
UNIT 7 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN

Structure

- 7.1 Introduction
 - Objectives
- 7.2 Women in Development
 - Education and Communication
- 7.3 Women, Population, Health, and Environment
 - Women and Water
- 7.4 Women's Participation in Community Decision-Making
 - Women's Economic Contribution
 - Women's Access to Education
 - Women Trained as Extension Workers and Technical Staff
- 7.5 Summary
- 7.6 Terminal Questions

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 6, you have learnt about the numerous projects being undertaken by various NGOs in an attempt to fill the void left by government's action regarding shelter and provision for basic necessities. In this unit we will discuss the role of women's participation in the community decision making.

Women, because of their reproductive function, have been defined as nurturers, a role that encompasses the responsibility of provision of food. In subsistence economies, where the entire dependence of daily existence is on natural resources, women have played the dual role of not only nurturing their families but also the environment. The well-being of the former is heavily dependent on the well-being of the latter. In this unit we will examine women in development, overall approach for empowering women, women, population and health, women and water, five needs which can enhance women's participation in the community decision making and role of women in NGOs for the protection of environment.

Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- explain a **community based participatory approach** with an emphasis on organising grassroots groups that can help equip women to analyse and understand their own socio-economic environment that involves creating awareness, building confidence, and moving towards self-reliance, thus enhancing the capacity to change;
- assess the status of women with specific reference to Pakistan;
- discuss as to how education and communication are necessary for empowering women; and
- explain as to how five needs can enhance women's participation in the community decision-making.

7.2 WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

Development must improve the quality of life of both men and women and increase equity among classes and gender. Recently there has been a growing awareness of the specific role that women play in the process of promoting social and economic development and of the differences between men and women in the use and

Approaches and Practices

management of natural resources. Women have always contributed significantly to primary environmental care: they bring their extensive knowledge, skills and perspective of the environment to both life-supporting activities, including water and fuel collection and household chores, and to productive facilities, such as agriculture and small-scale industries. This means that access to and control over natural resources including land, fuel, fodder, minor forest products and water are critical for women. Biodiversity and the quality of the environment are also essential in this context. Other factors that affect women's environmental management are their decision-making power, their access to appropriate training and technologies, their development options (including employment and income generation) and the macro-micro linkages on policy level.

Since the creation of man, there have always been distinct roles that are performed by youth, men and women in society based on gender. Gender can be defined as a dynamic and culturally determined social pattern created by men and women to define their relationships with each other and with their environment. It is these relationships that determine the decisions and activities that in turn have been affected in both the management and utilisation of the environment for sustainable development. It has been observed and accepted that there is an undesirable imbalance that has developed between men and women and has affected the performance of their roles. In many cases, this has either distorted or hampered development with often-adverse effects on the environment. Efforts have, therefore, been made internationally and nationally to speed up development.

However, with industrialisation and globalisation, development centred economic development models have been imposed destroying indigenous sustainable development practices, which have been practiced over centuries by various communities, especially women. The mechanisation of agriculture, shifting of power to men by portraying them as the operators of technology and hence major producers, leading to the marginalisation of women have affected their role. In the meantime, dual economies of subsistence and industrialisation continue to exist; while the latter continues to practice unsustainable levels of extraction and pollute the existing resources, women are forced to continue their role as nurturers at the household level, extracting whatever meagre natural resources are left. The result is that patriarchy and globalisation have severely eroded women's role as caretakers of the environment.

The massive migration of people resulting from capitalist agriculture, and environmental disasters have led to further degradation and polluting our cities; women, torn from their social support, have to exist in these new malfunctioning systems. They are thus truly the victims of the development and environmental crisis. The ultimate irony is that, in this new scenario, they are considered as a contributing element to unsustainable environmental practices.

Women in the rural environment know their priorities that they have less power, and that they are accorded no space to voice their demands is another issue. Given a chance, they are more than capable of asking for and managing the resources to the best interests of all. It is indeed with the drive of a highly ecologically and economically exploitative system that women have lost control over sustainable management of resources.

Most women in Pakistan live in rural areas. Women who constitute about 48% of the nation's population are largely illiterate, usually marry early, bear innumerable children, and suffer from anaemia. In most parts of the world, women outnumber and outlive men, but not in Pakistan. In addition, they have no say or control over their lives, have low self-perception and are viewed as dependents.

Despite these low indicators of development, women have traditionally performed the essential tasks of nurturing and serving their families. In rural areas this has meant growing and preparing food, fetching water, gathering fuel, caring for domestic animals, and contributing wherever possible to the family budget. In urban areas, the

basic responsibilities are no different. Most of the work women do is unpaid and, therefore, unrecognised and unappreciated.

The poverty of about 40 percent of Pakistan's population, particularly in rural areas, has added implications for women. These managers of water, forest, livestock, fuel, sanitation, and subsistence agriculture invariably find themselves bearing the burden of the vicious cycle of resource depletion, poverty, and dependence on the earth and its resources.

Women's low social status precludes any significant decision making in their daily lives. Only when women have achieved some level of development, individually or collectively, through better education, health, and income do they perceive themselves in the position of making key decisions.

Given the state of Pakistan's environment, its general poverty and fast dwindling natural resources, and the reality of women's existence, the challenge is to mobilise women and channel their activities and energies in a manner that enhances their social status as well as ensure sustainable development. Unless development is seen as a process that allows women to express their potential fully and provide opportunities to them to control their own lives and the surrounding environment, the transformation of women from passive victims to active participants will not take place. And any conservation strategy in this regard will invariably fail.

Given the objective of empowering women and drawing them into the conservation mainstream, the urgent need is to design special strategies and interventions for women. But the range of constraints on them must be borne in mind. The biggest obstacle is women's seclusion and lack of mobility, which is a major factor that prevents their access to education, skills, and other resources, including financial. The other major obstacle is the stereotyping of certain roles as appropriate only to women.

Devising a package of projects or programmes to overcome these hurdles requires an understanding of three fundamental principles.

- First, neither the 'showroom' nor the 'delivery' approach has succeeded in achieving women's development goals. The former requires potential beneficiaries to locate and ask for the service being offered; the latter offers services as charity. Instead, a different approach is needed, one that can reach out to the needy in their localities, remove dependency, and create confidence and strength.
- Second, the approach has to understand the complexities of the social and economic processes within which a particular community of women resides. As Pakistan is a stratified society, class/clan/caste, sex, location, and other factors strongly influence the roles, interactions, nature of work, and so on in communities. Any intervention must vary from villages to cities and towns, from plains to mountains, from poor to the better off. Although the deprived and economically underprivileged who have the closest links with and dependence on the environment are usually the priority groups and potential agents of change, others also have to be drawn into the development process as actors and mobilisers (see Table 7.1).
- Third, the most essential component of this approach is the catalyst -- an individual, officially supported person, or NGO. The role requires sensitivity, commitment, and identity with the women being worked with. It will need special training programmes for community development work and methods for organising women in groups. The catalyst or mobiliser will need to create awareness; help from groups at the village, or lane level; set priorities with the help of the group on immediate issues to be addressed; and arrange for any technical expertise needed. In addition, he/she will need to assist in the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the programmes to identify bottlenecks and find ways with the group to overcome them.

Table 7.1: Integrating women in development

Sector	As Actors	As Clients
Education	Teachers' trainers, extension workers; as mothers, instilling consciousness, respect for nature, conservation habits	Students, women trainers
Communication	Media directors, producers,	Special programmes on women and environment issues
Research and technology	Researchers at independent research organisations; women's rights organisations, technical institutions	Impact studies on renewable resources and depletion and pollution on women; learning from women's experiences
Administrative and legislative	Administrators, policy makers, Family Court judges, High Court judges, lawyers	End of discriminatory laws, progressive legislation on family and labour affecting women; affirmative rules of no taxes on widows, single women
General economy	Agricultural workers, industrial workers, self-employed unpaid family help, service sector	Recognition as wage-earners: minimum wage benefits; incentives for skills, credits, project planning
Grassroot	Social Organisers with greater access inside homes, catalysts	Women's groups around economic, health, education activities
Population	Acceptable population control agents	Rights to control life, to make decisions, to space births

Being women, the catalysts have the advantage of access to women's homes. They can enter a community to discuss health, sanitation, education, income generation, or a combination of these topics. As external change agents, these field activists need to be viewed as paid professionals and not just as voluntary workers, a term too closely associated with social work of the welfare delivery approach.

In addition to these external agents, religious organisations, teachers, and mothers can be mobilised and trained to convey conservation ethics. For instance, women preachers can learn to raise consciousness on environmental issues. Similarly, teachers can be used to impart relevant information after being trained. The trainers for women will have to be women. If mothers are to be mobilised, they will need better levels of literacy as well as hygiene, health, and nutrition; knowledge of and access to family planning; improved skills; and environmental awareness.

The programmes based on these principles must be holistic rather than fragmented, integrating various aspects of women's lives with conservation objectives. Several key steps for implementing such a programme have been identified (see box 1) as below:

Box 7.1: Implementing women in development programme

➤ Identify clearly the target beneficiaries.
➤ Create or strengthen the village, or lane organisation through participatory activities.
➤ Involve women in conventionalising programme and putting them into operation.
➤ Understand the specific social situation of the target group for example, the women's mobility, seclusion, or lack of education.
➤ Understand the women's activities and needs from their perspective—whether it be poultry or dairy production, wood gathering, water carrying, cooking, or income generation.
➤ Recognise and respect women's experiential knowledge and abilities, such as their knowledge of local plants or herbs, health system, and skills and crafts.

Given that most environmental issues affect women and that women's perception of these is in direct correlation of their level of development, the focus must be on improving the latter. Fundamental solutions suggested by women in the village meetings and the workshop includes the need for systems of equitable development and distribution and realistically planned development policies. Others were for raising women's consciousness and providing opportunities for improving health, education, and income generation.

Here the emphasis is on the importance of each package being an integrated one containing information, technology, provision for raising capital inputs, organisational skills, and self-management system. Each should enable awareness, collective action, and increased production, and should lead to an improved quality of life for women and their families within a sound environment.

Education and Communication

Education can be a valuable tool for creating awareness and enhancing status, and it has tremendous potential to mobilise and empower women.

At the formal level, the immediate requirement is to increase the number of girls' schools, especially in rural areas. The Seventh Five Year Plan had made a commitment to increase primary school enrolment of girls from 2.9 million in 1987-88 to 5.9 million in 1992-93 (increasing coverage from 41 to 70%). Similarly, the proposal to make a school available within a radius of 1.5 kilometers should help overcome cultural constraints on females.

Relaxing the age limitation and academic requirements for primary school teachers to meet with the shortage of females in this field and incentives such as free books and meals, scholarships, and uniforms to encourage parents to send girls to school are also needed. For women who marry early and later desire to pursue education, the age limit for entering educational institutions should be relaxed. NGOs, which are already involved in the adult and women's literacy programmes, should be supported to expand into rural areas, where literacy level is an abysmal 7%.

For education to become relevant to women and their lives, courses and course contents require considerable restructuring. In addition, the curriculum has to incorporate regional specifics. Similar decentralisation initiatives in the Himalayan regions of Garhwal and Kumaon linked education to people's life support systems and led to women's involvement in planting tree nurseries and active afforestation, with schools providing the seedlings.

At the higher level of education, women, environment, and conservation should be introduced as a focus area in Women's Studies Centres. These centres are being established in the five major universities (one in each province and one in Islamabad). They have been set up, in the initial period, to generate information for materials on the basis of which courses can be formulated in the future and, ultimately, women's perspectives can be mainstreamed into all educational disciplines. Just as conservation and sustainability concerns must be brought into all courses throughout higher education, as recommended earlier, they must be introduced in women's studies.

The Open University programmes could be specially designed to educate, inform and mobilise girls and women who are unable to enter formal institutions. Adult literacy programmes and efforts like the Baldia School Teachers' Association in Karachi should also be actively supported and publicised. This group holds literacy classes for girls and women in certain localities to suit the convenience of students and teachers, who are the literate women of the neighbourhood.

The manner in which women are projected in the visual, audio, and print media is critical. Women working in the conceptualisation and production of programmes can make sure to portray women as active participants in agriculture, industry, community work, and health care, rather than as sex objects.

Special programmes to communicate environmental issues and their relevance to women are imperative for raising awareness. Some of the extra efforts needed are videos, audiocassettes, and special literature to broaden the information base and raise the level of awareness, and workshops for women in areas where existing development projects operate. Such workshops must be designed to elicit the maximum participation of women.

SAQ 1

- i) Briefly explain the role of women in development.
 - ii) Explain the following in your own words:
 - a) Integrating women in Development.
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7.3 WOMEN, POPULATION, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

Women have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health... Good health is essential to leading a productive and fulfilling life and the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment... However, health and well-being elude the majority of women.

(Beijing Platform for Action, paragraphs 89 and 92)

Population is perhaps the most important factor in any "women in development programme" because of its implications on women's health, nutrition, and productivity. In theory, women ought to be the agents of population control but in reality, they are not. Women's acceptance of family planning is linked closely with their status in society and the control they have on decisions regarding reproduction.

Programmes to increase economic productivity, enhance skills and education, bring monetary returns and control over earning, improve health facilities, and raise awareness regarding the advantages of fewer children and births with spacing can be effective in bringing about a change in the population growth. Other important ways to control population growth are: to promote acceptance of late marriages and incentives for having fewer children. For greater effectiveness, all the measures to promote population control have to be addressed to men with equal force.

In addition, preventive health measures for women and children need to be introduced. Information on child spacing and the dangers of frequent pregnancies has to be provided to young women and mothers. The role of mothers as key health providers must be recognised. Time saving technologies to alleviate women's workload, which can give more time to health and hygiene responsibilities, should be developed. Trained paramedics and highly trained medical staff, for high-risk situations, should be accessible to pregnant women. Community based programmes should be implemented to have health extension workers.

Given the extremely low literacy level of women in Pakistan and their crucial role in natural resource use and management, programmes for women are a priority. They can train new extension workers who can act as demonstrators and community mobilisers and can increase employment for women. This has been conceived as a multi disciplinary course covering community organisation, public health, home economics, human ecology, adult education, industrial arts, and agriculture.

Training in the health sector is equally important. Traditional birth attendants, lady health visitors, paramedics, and nurses are in short supply in Pakistan. Similarly, there is a chronic shortage of female veterinary doctors, agriculture and forestry extension agents, and mid level technically trained workers in other fields.

The Pakistan Forestry Institute for women along with some NGO's has already drawn up an extension-training package in forestry for women. The programme covers establishment of nurseries, selection of trees for family compounds, tree care, seedling production, and transplanting. This should become a regularly offered course of the Forestry Department. NGOs working in the women in development field in rural areas have shown keen interest in sending people to the training. In view of the importance of afforestation programmes, as well as women's own fuel and fodder requirements, forestry related programmes have the potential for expansion.

In Sri Lanka, participation in management of forestry has been carried in a vigorous manner by the Sri Lankan women. The following is an example of that. The village of Kinchigune Sri Lanka was famous for its rice farming. With fertile soil and plenty of water from clear mountain streams, the village was surrounded by forests that provided medicinal herbs and other forest products to nearly 40 families residing there. The village was virtually self-sustaining. In 1987 the residents were given short notice to leave Kinchigune village because a hydropower project was to be developed there. The 40 families were resettled on a tea plantation. Each family was given 1.5 acres of land planted with tea interspersed with coconut to compensate for the loss of their land. The people did not know how to grow or market tea and there were no forests for fuel wood, game animals or medicinal plants. They were reduced to subsisting on purchased rice and dried fish. The new village had only one drinking water well; they had to go to another additional wells, but these were in poor condition, unhygienic or claimed by other people. The other villagers acted hostile towards them; the farm animals they had brought with them were stolen and slaughtered by thieves in the neighbouring villages.

Kamini Meedeniya Vitarana is the president of Rut Rakaganno (The Tree Society) and a senior environment scientist with the Environmental Foundation. As part of a study, she interviewed the resettled women, who were in a state of cultural shock. With her guidance and encouragement, they formed the Samanalagama United Women's Association. In their joint efforts, the women cleaned up one of the neglected wells and secured the right to the common use of the wells. Applying in the name of Rut Rakaganno, the society then obtained a plot of land from the government to grow fuel wood and medicinal plants. With advice from the forestry department and the Ayurvedic Research Institute, the women are planting trees and plants for fuel wood and medicinal purposes.

Rut Rakaganno provided liaison with the government departments. Environment Foundation contacts made the project work much easier. The families also formed a

society to jointly market their tea and obtained help from the Regional Tea Small Holdings Authority. Women are mostly responsible for the tea crop, so they are key players as well. The women now receive higher prices for their tea, are less dependant and have better access to clean water. Efforts are being made to organise a nursery school so that women will be free for some part of the day to take part in the community activities. Girls from adjoining villages have also joined the society.

There are various linkages between gender, population, development and the environment. They are the first to suffer from environmental degradation. Therefore their role as custodians of the environment should be strongly supported.

Principle 21 of Rio Declaration 1992 States: Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development.

In Pakistan, the movement for education and training for women has largely been restricted to the schemes of the Social Welfare Departments. Formal schemes leading to a certificate or diploma are available in 107 girls' vocational institutes throughout the country, with facilities for 11,000 women. Thousands more receive non-certifiable training in approximately 1,230 institutions in the country. The Agency for Barani Areas Development operates 19 technical training centres for women in 11 districts of the rain fed areas of rural Punjab. The ministry of industries runs training centres through the provincial small industries corporations and boards.

The National Education and Training Centre in Islamabad is the national scheme of the Women's Division under which training in non-traditional areas is given to enhance the professional skills of women and to create a corp of 'trainers'. Courses primarily deal with managerial areas, such as running a day care centre, setting up community project, increasing community participation, and monitoring and evaluating projects.

Many more institutions are needed for training women to take up income generating opportunities in urban and rural areas. Without waiting for new ones to be established, however, some existing ones can be streamlined. The formal schemes leading to certificates and diplomas (in polytechnics, for example, technical training centres, and vocational institutes for girls) can be radically changed to include courses that contain sustainable development components and enhance women's employable skills. Since formal employment is not always possible (either because of lack of opportunity or cultural constraints), self-employment for women should be focused upon.

7.3.1 Women and Water

Women play an important role in water management. They often collect and manage the water in the households as well as in the fields. Due to this, women have a considerable knowledge about water resources including reliability and quality. Despite their importance and multiple roles, women are currently not adequately involved in management. Not enough attention has been given to women as the primary human resource and the ultimate users of water.

In the developing countries, women and children often spend eight or more hours a day in fetching polluted water from supplies which, because of drought, become increasingly distant. Women and girls are also responsible for preparing and cooking food, cleaning utensils, washing children, disposing of babies' faeces and scrubbing toilets. Involving women in the planning, creation and maintenance of water and supply facilities is, therefore, crucial.

Women make multiple and maximum use of water sources. Given their multiple and often competing needs, such as water for livestock and for human consumption, as well as time and resource constraints, women cannot avoid contaminating water supplies despite their best efforts. Poor water access and quality affect not only crop

and livestock production, but also affects their health and that of their families. All types of water related diseases affect millions of people each year. Women take care of the people who are ill due to diseases like malaria, onchocerciasis and diarrhoea. They do their own labour and labour of those who fall ill as well.

Involving women in the planning, operation and maintenance of water supply and management is therefore crucial as:

- With safe, reliable and convenient water supply, they will be able to rechannel vast amount of time, energy and labour into more productive pursuits.
- With education and provision of a clean water supply, women will learn that the suffering, diseases and death caused by dirty water can be avoided and family health and hygiene improved by using pure water.

Women are the most reliable source for the identification of water resources. Women should be consulted when investigations for development of water resources are undertaken in a community. Their knowledge of water sources and water quantity during wet and dry seasons, and their assessment of smell, taste, colour and convenience, can assist in the final choice of sites. They may also be aware of alternate sources.

The health benefits arising from improved water supplies may not be fully realised unless there are complementary inputs in the field of sanitation. Inadequate sanitation or sewage treatment plays a part in the transmission of many water related infections. In Pakistan, integrated water and sanitation programmes have been successful, partly because women have been trained as sanitation promoters. Not surprisingly, women are the most effective promoters and educators in programmes where they are the primary focus, as they generally understand more intuitively the problems and issues faced by other women and can communicate with them more openly. They are also more sensitive to social pressure from other women to do a good job.

Women can participate in the local water and supply management in four major areas:

1. Site management as individual managers;
2. Care takers;
3. Local administrations; and
4. Self-sufficient system.

SAQ 2

- i) Write a note on the following:
 - a) Women, Population and Health.
 - b) Women and Water.
 - c) Explain the role of women in the NGO's in the protection of environment.

7.4 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING

If project manager were to be asked whether rural women in Pakistan should be involved in the decisions affecting rural water supply, in many cases the answer is likely to be "Yes... but". Yes because domestic water supply has traditionally been considered to be within women's domain. They are the ones who usually have to satisfy the family's needs for water for a variety of purposes: cooking, washing, drinking, bathing, sanitation and care of livestock; in some areas of Pakistan women reportedly spend more than five hours per day fetching water over steep mountainous terrain, balancing heavy containers on their heads and by hand, and often carrying children at the same time.

Whether or not the arduous physical task of hauling is done by women alone or is shared with children and others in the village, ultimately it is the woman who is responsible for the family's water supply: it is she who determines how much is needed, how it will be stored, how it has to be used and by whom. Protecting the water from contamination and rationing its use thus becomes a matter of direct concern of women. The health of the whole family depends on how wisely a woman regulates the storage and use of water within the home and this in turn depends on the ease with which she can access the water required for family use, in the quantity needed and of a quality she considers acceptable even if only judging by its taste and appearance.

In all of these actions concerning water storage and use, women are clearly the decision-makers. But are they also involved in community level decisions related to water supply? For example, do they have a say in the choice of a site for the pump, or in selecting among technology options or in establishing a tariff system for water use? In most cases, while their role as the community's main water users is clear, what is not clear is whether and how they can play a broader decision making role outside the family without violating the norms of the socio-cultural context in which they live.

In exploring this matter further, several factors should be taken into account. They are discussed below as a set of "needs" for women's advancement.

7.4.1 Women's Economic Contribution

As in most developing countries, rural women's work in Pakistan is generally considered to be routine, confined to domestic chores and therefore their contribution to the nation's economy is not adequately reflected in the productive labour statistics. In reality, however, they are found to play an important role in the economic life of the village. This is confirmed in a number of formal or informal assessment studies conducted in recent years.

For example, in many parts of the country, rural women are responsible for processing farm products, rearing animals and poultry, keeping gardens, and producing textiles and clothing, all of which is done in addition to fetching water, gathering fuel and fodder, disposing of waste, maintaining building and nurturing and raising the family in statistical terms. Agha Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) finds that women provide over 50 percent of the total labour used in farm activities, in the Northern Areas. In the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) the Malakand Social Forestry Project notes that the care of livestock is the sole responsibility of women throughout the Malakand Agency, except for a few households where this responsibility is shared. According to a survey conducted by the Barani Agricultural Research and Development Project in 5 districts of NWFP, 85% of the rural women participate in agricultural work and are responsible for 25% of the production of major crops and 30% of the food crops. Women's contribution to the total agricultural income is estimated to be in the order of 25-40% (World Bank, 1989).

Since the value of women's economic contribution is not fully recognised and appreciated, they are often by-passed in project planning. This tendency can be seen very clearly from the following observation of experiences in the agricultural sector in Pakistan.

Despite the fact that women do carry out many independent activities in agriculture, their role is usually defined as "helping the men". In fact they themselves tend to define their role in this way. Since their decision-making power is limited, even when it concerns their own activities and time allocation, they are usually not considered as independent actors in the production process. This dependency represents a serious constraint on the ability of the project to approach women as a target group, particularly when extension recommendations involve the use of external inputs or adopting new technologies.

Rural women's productive roles are likely to vary considerably with differences in the economic situation of their families and with the degree to which ethnic or cultural norms restrict them to the family compound. Various studies have shown that in Punjab the input of females in economically productive activities declines with the rise in economic status as determined by the size of the land holding. Similarly one study indicates that under equal ecological and economic circumstances, the female participation rate of rural women is lower in the more conservative Pakhtun areas of NWFP and Baluchistan, as compared to Punjab. However, regardless of how limited their productive roles may be, even the least of such activities, if it is to be done efficiently and bring returns, requires the use of intelligence, good judgment and basic managerial skills for which the persons involved, regardless of gender, deserve credit. Where such credit is not being given, it follows that fair opportunity for improving skills will not become available. This disparity needs to be rectified.

Male community members must be enabled to see that by acknowledging and attaching value to women's economic contribution, everyone stands to gain. A fair minded assessment of gender roles should open the way for women to receive the much-needed technical assistance and resources of which, at the moment, they get an inadequate share. Technical and moral support will help in improving women's task performance, resulting in more efficient time use and larger gains to their immediate families. By enhancing women's access to resources, through a credit scheme, the UNICEF sponsored programme in Baluchistan has shown that qualitative indicators like women's sense of self worth can be radically improved, thus giving them the opportunity to become direct beneficiaries of the development process in a non threatening way.

The PAK/German Integrated Rural Development Programme in Mardan, NWFP, has followed a strategy of practical demonstration in order to convince the male members of the community regarding the economic viability of women's activities. By initiating a joint credit scheme targeting both male and female, the programme has been able to establish the credibility of female borrowers. In the same villages, the repayment rates of female borrowers were observed to be higher than those of male borrowers. Moreover, in the savings programme, women have been active partners, and have thus directly contributed towards the financial capacity of the community.

The Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) programme has demonstrated that major strides in the role of women can be made once the community is convinced of the value and importance of women's contribution to development, for example, the self-support activities in the Orangi area have led to the sprouting of hundreds of family enterprise units in the lanes, some with OPP guidance and others spontaneously. Women have become active workers and partners in these enterprises. OPP finds that the multiplying family enterprise units highlight a great social change in the traditional life style of the community. Not only is the number of working females increasing rapidly, but also women entrepreneurs are coming forward. In fact, among the OPP clients, 283 family enterprise units are run by women managers.

7.4.2 Women's Access to Education

Ideas and idealistic views are commendable for they are the motives for progress, and the world would indeed be a sad place without them. But one has to be realistic and pragmatic too, for instance, leaving aside the enlightened sections of the society, our rural community is the worst example where girls are confined to their traditional roles; they should have an equal right to education, employment and most importantly, the right to choose when to give birth to human life; but quite surprisingly they cannot have a say in the planning of their family. Environmental challenges mostly stem from growing population and growing poverty. There is a dire need to control population and eradicate poverty. Both are challenging tasks. The answer lies in the empowerment of women: in giving them the right to choose the quality of life striving towards restoring gender balance and consequently sustainable eco-balance in the context of social ecology.

The alternative is to help develop understanding of the problems associated with unequal gender participation vis-à-vis ecological management and ecological issues. Socio-economic statistics need to be collected and analysed so as to formulate a cohesive gender strategy for eco-management, re-defining social responsibilities of both genders.

The first step towards achieving an alternative ethical culture is a culture where education is accessible to everyone. Without this the effectiveness of other factors decreases. No doubt, gender mainstreaming through policy, political will and collective social responsibility is the answer to create a road towards sustainable development. But no society can become economically sound, socially viable and environmentally friendly unless it is enlightened enough to take drastic and radical steps. Proper education is the pivot, which can take forward the torch of ecological management, that has the capacity to make and break a society and culture and envision a better tomorrow. Gender sensitisation through proper awareness and education is the primary step, which can restore gender balance in executing environmental theories to practice and in moving towards a sustainable environment.

Girls' education generally tends to be of low priority in the village communities of Pakistan. As a result, literacy rates among rural women are extremely low, in some areas barely three to four percent. Two reasons are commonly given for differentiating between girl's and boy's education:

- Girls are needed at home by their mothers to look after younger siblings and to help with household chores; and
- Schooling involves costs. It makes more sense for low-income families to invest in the education of boys who have better prospects of using their education to salaried jobs.

In certain areas, however, greater value is now being attached to girls' education. It is felt that education will help to make them better mothers and will provide them with greater confidence. In a survey conducted by Action Aid, such positive attitudes towards female literacy were seen to be fairly common in the Kalinger area. In one village, a father who was determined to educate his daughter, was noted as saying:

“The difference between an illiterate and an educated person is like the difference between a donkey and a parrot. The parrot as a bird is wise and quick to learn, while the donkey will go backward if you push forward and forward if you push backwards.”

Although being illiterate is not synonymous with being ignorant, it is easy for an illiterate person to feel inferior vis-à-vis others who have had more exposure to formal education and who are more articulate and better connected. Socialisation factors, which create feelings for inadequacy, unworthiness and timidity, can hold back village women from taking an active part in the community decisions, especially those involving negotiations and contractual agreements with the authority figures.

The traditional methods of teaching have often proved discouraging to adult women who have little time to spare and little patience to learn phonetic skills as such. Women's education has to be informal, lively and functional if it is to arouse their interest and sustain their motivation. The available participatory techniques for adult learning need to be fully explored and new approaches designed, keeping in mind the specific needs, constraints and potentialities that apply to rural women in different areas of Pakistan.

Many innovative approaches are being tried to improve literacy among young girls and women. One such programme is the LGRDD/UNICEF pilot project targeting cotton pickers in the Multan area. Adult literacy centres have been established to support the organisation of female youth groups, which have now become the main implementers of the approach at the field level. The success of this project can be

measured by the fact that the female youth groups actively identify and plan the components of the literacy programme.

The OPP experience gives encouraging evidence that traditional barriers to girls' education can be overcome. For example, out of 509 schools in the Orangi area, 443 (87%) are now co-educational and only 66 (13%) are segregated. This expansion of opportunities for girls' education has been accompanied and supported by a corresponding increase in female teachers. Out of 1818 teachers in 1991, 1318 (75%) were women and 457 (25%) men.

Furthermore, traditional attitudes can be overcome by involving communities in the selection of teachers. The Basic Education Project for girls, being sponsored by UNICEF in the Thatta district, has shown that constraints like non-availability of female teachers can be superseded if the community is allowed to nominate their own teachers.

Special situations arise when services and resources which women need, e.g., clean water supply, access to sanitation, medical services, come in conflict with the prevailing cultural norms. For example, in case of illness, women may need urgent medical attention but in the absence of female professional medical staff, health problems may have to go unattended and often become chronic. In addition, when health care facilities are available outside the village, women may not have access to them (except in emergency situations) due to restrictions on their mobility. The same applies to other services such as agricultural extension, technical training or market for local product. This restriction applies in particular where accessing these services involves direct communication with males.

Similar ethical dilemmas may arise in connection with women's access to water supply. When selecting the site for a new water source, e.g., a hand pump, sometimes a public place may be selected for the convenience of all without taking into account local restrictions which would bar women's use of that site.

The extent to which women's mobility is restricted varies, of course, from one ethnic group to another. In pakhtun areas where the rules of conduct are particularly strict, the setting of a pump poses a problem, as the following observation indicates:

"In Loralai ... due to strict purdah observance, installing a hand-pump outside the compound will probably mean a constraint for women to fetch water. In theory more people will have access to the pump but practically such a public place may be hardly visited by women; they will prefer to walk longer to an alternative water source if less exposed to possible passers-by. Sometimes a wall around a pump may be a solution to overcome women's hesitancy but certainly not so in many cases. In Kharan and Chagai, the village and its direct surroundings is considered to pose a great risk for a woman. In pakhtun areas similar free movement for ladies is unthinkable."

Since women are the main users of the water source and they are the ones required to observe cultural restrictions of whatever kind, it should make sense to consult women before selecting a definitive site for the improved water source. In a number of sanitation projects, it has been demonstrated that by involving women in the process of technology choice and site selection, acceptance levels and effective use of the facilities can be improved. For example, in the UNICEF Northern Areas Sanitation project, it was found that when women actively participated in the project, there was an increase in both the implementation through the meeting of targets and in the utilisation rates of sanitation. To the contrary, in the case of the Mardan Integrated Rural Development Programme, it was found through a field survey, that in one village only four out of the total toilets constructed were being used. A major factor that had contributed to this outcome was the oversight on the part of the project staff in terms of including the women's group in planning and implementation. Sensitivity to the need for involving women and the use of simple participatory educational techniques can, in fact, foster rural women's participation in the comparative assessment of process for helping them gain skills in problem solving.

Approaches and Practices

The heavy workload, which the rural women carry, is seldom questioned either by the women themselves or by their community at large. It is generally accepted that this is their destined (or at least socially sanctioned) lot, as daughters, wives, and mothers. The women themselves may not wish to question their lot in life. As one project report illustrates:

“It is very difficult to ask women if they are happy with their situation or not. By saying they are not happy they would implicitly say that Allah has not given them a good life or that their parents or husband is not good for them. For these reasons, women were indirectly asked if they were satisfied with their position by asking them if they would like their daughters to have the same life as they.”

Three types of solutions are being tried by innovative development agencies in Pakistan to reduce women’s hardships and to increase their problem-solving capacity:

- One is to increase women’s access to labour-saving technology such as nut cracking machines introduced by AKRSP in the Northern areas. AKRSP’s WID and technical sections collaborate in developing and disseminating packages designed to decrease women’s workload and increase their earning capacity. However, some problems with acceptance are reported.
- A second solution is to initiate separate demonstration projects for women such as poultry raising and vegetable growing (also by AKRSP) or women’s nurseries to produce high value animal fodder (by the Malakand Social Forestry project, NWFP). These activities are carefully monitored so as to assure an experience of success. This practical proof of what they can achieve empowers women to take new initiatives on their own.
- These measures, however, have sometimes run into problems. In some instances, village men have interfered by either appropriating the technology for their own use or by attempting to take over the management of demonstration plots such as women’s fodder nurseries. This is where the assisting agency has had to take a firm stand in discussing the problem with the male village leadership.

Most important, women’s feeling of powerlessness is being counteracted by promoting the formation of women’s organisation (WOs), sometimes starting with informal discussion groups at the neighbourhood level. WO are, in most cases, separate entities from the regular Village Organisation (VO). However in some areas, due to opposition from the male villagers, no separate WO have been encouraged; instead VOs have a women’s section. Although cultural and religious differences tend to inhibit the spread of WO to some extent, the principle of encouraging women to participate in development activities is said to be gaining ground.

One such programme that can be cited, as an example of successful female involvement is the PAK/German Integrated Rural Development Programme in Mardan. Women’s participation in income generating activities like forestry, poultry raising and fruit cultivation was promoted by actively supporting women’s organisations through a process based on mutual trust and self respect in terms of initiative taking and follow up, in male village development organisation (VDO), e.g. in one village the project had to withdraw support from the VDO due to lack of interest and commitment, while in the same village, the women’s section of the programme assisted the women’s group to successfully implement income generation projects through poultry breeding and fruit plantation activities and savings and credit schemes.

7.4.3 Women Trained as Extension Workers and Technical Staff

To expedite improvements in rural women’s situation, it is imperative that Women in Development (WID) programmes must be able to attract and retain female staff of the calibre and attribute acceptable to local communities. This has not been easy for

obvious reasons, such as the shortage of resources and facilities of training female development staff and the difficulties which women extension agents often encounter at the village level i.e. both physical hardships and problems of acceptance by villagers themselves. There are ways to overcome these problems by training more women from within the village itself.

Several agencies are also making special efforts to train female professionals and auxiliary staff to help research and involve rural women in development programme. For example, the Pak-German Promotion of PHED NWFP organised a three-day workshop for Lady Health Educators from the health Department and other agencies to train them in conducting health and hygiene education. The trainees were provided with a kit of materials that help them initiate village-based training for women. Their function is to promote hygiene education practices in villages where water supply schemes are being implemented by PHED under the integrated concept.

To overcome the shortage of female staff several innovative solutions are being tried:

- Some NGOs have attempted to involve women extension workers from other line departments, e.g., Health or Social Welfare.
- To get around the problem of finding literate women for extension work, one project gets the cooperation of school going boys to help their illiterate mothers in doing the paper work required for extension tasks.
- As the level of literacy for females has improved in the Northern Areas, many male managers of women's organisation are now being replaced by female ones.
- In one village, the role of the manager has been expanded to include village accounting activities. Every fortnight, the female manager is now required to audit the records and accounts of different women's organisations and male village organisations in the area.

In all instances, the consent and support of male members of the community has been assured from the start. To overcome issues of female mobility, mobile teachers' training unit has been set up in Baluchistan, which focuses on training female teachers within the districts.

Local distrust of outside female workers is also found to decrease with time. The following excerpt from a field report is an example:

“During an in-depth interview a woman was asked if she has appreciated the hygiene education visit. Her answer was the following: ‘It was the first time for us that we were visited by women we did not know at all. First our men did not like it but we said it is good that they come. Then they accepted it. You have made an entry point for us.’”

SAQ 3

- i) Explain the following in your own words.
 - a) Women's participation in community decision-making.
 - b) Women's economic contribution.
 - c) Women as extension worker.
-

Let us now summarise what we have learnt so far.

7.5 SUMMARY

Women are the main victims of environmental degradation. They are sound managers of natural resources. Women are close to nature and in constant contact with the environment. There is a need to enable women to participate in the decision-making.

Approaches and Practices

It is well documented that development programmes that ignore women either failed or have had negative social impact, as they are based on an inadequate and only partial understanding of society. Due to women's vital role in production and reproduction, the programmes and policies targeted at the community have their greatest impact on women. Yet this gender-specific impact is too often ignored by planners, overlooked by field workers, and bypassed in project implementation.

Five needs which can enhance women's participation in community decision-making, are:

- To recognise women's economic contribution;
- To increase women's access to education;
- To consider cultural limitations when planning resources needed by women;
- To reduce women's drudgery and to free their time; and
- To increase the number of women trained as extension workers and technical staff.

Human beings are at the centre for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. Women have often played leadership roles or taken the lead in promoting an environmental ethic, reducing resource use and reusing and recycling resources to minimize waste and excessive consumption.

(Beijing Platform for Action, paragraphs 246 and 250)

7.6 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Briefly explain the role of women in development.
2. Explain the objective of empowering women.
3. Explain the following in your own words.
 - a) Education and Communication
 - b) Women and Water.
4. Explain different approaches to enhance women's participation in the community decision-making.
5. Examine the role of women in the protection of the environment.

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