing women's control over resources, but the subsequent objectives are strangely 'watered down', and are concerned only



with distribution of welfare benefits to women, or with providing women with increased access to resources).

We shall now look at the first seven elements of the above logical sequence of a development plan, with a view to explicating the planning sequence, and at the same time seeing how gender issues go missing, or otherwise fade away.

*Situation Analysis* refers to the initial review of the situation in the area that is of interest to the plan, particularly to mention the various problem situations that might need to be addressed by the plan. In any rural development situation, we should expect the analysis to include the various gender issues that stand in the way of equitable development, and which perhaps equally impede the development process. In practice, gender issues may disappear from a programme plan at this stage, if the situational analysis provides little or no information on gender gaps and the discriminatory practices which underlie them. It is a good general rule that gender gaps should be revealed by the routine gender disaggregation of all socio-economic data.

*Policy Imperatives* refer to those aspects of the policy environment that are relevant when deciding what to do about the given *situation*. In the area of gender, a development programme is subject to the principles and goals accepted by all parties in international agreements and conventions (notably the 1995 *UN Beijing Declaration and Platform*, and the 1979 *UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*). National governments and development agencies also have their own gender policies, which to some extent reflect and contextualise the international agreements to which they are party. But in practice it is common for a development plan to outline general development principles, but to overlook gender principles.

*Problem Identification*. In terms of formal planning logic, no *situation* can be said to present a *problem* unless there are *policy principles* that dictate which aspects of the situation are unacceptable. It is these unacceptable aspects that present the *problems* on which action must be taken. Despite this formal logic, many problems are identified as 'obvious', and may indeed be so. But the 'obvious' aspects of problem identification tend to be notably missing in the area of gender. Whereas many ordinary problems are 'obvious' without recourse to looking at the policy, gender issues tend to get overlooked, along with the gender policy itself. Gender issues may be overlooked as being 'political' in plans that take a technical or purely economic perspective. They may be overlooked where the vocabulary is gender neutral, in terms of 'people', 'farmers', 'target group', 'beneficiaries', and so on, which provide an easy formula for gender blind treatment of development issues. Most of all, gender issues are likely to be overlooked by male planners who are definitely not interested in recognizing or addressing issues of gender inequality. For the identification of (glaring!) gender issues, it may be necessary to wave the gender policy in the planners' faces before the existence of gender issues can be admitted.

*Formulation of Goals* should follow naturally from problem identification, where a goal may be summarized as an expressed intention to address a problem, perhaps with a statement of intended quantified outcomes, to be achieved in a specified time. In terms of gender issues, the goal should simply state the intention to address and eliminate the gender issue, for instance by ending a discriminatory practice, and by closing a gender gap.

*Intervention Strategies.* The logic in moving from *goal* to *intervention strategy* is that the chosen intervention, in order to be effective, must tackle one or more of the underlying causes of the given problem. But with poor planning, the intervention is merely considered to be a ‘good thing to do’, without any established causal connection with the original problem. In the case of gender issues, we should expect that an intervention strategy must be effective by addressing the underlying causes of the gender issue, and feasible in terms of previous experience, and in terms of anticipating, countering or bypassing patriarchal opposition. Strategies of information, communication and mobilization can never be good strategies ‘in themselves’, but need to be justified in terms of achieving goals, and addressing underlying causes (e.g. Is lack of information actually a root cause of the problem being addressed? Or is it merely a symptom of a larger underlying problem?). For gender orientation, strategies need to be justified by their contribution to the process of women’s empowerment, as a means towards addressing gender issues. (Conversely, women should not be the passive recipients of information, distributed from an information center which imagines it knows best. Such processes may be disempowering).

*Implementation Strategies.* It is often useful to distinguish between the higher level *intervention* strategy and the lower level *implementation* strategies. There may be many different alternative strategies for the implementation of any given intervention strategy. For example, the goal of access to agricultural information may be achieved by the *intervention* strategy of increasing women’s literacy. Increasing women’s literacy may be achieved by various alternative *implementation* strategies, such as increased formal schooling for girls, adult literacy classes, each one teach one, etc. For gender orientation, the appropriateness of an information strategy needs to be assessed partly by its effectiveness in distributing information, and partly by its effectiveness in promoting the larger process of women’s empowerment.

*Objectives* are the expression of the more specific and more detailed intention of implementation purpose, especially in terms of activities and intended outcomes. Very often an implementation strategy is not properly identified or even justified, but may be deduced by its being implicit within a list of objectives. In the area of gender, programme objectives typically do not show any intention to address gender issues. If a planner or project manager is challenged on why the goals and objectives are gender blind, it is common (in this author’s experience) to get the response that ‘our project is very gender oriented, because our staff are all very gender aware, and our implementation is gender sensitive’. Such an answer, which is infuriating and useless, may arise from ignorance or dishonesty. The plain truth of the matter is that the gender orientation of programmes is about recognizing and addressing gender issues. The intention to do so must be clearly made explicit in the goals and objectives, and in the description of the implementation process. Even then, it is very difficult to push implementing agencies to actually do the job, because they prefer an easy life, and do not wish to get implicated in upsetting the existing patriarchal social order.

A gender oriented objective may be an *outcome* objective, concerned with closing gender gaps, or ending a discriminatory practice. Or a gender-oriented objective may be a *process* objective, concerned with the activities and social process by which the outcome is to be achieved. The process of women’s empowerment is just as important as the resulting outcomes in closing gender gaps. Even if women’s collective action fails to make much progress in closing a gender gap, women of the community have learnt much from the process of collective mobilization around gender issues. This may be even more important than the material results, because even if they failed this time, they may have learned enough to succeed next time! Empowerment is a cumulative process!

## **Towards Effective Leadership for Addressing Gender Issues**

Suppose you are a programme officer in a developing agency, responsible for overseeing some aspect of the planning and implementation of a development programme. How are you going to use your position to take the lead in ensuring that this programme is properly gender oriented, in all aspects of planning and implementation?

Here we shall make a preliminary attempt to address this question in general terms, by pointing to some of the main leadership imperatives, for each stage of the process of programme planning and implementation.

### ***Leadership Imperatives***

*Situation Analysis.* Ensure that the Situation Analysis does not use gender blind vocabulary (people, farmers, target group), but includes gender disaggregated vocabulary and data, and identifies gender gaps and discriminatory practices.

*Policy Imperatives.* Ensure that the programme plan mentions the relevant principles and goals from all guiding gender policies, and that these principles and goals are properly pursued throughout the sequence of planning and implementation. Make it clear that planners and implementers do not have personal discretion on whether to implement or drop policy imperatives.

*Problem Identification.* Ensure that all gender policy is set against the situation analysis, for the proper identification of all gender issues that are relevant to the programme goals, or that stand in the way of project success. Also draw attention to wider gender issues which may not be directly relevant to the technical aspects of project goals, but which can be addressed by using or extending programme interventions. Make sure that there is a proper investigation of relevant gender issues and their underlying causes. Involve the women of the affected community and target group in this identification and analysis.

*Formulation of Goals.* Ensure that the programme expresses the intention to address all gender issues identified as problems, by formulating goals to address these problems. Ensure that these goals express intention specifically and quantitatively (e.g. to completely close a particular gender gap during the five year programme period).

*Intervention Strategies.* Ensure proper identification of intervention strategies for addressing gender issues, in terms of effective measures to address underlying causes, in terms of feasibility, in terms of previous experience of success elsewhere, and in terms of facing or circumventing the likely patriarchal opposition. Involve women in the affected community in identifying and planning workable strategies. Do not allow strategies to be 'set in stone', but make strategic planning formative and adaptative, with participation from the local community.

*Implementation Strategies.* Ensure that both intervention and implementation strategies are not top-down, but instead use the process of women's empowerment as a bottom-up method for recognizing and addressing gender issues.

*Objectives.* Make sure that the list of objectives is specific on women's participation and intended outcomes. Include both outcome and process objectives, with the latter spelling out the objectives for the process of women's empowerment. Encourage the view that the process of empowerment is valuable *in itself*, quite apart from the measurable material outcomes.

*Implementation System.* Ensure that the implementation system and sequence is not purely linear, but allows for feedback adjustments on the basis of findings from M&E. Leave space within the implementation system for trying and testing different strategies for women's empowerment. Involve the women of the community in this process.

*Management System.* Distinguish between the overall management board that oversees the project, and the management committee of implementers. Include women of the community in both of these committees, to ensure that gender issues are properly recognized and addressed throughout the process of planning and implementation.

*Monitoring and Evaluation.* Ensure that indicators are concerned with measuring progress on activities, and the quality of these activities, as well as quantitative measures of outcomes. Devise methods and indicators for monitoring progress on implementing and developing the process of women's empowerment.

Overall, make it clear to the rest of the management team that gender issues are not 'separate' issues, but are development issues like all other issues. Be constantly aware that attention to gender issues will be overlooked if they are not made explicit at every stage. This is not only because of patriarchal resistance, but also because the adoption of a gender neutral and technical vocabulary serves to ensure that gender issues remain hidden from view.

Insist that responsibility for gender orientation of the programme must not be compartmentalized, or dealt with only by a separate 'gender specialist'. If there is a gender specialist, the role of this person should be to keep everybody else on their toes. Concern with addressing gender issues must be mainstreamed within the programme, and concern everybody.

Insist that the logical sequence of planning and implementation must be applied rigorously to the process of recognizing and addressing gender issues, in the same way that it is applied to all other development issues.

## **Conclusion**

Strategies for women's advancement must be firmly grounded, firstly in the logic of effective intervention to address the underlying causes of gender issues, and secondly as a contribution to women's own process of taking collective action to recognize and address gender issues.

Such collective action needs leadership. Firstly, this needs leadership at the local level, for women to find the organizational space to meet, to find their collective dissatisfaction, and to take action against gender discrimination and oppression. Secondly, addressing gender issues needs leadership at the global level, where action at the local level can be supported by the larger sisterhood, especially for inter-related effort around gender issues of regional importance.

In both types of leadership, good information dissemination and communication can make the critical difference, if well designed and properly focused on mobilization for women's empowerment.

Such leadership depends crucially on adequate understanding and conceptualization of the problem area, as a means towards strategizing in an environment of patriarchal opposition. This paper has tried to contribute towards such improved conceptualization.

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29 September 2002