

Interactions between Policy Assumptions and Rural Women's Work - A Case Study

Kumud Sharma

The concern of this paper is limited to the approaches to rural women's development and an understanding of their work roles in the planning strategies. In the last decade many national and international agencies have emphasised the need to pay special attention to the needs of rural women who constitute a large majority of food producers in the developing countries. A basic feature of all centrally planned economies has been to introduce changes in economic and social organization, introducing new and modified technologies and providing resource inputs for increasing agricultural productivity. A general consequence of this has been increasing polarisation in village society based on a system of inequalities and unequal access to resources and power by different sections.

Policies to achieve agricultural development through mechanisation and the package of high yielding variety seeds, credit and fiscal incentives, have reinforced the rural power structure. The fertile area is increasingly being directed to cash crops or crops for export than to food crops, resulting in increasing malnutrition among the growing population of the rural poor. The crop selective strategy has also accentuated the regional and spatial inequalities, transforming the base of production. The continuing debate on this issue has made it increasingly clear that without structural and institutional changes the benefits of rural development will be monopolised by the rural elites.

Changes in the economic and social participation of rural women are linked to the way the rural economy gets incorporated in national and international markets.

We begin by describing the present rural scenario and the work roles of rural women to understand the implications of rural development programmes for their employment opportunities. Women's work in agriculture and allied activities is related to the village stratification system. The dynamics of village life embraces various facets which affect the allocative, distributive and participatory process in the community. The introduction of democratic decentralisation policies of land reform, investment policies in agriculture and rural industries, creation of administrative infrastructure for rural development i.e. health, education and welfare and target-group focussed policies for income generation and alleviation of poverty, have on the one side weakened the hold of the traditional caste stratification and dependency relations, on the other hand have created new power relations between the haves, and have-nots. The problems however, cannot be solely located in the modernisation aspect as more important is the socio-political context within which the changes have been introduced.

The paper is based on my field work in a green revolution district in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The district has the longest history of planning at grassroots level. The Pilot Development Project, Etawah, was started in 1948 and later become the model for India's Community Development Programme. The field work provided an interesting opportunity to explore the relationship between development activities and socio-economic changes and women's access to information, resources and decision-making.

I

Profile of Rural Women in Uttar Pradesh

Rural women constitute 80.92 of the female population and 38.98 per cent of the total population. In Uttar Pradesh 82 per cent of the population is rural. Uttar Pradesh ranks 14th in urbanisation and 25th in literacy rates among the thirty one States and Union-Territories. There is a marked disparity among the districts so far as female literacy is concerned which varies from 41.41 per cent to 6.30 per cent. The sex ratio of the State is 886 as against 935 for the country (1981 Census). It ranks 24th in descending order of sex-ratio. In 1981 the total work force in rural areas of Uttar Pradesh was 26.87 million of which 2.81 million were women. The distribution of workers in agriculture and household industry in the state is as follows:

	1971 Census			1981 Census		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Cultivators	57.43	59.10	42.64	58.02	59.26	46.43
Agricultural Labourers	19.95	17.18	44.49	16.32	14.42	34.00
Household Industry	3.66	3.64	3.92	4.39	4.24	5.86
All Workers	30.94	52.24	6.71	29.13	49.61	6.02

Source: Census of India 1981 - Series 22 Uttar Pradesh.

Over the years there has been increase in the proportion of agricultural wage labour to total agriculture workers at all India level although in Uttar Pradesh the number of both men and women agricultural labourers has declined in 1981. What is significant is that the proportion of women wage labourers in agriculture is much higher than men. It seems to be the single largest avenue for women's employment in rural areas. The agricultural labour households include the landless and the marginal farmers who derive the major portion of their income from wage paid labour in agriculture.

Agricultural land is the main production base in the rural areas and the land concentration means concentration of other assets also. The first Agricultural Census of Uttar Pradesh was conducted in 1970-71 and it was found that nearly 47 per cent of the holdings in the State were below 0.5 hectares and another 20 per cent were between 0.5 to 1.0 hectares. The Agricultural Census of 1976-77 showed a slight increase in this category, and the holdings below 0.5 hectares accounted for almost fifty per cent (49.7) of the total holdings cultivating on 10 per cent of the total cultivable area. While 20.9 per cent holdings which are above 5 hectares, are cultivating 22.3 per cent of total cultivable area (Appendix I).

The concentration of land in large holdings has led to greater mechanization of tasks and crop intensity, however, the substantial number of small uneconomic holdings has increasingly made these families dependent on wage employment. Population growth has meant a rise in land-man ratio and a decline in per-head cultivated area for the rural population.

In the State of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) 65.88 per cent of the geographical area had been brought under cultivation by 1977, leaving 8.21 per cent land for non-agricultural uses, 8.71 per cent for forest, 0.32 per cent for permanent pastures and 2.35 per cent for miscellaneous uses like orchards and groves. Apart from this 4.75 per cent of land is wasteland and 2.26 per cent is fallow land and 3.85 per cent is barren and uncultivated land.

Over the period of twenty years between 1954-57 to 1974-77, the net sown area in the state has increased from, 62.60 per cent to 65.88 per cent only which means there has not

been any significant change in the land use pattern. Upto the middle of 60's the main crops of the state were paddy, wheat and gram covering 19.59, 17.85 and 12.03 per cent of the total sown area respectively followed by barley, sugarcane and maize. By the mid-seventies the area under wheat significantly increased from 17.85 to 27.01 and paddy's coverage remained at 19.62 per cent. There were marginal increases in oil seeds and sugarcane and decline in barley and grams. Till 1977 only 41.77 per cent area was irrigated and 28 per cent was under HYV crops. It is a situation of stagnant agriculture.

A comparative study of employment of women in agriculture and non-agricultural sectors in rural Uttar Pradesh as obtained from 27th Round and 32nd Round of N.S.S. is given in the statement below:

Category of Employment	27th Round (1972)		32nd Round (1977-78)	
	Sex Ratio	% to Total Female Workers	Sex Ratio	% to Total Female Workers
A. Agriculture	325	82.42	288	88.64
1. Self-Employed	341	72.41	288	74.27
2. Regular Salaried/ Wage Employment	134	1.91	82	0.78
3. Casual Labour	301	8.10	337	13.59
B. Non-Agriculture	270	17.58	134	11.36
1. Self-Employed	349	13.83	176	9.01
2. Regular Salaried/ Wage Employment	150	2.24	67	1.54
3. Casual Labour	143	1.51	78	0.81
C. Not in Labour Force	7159	68.74	6213	77.11
D. Unemployed	416	1.39	161	0.63
Total Working	299	29.87	255	22.26

The study reveals that the percentage share of female workers in agriculture has gone up by a little more than 6 per cent (6.22) during the period 1972-73 to 1977-78 (27th Round to 32nd Round). This increase is accounted for by 1.86 per cent in self-employed cultivators and a major share by 4.36 per cent in agricultural labourer comprising of wage employment and casual labour. Hence the influx of agricultural labour class has been the major factor for the continuous increase of female workers in agriculture sector.

On the contrary the women's participation in non- agricultural sector has shown a corresponding decline during this period from 17.58 per cent in 1972-73 to 11.36 per cent in 1977-78. The substantial decline is noticed in self-employed category where the women's participation has decreased by 4.82 per cent.

The District

In the Etawah district the sex-ratio in 1981 was 831 as compared to 886 for the State and 935 for the country. It has shown gradual improvement till 1961 (806 in 1931 to 847 in 1961) a drop in 1971 (826) and slight improvement in 1981. The female literacy in the district is higher i.e. 24.02 per cent as compared to the state average of 14.42 per cent in 1981. The work participation rate in the district is very low 1.25 per cent, as compared to the state average of 6.02. It is one of the exceptional districts where female participation rate in rural areas is lower (0.89 per cent) than in urban area (3.31 per cent). More than three-fourths of all workers recorded in the 1981 Census are in urban areas mainly employed in the weaving

industry which is concentrated in the town. In the district 18.87 per cent of women workers were engaged in household industry as against 23.83 per cent working as cultivators, 21.80 per cent as agriculture labourers and 35.50 as other workers.

It is interesting to note that area under cultivation in the district has been rising steadily over the last four decades from, 51.66 in 1930-31 to 65.59 per cent in 1974-77. But female employment has been steadily declining over the years. The blocks where women's participation is higher are the three blocks under the Pilot Project where women are mostly employed as agricultural labourer and in household industries. In these blocks percentage of scheduled caste women is higher (between 28 to 30.17 per cent). The block which has a higher concentration of land holdings above five acres, has maximum number of female agricultural workers (37.48 per cent). The four blocks which have more than 90 per cent of the holdings below 5 acres have very low participation of females. Possibly they are working as unpaid family workers who are not counted as workers.

Some of the schemes which are being implemented by different government departments in the rural areas are Adult Education Programme, Applied Nutrition Programme and Family and Child Welfare Project. There is one Extension Training centre which organises training for village and block level extension staff and for organisers of Charcha Mandals (rural discussion forum for farm women). The Planning Research and Action Division of the State Planning Institute, Uttar Pradesh, takes up diagnostic studies on socio-economic problems in rural areas and functions through its field laboratories in which different schemes are operated on experimental basis.

The Pilot Development Project (Etawah) is one of the field laboratories for action research on integrated rural development. It covers three blocks of the district. In 1979-80 it carried out research and development activities in order to simplify and standardize bio-gas technology and community bio-gas plant¹. In 1979 a community bio-gas plant financed by UNICEF was installed as part of the experiment in decentralized village energy system. The village had 27 households. A cooperative society was formed to ensure a regular supply of gobar-gas to all families. Right from the beginning the problem cropped up in the functioning of the cooperative society which was dominated by the richer families. The maximum problems were faced by the women as the whole thing was planned with a total disregard of women's roles. Gas for cooking was supplied between 8-10 am. and 6-8 pm. In the morning hours most of them were working in the fields and it was difficult for them to combine domestic and agricultural activity².

Women are engaged mainly in agriculture. In a few blocks sericulture was promoted by the Pilot Development Project since 1954 on household basis. The programme aims to provide additional source of income to landless labourers and marginal farmers. The rearing of silk worms is mainly the responsibility of women and children as the activity is undertaken at the household level. It is a Government subsidized programme where mulberry leaves and layings are supplied to silk worm rearers from the farms which are maintained by the government. However, the marketing of cocoons is done by the rearers themselves, who sell it to a private party from Bengal.

All the extension staff is male. The landless and marginal farmers family engaged in this activity have been increasingly facing the problem of lack of adequate space in their homes, inadequate supply of mulberry leaves, intensive nature of activity for a fortnight as they have to keep a vigil all the 24 hours, and change leaves 4 times a day. This means physical

¹ Annual Plan 1982- 83, Vol.I, Planning Department, Uttar Pradesh.

² Gobar Gas Show-piece of Sadiqpura - Govind Kelkar, Nirlep Malhans and Jyoti Sanghera - EPW February 1981.

exhaustion. The yield per chowki (tray) is also low because of the quality of eggs supplied to them and inability of the rearers to maintain the standards recommended by the extension staff. The Project staff has never explored the possibility of training women in reeling and weaving, even though Etawah has weaving as an important household industry.

Some weavers women who were interviewed compared their over worked lives to the looms itself which rarely remained idle. Interspersed with domestic chores they worked on the looms filled bobbins, dyed the staple yarn, starched and dried it. The only activities which were exclusively done by men were operating the 'Arpin' for preparation of yarn, repair of the loom and marketing. These were all Muslim women and practice of 'purdah' was given as the main reason for not taking part in out of home activities.

Some of the main features of women's participation in agriculture which have been observed and also corroborated by other studies are:

- 1) gender specificity of tasks which creates more demand for women's labour in certain operations. However, the sex division of labour is not very rigid and some tasks are done by both men and women;
- 2) more involvement of women in coarse grain producing area;
- 3) Male, female wage differentials. In the field area it was found these women were paid 4 to 5 rupees while men were paid 7 or 8 rupees;
- 4) Differential rate of participation in wage labour by caste/ income group. The upper caste women from Brahmin and Thakur families did not work in the field. There is a negative correlation of family income and female participation rates. With increasing family prosperity there is a tendency among other caste groups also to withdraw women from active field work outside the home. What happens in the reverse process where upper caste groups traditionally not engaged in work in the fields, become downwardly mobile has not been explored adequately. Few instances were found where women from upper castes who lost the family support (through death, desertion or divorce) were not prepared to undertake manual work in agriculture.
- 5) Growth of female agriculture labour over the last three decades is the most significant structural change in the rural economy. It is a manifestation of growing rural pauperization and landlessness. The overwhelming response of women to programmes of public works, indicates that the need for employment is greater among women than what is officially recognized.

II

The Community Development Programme The National Approach

The Community Development Programme was launched in 1952 as a multi-dimensional programme aiming at a process of socio-economic transformation of village community by mobilising both governmental and community resources. The programme drew inspiration from several indigenous experiments (Nilokheri Etawah and Firki). It combined some of the basic tenets of Gandhian philosophy of rural reconstruction and the techniques practiced in the USA (The Tennessee Valley Project) with a definite welfare bias. An Operational Agreement was signed between the Governments of the United States and India for the first

55 projects of rural development which is popularly known as Community Development Programme. Of these six were started in Uttar Pradesh. It offered a uniform working pattern throughout the country without taking into consideration regional and local variations. The Block was the basic administrative unit of the rural development programme. The Government trained a number of Block Development Officers and Village Level Workers for administering the programme at the block level.

The basic objectives of India's rural development programme stated in every plan were (1) increased agricultural Productivity and diversification of rural economy (2) reduction of poverty, inequality and unemployment to achieve growth with social justice and (3) promoting peoples participation for stimulating growth and expanding the democratic base and (4) improving quality of rural life.

The major instruments designed to achieve these objectives were:

- 1) Agrarian reforms
- 2) Modernisation of agriculture
- 3) Development of rural infrastructure for delivery of services and promoting people's participation
- (4) Development of credit system for reducing poor farmer dependence on traditional credit and preventing their exploitation
- (5) Promote rural growth and diversification with programs of employment generation in sectors such as dairy, animal husbandry, fisheries, rural industries etc.

In the Sixth Five Year Plan, Area planning and organisations of rural poor were added as new policy instruments.³

The social content of the rural development programme, however, got diluted because of the over-riding pressure for raising agricultural productivity to meet the food crisis. Right from the beginning the First Five Year Plan emphasised the need for increased food production because of the growing food shortages, aggravated by the partition and the loss of more fertile area in the sub-continent. The contradictions that developed in the sector of rural development due to shifts in emphasis and priorities in response to changing situation put great stress on the ideological and operational content of the programme.

The patterns of development in rural areas were more confusing because of the complex and intertwined structure of land, caste and communal relations that characterised rural society. All sections which advocated the abolition of Zamindari (landlordism) did not necessarily support the theory of "land to the tiller". There were sections which pleaded that first priority should be given to raising agricultural productivity (grow more food) through the dissemination of new technology, chemical fertilizer and developing 'delivery agencies' in the rural areas to reach much needed information training and other inputs to farmers. These sections which, included politicians and bureaucrats - some of whom emerged as planners pressed the view that major upheaval in agrarian production relations, which

³ Country Review and Analysis on Role and Participation of women in Rural Development (India) - Report of a National level Committee appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India - 1979-80.

would follow any radical measures for land redistribution, would effect productivity negatively.⁴

Right from the beginning the Community Development Programme developed an agricultural bias. It was not able to offer any positive economic activity to classes of people other than large agriculturists. The programme almost exclusively confined itself to increasing agricultural productivity without effecting any change in the structure of village economy and institutions.

There is no dearth of literature on the concept and approaches of the Community Development Programme its background, context, character and content. However, neither the bureaucracy nor people, nor intellectual elites had any coherent understanding or grasp over the essential features of the programme which aimed at all-sided development of the village community with three basic objectives of economic growth, social transformation and self-reliance. The village community accepted it as a programme initiated for the improvement of agriculture in particular. The bureaucracy which had some idea about the plan, though sketchy and incoherent and was more worried about the fulfillment of certain targets assigned to them and engrossed in their own departmental-routines and problems. Several of these programmes progressed along parallel lines without any organic relationship with each other. Many officials believed that the programme was an "American Import" without any Indian bias and was being implemented through foreign aid.

Some believed it was a brain-wave of some enthusiasts who initiated a movement without the least idea of how mass movements work. In fact the entire programme was understood and implemented in complete isolation from its historical context.⁵

The first evaluation report on the working of Community Projects also stated that the arrangements made for the training of block level functionaries incharge of implementing the programme, were small palliatives for an evil which though at present incipient is organic viz. that of a non-specialized coercive agency trying to build up a programme which should be based on the value of popular initiative, progressive outlook and community action. It further stated that an emphasis on organisational compliance and official responsibility was threatening to turn a state induced popular movement of rural regeneration into an official programme of tasks in which people are asked to participate.⁶

Initially, the programme had nothing to offer to women. Planners in their preoccupation with agricultural growth forgot millions of rural women - the silent producers in the rural economy. The Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, admitted that "When we began the women's programme, we did not have a single woman in our community Projects Administration. We completely forgot that it is not possible to strike roots with any programme unless women come into the picture. This was a later realisation. Even when the realisation came we paid lip sympathies perhaps because it had a terrific pressure on it on the one side of food production and on the other from the provision of amenities. Our organisation had very little time to devote to evolve a programme for women, which by its very nature would have required much more sustained and much better efforts...." He hoped that the help of voluntary organisations the vast reservoir of non-official women power which is lying virgin could be utilized for energizing women's programme.⁷

⁴ Francis Frankel, India's Political Economy O.U.P, 1976 - in Women's Participation in Political Life in India - Maitreyi Chowdhry, Zoya Hassan and Vina Mazumdar, Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1983.

⁵ The Committee for Evaluation and on Public Participation Government of Uttar Pradesh 1959.

⁶ Evaluation Report on Second Year's Working of Community Projects - 1955.

⁷ V.T. Krishnamachari - Village Self-Government in Democratic Planning, 1957.

There is considerable debate on the genesis of the women's component of the Community Development Programme in fact there is some evidence that policy makers deliberately avoided committing themselves to women's work.⁸ In 1948 when The Pilot Project, Etawah, was started, Albert Meyer, then Planning Adviser to the Uttar Pradesh Government, felt that "the need for working with women in the project area is great but it has proved the most difficult because the social situation of women in Uttar Pradesh is such that policy makers generally wish to avoid committing themselves to programmes of women's work and are often hostile to women's welfare work. Village men also hold the same views, but more strongly. For somewhat similar reasons officers at supervisory level in the Planning Department have not yet evolved targets or systematic programmes of work with women. Efforts to reach rural women have therefore been uneven, sporadic and fluctuating".⁹ Similar resistance from other states was also reported by senior civil servants.

Successive annual conferences of Development Commissioners later emphasised the need to bring women into the ambit of the Community Development Programme in a bigger way, as lack of participation of women in the programme was responsible to a considerable extent for the programme not making the desirable impact. The areas which were thought as offering great scope for women's participation were in the field of sanitation, hygiene and better ways of living. Women can also employ themselves in gainful occupation during spare time by learning arts and crafts. However, the main objectives of the women's programme was to help village women become "a good wife, a wise mother, a competent housewife, and a responsible member of the village community."¹⁰

Right from the beginning the women functionaries saw the incongruity in helping poor rural women in programmes of improved home living methods however, our planners were convinced that women needed training in household management, child development, nutrition and home crafts etc. Twenty five Home Science Wings were started in 1955 with the Extension Training Centres for the training of village level women workers in family, food and nutrition, child development, household management, kitchen gardening, poultry and extension methods. One woman member of the Planning Commission chided the officials, "we give a wrong impression to outsiders who visit community project area that women do not work in villages. Why should we give this impression? Is it because of our failure to take sufficient and desirable steps to get their co-operation"?¹¹

In the Second Five Year Plan the emphasis was on industrial growth. Towards the end of the Second Plan, the Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP) was launched in 28 districts with assured irrigation. In the Third Plan when the major emphasis in the rural development programme again shifted to agriculture to meet the food shortages, and achieve self-sufficiency in foodgrains, the women's programme received a set-back. While the number of men village level workers was increased in intensive agricultural development areas the number of women village workers was reduced or even eliminated by a few states. Some of these women village level workers were retained in those blocks where the Applied Nutrition Programme (ANP) was implemented. The, ANP was

⁸ Rekha Mehra - The Neglect of Women in India's Rural Development Programme - A Study of failure in Planning, in Women and Rural Transformation; ICSSR, CWDS; Concept, Delhi; 1983.

⁹ Albert Mayar - Pilot Project India - The Story of Rural Development at Ettwah Uttar Pradesh Berkeley, University of California Press, 1958.

¹⁰ Parimal Das "Women Under India's Community Development Programme - International Labour Review - 1959.

¹¹ Durgabai Deshmukh's address at the Second Development Commissioners' Conference on Community Projects - 1953.

introduced during the Third Plan period with the objectives of imparting nutrition education to mothers through demonstration feeding, production programme and training of women functionaries. The Programme was implemented through women's grassroot organisations (Mahila Mandals) and covered 34 per cent of all Community Development Blocks.

In the Fourth Plan a special Central-Sector Scheme for rural women called 'Composite Programmes for Women and Pre-School Children' was introduced, with components of nutrition, economic activity and training of associated women workers. This scheme was implemented in non-ANP blocks. During the Fifth Plan, the component of demonstration feeding in nutrition Programme was discontinued and a new scheme for promotion and strengthening of Mahila Mandals was introduced to promote local leadership among rural women. Programmes for rural women were thus kept alive- only through the help of centrally sponsored schemes.¹² The concept of 'minimum needs' was introduced in this Plan which sought to provide elementary Education, Primary Health care and nutrition, drinking water, house sites and other basic amenities to the rural poor.

Programme for rural women in the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation is looked after by the Directorate of Extension, which has a 'Home Science and Nutrition Education Wing'. With the introduction of intensive Agricultural District Programme and High Yielding Variety (HYV) seeds in 1964-65 the emphasis shifted to improved agricultural practices through training, demonstration and radio discussions. Hundreds Farmers Training Centres were started in-districts selected for HYV programme. No mention was made of women's role in the management of farm resources or decision-making. The Home Science Wing of the Ministry of Agriculture set up four test kitchens in its four regional offices to carry out a programme of consumer education for women for popularising the new cereals.¹³ As an after thought, farm women were also included in the training centres, mainly to familiarise them of the nutritional content of the cereals. An enthusiastic response of farm women to these training courses resulted in extending the programme for imparting training in agricultural practices and animal husbandry.

The 1965 Save Grains Campaign also did not initially visualise that 60-70 per cent of food grains is stored at domestic level by women. A later realisation, that it was women who managed the food stores, resulted in training women extension functionaries in a limited area, in scientific storage. In 1975-76, the Department of Food introduced a scheme of Training and Demonstration in Scientific storage through Farmers Training centres and a lady demonstrator was appointed.

It was only after the criticism of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, that the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, belatedly initiated a scheme in 1975-76, to train women in simple technology.¹⁸ Krishi Vigyan Kendras (Agriculture Science Centres) were established to train farm women and girls in agricultural operations as well as in home science, home crafts and cottage industries. The overall results have not been very encouraging.

The Ministry of Agriculture never had a clear cut policy about the programmes of rural women. The emphasis remained on home crafts and women's role as consumers. Although periodically National and Regional Committees kept on reiterating the importance of women's roles in the rural sector, women as producers remained peripheral to rural development programme. The transfer of the women's programmes to the state sector in

¹² Shanti Chakravorty - Women's Role in Development: A Historical Review of Programmes and Policies - 1979.

¹³ Ibid

the sixties, before the states were oriented to the importance and need for such Programme brought an adverse effect, in terms of allocation of funds, training of fields level staff and technical and administrative supervision.

The National Commission on Agriculture (1976) and The Country Review and Analysis on 'Role and participation of women in agriculture and rural development' undertaken by a National Committee set up by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1979-80, reiterated that 'developmental efforts have not taken much cognizance of the roles of women and there is a need to improve her productivity and skills in farming operations and strengthen her role in the local decision making bodies. Examining the increasing undervaluation of women's role in agriculture and their 'economic invisibility' to planners, the Committee emphasised that "the articulation of the relationships between land, labour and capital in the rural social structure and the impact of their incorporation into the larger market system is central to the understanding of the various dimensions of rural women's lives".¹⁴

For the first time, there was considerable discussion for ensuring, for women, ownership of land and house sites, when they were distributed under land reforms or a public distribution programme. The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) emphasize that 'economic independence would accelerate the improvement of the status of women. Government would endeavour to give joint titles to husband and wife in all development activities involving transfer to assets'.

Some of the problems identified by the National Level Seminar which discussed the Report of the Country Review and Analysis (September 1980) were:

- (1) marginality of attention/services for women in rural/agricultural development programmes;
- (2) special constraints of women that obstruct their access to available assistance and services;
- (3) low productivity and narrow range of women's occupational skills;
- (4) wage discrimination
- (5) low level of rural women's participation in decision-making;
- (6) inadequate finances;
- (7) inadequate monitoring of women's participation in different sectors and programmes.

During the discussions on the focus of agriculture extension service, it was pointed out that while there was considerable support for expanding rural women's participation in non-agricultural occupation, the extension authorities did not feel the necessity of modifying the present extension service structure to take science and technology to improve agriculture practices to women farmers. Even in post-harvest operations which are predominantly done by women, only 15 per cent of the trainees' were women.

The report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India 1974 pleaded for the adoption of a well defined policy to fulfil the Constitutional directive and governmental

¹⁴ Country Review and Analysis on Role and Participation of Women in Rural Development (India) - Report of the National level Committee appointed by the Ministry' of Agriculture and Irrigation. Government of India, New Delhi, 1979-80.

long-term objective of total involvement of women in national development. It also recommended that the provision of the Maternity Benefit Act 1961 should also cover agricultural labourers, and a legislation should be enacted of Article 39(d) of the Constitution guaranteeing equal pay for equal work, to add weight of legal sanction to what is only a policy statement at present.

In 1975 the Government of India constituted an Inter-ministerial Empowered Committee to look into the recommendations of the CSWI. The Ministry of Labour felt that there was no need to have a separate policy relating to women and employment as special clauses have already been incorporated into various labour laws and Equal Remuneration Ordinance 1975 (become an Act in 1976). The Empowered Committee was of the view that a composite policy on women welfare would be desirable and this is already being pursued by the Women's Welfare Division in the Ministry of Social Welfare.

The Planning Commission appointed a Working Group on Employment of Women (1977). The Working Group stressed that for achieving the social objectives of reduction of inequality, poverty and unemployment among women can not be achieved without a deliberate policy and a specialised agency to identify, promote and assist individual women and women's groups to develop necessary information and skills, to undertake income generating activities and to actively promote their support by the major agencies as mere directives to the existing promotional agencies will not help.

The Group also stated, that the impression has so long been that any programmes for development taken up would automatically benefit both men and women. Experience has shown that it is not so and it is felt that unless there is a special plan for women with specific earmarking of funds in all sectoral plans women will not benefit. The strategies suggested by the Working Group were:

- 1) allocation of funds in every sectoral plans to special component plan for women which should be non-divertible;
- 2) directive to all financing institutions including commercial bank to ensure that a reasonable share of their investment is directed to women;
- 3) allocation of resources to women within all programmes directed to specially and economically weaker section (SMFDA, DPAP etc.). The group also recommended administrative mechanisms like Directorate for Women's Development and a women's Development Corporation in every state.

Most women's programmes are focussed outside the priority sectors i.e. food, water, energy, housing, industrialization, rural development etc. which are of central concern to women. While women's productive role is now recognized at a rhetorical level at least in national policy documents, there is still a tendency to regard programmes for women to development as a separate exercise within particular sectors, institution or departments with insufficient resources and coordination at inter and intra agency level. The problem of conceptualizing women's issues within the overall development process is evident from the way the concept is interpreted by policy makers which creates small pockets of action where women are confined to some select programmes and issues. The 'women specific projects', conceived for income generation, for skill development and for providing basic needs to poor rural and urban women deal with symptoms of the structural imbalances through remedial action.

The administrative mechanisms created at the Centre with the ministries of Rural Reconstruction, Labour and Employment, Agriculture and Social Welfare, while important in focussing attention on women's issues have remained marginal within the present administrative set up. These programme units present a paradox, although administratively weak, they do provide emotional support and resource to women's question on the policy power spectrum.

In the last decade there has been considerable debate on the need for grassroot level organisations of rural women to articulate their needs and act as pressure lobby to improve their access to development inputs. Needless to say that all these exercises at the Central level have not made much dent in the thinking at the state level.

III

Conceptualising Women in the Rural Development Programme in U.P.: The Obstacle Race

At the state level the history of women's programme presents a dismal picture. The history of rural development planning goes back to 1937, when the first Popular Ministry assumed office. A program was launched in Uttar Pradesh aiming at the development of the rural economy with emphasis on community organisation and cooperative effort. In 1948 the Uttar Pradesh Government initiated a Pilot Development Project at Mahewa block in the district of Etawah, with the help of Albert Meyer, the Planning Adviser, a few American and half a dozen Indian specialists in agriculture, village and town planning, cooperation and administration. The Pilot Project in rural planning and development covered 64 villages and the programmes included improvement of land, agricultural practices, educational facilities and sanitation in the villages.¹⁵

This model which became the prototype for the Community Development Programme and, National Extension Service in thousands of villages in India also laid emphasis on building community life without breaking up old traditions. It aimed at promoting a positive expansion of traditional culture and social structure capable of absorbing the emergent effects of technological development and change.

Right from the beginning women were given training in tailoring, weaving, textile, printing and home crafts. The objective was to provide necessary skill to willing women in rural areas so that they may utilise their spare time and earn wages to augment their family income. Marketing of the product was done through the project agency. A Women's Industrial Cooperative Society was also set up to start production with its own resources and explore the markets for the products. This was intended to provide a model to study how village women were able to run commercial affairs. It was decided to extend this experiment to other areas if it succeeded after needed modification.¹⁶

During my visit to this area last year, I was told that the cooperative is now defunct and the members have been pressing for a share in the profit that the cooperative had made. No formula had been worked out by the women members initially as to the sharing of profit.

The Pilot Project report also pointed out that there is difficulty in institutionalizing such programmes on the pattern of cooperatives, because women cannot furnish securities, as the

¹⁵ A brief note on Pilot Development Project (Etawah) Planning Research and Action Institute - Planning Department, Uttar Pradesh - 1972.

¹⁶ Ibid

land owned by their families is not in their own names. Further not being regular earning members they cannot furnish any security as well as guarantees for loans. In spite of the problem faced in the marketing of readymade garments the project is still organizing training in tailoring and knitting in the project area.

The 1959 State Committee Report¹⁷ stated that "a section of female population in villages stands in need of economic programmes to supplement its family income. This section is primarily interested in programmes connected with agriculture or crafts. There is lot of exploitation by the middlemen with the result that village women are unable to take advantage of such programmes in crafts. They should be helped in organising their units which may ensure purchase of raw materials at cheap rates and arrange for marketing of their finished goods".

In the 50s, three agencies were engaged in women's welfare programmes in the State:

- (1) Social Welfare Department - implementing women's welfare schemes in 33 districts of the State, with one District Organiser, one Craft Teacher and 10 to 12 trained Gram Sevikas (village level workers);
- (2) Planning Department in NES Blocks of Stages I and II with one Assistant Development Officer and two village level workers at block level;
- (3) Social Welfare Board - in 24 districts of the state with a District Convenor who was assisted in policy and programme matters by a District Social Welfare Advisory Committee and the field work was carried out in groups of 10-15 villages by a team of one village level worker, one craft teacher and one 'dai' (traditional-birth attendant).

There was multiplicity of agencies doing almost similar type of work. The contents of the programme were mostly confined to the running of "Balwadi" (pre-primary educational centres), teaching village crafts like embroidery, tailoring and spinning and promoting social and cultural activities. In some areas maternity and child welfare activities were also taken up.

The Planning Research and Action Institute, Uttar Pradesh, decided to set up a women's programme section in 1957 to strengthen the work in the Pilot Project area in Etawah, to assist in the evaluation of Women's Programme in operation in the State and to develop appropriate programmes, methods and techniques for work among rural women through Pilot Project experiments and suggest a suitable pattern of organisation. The main objectives of the Pilot Project was to arrive at an appropriate content of a programme of Improved Home Living Extension in the direction of Health and Home-making, Education (liberal education) and Occupation.¹⁸ Other objectives were:

1. To define effective extension methods and techniques to implement a programme of Improved Home Living;
2. To define suitable types of training programmes for extension workers;

¹⁷ A UNO Community Development Evaluation Mission in India in 1959 stated that there several examples of rural young girls expressing that they were tired of tailoring and knitting activities which did not pay them back and would rather like to join agricultural clubs to learn the improved skills in agriculture, animal husbandry etc.

¹⁸ Report of the Committee on Evaluation and Public Participation - Ibid.

3. To define a suitable organisational structure for the administration and execution of programmes of Improved Home Living Extension work among women in rural families.

After 3 years of its functioning in one block, it was decided to extend it to an adjoining area (Mahewa) as a 'test project', including a group of 32 villages, however, the emphasis of the programme remained the same.

The Report on Women's Programme (1959) also noted some of the contributory factors for the slow progress of women's programme in the rural areas such as:

- (i) A poor concept of realistic programme and inadequate knowledge of felt needs and approaches upon which to go to work;
- (ii) Insufficient knowledge of the nature of home demonstration projects likely to find acceptance in rural homes;
- (iii) Inexperience in organising experimental work in village setting, to enable field staff to identify and tackle problems in a systematic and effective way;
- (iii) Absence of a well conceived and properly built supply line for uninterrupted flow of day to day activities;
- (iv) Absence of organised units at the field level to pool, collect and disseminate information to field staff to enable them to cope with the changing needs and changing situations in the field;
- (v) Inadequate guidance and directives to the field staff;
- (vi) Lack of co-ordination at field levels between the women extension staff and those from other social services;
- (vii) A poor grasp of the precise nature of integrated programmes for rural women in the CD programme and implications of such work for women.

The report also admitted that building up 'Home Industries' programme in Pilot Project area, acceptable to village women and which is practicable and feasible under the local conditions, constitutes the biggest challenge to the organisation. A programme for improving the economic conditions of the village families is one of the weakest links in the C.D. Programme. In addition to the difficulties of getting trained personnel, adequate finances, facilities to the field staff, a very curious and inexplicable fact which strikes even an ordinary student of the C.D. programme is an indifference to and lack of knowledge of women's programme generally and specifically its place in Community Development.

In February 1964, a study Team was appointed to examine the conceptual and operational aspects of the Women's Pilot Project at Etawah with particular reference to process and methods followed, administrative structure, impact of programme and features which distinguish it from other women's welfare schemes in India.¹⁹²⁰

It was officially stated that the Project is a composite programme of field action carried out at research levels, directed to the development of the personality of the rural women, in order that she might come to play her role in her home as an efficient housewife and mother in the family, an efficient partner in the social, economic and cultural pursuits and in her village as conscientious citizen. In 1960 it was decided to take up another Block as a 'test project' in a group of 32 villages, by extending and duplicating the methodology and activities of the Pilot Project. The Project was fully financed by the State.

The report stated that since both the 'Pilot' and the 'Test' projects are run with similar programme contents, methods and techniques, the distinction is merely national rather than operational. There was also no specific relationship either with the Panchayati Raj institutions (local self-government) or with, the NES. The main distinguishing features of the Etawah project were:

- (1) The Sangrahalaya (American equivalent of extension workshop) or a central unit where improved field experiments and research on home living extension are conducted before their application in the field;
- (2) Location of home units within the village;
- (3) Recruitment of village level worker from within the village, which was very helpful in building a close contact;
- (4) Establishment of a Women's Co-operative which was a novel experiment in the district
- (5) The group or institutional approach rather than individual approach for undertaking development activities.

The report pointed out that except at the initial stage there has not been much thinking, appraisal or assessment of the programme. The priorities and pattern which were once decided continue to be followed with greater bureaucratization and lesser enthusiasm. The report noted that the priorities of the programme had not been carefully laid down and it has mostly concentrated on "improved home living methods". There has hardly been any stress on the economic status, needs and requirements of women, hence women from better off families were only able to practice a few ideas propagated by the project. The 'income projects' related to handicrafts were not satisfactory as production and marketing are not continuously followed.

In the field of agriculture, the only 'income project' was growing vegetables on a plot of land belonging to the village panchayat. A group of women were encouraged and assisted to grow vegetables on plots individually allotted to them, however, the programme was a failure. The demonstration effect of the programme was limited to only such homes and families which had frequent contacts with the project and mainly belonging to higher castes and income groups.

The main reason for the programme not achieving desired results, are lack of perspective and foresight in planning the programme, failure to determine the priorities and content of the programme in the light of the problem, needs and requirements of the area. The work

²⁰ Report of the Study Team on Women's Programme - An Evaluation of PRAI's Project at Etawah; Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development, 1966.

load on the field staff is such that it turns them into filing clerks. The absence of a senior person at the project level after the formation stage, who could take decision, influence policy decision and co-ordinate the activities of the project was a very important reason for the gradual diminution of the Project.

In 1968 the women's component in the Community Development Programme was jettisoned by an executive order of the State Chief Minister. The State Social Welfare Board was however, allowed to continue because of strong representation from the State Finance Department that the abolition will result in stoppage of Central assistance. The closure provoked a protest from the women functionaries as the programme was held as a model to other states. The result of this closure has left only skeleton services for women in the State.²¹ It has also meant a reversal to a fragmented departmental approach to women's problems. The dismembering of the women's programme in Uttar Pradesh had an undesirable effect on the overall climate within the state. In 1979 the women's programme evaluation unit in the Planning Research and Action Division of the State Planning Institute, Uttar Pradesh, was transferred to the Directorate of Social Welfare. Currently only two units one in the Ministry of Rural Development looking after the Applied Nutrition Programme and the other in the Directorate of Social Welfare - have any focus on women.

The Applied Nutrition programme was started in Uttar Pradesh in 1963-64 to:

- (i) Improve the nutritional level of mothers and children to reduce the incidence of infant mortality and illness;
- (ii) To bring about changes in food habits;
- (iii) Provision of clean environment, better health services and drinking water supply.

The programme is run by a Directorate of Women's Welfare at the state level and provides for one ADO(W) and 5 women village level workers at block level to implement the programme. The programme is implemented through Mahila Mandals for a period of six years in a selected block. ANP is an integrated scheme and needs the co-ordination of other departments at field level i.e. rural development, horticulture, animal husbandry and health. There is no woman official at the district level to supervise and co-ordinate the programme which is being looked after by the District Development Officer.

The above review suggests the historical neglect of women's role in the programmes of rural development which continues to persist. Planning for rural women's development is still in its infancy. The compensatory mechanisms suggested to remedy this situation put emphasis on giving women access to health care, nutrition, training, credit and simple technology. Strategies employed to improve rural women's situation through i.e. nutrition programmes, income generating projects, training for self-employment etc. often amount to women pleading an entry into the system where the rules of the game are predetermined. It means creating a little space for women without any substantial change in the perspectives.

Some of the district and the block level functionaries who were interviewed, questioned the relevance of village multi-purpose workers in the present context as they have become 'jack of all trades'. They felt that they are the worst victims of official policy of target achievement in programmes oriented to beneficiaries in poorer sections. They also felt that scrapping of the women's Programme in Uttar Pradesh has adversely effected women's

²¹ Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India - Chapter VIII, 1974.

programme and has eroded the infrastructure for women in the state, although social attitudes and village conditions are not conducive for effective functioning of women's staff. The District Agriculture Officer was of the view that the decline of female participation in agriculture was due to:

- (1) total dependence on agriculture has increased and it has adversely effected women's involvement in agriculture. Women now get employment for lesser number of days;
- (2) mechanization has marginally effected women;
- (3) fragmentation of land holdings;
- (4) social attitude to women's work outside home.

According to these functionaries people's participation in planning and implementation of rural development programmes has remained a slogan and an oral commitment. The Integrated Rural Development Programme has turned into a formal government programme where the community orientation is completely diluted. Such a change in the nature and content of programme has substantially contributed to the deterioration of the public image of development functionaries. Institutions like caste and Panchayats have hampered the process of development and the main problem is to reach women from the weaker section and mobilise them. Mahila Mandals have only functioned smoothly in uni-caste villages.²²

IV

Nothing illustrates more clearly the disadvantaged position of women in their access to resources (material and non-marital) skills, technology and inputs, than the all-pervasive bias of development planners treating women primarily as consumers rather than producers, more in need of social services such as health-care, education and nutrition rather than deserving special attention in productivity oriented programmes, At a time when the strategies for improved food production and reduction in post-harvest losses are viewed as crucial to meet the food crisis - nothing is mentioned about women's role as food producer, processor and distributor - apart from stray references of women's role in post-harvest operations. This bias is closely related to many assumptions inherent in planning methodologies:

- (1) Male, as the head of household and women as supplementary earner. The culture of dependency within which women exist and which defines their roles priorities and needs, creates a conflict between women's needs and what they are targeted for. The 1971 Census showed a rise in the proportion of female-headed households. The majority of the female heads of households tend to be widows, divorced or separated women.
- (2) The stereotyped view that women do not work if they are not within the cash nexus. The 'number game' which leaves out many women who are engaged in productive work, is an effective mechanism for keeping women in a subordinate position and

²² Personal Interviews with the development functionaries in the Etawah district.

perpetuating the myth that women's work is auxiliary.²³ In the agrarian economy in the subsistence production, the line of demarcation between women's productive and non-productive work is very fine. The work women do in home-based industries, in processing and storage of agriculture products, unpaid and therefore unrecognized. The parameters of 'work' used in official data systems reflect the existing notion of what constitutes women's work. This does not take into account the majority of rural women who attend to unpaid domestic work or those engaged in free collection of fuel, fodder, firewood and in providing service in household occupations like raising of kitchen gardens, orchards, poultry, dairying, weaving, etc. The National Sample Survey data from the 27th Round indicates that more women work in their own farms as a helper (30.39 per cent) than as workers in their own right as compared to men where 49.54 per cent work in their own right and only 20.4 per cent as helpers.

- (3) The sexual division of labour is never perceived as a problem, although there is an integral relationship between structural and technological changes in agriculture and patterns of women's work, wage labour and family labour in a segmented labour market.
- (4) The assumption about the flexibility of female labour force is not applicable to poorer households. There the flexibility of female labour is more a function of market mechanism and rural pauperization than women's voluntary withdrawal from the workforce. In fact dubious categories devised to collect data on women's unemployment i.e. available or seeking work may not adequately capture the quantum of underemployment and unemployment among rural women.
- (5) That rapid population growth is reason for increasing poverty and landlessness even though it is now sufficiently clear that population growth is linked to the conditions of poverty and insecurity and unequal status of women within the family decision making process. The success of any family welfare programme will have to take into consideration the questions of poverty and inequality.

Recently several studies have focussed on intra-household inequalities. Yet, the public policies persist in retaining the household approach in all target-group focussed policies. A symposium jointly organised by eight women's organisations in 1980 deplored the non-recognition or 'tacit silence' of Government in recognizing women's economic decision-making roles and their major contribution to the survival of the family - particularly in the rural areas and among all poverty stricken groups across the country. It was stressed that the exercises done in the past 10 years have identified that this 'invisibility' of women to programme planners and administrators was rooted in the established tendency to view women only through the screen of families and households and not as individuals in their own right, thus ignoring the inequality within the household which has in the past prevented women's access to education, training, employment and participation in the decision-making bodies.

Demanding replacement of family/household approach in programme thrusts by explicit mention of women as a target group, the Symposium pointed out that atypical illustration of asset transfer generating intra-household inequality, is the case of distribution

²³ Asok Mitra: Status of Women in India: Shifts in Occupational Pattern 1561-71, Delhi 1980, Introduction.

of rural house-sites and surplus agricultural land to the male head of household only. In cases of desertion, divorce or eviction the women are left with practically no security.²⁴

The Sixth Five Year Plan recognizing that economic independence will accelerate the improvement of the status of women, promises that the Government would endeavour to give joint titles to husband and wife in all developmental activities involving transfer of assets.²⁵

The subordinate position of women in rural areas is linked to both inter-household and intra-household inequalities. The first determines the households access to land, technology, credit markets and other resources. Patterns of gender roles in agricultural work differ in each strata. Each rural household is placed in a system of social stratification (class, caste and ethnic groups) that determines the conditions for women's work as farm labourer, as unpaid helper, as manager. The second determines the organisation of labour within the household based on an unequal division of labour where women shoulder the primary responsibility for family survival strategies (child bearing, childcare, nutrition, food processing, fuel and fodder collection, fetching water, care of milch cattle etc.) although the intensity and nature of work depends on the type of household. The normative patterns of interaction among male and female members in the household which are strengthened by the patriarchal ideology and institutional mechanism are actually linked with unequal distribution of resources, rewards, rights and responsibilities and these influence social expectations, work patterns, self-perceptions and identity formation.²⁶

Family and economy are not two autonomous realms but are inter-connected systems. Economic dimensions of the family enforces the most pervasive power relationship between men and women.

The nutritional need of women in the poorer households are much higher but the intra-familial inequalities in food distribution are determined not by work input but by social and cultural factors. Most of the nutrition surveys assumes an equal distribution of food within the family. Family is seen as a cohesive unit working for the welfare of all members of the family.... Inequalities in the distribution of food fit into the story as do inequalities of other types including that of medical attention. Some scholars have justified lower food intake by women (Sukhatme and others) on the ground that typically women's activities need low energy requirements. However, the back breaking work of rural women in poorer households in India belies this argument.²⁷ It has been observed in many families that men and boys in the family are given better food than women. More girls suffer from acute malnutrition than boys in the same age group. Even in slightly better off families the belief is that girls should not be given nutritious food as they will attain puberty early. Women's unequal access to healthcare, education, nutrition and other familial resources are rooted in the family and surface early in life.

A crucial area which has not received adequate attention from policy planners is the inter-relationship between the growing scarcity of energy resources for survival and its impact on women's health and nutrition. Non-commercial sources of energy i.e. firewood, cowdung and crop wastes provide about 90 per cent of the country's cooking energy

²⁴ Symposium on "Indian Women in the Eighties: Development Imperatives" - 1980.

²⁵ Sixth Five Year Plan 1980-85 - Chapter on Women and Development

²⁶ Kumud Sharma - Community's Perception of Sex Roles: An Exploratory study to develop a methodology for promoting values of sex equality - mimeographed. Centre for Women's Development Studies - 1982.

²⁷ Amartya Sen - Conflict in access to food - Coromandel Lecture - Mainstream, January 8, 1983.

requirements. A study conducted by ASTRA²⁸ (Application of Science and Technology in Rural Areas) on rural energy consumption patterns, showed that men, women and children contributed 37 per cent, 53 per cent and 16 per cent of the human energy not so much on productive activities but on survival tasks such as gathering of firewood, fetching of water and cooking. One of the most significant results of this study was the role of human energy specially women's energy in the rural energy matrix. Women spent about 6 hours a day on survival related and agricultural tasks as compared to 4 hours a day by men. (Firewood contributes 81.6 per cent of village energy supply). In addition to this women perform other tasks which are not shared by men viz. fetching water, gathering firewood, cooking, washing, cleaning and child care which place demands on women's energy. Provision of drinking water, cooking fuel, childcare facilities can go a long way in reducing the back breaking drudgery of rural women. Diffusion of appropriate technology in the rural areas to reduce women's drudgery is not only a question of acceptance and adaptation but also a question of cost-benefit when they are directed towards socially and economically disadvantaged groups. Another important reason why almost every effort to involve rural communities in accepting new energy technologies like improved wood stores, bio-gas plants or fuel wood plantations fail, is that women are rarely involved in these projects. Just by increasing the efficiency of wood stores which is now a miserable 5-10 per cent the country can have its present firewood consumption to about 75 million tones and would save many hours of toil for millions of women that type spend on firewood collection.²⁹

Economic discrimination against women both overt and covert constitutes a reality and the foundation lie deep in our social and economic structures. The sexual asymmetry sometimes assumes an extreme expression in crimes against women. The growing structural violence against the weak, the oppressed and the disinherited is only a groundswell of a deep malaise of a social and economic order that thrives on inequalities of all kinds - race, class and gender. The concepts of equality, social justice, human rights and dignity enconded in the rhetoric of development may find expression in policy statements, but will remain pious wishes unless a well articulated and strong women's movement gathers momentum.

²⁸ Quoted in S. Batliwala - Women in Poverty: The Energy, health and nutritional syndrome - presented in a Seminar on Women and Poverty - 1983.

²⁹ The State of India's Environment 1982 - A Citizen's Report, Centre for Science and Environment.