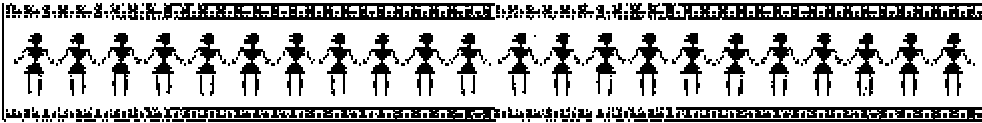


Unit 2

Accounting for Women's Work



General Objective

After studying this Unit, you would be able to help participants in your training session to provide an overview of what constitutes women's work.

Specific Objectives

This training Unit will help you to enable trainees to:

- Identify factors that contribute towards making women's work invisible.
- Identify the areas of activity of rural women;
- Assess their strengths and potential; and
- Account for women's work.

Planning

- Time** : Three hours
- Training Methodology** : Group discussions, group exercises
- Training Materials** : Chart papers, markers.
- Trainers Preparation** : Familiarize with the session plan. Listing the issues to be taken up for discussion with the group. Preparation of charts.

Background Material

Introduction

"The inclusion of women and other poor people does not come as a matter of course. Changing age-old traditions is a matter of struggle to change gendered or caste-based norms of behaviour..."

The status of women is directly connected with their economic position, which in turn depends on opportunities for participation in economic activities. The economic status of women is now accepted as an indicator of a society's stage of development. It is of the utmost importance, therefore, that the country makes full and effective use of its human resources by providing economic empowerment to women who constitute 50% of its population.

What constitutes women's 'work'?

As indicated in the previous Unit, poor women are engaged in a variety of occupations: Small farm agriculture, livestock tending, processing livestock produce, gathering and processing fruit produce, tree growing, trading and vending, producing manufactured items such as garments, bidis, foodstuffs etc. at home or in small worksheds. They also provide manual labour in fields, at construction sites, in factories and worksheds, providing services such as – domestic help, washing, cleaning, transportation, childcare etc.

For a clearer understanding we may group women's activities under the following broad heads:

- Service involves providing some facility for a price.
- Trade involves exchange of goods and services for cash or kind.
- Production involves use of some inputs to transform them into some other output or product.
- Production activities can be classified again into three:
 - Land-based
 - Livestock-based
 - Manufacturing-based.

Even though the activities have been categorized into three, it is worthwhile to remember that poor women engage in these activities on a very small scale, which generates very small returns, involves very few transactions with others, and are therefore most vulnerable.

Also, for poor women, all these activities are intermingled and overlapping. For example, a woman may be engaged in farm labour for part of the year (during harvest time). At other times of the year she may be engaged in manufacturing some product, like making papads, leaf plates, or weaving, and simultaneously also raise some goats, cows or poultry or fish.

The different production relations are also combined in these multiple occupations. Self-work is combined with piece rate work and somewhere there is wage labour too at different times of the year. Different activities may be on different terms, for example, embroidery may be on piece rate, dairy on self-work basis, and agricultural labour on daily wages. So it is obvious that there are different ways for women to earn a livelihood.

In addition, there are innumerable activities performed by women for sustaining the members of the family. These do not generate any money, but are also WORK. Examples are filling water, cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, child care, fetching fuelwood, fodder, looking after the old and infirm. Sometimes these activities are performed by women for the well-being of the family and sometimes to support other members of the family so that they are able to generate resources for the family. Each of these activities constitutes WORK. The fact that it is not viewed as work is another issue and we will come to that later.

In the rural areas and with the poor it has been observed that a lot of barter trade relationships exist among the rural poor. Goods made by one family are exchanged for goods made by another family, for example, one family may exchange rice with baskets made by another family. Also goods may be exchanged for services, i.e. rice may be exchanged for grazing animals or fetching water from the distant pond etc. In all such activities, which again constitutes Work, women are involved in the barter trade relationships. This

involves awareness of the requirements in the house, and how they can be met, as also an assessment as to how much can be exchanged for what. These are important judgements made by women and most times independently. Again, these important activities are hardly viewed as Work.

We can, therefore, see that the major portion of women's work is "invisible". They are engaged in activity from before sunrise to after sunset, yet, are not recognized as workers. Their contribution towards the economy also goes unrecorded. Interventions to strengthen the work of the poor women and to make it more sustaining, visible, and effective needs to take this into account.

Making Women's Work "Visible"

Lack of visibility of women's work is an issue that needs further research and interventions. The economic analysis of a woman's role cannot be in isolation and has to be taken up with other analyses involving the socio-cultural milieu and the political climate in which women find themselves. A few of the issues involved in making her work visible are discussed here.

- Co-sharing of tasks on the home front and breaking down of traditional divisions of labour within the household are pre-requisites for social and economic transformations. The Report on the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for women as far back as 1980 recognized that household tasks and family care should be shared by men, with a view to facilitate the access of women to gainful employment.
- Traditional roles of women and their work within the homes prevent men from realizing the value of their work and women's work goes unrecognized. This is largely because there is no monetary value attached to such jobs. However, this situation may be reversed if men start contributing towards household work, or hire help to carry out household work. This contributes towards making a woman's work visible.
- The relevance, visibility and importance of a woman's work arises only in situations where women are engaged in some income generating activities and are able to contribute some money to the family. In such situations it has been observed that not only household work takes second priority but also men in the family contribute their time and effort in household tasks. The involvement of women in income generating activities can help women's work become visible if men assist women in household work in recognition of their economic contribution.
- Women generally take on work in the fields as wage labour. However, this work is seasonal, intermittent and irregular. She gets paid for the days she works and the days that she does not work outside she spends that time on household tasks. This raises the issue of her work being recognized and visible when she is engaged in wage labour and her work not being visible when she is performing household tasks for the same amount of time. A cost, therefore, should be attached to the household work since it is labour expended.
- More often than not women (and men too) involve the children – especially girl children in household tasks. While the children take on household responsibilities, women are able to go out to earn a livelihood for the subsistence of their families. The cost attached to lost opportunities (of girl children not being able to attend school, for example), impact on family, and other values not accruing to children need also to be taken into consideration. Visibility of women's labour has meaning here.

- Women face extreme hardships, spend innumerable hours and are burdened heavily trying to access facilities like water, fuelwood, and fodder. The proximity of facilities like hand pumps for example, would result in both time and effort saving. Women would then engage themselves in productive activities. Analysis of time allocation data regarding what women do, and how time would be translated into money will provide answers to women's work and its visibility.
- The upsurge in the number of self-help groups (SHGs) and the targeting of their savings by banks is a common feature in any village. This movement has been spearheaded by women and is successful because of them. Women manage household activities, account for money, and save a little from daily expenses to contribute towards SHG savings. Women procure loans for family benefits, (which would be available only when savings have happened), and they are prime initiators for the savings drive too. This aspect of their work also needs to be made visible, especially when it is recognized that to save women may actually be giving up something of need (such as food) in their daily lives. The analysis of savings and how they are generated by women will help to make women's contribution visible.
- An analysis of the physical burdens on women (traversing long distances for water, fuelwood, fodder, and hard labour) adversely affects their health status. They also have to bear and rear a large number of children that has adverse impacts on their health and productivity. The low nutritional standards contribute towards further degradation of their health. Women often are the last to eat, and eat whatever is left over after the family members have finished eating. Data on health impacts of nutritional deficiencies and physical debilitation also caused by excessive childbearing will point to the importance of closely examining the workload of women.
- Government regulations like the Factories Act for example, provide legal and social benefits to women in the formal sector. However, there is a denial of such benefits to women in the informal sectors. Large numbers of women get pushed into working in the informal sectors primarily because of cost cutting and low labour costs. Efforts to document these disparities would grant greater visibility to women's work.
- Women play the traditional roles of cooking and childcare in any household. These roles are considered only 'traditional' and 'unskilled'. However, in situations where these so called 'unskilled' jobs become activities for income generation (for example, a restaurant serving meals, or a crèche providing child care facilities), they undergo a change, acquire the status of "skilled" jobs, and take on a certain value. Women have long been performing these tasks and there has been a lack of recognition of household tasks involving "skills" and 'competencies'. Economic values granted to household tasks would make women's work visible.
- Employment alone cannot emancipate women. Income generating activities and jobs can contribute to promoting women's self-determination and dignity, or they can hinder it. To promote it the jobs must offer the women the possibility to organize and to share fairly in decision making and control in the workplace.
- Women must fight for the recognition and visibility of their work, whether it is in the field of production or reproduction, caring for needs, or households. They must battle the stereotypes and attitudes which portray women as subordinate and passive, capable of certain activities only,

place responsibility for child care and household work exclusively on them and, assign a low value to it.

- The need for organizing gender sensitization training of men emerges from all the above discussions. This will assist in a clearer understanding of accounting for women's work and providing visibility to women's work – productive as well as non-productive.

Work Plan for Your Training Session

Group Activity 1

The purpose of this exercise is to enhance sensitivity to women's work. It helps to focus on the various jobs that a woman does – at home, and outside the home, paid as well as unpaid, earning in cash or kind, for consumption needs or family requirements etc.

You as the trainer can paste chart papers on the board. The participants in your training session are asked

1. Make a list of what work women do the whole day on any typical day. What work do they do when they get up? What do they do after that? What do they do during the course of the day, both inside and outside their homes? In other words list the tasks performed during the daily routine of women.

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Trainers may get the process started by putting down a few activities that women are engaged in such as:

- Fetching water;
 - Lighting a fire;
 - Cleaning the house;
 - Cooking the morning meal.
 - Participants proceed and list out the activities.
2. Based on the work the women do on any typical day, (a list of which the trainees have just prepared), can they now make a time table or schedule of a typical day in a woman's life.

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Women's Work and Productivity

You as the trainer may get the participants started by putting down a few examples.

- 5 a.m. Wakes up
- 5.30 a.m. Fetches water
- 7 a.m. Lights fire and cooks meal

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3. Now, can the trainees try to make a list of the changes in activities, or the activities that take place in the daily time schedule of women during different times of the year, different seasons of the year, festival seasons, agricultural cycle etc. They should also mention the time taken for these activities.

Again, you as the trainer may initiate the process of discussion by giving a few examples.

For example:

Activity	Time spent
1. During the rainy season, major time is spent on planting paddy saplings	6 a.m. to 6 p.m
2. Daughter's marriage preparation	11 a.m – 2 p.m. for one month
3. Harvesting time – cutting and storing	6 am – 6 p.m.

4. Please make a list now of the various skills that women possess.

As in the previous exercises, the trainer initiates the discussion and lists out a few skills as examples.

1. Cooking
2. Cutting
3. Stitching
4. Weaving
5. Taking care of children
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

Processing

You as the trainer involve the participants in discussions and highlight the work and the time spent on each activity by women. The focus of the discussions is to make the work of women 'visible' and accountable in terms of time.

Later on you may also attach monetary values to these activities and make the discussions more focussed.

Some of the observations that may appear could be as follows:

- Women work for as long as 16-18 hours a day.
- They have double work responsibilities – towards home and also towards generating income for the home.
- They have little or no control over money. In most cases women spend the entire money they earn on maintenance of the family.
- They are engaged in activities like cooking, bringing up children, and collecting fuelwood, fodder, and water.
- Domestic work takes up most of their time.
- Women's work is not valued. It is, in fact, not considered work.
- They are not involved with all the processes in the activity.
- Women spend almost no time on paying attention to themselves, even when they are sick.
- Their physical and mental condition suffers due to excessive work.

Group Activity 2

You as the trainer can lead the participants in a discussion on what facilities are required by women and the distances they have to traverse to access them. This is recorded on a chart paper. Instead of chart paper, drawings can be made on mud in the courtyard or any other surface in that local area. Later women participants can discuss how much time they could be saving if the

Women's Work and Productivity

facilities were provided closer to their place of residence. This could later lead to a discussion on usage of time saved.

Facility	Time Spent	Time Saved
1. Hand Pump	3 hours	2 hours
2. Fuelwood		
3. Fodder		
4. Local Grocery Store		
5. Market for their home-based products		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		