Gender Issues in Anti-Poverty Programs in Asia

Experiences and Issues

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poverty is more acutely experienced by women because of gender-based discrimination. The major gender-based problems of the poor are: unequal sharing of food, inadequate or lack of medical care leading to illness and health hazards, under-payment, long hours and tedious and hazardous work, loss of employment or lower productivity due to illness, etc., forcing them to sell or pawn their meager belongings, problems regarding shelter, fuel and security, a large percentage of female-headed families, having little or no lands or other property, having to live below the poverty line, and persistent verbal and physical violence and illtreatment of women often ending up in suicides.

The remedial measures thought of are: the employment of women in non-agricultural pursuits outside the traditional female areas, giving emphasis to food crops besides cash crops, providing improved technology and training women in their use, providing credit facilities and extension services, establishing cooperatives and marketing outlets and development of cottage industries. But there are some adverse effects of creating new opportunities if these are not backed by supportive arrangements to assist in women's household responsibilities. These include increase in the work load of women and children, withdrawal of girls from schools and use of other women as labor substitutes. To be of real benefit to women, instead of piecemeal measures, a package of measures covering the entire process of production and marketing must be adopted. Cash income may not by itself raise women's standing at home; it also depends on the size of income, mode of control of family budget and cultural constraints.

Asia is still predominantly rural but there is a growing trend towards urbanization, due mainly to the influx of rural migrants. Contrary to the traditional male dominated migration, women are now outnumbering males and among them those of the 15-24 age group are substantial. International migration of young girls seeking jobs as domestic helpers is developing into a big business

A number of factors exist in the urban labor market which affect the employment of poor urban women: a) a labor aristocracy and a segmented labor market; b) the creation of an age-specific work force of women in export industries; c) the growth of marginal urban employment. The informal sector offers three types of employment: a) self-employment, absorbing 2/3 of migrants; b) outworkers, who are mainly women and children; c) domestic work, which is like an extension of work at home.

Programs focusing on poor urban women could consist of skill-upgrading, higher prices for products, easier credit, etc., non-formal banking institutions, building on family and kinship networks and newly created aid networks, particularly in times of great hardship.

The provision of basic services like water supply, sanitation and health care, cheap energy, etc., can benefit women, especially when their perspectives and needs are considered.

For the sustainability of development programs, the experiences and knowledge of women should be used as resources for planning, implementation and evaluation. Only then can women influence and really benefit from these programs.
I. INTRODUCTION

After more than four decades of development effort in Asia a large number of its people continue to live in poverty. This is so despite the relatively high growth rate achieved in many parts of the region during this period. In Asia alone the number of people living in poverty is estimated at more than five hundred million. The several anti-poverty programs implemented so far have, no doubt, alleviated poverty to some extent, but such programs have also created new inequalities or reinforced the existing ones. There is increasing evidence that women do not automatically benefit from anti-poverty programs, and that many growth strategies may make the conditions of significant numbers of women in poverty groups worse, if certain adjustments are not made in regard to planning assumptions and implementation methodologies. In almost every Asian country women comprise a disproportionately large percentage of the poor and the very poor. There are proportionately more female casual workers than male. For example, in India, according to the 1981 census, half of all rural female workers, against 1/4th of all rural male workers, belong to this category. The reason for this disproportionately large percentage needs to be fully understood and measures taken to overcome them.

This section argues that women's experience of poverty may be different and even more acute than that of men because of gender-based forms of exclusion. Three distinct ways by which women become impoverished can be identified. Women become poor or improve their economic situation together with the rest of the household. Women become poorer through a worsening of the household access to resources. In this case their interests are inter-dependent with the collective interests of the household. They can become poorer also with the breakdown of the family unit itself or their loss of male support. At the same time, women's lives are governed by more complex social constraints, roles and responsibilities and concentrate on the non-monetized sector of society more than those of men.

For this reason, policies and programs to reduce poverty need to be sensitive to gender issues within and among households. Within households, efforts to provide the fulfillment of basic needs must take into account the intra household structures and dynamics which affect the use of income and decisions over resource allocation along gender lines. Among households, female-headed households with young children tend to be among the poorest in the rural areas. Very often macro level data on poverty conceals these differences and overlooks reality at the micro level. In policies and programs these structures have to be taken more seriously. What is clear is that women and men experience the state of poverty differently and often unequally and that they become impoverished through factors that sometimes — but not always — diverge, and these have important implications for policies and programs. Indicators need to be found which are capable of addressing the different life circumstances of women and men such as the differing significance of marriage and child-bearing in their lives, the greater social constraints on women's mobility, women's unpaid contributions in income-replacing activities and as managers of meager resources of poorer households.

II. MAJOR GENDER-BASED PROBLEMS AFFECTING POOR FAMILIES

This part of the paper examines the major problems affecting poor families and what are perceived to be the main problems and needs of women living under rural and urban poverty. In so doing, this section seeks to highlight where the issue of women and poverty requires special attention and indeed needs to be an integral part of poverty alleviation programs in rural development, urban
development and the delivery of social services. In general the poor appear to lack the basic means by which to ensure their physical well-being. They suffer from severe malnutrition and illness and their life expectancy at birth is among the lowest in the world. Physical survival and well-being is at the core of the poverty phenomenon and the struggle to stay alive, the over-riding priority of the poor. Concern with the main problems of physical well-being must therefore be central to any attempt to deal with poverty. Once physical survival is ensured, other basic needs come to the fore — physical needs for shelter, fuel, clothing and needs of security and self-respect. At very extreme levels of deprivation, concern is likely to be for survival and security, so that such needs as autonomy and self-respect will often take a secondary place in the coping strategies of the very poor. In fact, the former set of needs can often only be assured at the expense of the latter and explains why poor families seek to become clients of powerful local patrons and first wives are often forced to accept their husbands' remarriages. Poverty is indeed generally associated with powerlessness, manifested in random violence, harassment and uncertainties which characterize the lives of the poor and reinforce their exclusion from the decision-making structures of society. The major problems facing the poor can be identified as physical weakness, powerlessness, vulnerability, physical and psychological isolation, lack of access to and control over development resources like credit, skills, education, land, new opportunities, channels of decision making, as well as lack of access to the more secure sections of the segmented urban labor market. Looking at these problems through the gender perspective is necessary for the designing of more effective policies and programs. Hence, it is proposed here to examine in greater detail the burden of poverty between male and female household members in the context of male-headed households, and secondly poverty and female-headed households.

2.1 Unequal Sharing of Food and Women's Economic Worth

While the burden of poverty relates first and foremost to the problems of basic physical well-being, it also has the additional dimension resulting from the relationship and social structures in the family and outside within which the struggle for survival takes place. Food is the most important item of consumption among poor households. It is important to examine the evidence of the intra-household sharing of food — inequality in food intake relative to requirements. There is today a fair amount of studies from several regions of Asia which point to the unequal sharing of food within the family with female members getting a much lower share than male members in food quality and quantity, making adjustments to height, weight, age, activity level and, for the female, whether she is pregnant or lactating.

Throughout, the most pressing concern in dealing with widespread malnutrition is simply that people do not have enough food. The interpretation of the unequal sharing of female food intake is complicated by the interaction between gender and economic factors. Practices which lead to inequitable gender sharing of food in the family include feeding males first, particularly adult males, and giving them the choicest and largest servings. The norms and values justifying such practices are ascribed to by women as well as men.

The main items in the daily household diet are another indication of the economic situation. Food occupies an important role in the social life of many societies and there is a distinct hierarchy in the value attached to different items of food. In many parts of Asia, rice, especially the finer grain variety, is usually preferred to all flour-based bread and represents the most satisfactory basis of the daily diet. Similarly, most other items can be placed on a scale from status food to famine or poverty food. Meats and certain large varieties of fish, for instance, can only be afforded by the affluent.
sections of the community. Poverty diets, on the other hand, include meals such as rice, chili and salt only, a gruel made of rice and water and which is cooked, and rice cooked only with lentils. In poor households it is not uncommon for younger women and girls to subsist on poverty diets while reserving better quality food for the males and the elderly.

Studies that have been done on landless and landed households indicate that in general girls from landed households are less under-nourished than those from landless households (Agarwal, B: July 1986). Also, female infants were breast-fed for a shorter time and given less supplementary milk and solid foods. The extent of discrimination against female children sharpens in time of economic distress. The extent of these practices against females is due to historical, cultural and economic practice. Historically, for instance, female infanticide is noted to have been practiced in several parts of South Asia and East Asia. The explanations commonly given for its existence are heavy dowry expenditures, the practice of son-preferences, and the interaction between economic and cultural forces. Several studies (Bardhan P: 1984; and Miller B: 1981) have argued that the earning capacity of females affect the economic value placed on women and female children in the household. Many writers have hypothesized that the differential survival chances of a female child would relate to the expected employment or earning opportunities of female adults. The actual economic worth of working would depend on the existing economic contribution of women to the household income. For a rise in women’s employment to make an impact on the survival chances of female children relative to male children there would need to be a distinct increase in employment and income opportunities such that the advantages are clearly perceived and can affect the behavior and attitude towards girls.

The perceived economic worth of females to the household is likely to be related not merely to whether or not they work in productive tasks but whether or not they earn, which would make their worth more economically visible. The physical visibility of women’s work, that is, whether field-based or home-based, should also be important in so far as this affects the social recognition accorded to it. In households where both men and women are earning, the differentials in their earnings are also likely to infringe on the relative valuation of males to females in the household.

2.2 Health and Women’s Life Chances

In as much as health care requires time, financial resources and information, the poor are at a disadvantage. Chambers (Chambers R: 1983) for instance, points to sickness in situations of poverty where costs entailed in dealing with ill-health lead to loss or sale of assets. Illness can thus have profound effects on lives of the poor, both immediate and over the longer term. Several studies have pointed out that illness is a normal part of life for people who are very poor, rather than an exceptional circumstance. The unsanitary conditions in which the poor attempt to regain their health combined with the inability to pay for adequate treatment exacerbate what might have been relatively minor illnesses. Furthermore, in households where the main source of income is the physical labor of members, days of employment lost or productivity lowered by illness often mean the starting point of its gradual descent into greater poverty. Many have to sell off the family’s land, pawn their jewellery or the livestock to pay for an illness and are unable to recover their property because illness itself has undermined the household total earning potential.

Many studies have suggested that there is a strong gender discrimination in access to health care. A study relating to Bangladesh (Chen et al; 1981) showed that even in an area where free
clinical care was available, males were more likely to be brought to the clinic and hospitalized than women. Other studies in Bangladesh also showed that among an equal number of boys and girls who were afflicted with diarrhoea, 66% more boys than girls were taken to health facilities for treatment. In a study of child mortality rate, it was demonstrated that female biological advantage is only evident in the first month after birth when it may be assumed that social discrimination has not yet had its effect. By the end of the first year the biological pattern is reversed. In the first four years of life, half as many more girls are likely to die as boys. In fact apart from death by drowning, UNICEF notes that young girls accounted for a larger number of deaths from all other causes "(Kabeer: 1989).

The under-valuation of women’s work either in the household or work place leads to women being expected to work longer hours than men and to do tedious, hazardous jobs using less technological innovations. The concept of woman as mother, producer and rearer of children leads to expectations that women should continue to bear children even when their bodies are exhausted or it is dangerous to their health to do so.

Apart from actual lack of facilities, women face other problems which limit their access to health services. Some of the obstacles documented are lack of information about the actual health services available, difficulty in attending clinics due to employment, housework and child care, inappropriate clinic scheduling, reluctance to be examined or treated by men, lack of privacy in clinics, lack of money for transportation costs, clinic fees and drugs.

The actual state of health of women’s bodies is reflected indirectly in the health of the babies they bear. Malnourishment of women in Bangladesh, (Asian and Pacific Development Centre :1990), for example, leads to 50% of all babies born currently being of low birth weight - below 2.5 kg - which in turn can result in a strong likelihood of infant death or of serious illness. A low birth-weight baby, for example, is 30 times more likely to die before the age of six weeks than a baby of normal weight. South Asia has the highest percentage of low birth-weight babies in the world – 31%. About 10 million low birth-weight babies are born annually in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Women who give birth to babies of insufficient weight are often those who themselves were underweight and poorly nourished before pregnancy. During pregnancy itself they did not consume sufficient calories for both themselves and the foetus. The roots of this condition can even be traced back to childhood and adolescence when discriminatory food practices in the family meant less food for girls. The lack of recognition of the extent of women’s work in the field, work place and the home has meant an acceptance of the myth that women spend less energy in work and therefore need less food than men.

The health problems of agricultural workers, particularly the hazards that affect women, have been a neglected area of study and action. The use of pesticides is a common danger to women workers and can cause cancer, miscarriage and genetic defects. Dust from rice husks can cause asthma and eye growths. In agriculture since women are the lowest paid workers they could end up with jobs that no one else will do and often are the most hazardous, such as pesticide-spraying. A health project was undertaken by the Foundation for Research in Community Health in India in the early 1980s to understand better the causes of death (Asian and Pacific Development Centre, 1990). It found, unexpectedly, that there was a high incidence of still-births, premature births and deaths during the peak rice cultivation season. At this time when rice is being transplanted everyone, including women whose pregnancy is almost full-term, are in the fields the whole day. Their work involves squatting and bending for hours. Such physical strains and pressure on the uterus can lead to premature labor as well as still-births.
Women working in plantations face many situations which can endanger their health. And among many women sprayers complaints still surface of sore eyes, rashes, burnt finger nails and disruption in the menstruation cycle. The Malaysian Ministry of Health in 1988 (Asian and Pacific Development Centre: 1990) attributed incidents of pesticide poisoning to unsafe working practices such as mixing pesticides with their hands, blowing the nozzle of the sprayer with the mouth to remove blockage and carrying out spraying operation without regard for basic safety precautions on handling toxic pesticides.

2.3 Shelter, Fuel and Security

Since shelter and fuel are joint forms of consumption, gender disadvantage is less likely to be discernible in intra-household comparisons and more likely to show up in comparisons for male- and female-headed households. The adequacy and type of housing enjoyed by a household not only determines the degree of shelter provided from the natural elements but is also a mark of social status. The homes of the poor tend to be precarious structures constructed with flimsy materials — walls of mud and jute sticks and roofs thatched with rice straw which have to be repaired constantly and are extremely vulnerable to adverse climatic conditions.

Recent studies have shown the growing scarcity of fuel sources and its implications for the well-being of the poor. Access to a patron's land or to common ecological reserves — the traditional source of fuel for the poor — are both drying up and women as well as children spend a great deal of time seeking new sources (Howes, M and Jabbar M A : 1986 ; Douglas JJ : 1982). In the face of growing scarcity, measures are often taken by the poor to achieve economies in fuel consumption — cutting down on the number of times a fire is lit, eating half-cooked or warmed food, storing dried dung cakes and leaves and twigs under their beds for monsoon days. The poverty of a household can be deducted from the kind of fuel it uses since there appears to be a fairly well recognized order of preferences among villagers, ranked roughly according to comfort and convenience of use, the effort required in the collection process or in storage, and whether or not the fuel had some value to non-fuel end use "Kabeer: 1989)."

Another area of concern lies in the issue of personal security and self-esteem. The major problems faced by the poor are in practice closely intertwined. Some aspects of the basic needs discussed earlier touch on the questions of security enjoyed by the household. The problem discussed here relates to another dimension of well-being — the security of the person, i.e., a vulnerability to violence and harassment which appears to be endemic to the situation of poverty in many areas of Asia. The intense competition for dwindling resources among the very poor as well as the struggle by the elite to defend their place in the existing power structures result in random as well as systematic intimidation, police harassment, false evictions, violent assaults and murder, of which it is the poor who are most frequently the victims.

What is less researched is the question of gender violence although it is referred to again and again by women’s groups. Verbal and physical intimidation of women is a common domestic phenomenon, part of a strategy by male family members to maintain their authority within kin-based hierarchies. Husbands, brothers and fathers figure most frequently as being responsible for violence. When violence and ill-treatment are persistent features of a woman’s life, suicide represents the final escape and the tragic revenge. Many development workers can confirm that the lists of suicide or incidental death through drinking poison in many parts of Asia are predominantly female. Violence
against women may be an aspect of class-based violence as well since women, particularly poor women without male protection, are among the most vulnerable sections of the poor. Sexual harassment and physical violence, together with the ability to manipulate community norms and customs are further weapons in the hands of those who already enjoy power and privilege in the community.

Violence, both systematic and random, is part of the condition of poverty in as much as poverty is associated with relative powerlessness and the poor are least able to defend themselves or to remove themselves from threatening situations. Poor women are often forced to stay with violent husbands or to accept sexual abuse at the hands of powerful landlords because they have no other options (Kabeer: 1989).

2.4 Female-headed Households and Poverty

Another major problem is the poverty proneness of female-headed households (FHH), especially those with young children. Several studies have shown that female-headed households relative to male-headed households either have no land or a nominal amount of land per capita and have a higher child-dependency ratio, that is, those 14 years and less of age to those in the 15-59 age groups (Visaria P: 1980). A significantly higher percentage of female heads of households relative to male heads are in a higher age group, especially that of over-60. They are dependent on male wage labor, self-employment in non-agricultural activities and contract work. Usually FHHs report no full participation in the labor force. Instead they are employed on a short-term basis, e.g., weekly status, they are unemployed or experience inability to find work on days when they seek work, they have a low education level and high illiteracy rate.

The overall picture that several studies (Parthasarathy G: 1982; Youssef H and Hatler, C: 1981) have given is that female-headed households relative to male-headed households have poorer survival chances, given their lower control over land resources and their greater dependence on wage income, their higher rates of involuntary unemployment and the lower levels of education and literacy of the households heads. Also many female heads are over the working age of 39. The smaller size of female-headed households, while an advantage in that it makes for a higher per capita income, also implies a lower availability of household labor and overall less labor at the command of female households heads. This can negatively affect the ability of female heads to be successful in self-employment ventures.

All these aspects, when viewed in connection with the observation that a higher percentage of female-headed households are in the lower income decile, indicate that female-headed households are more poverty prone. A study by Parthasarathy carried out in 1980 in the District of Andhra Pradesh (Parthasarathy G: 1982), notes that the percentage of female-headed households in the bottom-most income group of less than Rs.175, which the author terms the "poorest of the poor", is higher than that of male-headed households. This holds for every caste where the data are cross-classified by caste groups. A much higher percentage of households among the scheduled castes has female heads relative to other caste groups. Among households in the bottom-most decile, 57.5% of female-headed households, are dependent on wage labor for a livelihood, 37.7% of them being dependent on agricultural wage labor, while only 36% of all heads, male plus female, are so dependent. In other words, female-headed households are seen to constitute, in this area, a much more marginalised group even among the poorest of the poor (Agarwal, 1986).
III. ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN

The next section looks at the strategies most commonly followed by anti-poverty programs and evaluates these from the perspective of women. The strategies most commonly followed are:

1. integrated rural development programs which aim to generate income and employment opportunities for the poor;
2. area development programs for impoverished and remote areas;
3. special credit programs for target groups, for example, small farmers, small business and the landless;
4. decentralized administrative systems to encourage bottom-up planning and better coordination among government agencies which deliver resources and services to the disadvantaged groups;
5. land and tenure reforms requiring re-distribution of land or the establishment of more secure tenancy rights;
6. the provision of basic needs;
7. relief or dole especially in the wake of natural disasters;
8. development of the household economies and small industries;
9. large-scale land settlement schemes.

There are some major shortcomings in these programs from the perspective of women. Women’s interests are assumed to be included in the various groups that governments plan for, like farmers, the poor. Yet on closer examination one finds that these groups are differentiated and that the lives of men and women within each group are structured in fundamentally different ways. A sexual division of labor exists that allocates to women the most tedious and labor-intensive work and limits women’s access to control over development resources. The generation of employment tends to build on this existing division of labor and may even intensify it. Even the most sympathetic thinking on women’s position still focuses on remedial action after the crucial resource allocation decisions have been taken and the direction of economic development has been laid down. There are many untested assumptions that guide anti-poverty programs which can work to the detriment of women’s position.

The first of these assumptions is about the social responsibilities of men and women. Governments plan as though men support poor families when, in reality, it is men together with women who do so and frequently it is women who do so alone. The fact that most male wage workers are paid sub-subsistence wages has been amply demonstrated. In these situations women’s income is essential to the household survival. Women’s income is also essential in migrant male households in which women are left behind to care for the family. What is clear is that female-supported households are increasing and that the poorer the household, the greater the reliance on the
earning capacity of women. Even with the most effective economic development policies, most poor families would not be able to survive without a major contribution from their female members.

The sole use of "household" rather than also "household members" as the preferred unit of analysis can create potential policy risks. This is because emphasis on the household tends to ignore the economic and social behavior that occurs both within and without the household. Whether planners like it or not there exist gender differences in the intra-household allocation of production and consumption within households.

The existence of gender complexities and the handling of income affect the quality of family life as well as the quality to food intake to children, their education and employment and even household stability (as conflicts about income are one of the major sources of household tension).

Emphasis on the household as a unit for planning ignores bargaining, power relations and the possibility of conflict between members and cannot pick up the differences in the interests of those women who are less articulate. In order to capture intra-household differences it is essential to complement household data with data on household members.

A closely-related problem deals with the concept of work. In the analysis of work and its reward, sharp differences are made between domestic and non-domestic spheres. Yet, for many groups of women the boundaries of the two spheres are not so clearly defined. For women in the subsistence sector and non-wage sectors of society, the domestic, and non-domestic spheres exist as a single system and it is often difficult to separate work directed at household members and work meant for the market.

IV. GENDER EQUITY AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN SECTORAL PROGRAMS

This section deals in much greater detail with the major successes and failures of sectoral programs in terms of their impact on gender issues and poverty.

4.1 Agricultural Development

i) Major Approaches and Assumptions

Policy interest in rural women started manifesting itself in the early 1970s at the time when widespread disenchantment with the effects of development policies on the agrarian sectors of the Third World countries were being felt. In some countries many of these policies had, by and large, resulted in stagnation levels of food production, nutritional decline and a de-structuring of rural communities, fuelling massive rural to urban migration. The problems of absolute poverty and of rural and urban unemployment and under-employment started to occupy a very central place in policy concerns. As the emphasis shifted from modernization to the provision of the poorest people's basic needs — for food, shelter, health — distributional issues increasingly appeared on the agenda but failed to recognize the effects of gender inequality above and beyond those of class membership. Meanwhile, a growing body of research documented the counter-productive efforts of ignoring rural women's contribution and their specific needs both from the point of view of agricultural productivity and of the overall welfare of rural families, as policy proposals related to rural women became intimately linked to an ongoing assessment of strategies of agricultural development ' (Kandiyoti:
This section provides an overview of the most commonly-held assumptions about the desirability of making rural women the target of direct policy measures, the goals that are primarily sought in doing so, and the means advocated to achieve these goals. The approaches can be evaluated in terms of which of women's triple roles -- producer, child-rearer and home-maker -- is recognized, as well as which gender need is met.

Since the fifties, a diversity of interventions has been formulated reflecting changes in macro-level economic and social policy approaches to development. There has been a shift in policy approach toward women from welfare to equity to anti-poverty and recently, efficiency and empowerment (Moser C: 1989). This description of the evolution of different approaches is an oversimplification of reality as different policy approaches have particular appeal to different institutions and may be used by a particular agency to meet the needs of different constituencies at the same time.

The welfare approach is the oldest and still the most popular social development approach, in many countries, to rural women. The programs generated were specifically targeted for "vulnerable groups" and would come into play when the normal structure of supply, the family and the market break down. The welfare approach is based on two assumptions. First, that women are passive recipients of development, rather than participants in the development process. Second, that the main roles that women play are those of home-maker and child-rearer. The main method of implementation is through top-down handouts of free goods and services. By the 1970s, dissatisfaction with the welfare approach was widespread. Many women professionals and researchers were concerned with the increasing evidence that Third World development projects were negatively affecting women. These criticisms resulted in the United Nations Decade for Women in 1976, which formally "put women on the development agenda" and provided legitimacy for the growth of a diversity of women groups in both the developed and the developing world. During the decade, women's groups and the agencies which they influenced developed a number of alternative approaches to women, namely, equity, anti-poverty, efficiency and empowerment.

Several studies in the mid-seventies showed that although women were often producers of development, particularly in agriculture, their economic contribution was ignored in national statistics and in planning and implementation of development projects. At the same time, new modernization projects, with innovative agricultural methods and sophisticated technologies, were negatively affecting women, displacing them from their traditional productive functions and diminishing their income, status and power. The equity approach grew out of these studies and sought to integrate women into the development processes of their country through equal access to employment and the market place. This approach recognizes that women are active participants in the development process, and focuses on reducing the lost grounds of women compared to men in the development process. It places considerable emphasis on economic independence of women as synonymous with equity. It argues that women should be given their fair share of the benefits of development. The equity approach encountered problems from the outset as many saw the equity approach as interference with their country's traditions of male-female relations. Nevertheless, its official endorsement in 1975 ensured that it continues to provide an important framework for those working in government to improve the status of women through official legislation, particularly in areas like rights of divorce, custody of children, property, credit.
A more acceptable approach was the efficiency approach which shifted the emphasis away from women toward development with the argument that women's economic participation in development links efficiency and equity together.

The approach has been formulated by several rural development programs as simply how best to tap the economic resources represented by Third World rural women and rural women themselves have been defined as resources in the rural sector. The assumption here is that there are vast human resources lying idle and untapped.

An equally prominent but somewhat contradictory view is that women are already overburdened with work and that the most pressing need is to alleviate the drudgery involved in providing the basic necessities of life such as fetching water from long distances, time-consuming food processing, firewood collection, etc.

An ILO report proposes that especially in rural areas most women in developing countries are over-worked rather than under-employed and there is a need for more productive technology for the tasks they perform so that there is labor-saving. The issue here is seen as efficient improvement in the quality of their employment rather than employment-creation (ILO).

Policy interventions aimed at rural women have gained relatively widespread acceptance. Some of the concrete areas in which such interventions are expected to produce beneficial results are fertility control, health, food production and the alleviation of absolute rural poverty through expanded opportunities for income-generation. It has been said that the promising point of intervention in the circle of rural poverty and high fertility is through women, specifically through upgrading women's productive activities from the household and subsistence sectors to income-generating employment outside the home. The argument here is that non-agricultural employment for women may, at one and the same time, promote rural development, raise women's status and alter reproductive behavior. Many writers also see the solution to world hunger as placing appropriate technology for subsistence agriculture where it properly belongs — in the hands of women.

Within this context, the antipoverty approach developed with the particular concern that many rural women are "the poorest of the poor". Low-income women were identified as one particular target group to be assisted in escaping absolute deprivation. Underlying this approach is the assumption that the origins of women's poverty and inequality with men are attributed to their lack of access to ownership of land and capital, and to sexual discrimination in the labor market. Consequently, it aims to increase the employment and income generating option of low-income women through better access to productive resources such as credit, markets, raw materials, and new opportunities and skills.

The three main strategies for meeting the world's food crisis are increased production, greater income producing activities and a reduction in post-harvest food losses. And these coincide with strategies for helping poor rural women. The serious basis so far in the introduction of new technologies, many writers have argued, have been geared to cash crop production, drawing off land and labor from food crops. Hence the level of food intake tended to fall even while cash incomes may have increased. In order that the food crisis strategies accomplish their goal of feeding the world, women must not only be included in planning, they must be central to it. In the introduction of new technologies, women must be consulted in the selection of these new technologies, trained in their use and given means to control those technologies most related to their spheres of economic
activities. These writers argue that assisting poor rural women is a crucial element in guaranteeing both development equity and food in the Third World.

Women are food producers in many parts of the Third World. The main constraints on their productivity are related to the labor time involved in their daily household maintenance tasks limiting the amount of time women have to invest in income-generating activities. A growing number of time-budget studies indicate that tasks such as water-fetching, the collection of fuel, the preparation and processing of food can account for the better part of an adult woman's extremely long working day. Allocating resources to better sanitation, easy access to water points, cheap sources of fuel, improved means of porterage and transportation, would have immediate beneficial consequences as would the reduction of laborious food processing operations through the introduction of labor and time-saving appropriate technologies. Better access to productive resources, improved techniques and tools for cultivation, access to agricultural extension services and the provision of farm credit to women are some of the measures envisaged in the area of agricultural production. As far as non-farm income-generating activities are concerned, interventions may cover a myriad of rural-based cottage industries from food-canning and textiles to soap and brick-making, depending on local skills and resources. Again, education and training, as well as the setting up of women's organizations such as cooperatives, to facilitate obtaining credit and finding marketing outlets are advocated as desirable and realistic objectives.

In short, the evidence of increasing level of female poverty and its implications for community welfare have undoubtedly been instrumental in promoting wide-ranging re-assessment of rural women's access to resources, access to land and water, to agricultural inputs, credits and services, to education, training and extension and to institutions and organizations. Ensuring an increase in women's rights of appropriation over resources and their own labor has emerged as an important policy objective for which a variety of measures have been advocated. These measures may be roughly summarized as follows:

a. the protection of women's existing sources of livelihood;
b. the elimination of discriminatory laws on the ownership and control of productive assets;
c. the promotion of equitable access to agricultural inputs, credit, extension services and education;
d. the support of extra household forms of organization of women's labor; and
e. the encouragement of an increased capacity for political empowerment and organization.

The fifth policy approach to women is the empowerment approach. This approach questions the fundamental assumptions concerning the interrelationship between power and development that underlie previous approaches. It argues in terms of the capacity of women to increase their internal strength and right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change through the ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material resources. Long-term strategies are needed to break down the structures of inequality between genders, classes and nations. Empowerment is seen as a slow process and involves the development of diverse women’s
organizations, movements, networks and alliances. It deals with cultural issues as much as economic and social issues and sees their interaction resulting in the specific forms of women's subordination. Hence, besides focusing on issues of access and productivity, it also emphasizes legal changes, mobilization, consciousness-raising and popular education.

ii) Factors Affecting Success and Failure of Programs:

Each of these apparently straightforward measures presents us with important choices and dilemmas which deserve detailed attention (Kandiyoti: 1990). First, one of the factors to which governments and planners are frequently invited to show sensitivity is that of development which actually result in the loss of female control over earnings that were traditionally theirs. There are examples of displacement of female labor and consequent loss of income in agriculture, manufacturing and trading. One example of this is the motorized rice hullers and modern rice mills which are seen as more commercially viable. With the introduction of subsidized motorized rice hullers it is not the people who had been doing the hand-pounding of rice that are given the subsidized credit for the purchase of the hullers. If this were the case they would not only retain their employment opportunities but would have been freed from drudgery, long hours of work and would have improved their income. Instead it is the wealthier villagers and urban traders with money to invest who benefitted most from the subsidized rice hullers and commercialized rice mills. Women who were formerly involved in the hand-pounding of rice are made redundant under the new system and are forced to subsist by sub-dividing available jobs by making them labor-intensive and by lowering further their wage level.

The spiral of rural change in the region has had a tendency to increase the labor intensity of work and drudgery of some of the poorest rural women without necessarily increasing their income. This is an area where the recommendation to provide women with the necessary training, organizational skills and credit resources to retain activities over which they already have some control has particular pertinence.

Second, the elimination of legislation barring women from access to productive assets in terms of rights of inheritance, ownership and control of property and the adoption of positive measures to ensure their equitable access to land, livestock and other productive resources is also essential. Legal access to resources is a major step, but it does not in and of itself ensure control. Piecemeal legal measures, especially if they are confined to title ownership only may create new possibilities but will tend to have a limited impact unless they are backed up by a package of measures covering every stage of the production process, including marketing.

Third, the inequality of women's access to agricultural inputs, credit and services as well as to extension and education have been well documented. Access to credits and to favorable terms is problematic for all economically and politically disadvantaged groups. In the case of rural women, these problems are compounded by the fact that their recognition as legal adults has in many places yet to be established. Women in some societies do have traditional credit arrangements among themselves, but the collective resources they are able to pool are meager and often tend to be more of a crisis fund. The measures proposed to enhance rural women's access to credit range from the support of grassroots self-help networks to the foundation of cooperatives and the introduction of supportive government legal systems. There is growing awareness that measures designed to enhance women's options as producers, access to resources, credit, extensions, education and services must be matched with parallel efforts to reduce their domestic responsibilities. An important factor to
consider in this respect is that the creation of new opportunities for one category of women in a household should not work to the detriment of others. In other words, it seems essential to look at the household as a total system and to evaluate the impact of changes in the life options of any member in terms of the effects it has on others. For example, opportunities to earn and control cash income for certain women should not result in their daughters, for example, being withdrawn from school to take care of household tasks and their younger siblings.

It is quite possible to imagine other situations where the intensification of women's productive labor makes the mother-daughter relationship a central labor relation in the household. The spread of schooling has the opposite effect in that it increasingly removes children, especially female children, who are mothers' helpers from the household and makes their labor unavailable to women whose burden increases. It may sometimes be in women's interests to hold their daughters back, and they in fact do.

The conclusion that emerges from the foregoing is that given their subordinate position within the household women have little control over labor other than their own, and the only area of latitude they have might be in relation to their daughters, daughters-in-law, mothers and other living-in female relatives. Policies geared to the abstract category of women without considering their current responsibilities within the household and how these are going to be substituted for, run the risk of merely sharing certain burdens differently among each group. When new demands are made on women's time something has to be given and that something is, more often than not, another woman's time.

The fourth factor is the advocacy of extra or supra family institutions to organize rural women's work. A strong case is made, for instance, for separate women's organizations like women-only co-operatives. The choice is justified on several grounds, such as building on already existing female networks or modes of co-operation, avoiding confrontation with cultural patterns which oppose the mixing of unrelated men and women and finally avoiding a submergence of women's interests and loss of leadership to men which occurs all too frequently in co-operatives with household membership.

There may still be an act of faith involved in the notion that providing women with a cash income will automatically ensure a significant improvement in their standing within the household. Admittedly, this may hardly be relevant when women's added income barely ensures survival. In other cases it will greatly be dependent on the one hand on the nature of the work, the regularity, security, and amount of the wage earned, and on the other hand, on the nature of domestic arrangements including modes of budget control and the cultural constraints infringing on women. Another factor that needs further investigation with direct implications for women's welfare has to do with changes in household dynamics following the creation of employment opportunities for women, especially in the context of male unemployment or under-employment. It may be worth exploring whether in situations of male dominance and where cultural systems emphasize male responsibilities there are short-term or long-term increases in domestic violence as well as other manifestations of stress and conflict. Conversely, where men's opportunities for earning wages are far ahead of those of women and women are perceived as an economic liability they may suffer great abuse as in the case of India where soaring dowry rates have been related to the increasing incidence of dowry deaths and even to female infanticide.
On the whole, there is relatively little detailed information about the effects of changes in women’s options on sexual dynamics in the household and the workplace in different cultural settings. These effects should not be expected to be uniform or unilateral but should be explored in their own right since they may spell the difference between increasing levels of harassment and abuse, or on the contrary, greater autonomy and well-being.

Lastly, an important factor has centered around rural women’s organizational capacity since it is in vain to hope for significant advances in rights of appropriation and access to services without a certain measure of political empowerment and participation. There is today extensive presence of women’s organizations and solidarity networks outside the home in many cultures. The extent to which women’s networks have been used and supported institutions to help them survive, to maintain existing privileges, to resist unfair treatment or as political tools to create change is also being increasingly documented. Several studies, however, alert us to the fact that class, caste and ethnic divisions may introduce strong competing loyalties as well as genuine differences of interests.

In conclusion, policies and programs for rural women have come from international development agencies as well as governments and there have been successes and failures as well as ambiguities and contradictions. This is partly due to the fact that many of the programs proposed to assist rural women are, at the same time, stop-gap measures to tackle some of the more visible outcomes of under-development such as rural poverty and marginalisation, the food crisis, rural to urban migration. The need to persuade economic planners of the certainty of pay-offs involved in assisting rural women on their own terms and within their own frame of reference reinforces the image of women as instruments of development rather than social and political subjects in their own right. While the package of target group approach to rural women might produce effects in the short-term it can be no substitute for development strategies with a serious commitment to tackle the mechanisms reproducing inequality and poverty. These strategies need to be informed by an acute awareness of the culturally and historically specific forms that women’s subordination takes and animated by the will to struggle of the women themselves.

4.2 Urban Development

Although the majority of the population still live in the rural areas, urbanization has increased greatly in the Asian and Pacific region during the last three decades. Figures charting this growth both globally and regionally are staggering. In the 35 years since 1959, the number of people living in cities almost tripled, increasing by 1.25 billion (World Commission on Environment and Development: 1987). While the urban population in the more developed world doubled in those 35 years, that of the developing world was quadrupled during the same time frame. By 2025, the world’s population is expected to reach about 8.5 billion and much of this will be in Third World cities; of this projected population, an estimated 60% will be urban. (World Commission on Environment and Development: 1987).

In Asia, increasingly, larger proportions of the total population live in cities and urban settings. For example, Jakarta, Indonesia, which had a population of 1.5 million in 1950, is projected to increase to 12.8 million by the year 2000 while Manila, Philippines, with a population of 1.78 million in 1950 is expected to reach a figure of 11.1 million by the same year (World Commission on Environment and Development: 1987). Throughout Asia, this is the growing trend with the exception of China and India whose urban populations only comprise 32% and 24% respectively of the total population (Brown, Lester et al., 1987). Due to the speed of urbanization, Asian cities are
experiencing over-crowding, uncontrolled growth of slums, increase in urban poverty, traffic congestion, inadequate sanitation, water and waste management and proliferation of disease and crime. Over half of this growth in urban population is due to natural population growth in the urban areas and nearly half due to rural-urban migration. There has been a marked increase in women migrants. In fact the rural-urban migration rate for women in the 15-24 age group has increased very substantially to the extent that there are more women than men migrating in this age group for many countries in South-East Asia. This pattern of migration is a break from traditional male-dominated migration in the Asian region. A new trend is also that of the international migration of young women seeking work as domestic helpers. This has become big business.

It is commonly argued that poor urban women are better off than poor rural women because it is assumed that they migrate from free choice and there is a free labor market in operation. In reality, to understand the migration process it is important to consider the structural forces which shape the organization of production as well as the dynamics of the household and kinship networks in influencing the choice of young women to migrate. It is well-known that within asymmetrical power relations of households and kinship networks, young girls and young women are among the least powerful. They are usually very controlled by family rules, its development cycle and kinship obligations. Research on the importance of young rural women to the cities has shown that the changing production structure and the poverty which follows such changes, lead families to send their daughters and young women to town to earn extra money to support the family/household unit. The earnings of these young women are often crucial to the survival of the family. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that female migration is not only related to factors of production but, equally important, to social relations to gender. Male violence, break-down in marriage, polygamy, are all pressures that have driven women into migration.

i) Factors Affecting Women’s Work in Urban Areas.

The work that women do in the urban areas is very much dependent on the wider economic situation which determines differential labor absorption in the urban areas as well as dependence on the stage of the women’s life cycle and their educational background. The economies of many Asian countries are at the stage of development where the growth of stable wage employment is insufficient to absorb the high growth in population so that certain groups, particularly women who are migrants, are incorporated at the margins of the urban economy. It has often been argued that in such a situation hierarchical differences are utilized to organize the conditions of production and accumulation.

In understanding the major problems faced by women in the urban areas, it is necessary to look at some of these hierarchical differences and how they contribute to the concentration of women in the low income non-wage sector. First, a labor aristocracy has developed in many Asian countries with high wages for small numbers of workers in the face of considerable excess labor supply. What results is a highly segmented labor market from which the labor force is separated into sub-markets with different employment conditions and wages. This segmentation is not a passing phenomenon which will disappear "as economic growth trickles down". Urban poverty will continue to co-exist with protected labor markets and will continue to be the life experience of many urban women and migrant women.

The issue of schooling and skills in bargaining take on a new significance with the growth of a protected labor market, particularly for employment in international, manufacturing and clerical jobs
in newly-created bureaucracies. In these labor markets schooling and the credentials it provides are used as selective mechanisms and as a measure of labor-trainability and discipline. Access to high-wage jobs is not only dependent on being competent in certain skills but also related to the protection and bargaining power of organized labor.

Secondly, we need to consider the creation of an age-specific female work force. In several Asian countries the international fragmentation of the labor process has led to differential labor selection of women in different stages of their life cycle, that is, to the creation of an age-specific labor force. There has been an overwhelming concentration of young women in world market factories, that is, factories which export to the international market. The group that are selectively absorbed in stable wage employment in urban areas are those with educational qualifications and those who possess the characteristics demanded by modern sector employment. These are usually male and young female workers. This employment for many women has brought about a break with the past, an opportunity for earning cash income and greater independence. However, in terms of working conditions, many of the intricate mechanisms of gender-based subordination continue to operate even though the framework is more heterogeneous and complex. The group most discriminated against is the older, often married women with few educational qualifications or formal documents.

ii) Assisting Women in the Urban Informal Sector:

The major avenue of employment for these women in many Asian countries lies in the urban informal sector. Even for informal sector employment competition is intense and most of the women are employed in activities that take very specific forms. In designing policies and programs to assist women in the urban informal sector it is necessary to seek to explain why the economic participation of these women takes their specific form. In many Asian countries the ability of women to participate in the informal sector depends on their ability to manage multiple roles. In fact, women’s work in this sector differs from those of men in a variety of ways. First, they are concentrated in areas of the non-wage sector that are compatible with their reproductive role, particularly, child rearing, and often extensions of their domestic responsibilities within the household. Secondly, they are, with few exceptions, concentrated in areas which require very little capital outlay and in areas with lesser growth potential.

Studies that have been done on the sexual division of labor in a number of informal sector activities in urban centers of Asia found that the kind of non-wage labor in which low income women are concentrated are those which have involved skills developed within the households. The task entailed in unpaid domestic labor, that is, work carried out mainly by women in the home, are transferred to the wider economy where production is for exchange. Men, on the other hand, do work which tends to involve new skills, new to the traditional Asian village society learnt in the formal or non-formal educational systems, or on the fringes of the modern industrial economy, for example, machine repairing. Men’s economic activity in the informal sector also requires a higher capital investment than women’s, such as the owning of small shops, or owning a taxi or van. Women are mainly found in the domestic services, selling of fruits and vegetables, in the selling of cooked food and petty trading, as well as in the textile and tailoring sector. Most of this work can be carried out by women in their own homes and be part of family consumption. Many women cook within their own premises and hence the trading of cooked food is a frequent choice for women, particularly if they are heads of their households. It requires very little initial capital outlay, it makes use of traditional skills, it allows a woman to combine her livelihood with her child-raising functions and it is more lucrative than many of the jobs open to women with little formal education.
If we compare the marketing activities of women in relation to those of men, there is a tendency for women to concentrate in areas which provide lower returns. In many parts of Asia women are concentrated in small-scale trading and small businesses while men are involved with large-scale trading and larger businesses. The main reason for this is not only the lack of access to market and capital, trading concepts and transportation but also the fact that large-scale trading and businesses require a level of flexibility and mobility that women will not have unless they are freed from their household chores. While a rigid sexual division of labor does not exist in small-scale marketing and trading, it is the women who usually help out in the husband’s small retail shop as the unpaid family worker together with her children.

Three major forms of employment can be identified in the informal sector and these are the self-employment, wage or contract labor, and family labor which is often unrecognized. Nearly two-thirds of women in Asia in the urban and informal sector are self-employed. In fact, in many countries, urbanization may help women escape some traditional social barriers to employment and even weaken patriarchal control in their daily lives. However, new problems emerge. Many of these women trade on pavements, indicating both the high degree of uncertainty of location as well as inability on their part to make structural and technological improvement. They are also the most vulnerable group to Police harassment.

Women in outwork forms another very large percentage of women in the informal sector. Outwork involves putting out all or part of the production process from a central point to several small units. This process is part of the strategy to cut labor costs, to overcome problems of capital investment and to survive in a competitive market. By putting out its work, the central enterprises take advantage not only of low wages, insecurity of employment and lack of social benefits but also of long working hours. Out-workers in Asia are predominantly women and children.

Another form of work that is a complete extension of tasks performed by women within the household is domestic service. This form of employment is one where women are already skilled as a result of task allocation by the sexual division of labor within the household. The tasks are practically the same ones performed as unpaid work within the family – cleaning, washing, ironing and taking care of children. Although domestic service is a relatively stable wage employment and cannot be strictly described as informal sector employment, it has some features similar to most informal sector jobs. For instance, it is work that is often done without a contract and therefore the employee may be subjected to instant dismissal. It is work that is seldom protected by any government regulations. Domestic service is a frequent job choice for female migrants and poor urban women are readily available because of the growth of a large middle class.

In developing programs and strategies to help women in the informal sector, an important question is why some men in the informal sector manage to be self-employed and even be small-scale employers, while women with their skills seldom achieve the status of independent producers. In order to assist women, the current strategies have included trying to strengthen women’s existing economic activities by skill-upgrading, improving productivity, obtaining better selling prices, lower costs of production, easier terms of credit and providing support services like space, equipment, health care, child care, introducing completely new activities that have a relatively high economic return.

An important intervention is providing access to credit. This means understanding and removing constraints on access to banks and other credit systems. This applies not only to fixed
capital but also to working capital. It is in this area that non-formal banking systems can step in to help these women. To encourage the expansion of small business, daily or weekly systems of lending for working capital could be evolved in collaboration with non-governmental organizations to prevent the misuse of funds. Structural and technological changes are also important. Both of these require access to credit as much as access to a fixed location.

iii) Women’s Networks as a Survival Strategy

I am concerned here with how life goes on for households in urban poverty. The reproduction of life is precarious in these households. Besides turning to income-generating activities, women especially in crisis situations turn to complex networks of kin and neighbors as a survival strategy. It may be that some women in extremely impoverished conditions are still able to raise healthy children while others are not, mainly because the former group has access to various survival networks while the second group does not.

In South Asia, there seem to be three patterns at work:

1. Although the family system has frequently been a system of sexual inequality and many women have sought to escape from oppressive family relationships, it is often the family and kinship systems which are recreated by women in their attempts to deal with the problems of poverty and survival.

2. Besides the family and kinship system, new social groups are created for mutual support. These social groups take various forms. They may be neighborhood groupings of supportive households; they may be people joined together by a shared, newly-created ideology; they may be people who are linked together by a common religion.

3. The creation of vertical linkages with social groups that are financially more stable. The most common form is the patron-client relationship.

A number of studies have shown how relationships are activated and used for acts of exchange.

The urban poor, as a survival strategy, organize their relationships as a social capital that also substitutes for the credentials and organized careers of the formal economy. In a situation of poverty, when life is extremely insecure, it is important to have automatic support in times of crisis. Family and kinship systems have commonly been used as unambiguous pointers as to who had the rights to assistance in times of need. These systems have not been without conflict, domination and violence, but they at least provided their members with some social insurance.

These survival strategies are especially created in times of economic crisis and adjustment, when the increased inability of the modern sector to absorb the large supply of available labor means a further reduction in the generation of employment and a fall in the standard of living of the poor due to price increases, reduction of services and drastic reduction in real income. This has often been accompanied by a parallel reorganization of daily life and the emergence of various coping mechanisms by women to deal with conditions of precarious living in resource poor situations. Many women in poor households are forced to make drastic adjustments in the household consumption patterns, reduce the quantity and quality of food intake and basic services, go into debt. In the absence of a welfare state it is at the level of the household where the fierce struggle of survival of the poor takes place and women as immediate managers of household resources are at the center of
this process. Pressures are set up to concentrate only on the most urgent needs and to neglect others such as home upkeep and repairs as well as to look for lower food prices in markets. This often means the co-ordination of shopping with other family members, including the use of extended family networks, especially women members of their networks. These networks are also relied upon as a result of intensification of domestic work from daily shopping due to more restrictive budgets, to increased cleaning, fixing, mending and sewing done at home — all of which has increased women’s workload and time-use. In other words, in the absence of a welfare state and the decrease in governmental services and subsidies, the family and kinship networks are often the only source of support and of alternative strategies.

The informal sector is able to provide a basic minimum standard of living to at least a section of poor women in the urban areas. While forms of work are directed by structural and sexual divisions of labor, women are seldom passive agents of these forces. Their economic behavior in response to these forces takes different forms. There remain differences in interpretation and organization of social experience and a resistance to larger processes which may range from highly individualistic competitive solutions — for example, individual small-scale traders and fruit sellers competing in the market-place — to solutions that are managed and controlled in a collective manner, such as the setting up of co-operatives and the organization of self-employed workers.

Whatever the solution, however, there appears to be very great reliance on privately-created systems that can be used and unambiguous points to rights of assistance in time of crisis. These systems range from family and kinship systems and newly-created mutual aid networks of different sorts to patron-client relationships. These networks do not bring about any long-term fundamental changes in regard to problems of emancipation and even of poverty, but in the short-term they at least provide some guarantee of survival, particularly during periods of great hardship.

Programs designed to protect women in the informal sector could build on these networks side by side with ways to provide women with training, credit and other support which are required to diversify production to improve their productivity and income.

V. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The development of basic services without doubt benefits women. The development of local water supplies, sanitation, roads, rural energy program and family health care all can do much to reduce women’s work and improve the health conditions of women and children. Available data however suggests that in the planning of these basic services women’s needs and perspectives have been excluded although they are the prime users of such services. As a result these services may not be used by those for whom they are intended. More and more decisions are taken by bureaucracies and women have little, if any, control over the direction that planning takes within these organizations.

In the discussion of larger issues of sustainability, it is important not to forget the need for social sustainability. In the final analysis, the best guarantee for sustainability of development programs is through the building on people’s needs and capacities, in this case, women’s. This means allowing women to have control or gain greater control, have a say and be listened to, be able to define and create from their needs and perspectives, be able to influence social choices and
decisions affecting the program, be recognized and respected as equal citizens with a contribution to make.

Programs can provide these opportunities for women if they examine the ways in which they are working with women in the planning and implementation stages. Planners and implementors need to ask how the relationship with decision-makers in the program can be changed a little so that women have greater participation as the definers or creators of the program. This means questioning the relationship behind women's role and involvement in that project so that they have more control and are not just as doers without ever being the definers in the program. The program should allow women to feedback into the system, instead of women always receiving instructions or ideas from the system and implementing them on its behalf. The field experience of women who were doing the actual day to day implementation and management of the program should be used as a resource by decision-makers. Their perception of the needs and problems, particularly of women, could go back into the system. Hence, in designing programs, more thought should be given to how women could feedback or report back into the program, project implementation and evaluation process. A concrete change which would result from this is that the program would be more responsive to women's input — an important improvement. There will also be a change in the sharing of knowledge within the project. The best assurance for sustainability of programs is the fact that they are responsive to real needs of people. Women on their own could already initiate lines of communication and feedback during meetings with whatever office the program comes under by not just listening to what the department wants women to do but also presenting some ideas and suggestions. Women should not just be told what the problem is but be able to tell government departments and officials what problems they have found. Women should also suggest problems they would like to work on first, that is, set priorities. Again this is a small area where women could be gaining a bit more control and influence if they had more input. All these are just examples of ways women can add to their role and influence and benefit more from programs and projects.
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