

General Introduction

This handbook presents fifteen case studies on the non-formal education of women from several Commonwealth countries located in the Asian region. The countries covered are India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Each section is accompanied by an introduction which highlights the major points of the case studies of the region.

The material and data presented in these documents pertain to the period between 1975 to 1980 generally, and in some specific cases, for special reasons, go back further in time. Some of the material and data were specially collected for this document. The main aim of this presentation is to place in the hands of the concerned people both in governmental and non-governmental agencies concerned with the planning and administration of non-formal education programmes the collective experience in operating such programmes for women, under different cultural, political, ethnic, economic and social conditions. The methodology of implementation of these programmes and the causes for successes and failures are explained so that insight can be provided for the planning and implementation of programmes for women.

It is hoped that the document has been successful in achieving, at least to some extent, this aim. Some readers, perhaps, would have found it useful to have more background information on the countries and the people covered in the case studies. However, this would have made the handbook too long. Moreover, it is expected that readers would have access from other sources to these data in respect of the Commonwealth countries covered here.

The studies have been arranged by countries, rather than by activities. This has been done with the following considerations in mind. The case studies are but a small segment of the tremendous effort which is taking place in Third World countries to modernise without losing the good values of the ancient and highly sophisticated cultures which exist there. The understanding of such social parameters and of the economic and political structures is necessary to grasp the full implications of the case studies. This is easier to do if the presentation is on a country-by-country basis.

The case studies present an interesting kaleidoscope. There are mixed populations of several races, such as Malays, Malaysians of Chinese origin, Malaysians of Indian origin, Sinhalese and Sri Lankans of Indian origin, tribals and non-tribals, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. The only exception to this general mix of communities is Bangladesh, where the population is more homogeneous than in the other countries of the region. There is also tremendous multiplicity of languages, so that for the same programme, communication materials need to be organised in different languages. There is also tremendous variety in the levels of communities covered; for example, there are modern and advanced areas like Colombo and very backward and isolated areas like the Chatroo Block in Jammu and Kashmir State. These factors make the case studies presented here interesting and wide-ranging.

Even though the case studies relate to different countries and to populations which are extremely varied, there are several common factors. Wherever the programmes have been organised with peoples' involvement and participation,

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whenever their feelings and needs are taken into account, they thrive. Getting the women to talk about their problems and needs and getting them to suggest a plan of action may turn out to be a long-winded and time-consuming process. After centuries of oppression women are often tongue-tied and shy of putting themselves forward. But though such programmes may take time to devise, they do bear fruit. Programmes started without consultation by the government or other organisations, if not related to people's needs, soon fail however big the initial fanfare was. This is a lesson which every practical minded planner and social worker cannot afford to forget.

Another common theme is that one cannot treat a programme in isolation. The comprehensive approach is exhibited by Bangladesh in its programme of population planning through rural women's cooperatives, and the Kirillapone Project in Sri Lanka and the Mobile Creche Project in India. To begin with they had one specific aim of population planning or child care. But the planners soon realised that, unless the totality of life of their clientele was touched, progress could not take place. With 75 per cent of the population in rural Bangladesh living below the poverty line, the first need is survival. Population planning can have meaning only if there is enough sustenance.

The whole Asian region is highly populated. Pressures on land are tremendous and two countries of the region, China and India, are the most populous countries in the world. Cities like Calcutta or Colombo have populations equal to those of several small countries in Africa put together. It is therefore not surprising if, in all the case studies presented here, whether they be related to rural or urban areas, child care or income generation, the preoccupation of planners and social workers lies with programmes aimed to relieve the population pressure. Without population control, no development plan is going to work.

Politics plays an important role in all developmental programmes. And this is so even in respect of programmes which are avowed to be apolitical. G.K.Chesterton, the writer, has stated that every man is a philosopher even if he denies it: "Show me his actions and I shall tell you his philosophy," he argues. The same is true of developmental programmes, including women's programmes. Like Chesterton one can say, "Show us what is being done in the programme and we can deduce the politics."

Sometimes the politics may be of a narrow nature, arising out of expediency rather than a real political will; sometimes it is international politics and sometimes it is the politics of a dominant group. In all such cases, there is generally a considerable difference between what is stated as the aim and what is actually put into the field as a programme; many times it is offered more as a sop, and most times, it is without any real roots and is dependent on outsiders.

Some development programmes emerge and grow in strength when they are part of a national movement, a people's movement. For example, a good deal happened in the direction of women's emancipation in the real sense when India launched a national movement against the imperial power ruling the country, under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru. Thousands of women living traditional lives came out into the streets, picketed shops selling foreign goods as part of the *Swadeshi* movement. They went to jail and participated in processions side by side with men. Similar phenomena occurred when Bangladesh fought its War of Liberation. The march of women towards their rightful place in a society cannot happen in isolation. When people define their own needs and become involved in programmes for their own development, the programmes generally work. But the programmes have to be related within

a larger framework of progressive policy at the national level if they are not to fizzle out.

The Malaysian study of the Kanita Project makes this very point in a subtle but telling manner. Although it talks about the project's being framed within the existing social structure, it concludes, "Women's potential as community leaders may only be realised if the existing social hierarchical structure changes, giving women more time and opportunity for decision making on the political level." At another place the study points out:

"The existing political structure encourages the perpetuation of a formal leadership system which is greatly dependent on the bureaucracy for assistance, guidance or information about new, more innovative development strategies. With grass-roots leaders being nominated by the bureaucracy and being given ascribed statuses that guarantee long-term accessibility to government benefits and services, it is likely that complacency and self-interest may be more frequently manifested than dedicated leadership based on communal interest. The ideal strategy would be to change the system of leadership, by decentralising the powers of the district office and transferring the responsibility to people."

The basic truth of this observation is familiar to every sincere field worker. On occasions we may have to substitute multinationals, dominant groups and elites for district offices or bureaucrats, but the situation is the same all over the Third World.

This is not to deny that public-minded individuals, social workers, academics and sincere bureaucrats will make a difference to the quality of the programme being offered, but such efforts cannot go very far. For a new wind to come, the whole nation has to be committed to change and there has to be a political will for such a change. It must, for example, be accepted that any programme for the non-formal education of women will, if successful, bring about a change in the woman's attitude to herself, to her social relationships, to her aspirations and to her environment. This will bring an end to male dominated society. Every successful developmental programme will change the status quo. Dominant groups and elites have to be resigned and prepared to accept that they may not remain privileged in the new order of things.

Finally, some thoughts on women's participation in development. Development is a much misused word. For centuries, women have occupied a low status in comparison with men. Plenty of lip-service is paid to the equality of women with men and in fact, in several countries, legally the women are treated as equal with men in many matters; yet it is still a man's world and in practice women remain subservient to men. A woman weaver, 38-year-old Mmalseta Dintwe of the Oodi Weaving Centre in Botswana has related her views in this respect succinctly. After commenting on the changes that have come which have made it necessary for women to work along with men, as otherwise they would not be able to support their compound, she observes:

"I think the work of women is heavy. For instance, if I plough with my husband and it comes time for rest, I will stamp corn in order to make food. He then tells me to bring water for washing. While I am cooking, he sleeps and I will wake him when the food is ready. The following morning, we wake up together and go to the fields, and after we finish,

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he knows that he has finished and I then start weeding. I harvest. Men are cheating us badly; they are people loved by God. We took it before, as it was our job and because things were easier, but now we are beginning to see that we are being cheated because things are changing. We now see that we are being killed by work."

It is indeed a fact of life that economic development and modernisation, when unaccompanied by social justice and fair distribution of national income - a phenomenon pretty common in most of the developing world - has pauperised the countryside and placed a greater burden on those sections of population that were already disadvantaged. For them (both men and women) the process of development has meant development of underdevelopment and life has become harder. Therefore women too have to be gainfully employed. But at the same time, they have to carry on their traditional duties too, in which men hardly help. Thus the women's burden has become greater than before even in terms of physical work and despite general development, they continue to remain second-class citizens in any country.

The consciousness that this is not right and things could be organised better for women is the spark from which the real development of women could begin. Such awareness should also lead women, and men too, to realise that real development for the entire society is possible only when the social and economic order is fair and just. One of the first steps to bring this about is to ensure that women are accorded their rightful position in the society not only *de jure* but *de facto*.

A developing society is a dynamic organism and as for the healthy growth of the human body, all the parts must receive nourishment and adequate exercise, so also for the healthy development of a society, each unit of the society, i.e. every person without distinction, must share in its resources. Otherwise only certain sections of the society would develop. Sooner or later such imbalances would lead to malfunctioning.

The effects of the current social changes are different on men and women. Those concerning women have tended to be noticed less. Women's concerns have to be seen as central to the process of development. Then talk of "integrating" women into development would become redundant. For truly, without women, there is no development.

Mrs Ila Bhatt, an eminent social worker whose work in the Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA), in India (not included in this handbook as SEWA has been documented internationally and is well-known), observes that women have become invisible to planners. Very few development programmes take into account that the natural tasks of child bearing and rearing, as well as the jobs in the house which a woman is always expected to do, impose a great burden on her, especially when she also has to act as a breadwinner for the family or contribute to the family's budget by earning. The case studies support these observations again and again. It appears that unless women start functioning effectively at technical and political decision-making levels, developmental programmes which would keep at their core the concern for women and their special needs will be limited in number. However liberal and well-meaning men might be, they would not know where the shoe pinches. In a man's world, they do not have to wear the ill-fitting shoes. The simple example of agricultural tools should illustrate the point. Over several development decades, improvements in agricultural implements have taken place. Yet in most developing countries, although the women work side by side with men in the fields, the size and shape of even new implements have remained proportionate to the physical build of men. The thought has just

not occurred that there could be different designs for women agricultural workers. No wonder therefore that development programmes in the use of science and technology ignore the special needs of women.

The imbalance which exists in developmental plans and programmes needs to be corrected. There is an absence of special programmes for women which look at the world from the viewpoint of women as equal participants in development.

Most of the cases included here are about programmes of developing skills for gainful employment, for income generation, literacy, family planning, nutrition and child care. Women's awareness that the present order of things is unjust, and that they can change it, comes through a specific participant's own efforts as she works out things for herself, and through the confidence she gains as she becomes economically less dependent on men. In most of the programmes in this document, such awareness is not explicitly included as an objective. Yet developing such understanding and building up women's confidence ought to form part of every programme for women. Moreover, they should also be made aware that self-reliance, rather than self-pity for their lot, is more important.

The developmental framework for women's programmes must also include programmes for family education, particularly for men. They too must understand that there can be no development without women. The Bangladesh studies on population planning through mothers' clubs and integrated rural development programmes go to show that the education of the community on the rightful status and role of women, side by side with the development programmes for women, is necessary.

Three things could be considered as basic ingredients for creating the right climate for development: a socio-economic political structure in which, side by side with the process of modernisation, social justice is not merely paid lip service, but is actually practised; building of awareness in both men and women that, without women, no development is possible; and last but not least, organising of women for self-help.

Self reliance in women must be combined with judicious help from the state and voluntary agencies to supply inputs which cannot be found locally. The Kanita Project in Malaysia shows the importance of building awareness in both men and women. The effectiveness of the development of self-reliance with selective outside help can be seen in the Kaduwela Training Programme of Sri Lanka.

Further, this self reliance should be operating not only in the implementation of a programme but also in identifying the needs of the population and planning a programme to meet them. Many a programme has gone astray because the outside planner has unilaterally decided what should be the aim of a specific programme. So long as somebody was there to push, the programme continued but it fell into disuse the minute the outsiders left. Even if what the local population wants may seem ridiculous, it cannot be rejected out of hand. The psychological bases of even seemingly ridiculous needs are important enough to give pause for thought. This is particularly so when programmes are being operated which go against traditionally accepted concepts and values.

A corollary of the statements made above is that any developmental programme for women has to be a part of the bigger national effort for development and should have links with its policies and programmes. Even a programme of teaching crafts in a village will not be successful unless there

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is a policy to promote such crafts to ensure finance on easy terms, availability of raw materials, tools and marketing facilities, and fair prices. The lack of a systems approach and inadequate managerial skills have been the common failings of many programmes, as the case studies show.

Another factor which has a tremendous bearing on the development issue is that of population pressure. In most of the developing world populations are increasing at a galloping speed. Family planning programmes take time to make their effects felt. The next few decades are going to be extremely critical. Planners have to ensure that there are sufficient fruits of this generation's development efforts to be distributed among the next, more numerous generation. Advances in technology make it feasible that such quick development could take place if the necessary conditions exist. One important prerequisite for such a thing to happen would be an integrated communications system using mass media, small media, and interpersonal communication. Under conditions of rapid modernisation in a democratic set-up, people are asked to make decisions in areas unknown to their parents - whether to use crops for home consumption or for sale, the number and spacing of births, the type and level of education to be provided for their children. Today people are forced to deal with aspects of life for which their traditions and accumulated experience offer no guidance.

The Tanzanian programme *Mtu ni Afya* (Man is Health), using face-to-face contact, literature and radio campaigning for a health programme, provides an interesting example of the use of a good media mix. The Tanzanian programme worked because Tanzanian developmental strategy places an emphasis on people's involvement in the discussion of development plans which affect their lives. Traditionally, in Africa, decisions were made by discussion until agreement was reached. Tanzanian planners wisely revived this tradition in the *Mtu ni Afya* programme. It was also kept flexible to accommodate the needs and environments of different groups. The method was also a well tried one, having been used earlier in political campaigning. A big publicity effort was gradually mounted through posters, press, radio and word of mouth. The coordination of government departments, university, the political party and voluntary organisations was good. It was not only for women but directed rightly towards the entire community. However, the campaign was significant in its inclusion of women in every aspect of planning and implementation. In a subsequent campaign on food ("Food is Life") women took part as group leaders, wrote scripts, produced radio programmes and acted as evaluators.

In the developed world, the woman's work is made easier by a number of household gadgets. Moreover, it is increasingly accepted that looking after the children and housework are joint tasks of both parents. Such a realisation by men in the developing world will still take considerable time because attitudes built over centuries cannot be changed easily. The education of the family and of men in these matters is a neglected but important part of the overall developmental programme.

However, there is one area in which more efforts at the national and regional levels could be mounted to reduce the drudgery of the woman's traditional work. Research using appropriate technology can develop cheap but labour-saving household gadgets. In fact, in many laboratories of the developing world, many such devices already exist. What is wanting are field trials, marketing and popularisation.

Non-formal education programmes of women are rather limited in nature. Income-generation programmes, for example, remain largely limited to traditional and home crafts such as cooking or basket making and weaving. Where there is no market tie-up or expert advice on designs and quality control,

the programmes degenerate quickly. It is necessary that income-generation programmes do not remain limited to these crafts but use better technology and tie into other production and distribution networks. If illiterate men can use lathes, there is no reason why illiterate women cannot also use them. As functional skills develop, the motivation for women to become literate might increase. The main constraint on women is their mental conditioning. They have to be helped to break out of their psychological prisons and develop new attitudes and self-confidence.