

## **DEVELOPMENT FOR WOMEN : METHODS AND PRIORITIES**

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### **Introduction**

The objectives of development and the related approaches have changed at different stages of the modern era of development. The growth oriented development programmes adopted by the developing countries since their independence, were later narrowed down to people oriented strategies to meet the growing needs of the poor. These efforts did not pay any special attention as such, to women's development.

The efforts to address women's concerns in development processes is a relatively recent phenomenon and dates back basically to the 'Women's International Year' of 1975. To understand the development programmes for women, various approaches have been identified. These include the Welfare approach, Equity approach and Antipoverty approach (Buvinic *et al.* 1983). Efficiency approach and Empowerment approach were two further classifications added by Moser (1989). These approaches emerged as a response to different views put forward by various feminist groups on women's development. Broadly they fall into three different categories of development models, namely, (a) women in development (WID), (b) women and development (WAD), and (c) Gender and Development (GAD). This study aims to analyse these models and approaches with a view to identifying methodological pertinence and limitations to meet the development needs and priorities of rural women.

### **Women in Development Model (WID)**

The main objective of the United Nations first development decade (1960-1970) was to reduce the poverty in developing countries through strategies to increase capital accumulation and GNP. Following the failure of this policy, the poor countries called for a new approach to development. The call was for a new international economic order to structure the global economy as well as to redistrib-

ute control over resources. With the United Nations second development decade (1970-1980), attention shifted to human resource development and basic human needs. This implied, among other things, an increase in the share of the poorest of the poor in the development process (Maguire 1984:5).

The pre-WID programmes were basically gender neutral and development planners assumed that benefits of these development programmes designed for men will automatically trickle down to women. Neglect of women by development planners was mainly due to the influence of sex role theory of modernisation paradigm in which women were included with children as dependents of a male household head in a nuclear family system. Women were viewed primarily in their capacity as housewives, mothers and secondary earners.

During the implementation of growth oriented programmes to meet the growing requirements of the developing countries, agricultural modernisation and industrialisation received much attention of planners. Agricultural modernisation brought about many changes in social relations and the allocation of labour in rural Asia. Women, particularly those in lower socio-economic groups, suffered rather than benefited from them. Mechanisation in developing world resulted in the reduction of jobs for women. Rather than reducing their burden, it has often rendered them jobless, as mechanisation has reduced the demand for family labour (Whyte and Whyte 1982:183-191).

In rural areas, women's access to land, labour, technology, credit and other inputs to cultivation appear to have worsened in most parts of the Third World. Whenever land reforms were undertaken, they often reduced women's control over land by ignoring their traditional rights of utilisation and giving land titles solely to male heads of households. Landless women from the poorest household are more likely to be engaged as seasonal, casual, and temporary labourers at low wages than their male counterparts (Sen and Grown 1987:34).

Industrialisation, in Third World countries, worked as an impetus for mobilising cheap docile, dexterous, submissive Third World women for export oriented production. When this new international division of labour was worked out and put into practice, it was found that women's status had deteriorated in most of the Third World countries (Mies 1982:4-6). Furthermore employment in these industries tends to be short term with high turnover. It leaves women with little choice but to move into sweatshop occupations or so-called 'informal' sector, once they lose their jobs (Sen and Grown 1987:35). The declining role of craft and cottage industries in the face of competition from cheap, mass produced factory goods also affects women's labour (Whyte and Whyte 1982:183).

In pre-WID programmes women's issues were included as "social welfare" concerns, i.e., family welfare, raising of youth and maternal and child health programmes (Linda 1991:7-8). Women were perceived as passive recipients of welfare programmes rather than active members of the development process. They saw rural women as essentially in need of better knowledge particularly in the areas of child care, nutrition, health, sanitation, home management etc. (Miranda 1991:7). Therefore, it was understood that the conventional stereotypes regarding women's appropriate roles had pushed them away from the mainstream of development.

The concern over women in development was also due to the increasing interest of feminists who evaluated the roots of the disadvantageous situation of women in developing countries. Boserup (1970) argued that various colonial and postcolonial governments had systematically bypassed women in the diffusion of new technologies, extension services and other productive inputs because of their perception of what women did. A similar view is shared by Tinker (1976) who points out those western stereotypes of appropriate roles and occupations tend to be exported with aid. Therefore, feminists stress the necessity of changing the perceptions of planners and integrating women into the development process. These views made a considerable impact on designing the priorities of the second development decade.

It was during the second development decade that the concerns of the female half of human kind were addressed in the context of global development. This new approach attempted to integrate women in the development process and in the 1970s it became the formula for development strategy. The term "WID" therefore emerged in a receptive policy environment (Pietila & Vickers 1990:vii-viii). The increasing concern over women's development is manifested by the UN's decision to declare 1975 as International Women's Year and 1975-1985 as the International Decade for women.

WID was a reaction and the outcome of two factors; the search for a practical solution after the failure of the first development decade (1960-1970) and the growth of feminism based on a systematic assessment of the disadvantageous position of women, borne out by both qualitative and quantitative analyses. It was also made explicit that the decade for women (1975-1985) was placed in the period of the UN decade of development in order to assure the integration of women into the total development effort (Maguire 1984, Pietila and Vickers 1990). As the theme of the plan and the decade was equity, development and change, the programmes for women initially followed the equity approach.

### **Equity Approach**

WID models and its approaches have their roots in liberal feminism and are closely linked with the modernisation paradigm, which dominated the worldview of international development in 1950-1970. The equity objective of the decade was a result of the liberal influence on development thinking. Liberal feminism has a tradition of fighting for equal rights and opportunities since the 18th century. In the 20th century, with the development of liberal theory of the welfare state, they demanded equal opportunities for men and women (Jaggar 1983:27-28).

Liberal feminists argue that women have the same potential for rationality as men. It is a fact that women have not always realised this (Boonsue 1992:14). There are two major foci in liberal feminist analysis of women's marginalisation. Firstly, women are denied equal

rights in education and employment. This disadvantaged position is related to prejudice against women. This is often combined with a second theme, that of sexist attitudes which sustain the situation (Walby 1992:5).

As far as the impact of modernisation theory on WID is concerned, women are seen as the poorest and most backward income group who are not yet making a full, productive contribution to development. Therefore, according to linear growth theory, the way to promote balanced economic growth is to increase the productivity and income of women in the lowest income households (Boonsue 1992:5). However, the WID point of departure in the modernisation paradigm stems from doubts over the presumed neutrality. It was not the market solution per se that had failed women, but planners and employers and sometimes women themselves, whose irrational prejudices and misplaced assumptions led to discriminatory outcomes. The problem therefore, was how to ensure that the benefits of modernisation reached women (Kabeer 1994:19-20).

Liberal feminism and modernisation theories influenced and sustained the equity objective of the decade. The WID strategies for gender equity were formulated in the belief that gender relations would change by themselves when women became full economic partners in development (Rathgeber 1990: 490-493). Therefore attempts were made to give women equal opportunities for education and employment, equal pay for equal work and equal standing before the law (Gerson 1982).

A major problem of the new equity programme for women in the Third World is their little relevance to the vast majority of poor working women. Treatment of women as amorphous and their problems as universal had oversimplified the conditions of women who belong to widely diverse age, ethnic, class, religious and ideological groups. Another problem with equity arguments are their strong redistribution components, implying high economic and political cost. As women benefit from territory gained, men must relinquish some share of a fixed resource pool, therefore losing ground (Buvinic *et al.* 1983:14-31).

## **Poverty Alleviation and Basic Needs Approach**

The awareness of the failure of equity strategies to improve the conditions of rural women saw a shift towards a new policy focus on women and poverty by the end of 1970s. Two factors have basically affected this change in development strategy. First, demonstration of the positive links between women's productivity and overall economic growth has created a powerful incentive for development policy makers to focus on rural women. Second, the poverty approaches minimise the negative political and social consequences of re-distribution.

Poverty alleviation programmes were designed mainly to provide basic needs for poor women casting them in the role of managers of low income households. Accordingly these programmes consisted of provision of health, nutrition and income generating facilities for women and their families. The provision of basic needs was considered by analysts as a continuation of the earlier welfare programmes in a new context. The addition of income generating activities with basic needs reflects the influence of WID's concern for women's productive roles by recognising that these responsibilities had an economic component and therefore required income enhancing measures.

The implementation of Basic Needs programmes were affected when there was large scale deterioration in the world economy and the ability of whole nations to act as sovereign agents was under threat during the 1980s. The structural adjustment programme imposed on them as a response to this dilemma was responsible for privatisation and cutting down state subsidies on provision for basic needs. A disproportionately large share of these adjustments tend to impact on women, who shoulder the responsibility of organising most of these services at the level of their respective households. The inability of development agents to continue the basic needs strategies led to change of the development theme from Basic Needs to Efficiency during 1980s.

## **Efficiency Approach**

The basic argument of the efficiency approach is that women are productive agents whose potential had been under-utilised in welfare oriented approaches. It identified the inefficiencies of bureaucratic structures in which Welfare and Basic Needs strategies were carried out. Behind these programmes was a Neo-Liberal ideology, which maintained that, the dismantling of bureaucratic controls and greater reliance on free market forces was needed to allocate national resources. It believed that competitive market forces, free of prejudices and biases of development planners, were the obvious mechanisms to generate gender neutral opportunities for self improvement.

Accordingly, the WID advocacy could shift the grounds for investing development resources in women from Welfare to Efficiency at a time when women had been primarily associated with the welfare sector in the planning process. It used efficiency based arguments for rescuing women from the margins of development and integrating them into the mainstream (Kabeer 1994:25).

## **Limitations of WID Model**

The decade for women (1975-85) with world-wide activities has resulted in consciousness - raising and creating deeper understanding of the sexual division of labour, development of norms, women's status, opportunities for women to use and gain better insight, availability of funds for women's activities and establishment of women's ministries. However, despite the variations in nature and emphasis of plans and policies, concrete improvements in economic, social, legal, health and political spheres have been minimal for those most in need (Hashim and Heyzer 1991:2).

Systematic investigations conducted in the developing countries where development approaches of the WID model were carried out, revealed that, while some women have improved their position, most have become poor. Maternal and infant mortality increased in some developing countries by the removal of basic

provisions under structural adjustment programmes (UN 1989). Women are still largely confined to the low-growth economic sectors such as petty income generating projects, crafts etc. In many countries women transferred from the formal sector to the informal sector and the female labour predominated in the informal sector (Pietila and Vickers 1990: 26).

The shortcomings of the WID model are seen by analysts as the limitations associated with the liberal world view and the methodology it used to evaluate and to promote women's conditions. One such criticism is that the quest for formal equality with men on the basis of an imputed common rationality posited a false identity of interests between men and women and denied the implications of their differing degrees of endowments in the process of human survival, well being and reproduction. There was little in WID advocacy to remind policy makers about the implications of women's unique responsibility for reproductive work for their ability to exercise economic agency (Beneria and Sen 1981).

Secondly, this formal equity overlooks the implications of the gender division of labour and responsibilities of how women and men perceive their needs and interests, as well as their capacity to act as rational economic agents maximising self interest goals. If men and women demonstrate different degrees of responsiveness to economic incentives, the reason may be sought, not only in the biased provision of these incentives as WID advocates have suggested, but also in the gender constitution of rationality and agency (Kabeer 1994:29).

Thirdly, the methodological individualism of the WID world view was incapable of considering, the questions of male power as a property of gender relations (Kabeer 1994:34). Women's marginalisation in the development process was seen as a wrong perception of planners, about the nature of women's contribution. Attempts were then made to resocialise planners through well reasoned arguments and gathering of more accurate data to facilitate more equitable planning. On the other hand, WID advocates avoided the issue of addressing women's oppression as it challenges male policy

makers and planners, especially those in male dominated institutions from which WID advocates sought support (Boonsue 1992:7).

Fourthly, as the WID approach focuses only on women, both at the policy level and at the implementation level, it has isolated women's concerns from the main stream of development activities. Therefore WID has become a separate project for women, a component within the development programme. The failure of development policy for women stemmed from this initial perception of women as separate from men (Kabeer 1994:8). Finally, another shortcoming of the WID programme is its emphasis on the similarity of women all over the world. They conceived women in both First and Third World countries as marginalised by common reasons in the development process. The perception of the homogeneity of women was basically due to the dominant voice of the First World women in articulating their version of the problems and priorities of Third World women.

### **Women and Development Model (WAD)**

While WID scholarship and advocacy became the established voice of feminism within the official agencies of development, there were also other voices in the international arena, descending from both the official view of development and the WID perspective within it. Women and Development was born as a result of a very different analysis of social reality of women from the one embodied in WID.

The accumulation of data on women's work and their contributions to the economy revealed that it was misleading to perceive women as being incapable of full participation in the development process. Such information showed that while women constituted half of the world population, and they comprised 33 per cent of the official labour force, they performed 67 per cent of all the hours worked (World Bank 1980).

This view perceives women as having taken an active role in the development process. Therefore it rejected the WID's main concern of integrating women into development, as they already fully participate in the development process. WAD advocates argue that

women are already deeply integrated into the economies and involved in the development of their societies; but on inequitable terms (Maguire 1984:23). Women are active economic actors in their societies, both inside and outside the household, which itself is central to the maintenance of societies (Rathgeber 1990:493).

The WAD model emerged in the second half of the 1970s, out of opposition to the paradigm of modernisation. The analytical base of WAD was drawn from dependency theory and rooted in Neo-Marxist feminism (Rathgeber 1990:492).

Both WID and WAD models share the view that modernisation process has widened the inequalities between men and women. However, while WID is concerned with the external manifestation of this process, WAD emphasizes structural and dialectical aspects of it. WAD advocates reject the lineal growth and equilibrium model of development put forward by marginalisation theory. Unlike the equilibrium approach, the goal of social change is not reform within the existing system but radical transformation of the system itself. Social, political and economic structures should be transformed in order to redistribute power and resources fairly (Maguire 1984:20-21).

Feminists, who follow dependency theory within the WAD model, point out that the inequalities between men and women could not be understood in isolation from the polarising tendencies of the capitalist mode of production which placed 'peripheral' countries of the Third World in a relationship of dependency with the metropolitan centres of the First World. Within an inegalitarian world order, the so called development could not release women from oppressive social, economic and political institutions (Leacock 1977:320). Therefore, self-reliant and independent development are the dependency norms of the development of the Third World countries. The strategy to achieve self reliance is by delinking and isolating the Third World countries from the international system (Boonsue 1992:9).

In contrast to the Dependency feminists, Capitalist Patriarchists in WAD model point out that the patriarchal definitions of women as mothers excludes women from the public world outside

the home, although that is certainly part of it (Jaggar 1983:260). Women's marginalisation, in their opinion, should be seen as the product of a far older system of male dominance over women (Mies 1982:13).

WAD advocates looking at the issue of women's oppression, and views the independence of women from men as a central analytical focus of the emancipation of women. As women are still under-represented in economic, political and social structures, WAD prefers to launch intervention strategies rather than to focus on fundamental shifts in gender relations (Rathgeber 1990:493). Therefore, these intervention strategies mostly focus on economic profits, which are considered the basic requirement for the independence of women.

### **Limitations of WAD model**

WAD offered a very different account of women's marginalisation in the development process from that offered by WID. Sexual inequalities were seen as a part of larger systems of inequality created by and essential to the capitalist process of accumulation (Kabeer 1994:49). It was focused primarily on the condition of women in the structures of international and class inequality. However it pays little analytical attention to gender relations within classes and the analysis covers up the disadvantaged among the sexes within oppressive global structures based on class and capital (Maguire 1984:30).

The version of dependency theory and that of the Capitalist Patriarchy are located at similarly abstract and highly segregated systems of domination other than in the specific institutions, constraints and practices through which these systems are manifested in people's everyday lives. They represent a form of holistic analysis which effectively reverses the flow of causality found in methodological individualism of WID, so that instead of following up from the lowest level of analysis, causality is now imposed top-down from higher levels (Kabeer 1994:53).

The past experiences of WAD programmes have shown that there is a great difference between the precept and practice of that development model. In practical project design and implementation WAD models tend, like the WID model, to be preoccupied with the economic independence approach, without taking into account the time burden of the reproductive work of women and without focusing on women as a separate group (Rathgeber 1990:493).

### **Gender and Development Model**

Gender and Development (GAD) model has its theoretical roots in socialist feminism and has focused its attention primarily on gender relations rather than on gender roles. Gender relations are those socially, culturally and psychologically constituted relations between men and women which are shaped and sanctioned by the norms and values held by members of the society concerned (Young 1987, Showalter 1989). Borrowing the concept of historical materialism from Marxists, Socialist feminists point out that gender structuring is not innate but is socially imposed; that the specific characteristics that are imposed are related systematically to the historically prevailing systems of organising social production (Jaggar 1983:127).

The GAD model has made an important contribution to build a less monolithic analysis of women's marginalisation. Further it has attempted to analyse women's position in relation to the men's and their mutual interdependence. GAD's analysis moves beyond demonstrating the adverse/ marginalising impact of development/ capitalism on women to a deeper understanding of the ways in which unequal relations between women and men may have contributed to the extent and forms of exclusion that women faced in the development process (Kabeer 1994:54).

GAD rejects the previous generalisation that capitalism is a simple and homogeneous structure of surplus extraction. It points out the different regimes of accumulations, which employ qualitatively different mechanisms of exploitation. Its implications for the gender

division of labour and for women's subordination will depend therefore, on the specific forms that accumulation takes in different social formations (Beneria and Sen 1981).

GAD considers WID's view that women's marginalisation from the development process was because of the unequal access to new technologies and skills, as an over-simplification. It points out that capital accumulation separated direct producers from men, and women from means of production. Although women had been integrated into the development process, they were integrated only at the bottom of an inherently hierarchical and contradictory structure of production and accumulation. The outcome of this structural process is seen as the formation of different classes and gender relations in the society. As Beneria and Sen point out, these changes in Capitalist relations resulted in changing gender relations and aggravating the conditions of poor women. In many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, where poor peasants and labourers have lost rights over land and common property resources, women have had to intensify their labour of searching for fuel, carrying water and processing food. This is worsened in areas where men have either shifted to cash-crop production or migrated to towns in search of work, leaving subsistence production entirely to women.

Methodologically, GAD follows inductive analysis than abstract theorisation. Gender relations in any historical situation is specific to that situation and has to be constructed inductively; it cannot be read from other social relations of other societies. It is further classified by the explanation of gender subordination made by Whithead (1979) that while the subject matter of analysis was seen to be the domestic arena, from which asymmetrical gender relations sprang, and its articulation with the broader economic arena in which these relations were reconstituted.

GAD model has made many important contributions to women's development. First, the recognition of women's reproductive and household activities as a part of human production system is an initial step to change the wrong perception of women's work. As Young

(1987) points out, it views production and reproduction of gender in a manner in which these two functions fit together or interlock in the family unit, or, in other words, between the productive market activities and reproductive family activities. Socialist feminists believe that reproduction and its organisation in the family are part of the economic foundation of society (Jaggar 1983:125). It seems to be a necessary precondition as far as the allocation of development resources and changing the inappropriate perceptions of development institutions over women are concerned. Further, it could help women to ease the burden and concern over family welfare and provide more opportunities to engage in economic activities outside the home.

Second, the use of gender relations as a category of analysis shifts the focus away from the earlier one on women. A focus solely on women tends to imply that the problem and hence the solution could be confined to women. A focus on social relations extends the analysis from women and men as insoluble categories to the broader interconnecting relationships, attributes and capabilities, power and privileges (Kabeer 1994:65) through which women are positioned as a subordinate group in the division of resources and responsibilities.

Third, the perception of women as a homogeneous group, marginalised from the development process, has clouded the real conditions faced by women in Third World countries. The social relations approach, being able to identify the various forms of women's marginalisations in South America, Sub Saharan Africa and South Asian regions, has linked these variations to the gender relations prevalent in respective areas (Beneria and Sen 1981). It succeeded in redirecting the attention of development institutions towards gender division of labour in allocating development resources and getting women's participation in the development process.

Fourth, the inductive methodology encouraged by the social relations approach looks into the situational conditions in a particular society and tries to identify the development priorities according to its needs. Therefore, it prefers to identify women's marginalisation through the gender relations and its relation to unequal distribution of development resources in that society. Here,

women's development comes from a bottom-up strategy rather than the more general top-down system.

GAD is basically an outcome of the work of scholars who attempted to overcome the methodological inefficiencies of both WID and WAD models to unveil the reality of third world women. Both WID and WAD, which focus only on women in the development process, lent themselves to labeling women as a separate group and isolating their concerns from the mainstream of development activities. An effort which focuses solely on women, easily overlooks the responsibility of men in relation to reproduction. It again promotes and reinforces sex roles (Boonsue 1992:10). The consequent treatment of men and women as isolated categories had helped to render invisible, the men's role in the continuing subordination of women in the development process (Kabeer 1994:54).

Second, the generalisation of the effects of Modernisation/ Capitalism/ Patriarchy over simplified the situation of Third World women and has been unable to explain the reasons for the unequal distribution of benefits and resources of development among these women. Third, methodological explanations of WID and WAD are located in opposite ends of an analytical paradigm. The formal equity arguments of WID exaggerates women's agency, ignoring their constraints in domestic work while WAD has overlooked women's agency, outweighing the impact of capitalism or Patriarchy. Therefore GAD appeared in 1980s as an alternative approach to respond to the gap made by the above two analytical paradigms.

### **Development from Gender Perspective**

Gender and Development model has attempted to link the welfare and efficiency arguments in which women have been placed in extreme positions in the development paradigm. Within welfare arguments women were kept as passive recipients of welfare, overlooking their capacity to change. It was responsible for allocation of development resources only for men. In contrast efficiency arguments attempted to overtone the agency of women while transforming the allocation of

basic needs to open market system. It has also overlooked the domestic drudgery and other constraints confronting women.

Further, WID's concern with the market economy valued the income earning resources as productive and economic. The domestic and unpaid work of women therefore was included in the welfare concern. Considering reproductive work of women as a part of economic formation of the societies, GAD stresses that welfare is complementary to development goals and redirects the vision of development organisations. It also stresses the need for valuing women's unpaid work as productive, extending the objectives of development from economic growth to improvement of living conditions of the people.

Planning for gender equity, on the basis of social justice rather than formal equity, requires a recognition of the full weight and implications of the gender division of labour in the lives of women and men, and of the different needs, priorities and possibilities that it gives rise to. Gender equity requires that welfare be seen as complementary, rather than in opposition to efficiency (Kabeer 1994:86).

However, gender equity based on difference rather than similarity goes beyond the provision of equal opportunities for men and women. It requires the removal of discriminatory barriers in order to give women similar opportunities. Even development institutions which possessed the capacity and resources to implement the gender equity have failed to do so due to their prejudices and stereotypes of views about women. (Goetz 1991).

The implementation of programmes for gender equity required identifying the needs of women, which were overlooked by development institutions. A recognition of difference, not only between men and women but also within the categories of women and men such as class, ethnicity and gender, is needed to identify the complexity of these needs. The false perception of the similarity of all women radically simplifies the complexity of these needs. On the other hand, development institutions were very enthusiastic to fulfil practical

gender needs of women to distribute resources in a way that preserves and reinforces existing inequalities.

Practical needs are usually a response to immediate perceived needs and arise from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender division of labour. Women may have much interest over practical gender needs through which resources for basic welfare needs of family are provided due to their responsibility for family welfare provisions.

Provision of strategic needs which arise in response to their subordinate position gets less attention from the development institutions as it challenges the existing inequality in the society. The relatively weak attention of women towards strategic needs has not only been due to their powerlessness but also to the ideological constructions among women themselves, which justify the subordination. Therefore women's collective strength at grassroots level seems to be the main solution to identify their needs and priorities as well as to eliminate these ideological impediments through sensitising their reality. The formal and informal women's organisations and movements the world over have proved women's capacity to resist their disadvantageous situation and discrimination to a certain extent and development workers are investigating the capacity of empowering women through grassroot level organisations. Empowerment approach is basically designed to meet this gap and against the hitherto existing top-down planning mechanism.

### **Empowerment Approach**

The grassroots empowerment approach entered into the development paradigm in the 1980s, responding to the requirements of the time. First, the top-down and bureaucratic planning system, being unable to distribute the development resources to poor women, was beginning to look for alternative ways of reaching the poor. It was women who were basically subjected to marginalisation in this top-down planning process, since bureaucratic organisations were unable to identify their needs properly, the root causes of their poverty and disadvantaged status remained unchanged. Past experiences have shown that the

“short term, ameliorative approaches to improve women’s employment and economic opportunities are ineffective unless they are combined with long term strategies to re-establish people’s, especially women’s, control over the economic decisions that strap their own lives” (Sen and Grown 1987:82).

Secondly, development planners were impressed by the experience of grassroots level organisations in several developing countries which have provided tremendous opportunities for women to identify their needs and satisfactorily fulfil them as compared to the bureaucratic system. Innovative grassroots experience has shown that the close, face to face interaction between organisations and their constituencies could shape ideas and policies on the requirement of everyday practices rather than the more rigid, hierarchical bureaucracy. “Therefore the most fundamental pre-requisite for the emancipation of women is currently recognised as mobilisation through an integrated process of organising and empowering” (Reddy 1992:654).

Thirdly, the empowerment approach has been identified as a response of feminists who wanted to move beyond the WID focus on formal equity with men. It was perceived that equity objective could not be achieved unless women are empowered to identify and fulfil their needs and the constraints they confront are removed. It is manifested by the UN declaration that “in the 1990s the task is to translate greater understanding of the problems of women into altered priorities ... empowering women for development should have high returns in terms of increasing output, greater equity and social progress” (UN 1989:41).

The concept of empowerment is linked with the notion of power and has emerged as a response to the limitations of previous analysis on women as powerless and passive groups, which underestimated their existing capacities. This approach perceives women as an innovative group, and it attempts to empower them in order to challenge the powers that oppress as a step to improving their lives.

This approach acknowledges the importance of women to increase their power. However, it seeks to identify powerlessness in terms of domination over others, and more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their own self reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the 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 (Moser 1993:74).

The process of empowerment of women is related to three dimensions, namely exposing the oppressive power of existing gender relations, critically challenging them and creatively trying to shape different social relationships. (Wieringa 1991:833) Accordingly it spells out that power disempowerment and power empowerment are necessary preconditions for women's development. Disempowerment has been identified as removing the obstacles and constraints that challenge the articulation of women's needs through organisational agenda.

Development organisations with power and resources to carry out development programmes, rarely had interest in women's needs and requirements. On the other hand, the power structures existing in rural areas were found to be a major obstacle for women to improve their living conditions. It was felt that only clear awareness of hierarchies of power and authority would help in removing the hierarchies and enhance equity. Disempowerment has to be carried out simultaneously with the process of empowerment in order to make women's mobilisation meaningful. Empowerment means the acquisition of knowledge and ability to decide the priorities to improve their own skills, to meet their own needs and to find their own fulfillment (Ogun and Houston 1991:12).

### **Grassroots Participation and Identification of Needs**

Most of the development programmes which were designed to help the poor to meet their basic needs have failed mainly due to the politics of needs identification and interpretation by planners who rarely have the sympathy and empathy with the experience of the poor in general and of women in particular.

Most women's programmes are based on the analysis made by outside experts who have a different perception of poor women. Frequently, they create programmes on the basis of their analysis, which do not fulfil women's real needs (Tandon *et al.* 1985:5). Planners have tended to prioritise men's needs over women's. Women are rarely perceived as knowing what they need; rather, agencies seek to think and implement on their behalf. Either women's needs and priorities are subsumed (and then forgotten) within those of the household collectively or, when they are addressed separately, they tend to fall in the category of women's practical gender needs as mothers, wives and careers within the family (Kabeer 1994:230).

The grassroots experience has revealed that women have been able to challenge the conventional stereotypes about gender needs and identify the strategic gender needs that were hitherto hidden, when they are provided opportunities through participatory research. Participatory research is a systematic process, which involves people in the analysis of their own situations. It gives women the skills and confidence to consider their own situations. It has been considered as the involvement of those who are traditionally the "researched" in the formulation, collection of data, and interpretation of information.

The grassroots participatory approach also has helped identifying strategic needs of women, such as sexual, reproductive and general health questions and other issues such as domestic violence, which remained unknown due to shame and embarrassment over woman's body or simply due to lower priority. Women's identification of the factors that lead to their disadvantageous situation is the most efficient way of empowering them. It is a method that enhances people's awareness and confidence, and empowers their action. (Chambers 1994:953) Consequently, it has the dual purposes of analysing and changing.

### **Compensation for Institutional Failures**

Mere identification of women's needs is not sufficient to solve their problems. It is necessary to ensure whether their interests are

articulated in planning and their needs are met (Setti 1992: 656). However, it has been revealed that translating women's needs into practice through organisational agenda was being hampered due to the gender biases entrenched in rules and procedures of development organisations themselves. It was observed that these top-down organisations even tended to create more marked division of gender roles. Further, these official organisations were found as not set up according to women's needs (Heyzer 1987:342).

The growing concern for integrating women in development resulted in the identification of the effectiveness of grassroots organisations for the same. Women's labour and ritual organisations around the world have granted a wide variety of non-formal associations. They may be small, co-operative, open groups recognised for reciprocal exchange of labour and goods, such as neighbourhood, rotating labour or credit associations or spontaneous prayers groups (March and Taqqu 1986:42). Moreover, studies have revealed that the formation of grassroots organisations was facilitated by the existing non-formal associations at village level.

Unlike bureaucratic institutions, grassroots organisations have attempted to organise their rules and procedures to meet the gender specific constraints that women from the low income households have had to deal with. Rules and procedures of these organisations have been set up to respond to the requirements of its members and to their constraints. Therefore grassroots organisations have been able to respond not only to women's primary needs but also the secondary needs arising in the process of fulfilling these primary needs. Grassroots organisations challenge the notion that a single strategy is sufficient to improve the conditions of women. Such organisations could launch multiple strategies and comprehensive packages to respond to women's primary and secondary needs.

As Kabeer (1994) points out, the lack of fit between the norms and procedures of mainstream banking institutions and the circumstances and constraints of women's lives have resulted in the ostracisation of women from the utilisation of services of these institutions. By contrast, poverty-oriented grassroots organisations

have provided institutional access in several ways. They could replace material with social collateral requirements, which can be accomplished through the practice of joint liability, borrower-solidarity groups. Financial loans from these institutions were provided for other than economic and productive purposes to respond to the various requirements of women. They have also been able to give women a sense of ownership of the institution, breaking down the conventional emotional detachment from the institution. These institutions have attempted to fulfil not only practical needs of women, but also strategic needs by increasing their access to, and control over new economic resources.

Identification of own needs and evaluation of the situation by women themselves gives them the opportunity to identify the oppressive power hierarchies and symmetrical gender relations which lead to their disadvantageous situation. These obstacles and constraints are visible within families, societies and development institutions and these constraints could reflect differently among women depending on their existential situations. Through the new perceptions developed by grassroots participation, women have been able to bring to light hidden factors that led to their poverty. It is being felt that only an awareness of hierarchies of power and constraints will help in their removal and enhance equity.

The grassroots empowerment approach is linked with the concept of power. The power of the poor and women. It gives a basic idea of feminism as a politics, as a strategy for the change of a power-structured, asymmetric, sexual relationship and perceives women as political agents. As Young (1987) points out, individuals are not primarily receivers of goods and carriers of properties, but actors with meaning and purposes, who act with, against or in relation to one another. This approach perceives human ability to initiate change and transcend the desired conditions. But it is exercised in various political and social contexts. Women's agency for example, is much less used and applied than men's agency. It was mainly due to the fact that traditional political theory and the development workers whose sustenance depended on it, could not properly identify

the existing agency of women. It assumed that women do not have the capacity to function as an agent of change as they are close to nature which is defined as unconscious and passive or having female attributes which furnish them with inborn procreative and caring qualities. Both views deny women the possibility to challenge and change their condition as women.

Eduards points out that the most important difference between feminists and traditional political theories is that feminism, by definition, is a theory of women's agency and women's collective action; the thought being that only women organised as women and acting on behalf of women, will work for a change of women's conditions in a way that challenges the sexual power relations (Eduards 1994:182). However, the contrasting difference of empowerment approach and WAD model based on feminism is that it is looking at the changes for women through gender relations at micro level rather than abstract level. Second, empowerment approach differs from the efficiency arguments of WID since it looks at the constraints of implementing women's agency and seeks the possibility of overcoming these challenges.

It is worthwhile at this stage to identify the nature of women's power and different theoretical concepts that deal with the possibility of empowering women. As Rosaldo points out, women seem to be oppressed or lacking in value and status to the extent that they are confined to domestic activities, cut off from other women and from the social world of men. Women gain power and a sense of value when they are able to transcend domestic limits, either by entering the men's world or by creating a society unto themselves (Rosaldo 1974:14).

A similar view is shared by Sanday emphasising the basic question of women's involvement in public activities. She developed a general model to explain the relationship between women's status and their public participation, which examines the relative contributions of the sexes to three aspects of human activity: reproduction, subsistence and welfare. She assumed that there is an overall sexual pull, which tends to draw men into welfare and women into

reproduction related activities. It was in the relative contribution of the sexes to the middle area, subsistence production, that the balance of sexual power was determined (Sanday 1974: 121-128).

Both these theoretical models have attempted to answer the question of transcending the activities of women from domestic sphere to public domain so as to empower women. However proponents of this domestic-public polarity have argued that these spheres are not necessarily hierarchically related and that the above theories have underestimated women's domestic powers. Some have argued about the domestic politics showing how women's rights to control their own productivity, labour and income along with certain material and sexual rights gave women substantial autonomy.

Whatever has been perceived as the factors that cause women's subordination and oppression, these theories have attempted to highlight the power of women and to emphasise the fact that women possess the power to be agents of change. Women's research has made an important contribution to social science in identifying women as agents in individual and collective actions, movements and organisations. Modern studies have shown that women throughout the world have protested against cruel treatment, indecent conditions and subordination (Eduards 1994:182). Therefore, it seems necessary to focus on women's agency and collective action in the process of empowerment. Women's collective actions give them a wider range of experience, an identity as part of a group with common interests and a sense of agency. Many studies have revealed that women feel empowered and strengthened by coming together.

## Conclusion

The views shared by feminists and their scope for the emancipation of women have given rise to various development models for women which fell into three main streams: Women in Development (WID); Women and Development (WAD); and Gender and Development (GAD). The common and fundamental aim of all these development models were to bring equity, development and change. Methodological orientations professed to realise these goals made the distinction among them.

The Gender and Development model attempted to link the welfare and efficiency arguments of previous development models, in which women had been placed in extreme positions in the development paradigm. In the welfare arguments of the pre-Women in Development programmes, women were kept as passive recipients of development assistance, overlooking their productive role in society. Capacity of women to change their position or their agency was disregarded. It leading to allocation of development resources only to men.

The efficiency arguments of WID, on the contrary, attempted to overtone the agency of women. While assuming the similar efficiency of women and men, allocation of basic needs, through an open market system was seen as the best means to promote gender equity. Such perceptions further tended to constrain women from receiving resources.

The Gender and Development model conceives that gender relations were socially constructed and therefore can be changed. Planning for gender equity requires a recognition of the full weight and implications of the gender division of labour in the lives of women and men, and of the different needs, priorities and possibilities that gender equity gives rise to.

Accordingly, gender equity has sought (a) the provision of opportunities for women to identify their needs and priorities (b) empowering of women to realise them and (c) removing of barriers against such fulfillment.

The Gender and Development model has identified a hierarchy of needs. Practical needs are usually a response to perceived immediate needs, which arise from the concrete condition of women's positioning within the gender division of labour. Such needs help women to improve the welfare of themselves and their families.

Strategic gender needs (SGN) reflect a challenge to the customary gender relations and imply changes in relationships of power and control between women and men. Women identify SGN

which arise from their recognition and challenge to their subordinate position in relation to men in society. The Gender and Development model assumes that grassroots organizations provide effective means for women to identify such needs and realise them. The empowerment approach of this model was formulated to mobilise women to identify and fulfill such needs through a participatory approach.

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