

South Asian Workshop on Women and Development

In June 1991, about thirty women activists, development workers and social researchers from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka participated in a month-long workshop on women and development organized by the *Freedom From Hunger Campaign/Action for Development (FAO)* held in Bangalore, India.

Discussions centered around women and environment; women and development; women and family; women, religion and ideology; women's organizations and strategies; women and law; women and health; and alternative/sustainable development.

Participants had the opportunity to expand their understanding of how the dynamics of socio-economic and political change affect women, and what, historically, development has meant for women. The myth that access to education, modernization and economic development leads to women's "liberation" was explored. For example, women in the West, in spite of their education, access to paid jobs, higher incomes and modern life-styles often suffer from gender oppression, and are ideologically tied down to the housewife/mother/lover image. Thus women's empowerment has to include political struggle against patriarchal oppression.

One of the most important outcome of the workshop was the reactivation of an informal network of women activists and researchers working in South Asia against exploitation and oppression of women, and towards regional solidarity.

SOURCE: ACCESS, Sept. 1991. From an article written by Aleeze Sattar, a worker in the Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC.

Women's Advisory Committee

Sexist attitudes that women are weaker, not as intelligent, not as driven, not as capable, etc., is a nationwide plague which may have inescapably found a cozy cranny within BRAC in which to breed. As more and more women join the BRAC workforce, this needs to be looked at more closely.

A ten-member *Women's Advisory Committee (WAC)* has been set up to watch, identify and address matters relating to "gender adjustment," especially at camp offices in the field. WAC will investigate into discrimination against women, imposition of any social or work "norm" on staff because of gender, or any other "socio-professional" issue that may arise.

The main issues raised so far during its meetings include: different social behaviors expected of female and male Programme Organizers (POs), restricted female mobility during non-working hours, women's housing, and maternity leave.

One method WAC is particularly using is to make senior field staff aware of what may or could be happening, and to make everyone else in the organization know that BRAC will not accept

sexist attitudes.

Sutapa, a female PO at Manikgonj says that: "I think it is great to sit and discuss these issues with our supervisors." In response to a statement that women were not good at community based programmes such as irrigation, power tilling, Sutapa says "So far I have not had any major problem in my work due to my gender." "As a PO," she added, "not only did I successfully manage the programmes, I also looked after male village organizations without any hassle." On the issue of female mobility, Sutapa reveals that "It is basically a question of managing time and adapting work to suit you." "For example," she continues, "because I find commuting alone at night uncomfortable, I arrange my schedule so that I can avoid travelling after dark."

SOURCE: ACCESS, June 1991

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is one of the oldest NGOs of Bangladesh. Its programmes encompass general rural development, education and health. It also organizes a series of women's production subgroups in village organization. It publishes *ACCESS*, a quarterly newsletter on the concerns and activities of women in Bangladesh and in South Asia. For more information, write to:

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