

The following sections—*Women and Food Security*, *Women and the new Information and Communication Technologies*, and *Women and Media* and are regular features of *Women in Action*. As these are Isis International-Manila's key advocacy areas, we keep track of the discourse on these issues and share them with our readers. Ed.

Mainstreaming Gender into National Food Security Policies

This paper was presented by Luz Maria Martinez of Isis International-Manila at the Asia Pacific Regional Workshop on National Food Security organised by Consumers International, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and South-east Asia Council for Food Security and Fair Trade, 28-30 September 2000, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The workshop was attended by representatives of NGOs in the region working on food security issues. Following are excerpts from the paper together with some additional information.

Introduction

The issue of gender mainstreaming is increasingly becoming an area of concern, in part because the development community is recognising that many well-meaning projects have not succeeded.

This has been linked to the fact that women in the community were not brought into the process at the time problems were being identified, concepts were being worked out and priorities were being set. Often, they were asked to participate only after the project had taken shape on the basis of consultations with leaders and key informants. The assumption is made that if a given project is good for "the people," (usually referring to the men folk) the effects would somehow trickle down to benefit the whole family (usually referring to the women folk). This is a fallacy.

Why Are Women Important in Food Security?

► Because in many rural families women are in fact heads of household, and the main farmer. This is true par-

ticularly where men migrate into the urban areas or abroad looking for work. This is also true in situations of armed conflict or strife where men go off to fight and leave the women behind. This is also a reality in the case of widows, and/or women with ill or disabled spouses or in marriages where the men do not like to work and depend on their wife and children to carry out the farming duties as well as the household chores.

► Because rural women often engage in farming activities and are knowledgeable about what the problems are and often have their own insights and ideas of how to solve the problems they encounter.

► Because women farmers almost always are involved in auxiliary farming activities that are overlooked or not acknowledged as valued farming work. These are often seen as "women's work" but in effect are critical farming chores such as weeding, pest control, harvesting, collecting seeds, storing seeds, hoeing, picking, cooking the family meals, making clothes, caring for the children, fetching water, finding sources of fuel, etc.

A common scenario taking place in many rural communities in the Asia and the Pacific region is that women are leaving and finding jobs in economic zones, urban areas and in the service sector economy. The majority of women who leave the farm behind do not want to return. Many mothers also discourage their daughters from choosing the rural way of life as it is viewed as a hard life with few rewards.

Without women there are no agricultural communities. Economics is surely part of the problem that underlies this diaspora, but another factor is the lack of equity and empowerment amongst women in many rural communities.

Gender Equity as a Goal¹

In any plan, whether originating from a government or a non-government organisation (NGO), issues of gender equity and/or empowerment need to be stated as a goal. Once the goal is set, the objectives of the plan must be worked out to include women in the assessment of the problem, planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Assessments should look into the practical needs of women and address their strategic interests.

Practical needs are those conditions that are

identified as unsatisfactory living conditions and lack of resources. These needs may be very much here-and-now and usually are short-term processes. For example, a water pump may be needed, or a health clinic, or training and equipment. Addressing practical needs is usually a short-term solution to an immediate problem but it does not address the issue of gender equity and/or women's empowerment. This solution is akin to giving farmers seeds to plant without altering the way the middleperson buys their harvest, or ignoring the issue of fair pricing and marketing of their goods, or without looking at the systemic problems brought about by globalisation and free trade.

Strategic interests are those that assist women to rise from a position of subordination in so-

ciety. These interests like all interests of empowerment are long-term and are related to strategies of equity where women will have more opportunities, greater access to resources, and equal participation with men in decision-making.

Strategic needs are less obvious and women themselves usually identify practical needs rather than strategic ones. This again is akin to asking a male farmer what his needs are and he identifies a plough or a hand pump without understanding all the other forces that keep him poor and barely surviving.

Subordination for women means that they are more likely to experience exploitation and be subject to violence not only in the home but also by the community and outside forces. Subju-



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gated women also have fewer options in life and opportunities. They are unable to improve their lives and the future of their children. Women who feel powerless are more likely to be ill and lack physical and emotional well-being. They lack solidarity with other women and other movements and are less likely to have political will and voice. In general, subordinated women have less ability to exercise their human rights.

Addressing Women's Empowerment²

The empowerment of women requires strategic goals that, over the long term, will free women from inequality and subordination.

The following are examples of how to address long-term empowerment issues through strategic plans in project activities.

- ▶ Gender analysis conducted before a project begins—This can be carried out through a participatory process involving women and men. Information can be collected through NGOs and people's organisations (POs). The analysis should include the sexual/gender division of labour, the types of work done, access to and control of resources and benefits, and some indication of change over time and influencing factors. A gender analysis provides necessary information to improve project planning and design, and baseline data as well from which to measure change in women's condition and position later on.

- ▶ Consultation with women—This

...by 2005 there will be 68 million elderly women in our region and that their health needs have not been adequately studied.

identifies women's affiliations, organisations, and representatives from within the programme area and appropriate on-going ways to consult and work with them. A consultation network may include local consultants, government employees, staff/members of women's organisations, and women community leaders. Advice can be sought on ways to maximise women's involvement, benefits and participation as decision-makers; and to gain the co-operation and support of men.

- ▶ Gain the support of men—Male support and involvement is important in development work with women in both integrated and women-only projects and programmes. Opportunities should be created for dialogue and negotiation between women and men, and for creating a common understanding of the benefit of women's participation to men and the community. The strategy for achieving this is best developed by women and men who are already supportive.

- ▶ Broaden women's opportunities—Maximise women's involvement in collective activity, women's organisations and community decision-making: strengthen opportunities to manage, achieve, receive information and training; and increase self-confidence

and credibility. This requires an awareness of women's time constraints and efforts to reduce their workload.

- ▶ Support organising efforts—Providing support to local women's and mixed organisations working to achieve social change and improve the position of women. These can include organisations working at the grassroots level and those concerned with research, advocacy and policy development. Strengthening links between similar national, regional and international organisations can be of long-term importance.

- ▶ Encourage gender awareness—Promote gender sensitivity and gender-focused planning skills among partner agencies, up to the most senior levels. The assessment should look at the practices and their impact on women, and the development and implementation of a process change.

Uncovering the Real Story

In order to assess the real needs of women there is need for sex-differentiated data. This data is important to help identify and chart out appropriate projects that address the needs of women. Statistics gathered by government, UN agencies and NGOs need to be gender-disaggregated.

For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report on Food Availability, Prevalence and Depth of Undernourishment and Access to Food (1996-1998) looks at the average per capita dietary energy supply. This statistic refers to the



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Older woman augment the family income by selling vegetables in Mandaue city's public market. Philippines

average calorie intake of people but fails to identify whether this calorie intake is by men or women. Many NGOs and groups working with poor rural and urban communities already know that when food is scarce, women eat even less as they will feed the men and the children before they feed themselves; in some cultures the women eat whatever is left by the men. The FAO report also identifies an average of the population that is undernourished but again does not provide gender-differentiated data. On the other hand, studies that look at women in particular have shown that the undernourished are indeed women (Regional Health Report, 1998: Focus on Women. World Health Organization (WHO) South-East Asia

Region). In developing countries 44 percent of all women suffer iron deficiency. This is due to inadequate dietary intake of iron, poor bioavailability of iron and high intestinal worm infestation.

Data that is not disaggregated assumes that the average percentages provide an accurate reading of a situation, thus hiding the reality of differences between males and females. Even basic information such as life expectancy at birth does not tell us whether the higher mortality rate is among baby girls. We know that in many of the cultures in the region the female child is less valued than the male child. If we were to look at disaggregated data, we may be able to

make a correlation between baby girls being allowed to die at a higher rate than baby boys.

The data most often collected on women is related to their childbearing role. This is evident in data that is collected by country on maternal mortality and fertility rates but the importance attached to this data stems from the ability to bear children rather than from a woman's health needs as a person. Once past the childbearing age a woman totally disappears from any mainstream statistics. The WHO report projects that by 2005 there will be 68 million older women in our region and that their health needs have not been adequately studied.

Where differentiated data does exist, there is a need to look at it and compare men and women. If there is a difference, the question should be why? Why is there a discrepancy?

In order to formulate, implement and monitor a national food security plan that is responsive to the nutritional needs of the population, it is imperative to uncover data on what women really need. NGOs are in key positions to gather this kind of information through their projects and experience in the rural communities as well as to advocate for this concept to be mainstreamed at the policy level. By collecting this important data, NGOs can critique government-initiated projects, provide important information to make plans equitable, and to lobby and advocate all institutions that collect information to differentiate their data by gender.

Monitoring the Implementation of National Food Security Policies

Women's empowerment and human rights need to be exercised at all levels of government. National constitutions must guarantee women's rights, enforceable through laws and policies and upheld by national judiciary bodies. In other words, women's human rights like all other human rights must be enshrined in national policies and need to be taken seriously by all sectors of society.

Policies protecting and upholding women's rights and empowerment should be reflected in all policies of government, not only health and food se-

curity. Questions need to be asked: What are the government's policies on women in all areas of governance? Women's access and control of resources should be an indicator of women's equity in resource-sharing. Can women own land? Are ownership laws equal for women and men? If not, why? What are women's rights in marriage? Employment? What kind of access do women have to education, training, financial credit, etc.? Along with access is the quality of the plans. Do government objectives and plans really help empower women or do they merely keep women in traditional roles?

The implementation and monitoring of equity policies must be clear within government structures. Who makes sure that women's rights are upheld? Are women's rights a goal within each department or is it all relegated to a women's committee or board that has no decision-making power or funding to pursue their mandate?

In food-security policies women should be part of all aspects of the policy including food production, marketing, import-export, national disaster plans, etc. and not limited to family nutrition and home-economics training. It is also important to assess if women are targeted in policies as equal members of a rural economy or if they are targeted only in their roles as mothers and wives. When looking at agriculture, governments tend to look at large farmers rather than small farmers but it is important to recognise that small sustainable farmers are likely to be women.

Conclusion

Gender is not an insignificant women's issue but an important factor that can affect the success of a project and the effectiveness of the development process in improving the lives of the poor. This makes it necessary for all NGOs to develop sensitivity to gender issues and actively promote the empowerment of women.

With the help of NGOs, women's empowerment can become a stated goal in policy plans pushing governments to conduct appropriate assessments, carry out thoughtful plans, implement useful programmes and projects and evaluate the effectiveness of these projects. It is also in this partnership between all institutions that the real story of women's needs may be uncovered through data, statistics and documentation.

NGOs working toward a better life for the poor and the subordinated can take the lead in pushing government at all levels to acknowledge the need to empower women, so that both men and women may benefit from equitable and sustainable policies and projects. ♪

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Source: *Two Halves Make a Whole: Balancing Gender Relations in Development*, A joint publication of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Match International Centre and Comité Québécois Femmes et Développement, Ottawa, August 1991.

² Reprinted from *Two Halves Make a Whole: Balancing Gender Relations in Development*.