

Case Studies from India

INTRODUCTION

The six Indian case studies are drawn from the north (Delhi and Kashmir), south (Madras) and west (Gujarat). Thus they represent projects and schemes implemented under a wide variety of geographical conditions, from snowy mountains to arid plains. In addition they represent both urban and rural contexts. The Mobile Creches for Working Mothers Scheme in Delhi, the Working Women's Forum in Madras, the Annapoorna Mandal Programme in Bombay and the Jyoti Sangh in Ahmedabad are targeted, respectively, at migrant construction workers, slum dwellers, working-class women and unskilled women. The other two case studies focus on rural women, from catering services in the west to functional literacy for mobile cattle-herders in the far north.

The reader will be able to pick out some regularly recurring themes in all the studies. One is the tendency for an organisation to focus initially upon a particular group of women and a particular type of activity, but gradually to incorporate other groups of women with similar needs and to develop from one activity to another. Indeed the range of activities in almost all the schemes is remarkably similar, from income-generation skills training to nutrition and child health, from literacy training to community self-help.

One interesting feature of many of the programmes is their long history. The Jyoti Sangh in Ahmedabad was founded over fifty years ago during the freedom movement. But other organisations have sprung from earlier ones and have adapted in range and emphasis to meet current needs.

A somewhat persistent problem for some of the programmes is the tendency of middle-class and upper caste women to dominate the management. Of course, as the studies show, there is a long tradition in India of middle-class charity and patronage of the poor. But the most successful schemes are those where there is grass-roots participation of women in identifying their own needs and learning to organise self-help.

Most of the case studies are sponsored officially or through international agencies with some voluntary effort. The Maharashtra Scheme is interesting, however, in that it involves university students in social service at village level. The Kishwar Project, although enjoying official financing, receives too little help in terms of the interest of experts and skilled personnel to contribute to the functional literacy programme carried on in instructors' houses.