# ASIAN AND PACIFIC CENTRE FOR WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

*WORK IN PROGRESS*

Report of International Workshop on

# Feminist Ideology and Structures in the First Half of the Decade for Women

Bangkok, Thailand

24 - 30 June 1979

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## FOREWORD

Where are we four years after International Women's Year and now nearly midway through the Decade?

The Asian & Pacific Centre for Women and Development (APCWD) felt that this question should be discussed and debated by women activists with the aim of suggesting changes in direction or focus that may be necessary in the women's movement and which could be taken into account by the UN World Conference in 1980. The fundamental question to be considered was that of ideologies for inspiring women to group themselves together to achieve goals for themselves and for society. Secondly, the structures established in governments to deal with women's integration in development had to be reviewed to determine whether there is a lack of fit between the ideologies and structures; and to make appropriate recommendations for future action. *Prima facie,* it was clear that the existing programmes for helping women - a little here, a little there, never enough and mostly welfare-oriented - were not adequate and that the most important and crying need was to generate women's groups and movements where none existed and to strengthen or modify those which survived in some form or other, but were weak or inactive. For, not until a women's movement develops from below, can women's situation improve. A time has come when instead of waiting for benefits from society or Government or development itself to reach them or to be given to them, women themselves will have to take power and make the opportunities happen.

The ideologies practised and propounded needed to be gone over to see what the goals were and whether they were or could be the same in the East and in the West.

There are several examples before us. The "developed countries" model where affluence has made little difference and has perhaps aggravated the view of women as sex-symbols. There is the experience of countries in which political ideology sets the tone for a larger measure of equality in roles and responsibilities of men and women. The experience of developing countries of Asia is one in which women are coping with poverty and severe lack of time arising out of a double duty, at home and at work. In several Asian countries, despite rapid economic growth and high technological development, the traditional culture continues, proving, if proof were needed, that economic development alone is no panacea for women. In others, women are being pushed back by religious revivalism. In the Pacific region, women are seeking alternative national development strategies to the colonial systems.

The women's movement in the West passed through a period of intense, dramatic social and economic change that *removed production from the home,* contributed to devaluation of women's household production and household maintenance, their exclusion from social and economic power and resources, and the notion that men work and women have babies. Currently, women in the Third World are going through much the same trauma for many of the same reasons, though the direct economic and political forces are different. If women from capitalist and socialist countries, elite and poor, North and South, are to bridge the political and economic gulfs between them, the recognition of this fundamental commonality of economic processes is crucial.

The distortions and misconceptions about the women's movement and the differences among women themselves about goals and strategies had also to be resolved. Even if women are agreed on what it is they are struggling for, others who at present control and dominate society may not understand these in the same way. This lack of understanding between women and the others may not even be known to either party. What is to be done to ensure proper communication and interpretation?

The situation is complicated by the biases of the media - the educational system and so on - but these media themselves can be forces for progress if properly directed.

Discussion was vital for taking stock of existing ideologies or the lack of them. There are several questions begging for thought and response; for example: Is socialism a necessary condition for feminism; Can there be a women's movement without a clear ideology; Can nonpolitical ideologies, such as Gandhi-ism, which have sparked many individuals in their struggle for transformation, be suggested as alternatives; What is the connection between development theory and administration, and feminism; In what way are women in the developing world dominated by the research on them by Westerners and with what effect on policy makers and funders who go by these studies in the developed and developing world?

APCWD also wished to draw attention to fallacies in lumping women with the poor without recognizing the vulnerability of women as women, and to the preoccupation of several agencies (including women's organizations) to confer only the social welfare-type of development benefits on women. The role of women as producers, particularly in agricultural economies, has not become sufficiently visible or clear to planners, policy makers, to society and to women themselves, nor is there an understanding on whether the role of woman as reproducer is to be considered as productive.

And so the Workshop took place. The consensus opinion at the end of the Workshop was that women were not very much better off now than they were in 1975 and that the betterment could not take place unless women themselves move to improve their situation by identifying their needs and reaching for solutions; and begin to have a voice in society and shape public opinion.

The primary focus of this paper, developed at the Workshop, is an examination of the role and function of women's movements and on the ways in which movements can be built and strengthened. Crucially related is the issue of how government and international structures can assist in the implementation of feminist goals. Examination of these issues involves looking at the relationship of governments to all movements working for social, economic and political change, as well as in relation to feminism.

The paper is divided into four parts:

1. Goals of the Women's Movement
2. Redirecting social processes
3. Government Structures (Institutions)
4. The Role of the Women's Movement.

The paper is groundbreaking in (a) its recognition of poverty as a fundamental problem to be dealt with by women concerned about women, (b) its redefinition of power as effectiveness rather than domination, (c) its consensus by women from all over the world, that we are concerned not simply about equity but also dignity, autonomy and basic socio-economic change, and (d) its recognition that organization and development of women's collective strengths is essential.

This document, we hope, will be a useful tool in the on-going effort to conscientise people and for spearheading and helping the movement. The present is a good time for spreading the message so that world opinion could be mobilized in the UN conferences that are imminent. We feel sure that there will be several exercises like this Feminist Workshop which will have the benefit of many viewpoints, and will help to make appropriate changes in the direction of the movement. The debate about feminism has to be a continuing one, at many levels and of many groups, in all parts of the world.

This paper should be deemed as a "work in progress", a working paper rather than as a final document, for many of the points need to be further developed and deepened.

We look forward to further discussion on it at the Regional Conference in New Delhi in November '79. We hope to incorporate suitable suggestions before presenting it at the World Conference in 1980.

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Bangkok
September 1979

## SECTION I

## GOALS OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

1. There are two long term feminist goals that underlie women's struggle for liberation from oppression and discrimination in all spheres and at all levels of society: First the freedom from oppression for women involves not only equity, but also the right of women to freedom of choice, and the power to control their own lives within and outside of the home. Having control over our lives and our bodies is essential to ensure a sense of dignity and autonomy for every woman.

2. When we speak of the power to control our lives, the term "power" is used not as a mode of domination over others but as:

(a) a sense of internal strength and confidence to face life;

(b) the right to determine our choices in life;

(c) the ability to influence the social processes that affect our lives; and

(d) an influence on the direction of social change.

3. The oppression of women is rooted in both inequities and discrimination based on sex and in poverty and the injustices of the political and economic systems based on race and class. This oppression manifests itself through oppressive social structures, and obsolete, irrational attitudes that thrive on inequalities of all types. Values surrounding women's roles in society are historically embedded in these structures and influence both men and women. Measures for modifying some of these values have failed when they did not attempt to change the structures. The partial changes thus effected could benefit only a minority of women. Even these women were later powerless to resist the reassertion of the old, unequal and exploitative values, backed as they are by the powerful forces of an international economic system, and national feudal structures and values.

4. The second goal of feminism is therefore the removal of all forms of inequity and oppression through the creation of a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. This means the involvement of women in national liberation struggles, in plans for national development, and in local and global strategies for change.

5. Some political ideologies and national and social movements have contained the seeds of many of the ideas of women's liberation through their advocacy of equality for women and their recognition of the need to involve women in people's movements. Feminism gives those ideas further dimensions. Women's struggle is not only crucial but central to the transformation of exploitative social structures and the creation of a more just society.

6. Feminism is transforming these struggles and releasing women's creativity in many new ways. This leads to new insights about social structures and social relations - visions of a new world and of new concepts of personhood for women, men and children in that world.

7. This definition of Feminism as the ideology of the Women's Liberation Movement is offered here because there are many misconceptions about the movement. These misconceptions have contributed to many differences between women's groups within countries and between women in different countries, particularly from the developed and developing countries.

8. The movement has often been projected by the media as one of confrontation and separation from men, and therefore, seen by many as an attempt to impose a cultural model emanating from the developed western countries. Women and men, sensitive and pround of their own cultural heritage often resist it as yet another dimension of cultural imperialism to which many parts of the world have been subjected for so long. Some have interpreted the movement as a diversionary move, to focus the international community's attention away from the inequalities and unjust economic and power relations that characterize the present world order.

9. Within the national context, the movement has often been criticized as being out of tune with national independence, and the struggle for development; as introducing a divisive element to disrupt national solidarity; as an elitist attempt to grab a greater share of the nation's scarce resources, and to divert national attention from the eradication of poverty, unemployment and hunger. The definition offered here will help to eliminate such misconseptions, and clarify the real goals and concepts of our movement, enabling women and progressive forces all over the world to unite in the common struggle for liberation of all people from the oppression of exploitative systems - national and international.

10. A study of the origin and essence of women's movements in different countries demonstrates that they have generally grown out of people's struggles for liberation. They have formed part of mass movements for national independence, against oppressive and exploitative social and economic systems, and against destructive wars that sought to annihilate people's liberation struggles. The great strengths of women's movements have been seen to rest on their grass-roots organizations and participation in mass movements, and not in organizations confined to women of the elite.

11. Progressive forces will see the women's movement as essential to strengthen and provide a new vision to the struggle for development and social justice. Women too must realize that their liberation can only be achieved with significant restructuring of society and the elimination of all exploitative dependent relationships. The inequality and subordination of women is an instrument, or function, of social structures linked to other inequalities. Attempts for its removal without corresponding movements for social justice for all can only end in perpetuating the existing unequal structures, enhancing only a few women's roles in the process. Formal participation by women in the existing political and economic process is not enough if it does not help women to move in the direction of the long term goals of dignity and autonomy for themselves, and of power to influence the process of social change.

12. The need for an independent women's movement, with firm bases in grass-roots organization is imperative. Any development strategies which do not take account of this are doomed to failure because they would further an ever growing gap between rich and poor men and women, and an economic system which benefits the elite at the cost of the poor and weak. Women's movement will help to perform multiple roles of mobilizing women's pressure at all levels of society, and of transforming values and attitudes of women and men through their participation in the process of transforming existing structures. However, since the control of resources and the direction of major development efforts rests with Governments, there is no question that Governments must indicate their support and commitment to these objectives. Experiments in new structures and methods initiated in different countries for this purpose are discussed later in this paper.

## SECTION II

## REDIRECTING SOCIAL PROCESSES

13. Social processes are formal and informal mechanisms affecting the political, social, economic and cultural lives of people. Such processes are manifested both directly and indirectly through education, customs, class relationships, religion, and personal and family relationships.

14. Socialization, the process by which people acquire the necessary values and behaviour for functioning in a society, has the most profound and lasting effect on the individual. It is the process by which the child learns the role assigned to her/him by society and perpetuated through its formal and informal institutions.

15. Since socialization is the growth of a social being, all existing forms of people's relationships can potentially be agents of socialization. However, those which directly involve the female child have particularly destructive effects. Women themselves have been conditioned to raise their sons and daughters differently. Roles are determined largely by the family form which defines personal relationships and by class structure which defines economic relationships of groups of people. Family and class structure are governed by the values, customs and economic basis of a society.

16. Most development efforts aim at restructuring the economic basis of society and changes in class relationships. Though, occasionally these attempts may have some impact on the family form, family and social structures such as patriarchy are remarkably persistent and unaffected by intervention.

17. The control of the female role and its definition by the males in the circle of her relationships is such that economic changes in family status may actually worsen women's oppression. In many developing countries, improvement in the economic status of a class has led to more unequal treatment of women. Village women are seen to be engaged in many more activities when in the lower economic rungs of society but become isolated and rendered inactive when the family's economic status improves.

18. If redicrecting of the processes of socialization is to happen, we must then find critical points and strategies for changing family forms and relationships. Since the medium of socialization is learning, and learning engages the individual early, interventions in the formal and informal media of learning is perhaps the most effective redirecting strategy - this intervention should take place at every level and involve all members of families. Some countries have found that even though changing a society based on individual free enterprise to a communal one results in more participation of women in economic activity, redirection of family values and relationships is a pre-condition for the success of the transformation attempts. Redefinition of the role of women and changes in both attitudes and behaviour must be accomplished through various complementary strategies through every medium of education, at all levels, and aimed at males and females.

## Economic processes

19. *Production and reproduction.* Strongly linked to the institutional power of educational processes and the family which formalize a particular concept of the role of women is the view that women are marginal to the economic system. The premise that women's work is largely unproductive and men's work is productive is a widely prevalent belief and has been accepted as a 'fact' by most developed and developing countries, without reference to the economic systems underlying this phenomenon. Sexual division of labour and role specialization has evolved over time in response to economic structures, but certain systems of organization have tended to regularize the differential valuation between man's work and women's work.

20. Industrial development, particularly under capitalism, has emphasized production for an external market, not the satisfaction of needs in a local economy. Such systems are based on the potential of labour to increase labour productivity. Subsumed in this system is the ability of labour to reproduce itself, since the maintenance of the working population and the continued input of labour is necessary to the accumulation of capital.

21. In other words, this satisfaciton of basic needs to reproduce human society is fundamental to an economic system, and yet it is unacknowledged as a part of the production system under most prevailing economic systems. The provision of reproduction services by an unpaid labour force in the family is crucial to the perpetuation of these economic structures. Therefore, there is a vested interest in maintaining family labour as unpaid workers.

22. The reproduction of labour is a complex process, which includes, besides the physical production of humans, functions such as the growing of food and its processing, education, running a household, reproduction of habitat. A large part of the subsistence reproduction is performed within the family, primarily by female labour.

23. The valuation of labour as it has emerged in this organization of the economy is a manifestation of the inherent bias of some economic systems against female work. In these situations man's work fetches a wage since it is performed in the production sector where a man sells his labour in "the market", while a woman who supplies labour in the reproduction sector is not seen to be performing work which has *value.*

24. This difference is carried over to status, which is conferred on the basis of the extent of a man's or woman's participation in the production sector, not in the reproduction sector. Woman's work has thus been sub-ordinated directly to wage labour and indirectly to capital.

25. Woman's position as housewife has affected her position in wage work as well. Low skill attainment, relative immobility and involvement in the reproduction sector has marginalized women to pools of "soft labour" which are eminently suited to direct exploitation in the production sector under certain economic systems. This is evident today in the ever-growing force of cheap female labour whose average wage is at least one-third lower than the average male wage, in women's retrenchment-prone status as workers, and attachment to the self-employed sector which yields a marginal income. A further evidence of the marginalization and invisibility of women as workers is provided by their exclusion from labour movements. Even laws governing trade union organizations exclude the possibility of organizing such workers.

26. The task of redefining and redirecting such stereotypes and structures is multi-dimensional and it is vital to understand the complexity of the over-all processes of change.

## Institutions as instruments for redirection

27. Legislation, the right to vote, education, employment, the family and the media have usually been regarded as the basic instruments for changing the social, political and economic structures in a community. It has been found, however, that they are by themselves inadequate for effecting transformation in the social values and the distribution of power, as they tend to reflect the prevailing dominant values in society.

28. Legislation by itself is not effective as a vehicle of major social change, except when the community is already prepared for such change. Laws which aim at removing discrimination against women and at raising their status often become dead letters in statute books. The community either remains unaware of their existence, or defeats them by ignoring their provisions. Though the constitutions of many countries give women the right to vote, this does not by itself guarantee effective participation of women in the political process.

29. Education too is inadequate, as long as the majority of women do not have access to it, as is the case in many developing countries. Even when accessible, the educational systems in many countries, both developed and developing, often strengthen and perpetuate traditional values and biased images of women's roles in the same way as the media. The internationalization of knowledge, and adaptation of educational models tend to reflect the cultural and economic dominance of industrialized countries. This is illustrated in the absence of training opportunities in agriculture for women even in countries where they play major roles in agriculture.

30. Employment also, by itself does not prove an adequate instrument to guarantee the autonomy or dignity of women. Restriction in training to jobs considered "suitable" - usually low paid, low skilled and low status ones - wage discrimination and other forms of exploitation: rejection of women as only "supplementary" or "secondary" earners, all militate against the effectiveness of this instruments. Protective labour laws sometimes restrict their opportunities still further, by making employers reluctant to employ them. The double load of family and job responsibilities prevents women organizing to protect their rights.

31. In the family while the woman has the larger and greater responsibility in the rearing and education of children and in the household work, her participation has not been rewarded either by recognition or by giving her a voice in family decisions. Patriarchy remains the prevailing system in most parts of the world even in families where the woman is the breadwinner. She is generally deprived the right to dispose of conjugal property without the consent of her husband while the husband who is considered to be the administrator of the conjugal property may do so alone. Changes in family attitudes and structure must be accompanied by organization of the community to accept these changes.

32. One of the major influences in societies is the media, which can play a powerful role either for progress or reaction. Its primary role today has been not only to distort the image of women and the women's movement, but to actively contribute to corroding the dignity of women. It consistently portrays women as non-productive, limiting their roles to those of consumers, reproducers and sex objects. This has been amply researched and documented over the past decade.

33. This biased portrayal of women is not accidental but is in the interest of the dominant economic and cultural systems which control the media. In countries where they are State-owned and controlled, they reflect the policies and ideologies of that State. Where these media operate on a private enterprise basis, they reinforce the views and interests of the dominant classes who own them.

Internationally, information moves primarily from the industrialized to the developing nations and is controlled almost entirely by agencies in the former. This means that most media systems and the images they portray are also both culturally and economically dominated by the industrialized countries.

34. The influence and impact of the media in regard to the women's movement have been clear. When the Women's Liberation Movement of the west gained momentum at the end of the 1960's, the reporting carried out by the media of those countries ranged from hostile and demeaning to ridicule and outright distortion. This has influenced the perception of the movement in both industrialized and developing countries and hindered serious examination and pursuit of the aims and purposes of the movement. Stereotyping of roles is evident in locally produced movies in many countries of Asia where women are portrayed as sacrificing and helpless (and enjoying it), as prostitutes, as cruel mothers in law and so on.

35. The need to combat this media distortion is, therefore, vital. It is essential for women to enter and use the media. Two strategies which women are already adopting and must continue are:

(a) working with the established media in order to change and increase the reporting about and presentation of women;

(b) the creation of alternative communication means run by women which both counteract the established media, and start defining women's reality in our terms. Many countries now have feminist newspapers and journals and some have feminist radio and television programmes; there are also some international initiatives (newspapers and resource publications) to create and strengthen information links between women in all parts of the world.

36. Using all these instruments for institutional change - the law, the vote, education, employment, the family and the media - becomes more effective when backed by the organized collective strength of women from the grass-roots. This mobilization of women builds women's confidence, helps them to exert pressure on exploitative structures, and in the process makes them more visible and able to gain recognition.

## Strategies

37. Women msut develop strategies at all levels (individual, community, national, international) that focus on specific issues in society and help to bring about such change. At least two strands of possible strategies can be identified. These are reformist and revolutionary strategies.

38. Reformist activities may well be the foundation on which more basic changes can be built. Many strategies may be only a means of ensuring that women's oppression is not worsened. Some reformist strategies are service oriented without affecting existing structures, e.g. the establishment of voluntary welfare groups whose political philosophy does *not* include challenging any of the systems or structures creating and maintaining the conditions causing the need for the service.

39. Reformist strategies which may provide a basis for further change include the bulk of the strategies employed by many women's groups, both traditional and non-traditional, by national machineries and by governments. Examples of such strategies are: legislative change, sensitizing the bureaucracy, the media, political organizations, and trade unions, building communication networks, consciousness raising, power revolution to lower levels, participation strategies, the building of enabling infrastructures such as child care centres; and programme development aimed at women as a target group. The actual growth and institutionalizing of women's organizations and national machinery for women are in themselves strategies.

40. Revolutionary strategies have a different focus. They do not aim to work with the present system - e.g. they do not attempt to move first through a reformist mode. The ways in which this is done is by:

(a) direct confrontation or intervention, and

(b) demonstration and practice of separate institutions and processes.

Direct confrontation strategies are practised widely - from the protests of many women workers in Free Trade Zones, the prohibition demonstrations in Maharashtra, India, to the deforestation protests of the tribal women in Northern India. Projects which provide for various needs of women through separate institutions which are independent of existing structures are also evident in many regions, such as the Women's Co-operatives in the Pacific, and Women's Health Centres in Western countries.

Whilst already effecting the desired redirection of social processes, such groups are able to challenge the existing systems through their rejection of them. Direct confrontation and separate institution strategies require, however, an enormous amount of effort, often for very little return. A wider women's movement base may help achieve desired basic changes in the system.

41. The essential difference between reformist and revolutionary activities is that reformist activities are incomplete: they do not allow us to achieve the goals of feminism because they are strategies which fail to comprehend the dual nature of female oppression. Strategies for equality within the present system address themselves only to the symptoms of female oppression and not to the inextricably intertwined critical points inherent in both economic structures and the marginality of women. This makes it easier to understand why "feminist reformist" activities fail to achieve even the relatively modest aims which are cited.

42. In order to achieve a "better world" for women *within* present systems, it is not possible to talk about redirecting social processes. It is only possible to talk about influencing, modifying or

readjusting. However, given the nature of free market economies - with their inherent inequality and competition - women who are content with this level of change must recognize that *constant* interception and monitoring will be required. Both economic inequalities and male-female inequalities in family and society will continue to flourish; therefore, women will remain on the outside, with a foot in the door. To even keep that foot in the door will require much strength.

43. Similar logic prevails when considering the general redirection of countries to more equitable and participatory societies. If feminist goals are not seen as being crucial, then the best that can be achieved is an economically equal society between men, but one which still perpetuates the oppression of women.

44. Socialism and feminism are, therefore, logical co-ordinates in any struggle for freedom. To argue that one is primary, or that one will be achieved as a natural result of the achievement of the other is to misunderstand the intertwined but separately created nature of each.

45. A "socialist" society which is still male dominated is not an equal or just society. A "feminist" society which is economically stratefied is not equally liberating for all women and, therefore, is not feminist. We would still be seeing a society where liberation, freedom and privilege were for the few. Therefore, our strategies must be dually focussed, they must aim to change the nature of class and economic relationships at the same time as changing the nature of relationships between men and women.

46. It is recognized that the broad goals of the movement cannot be attained within a short time. They involve traversing many areas, and changes in structures, values and attitudes in all sectors and levels of society.

47. The development process has already released many forces of change in our societies. It is crucial now to stimulate and institutionalize women's power to influence such changes to ensure that they take us in the direction of our long term goals. This will require both short and long term strategies with specific objectives. Many of them may appear very small steps, which we hope will have a cumulative impact in the long run. Some dramatic and sharp steps will, however, still be necessary, to arouse and demonstrate national will.

## SECTION III

## STRUCTURES AND INSTITUTIONS

48. The World Plan of Action for the Decade placed emphasis on the establishment of special Govenmental machinery for the integration of women in development.

49. The complex structure of society and its processes indicate that government machinery by itself may not be sufficient to effect the kind of transformation needed to expand opportunities for women to influence these processes and the direction of change.

50. Outside the revolutionary situations[1], however, the role of Governmental machinery can at best be reformist. A review of existing government machinery reveals two major types:

(a) Machinery/units within the Executive branch.

(b) Advisory structures.

51. Sometimes the two are combined. It has been sometimes assumed that these agencies, *which must perform co-ordinating and policy framing functions,* are best attached to the office of the Chief Executive, or the central planning agency. Many countries have, however, preferred to locate them as a part of the social welfare/social security/labour ministries. It is still too early to adequately evaluate the connection between their location and ability to influence government action.

52. In addition to such co-ordinating agencies, a few countries have established units/cells/special officers/advisers within the different operational departments of government, e.g. Agriculture, Industry, Health, Education, Labour, etc.. These units may have single or multiple functions such as information gathering, monitoring programmes of their ministries in order to increase their concern for women, or implementing special programmes for women.

53. It should be noted that in many countries such functions are also undertaken by the co-ordinating agencies. In addition, they sometimes undertake redressal of grievances, and monitoring of employment conditions of women in public services. They also perform a liaising function with women's organizations, and are generally required to liaise with international agencies concerned with women, interministerial committees, or representation of different key ministries on the Advisor Bodies. Some National Commissions have been established as instruments for co-ordination and influence on policy formulation.

54. Little critical attention has been turned towards an assessment of the objectives or of the extent to which such machinery or other alternatives can best achieve them. As the international pressure on governments to establish or upgrade such machinery increases, it is important to question the economic, social and political objectives of the policy behind such institutions, and to determine the best means of attaining them.

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*1* Experience in countries where women have been part of the revolutionary struggle such as China, Viet-Nam, Cuba, etc., have shown how the continuous interaction between the women's movement and the revolutionary process has led to major transformation of social structures and values. This process is continued by political organizations of women which seek to influence community and government action at all levels. Examples of this kind are the Women's Union of Viet-Nam, the All-Women's Federation of China, and the Cuban Federation of Women, which continue the process of conscientization and mobilization of all sectors of society. In these situations, special governmental machinery have not been considered necessary.

55. Despite the Decade, women's issues have remained a marginal concern with a majority of governments. However, many governments are now facing the need to re-evaluate the development ofjectives and strategies, and the best way to gear their administrative machinery to meet new challenges.

56. Bureaucracies, by their nature, tend to get "cut off" from the people they are intended to serve. This process is strengthened when they are primarily recruited from the elite classes. They become a major obstacle unless they are sensitized and activated to work for change.

57. It appears that the special machinery for women have been *primarily seeking to fulfil the function of sensitizing the bureacracy - by making women visible to them* with varying degrees of success. They have sought to ensure some flow of resources for women's development, by emphasizing women's claims as beneficiaries. They have not, however, been adequately effective in demonstrating the linkages between major development issues, e.g. balancing eradication of mass poverty, unemployment, and inequality with economic growth, redistribution of the world's resources, population control etc..

58. A major reason for this inadequacy is the establishment of machinery without clear understanding of the differences in situations and concerns of women in different strata of society. For example, many women's programmes assume that women have a lot of leisure, and can be mobilized to support developmental activities - such as adult education, training in household crafts, child health and nutritional programmes, etc.. Such programmes ignore the heavy burden of responsibilities carried by poor women and their lack of time for any additional activities.

59. Another example of the failure to differentiate women is the common assumption that the simple presence of women in the bureaucracy or on advisory bodies is enough to ensure the fulfilment of the goals of equality and integration.

60. The composition of many advisory bodies, and of some traditional women's organizations, represents the same type of biases.

61. If the links between women's concerns and development goals are to be clearly identified, articulated and integrated into government policy, then it is essential for the special machinery set up for women, to be

(a) in contact with women's needs, concerns and aspirations at different levels of society, and particularly at the grass-roots;

(b) aware of emerging issues in social, economic and political development, to identify the manner in which they affect, or are likely to affect women in different strata; and

(c) able to identify the critical levers to influence government action on the one hand, and action by women's groups on the other.

62. Their role, therefore, should be a catalytic one, rather than one of direct implementation of programmes, which should be more properly the concern to other agencies of government. However, in initial stages, they may have to assist in designing of specific programmes and in formulation of national plans, establishing a link between field experiences and the planning process.

63. It is obvious that for these machinery to be effective, they will need links not only with other government departments and planning agencies, but with other major social structures and institutions that influence the pace and direction of development and social change, e.g. banks and other specialized funding agencies, employers, professional bodies, educational and research institutions, the media,

regions, and other cultural organizations, etc., as well as women's groups. Above all, they will need contact with political organizations and trade unions.

64. Such links could initiate a two-way process of sensitizing, of releasing impulses into the system that may eventually build up the forces of change. In view of the existing lack of awareness/resistance of many of these agencies/institutions, it may be necessary to promote establishment of special units/programmes within such institutions. The involvement of women in the trade union movement, for example, has been marginal thus far. This has been the case for many reasons:

(a) The majority of women are excluded from membership because their work is not recognized as falling within the "productive sector";

(b) In developing countries there are high levels of unemployment and self-employment of women;

(c) Women in domestic service and petty trades, who represent a significant percentage of the "employed" labour force, particularly in Latin America and some parts of Asia and Africa, are usually not unionized because they work in isolation; and

(d) Where women are in the trade unions, the number holding leadership positions is extremely small.

65. And yet, as institutions of power and influence in the society, their support is important for the transformation of society. Their role in the economy affects important areas of women's lives and working conditions and special programmes for increasing the involvement and concentration of women at all levels of the trade union movement are of special importance.

66. The critical role that some of these institutions could play in redirecting social transformation in the direction of feminist goals, provides the strongest argument to involve them in the conscientization process.[a]

67. Some political parties have encouraged and supported women's groups/fronts/committees among their members. The effectiveness of these groups as a force for change in the direction of feminist goals depends on the way in which the women in these groups perceive their role. Those who are content to play a merely auxiliary role within political organizations, can not be an effective force in influencing change.

68. Governmental machinery, unless they are supported by such intermediary agencies and opinion building structures, can only play a limited role.[b]

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*a* Two examples of this type are provided by the Women and Development Unit within the University of West Indies, and the Women's Studies Programmes of many educational institutions.

*b* The chart in Appendix I illustrates some types of linkages.

## SECTION IV

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONS

69. Realization of feminist goals will depend on the success of the movement in organizing active women's groups at all levels of society and particularly at the grass-roots.

This is necessary

(a) to mobilise women to exert pressure on government and other strucutres;

(b) to enable women themselves to develop a sense of power, to influence and redirect the processes of change. Participation in such organizations help women to gain greater self-confidence and dignity which is one of the goals of feminism.

70. Such women's groups are especially necessary at the grass-roots, *i.e.* among the poor and working women, as well as among exploited and invisible groups in all levels of society. They can provide a powerful force for change by giving the movement a mass-base.

71. This independent mobilization of women has to be seen as an effort outside, and in addition to, any government or government-sponsored structures.

72. The relationship of women's organizations and movements to government structures will vary depending on the political climate and attitude of the government toward women and toward the need for restructuring society. Governments which are committed to a policy of redistribution of resources and power, should appreciate the force for change that women can provide. Governments that have the political will for such changes, should regognize women's potential, and help to promote the women's movement through organizations at the grass-roots. Linkages between women's groups and government institutions have been most effective where this recognition exists.

73. Where governments are not committed to structural changes that are consistent with feminist aspirations, it is necessary for the women's movement to remain primarily outside, and frequently in opposition to the government, directing its efforts at those structures and forces in society which are seeking radical changes.

74. The majority of governments fall in a spectrum between these two positions, and realize the need for some changes in society, particularly in relation to the needs of development. This realization does not necessarily include recognition of a need to change women's roles and position. In such situations, the women's movement must determine when and where it is effective to interact with govenment institutions. Where women's organizations have limited their influence on governments to the social service sectors, they have failed to influence major areas of political, economic and social policies.

75. The women's movement, through its organizing, investigative and communication efforts must demonstrate this connection - between feminism, and social and economic change - or development. In short, it must make women visible, not only as passive beneficiaries, but as active agents of development.

76. Where a powerful women's movement exists at the grass-roots level, it can move effectively, influence government policy, and ensure that women receive a fair share of development resources

and attention of government as well as other agencies in society. This could include the demand for more effective, and concerned machinery within government and other agencies, and recruitment of persons with feminist perspectives in all levels of government structures.

77. Even when persons with feminist goals are within government structures, the need for an independent movement outside remains. It must maintain the pressure for changes and continue to activate more women, which will also strengthen the forces for change within the structures.

78. It should be noted that in developing countries struggling with the problems of mass poverty, sometimes the government represents a more progressive force, while the forces of resistance are concentrated in economic/traditional power structures. In such situations, it may be impossible for grass-roots women's groups to grow without the support and backing of government. Such support may be in the form of resources - for employment generation, and other developmental activities, and/or as mobilizing support - with trained cadres, and by recognition of their representative status in local government machinery.

79. The catalytic force and will that is often generated by grass-roots level women's groups, can help to propel even traditional women's organizations, with limited perspectives, into the pursuit of the broader goals of the feminist movement.

## Conscientization and Monilization

80. One of the fundamental tasks of the women's movement is to create among women a consciousness of their oppression and a sense of how it can be altered. The political transformation of societies has invariably been preceded by the creation of such an awareness among people of their oppression, exploitation and inequality. This awareness is necessary if women are to transform their societies into those which will be less exploitative and oppressive both to women and to the community generally. Many women strongly resist any notion of feminism. Their resistance is buttressed by strong social values and institutions. Thus support groups and "consciousness raising" among women must be fundamental parts of the strategy. While conscientization and mobilization are primarily tasks of movement, they are processes in which government participation can frequently be enlished.[2]

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2 An example of the relation of conscientization to mobilization was the "speak bitterness" campaigns used both by the Chinese Government Party to unite the peasants in support of the land reform and by the Chinese women's organization to rally women behind general campaigns and their own emancipation during the 50's. When it was found that women at best attended meetings but remained silent because they were not accustomed to speaking out in front of men, and at worst did not attend at all because they were shy, or had difficulties with young children, special meetings were held for women. No men were present at these, women were encouraged to bring their children and the proceedings were as brief as possible so that the children were not bored and the women did not have to sacrifice too much of their precious time.

Activist women, or women who had already been identified as ready to speak would open the meeting. If the current campaign involved land reform, they might speak about the way that the exploitation of the land tenure system had affected them, recalling perhaps a year when a crop failure had forced them to sell a daughter to pay the rent, or how a child had died of malnutrition or how they had had to accept sexual abuse by a landlord because they had no redress. In campaigns to implement the Marriage Law, women would speak about their unhappiness as victims of the old system, about being forced to marry strangers, being beaten by their husbands, being deprived of any dignity and any say in the affairs of the family. The women who spoke would often be those whose lives had been exceptionally tragic, even by the standards of their society, but their sufferings did fit a pattern and strike a chord in the hearts of all the others. An enormous feeling of indignation would mount which, directed into action, became a real force for change.

A shared realization of common suffering together with a common indignation and will to act was the first goal of such a meeting. Once this climate had been created it was possible to unite the women in some form of action to help themselves.

81. The process of becoming aware involves:

(a) reflection on the objective situation, i.e. *conscientisation;*

(b) analysis of the situation including identification of issues;

(c) the development of strategies for action on the issues.

(a) *Reflection*

82. While women are usually aware of their problems, few have the opportunity to reflect on these in a way which can lead to analysis and action. Conscientization involves creating opportunities for such conscious reflection, whether at special meetings, in the work place, at the market, or while women are doing their washing. These discussions need to be carried out systematically in order to link them to political analysis and strategies for change.

(b) *Analysis*

83. In anlyzing the conditions of women's lives, there is a need to identify the specific factors which create particular problems as well as to examine the over-all system responsible for female oppression. Through such analysis, issues can be clearly identified, relevant goals and objectives set, and priorities for action established. As the needs and concerns of women are identified, it will be possible to see where these coincide with issues being raised by other groups involved in fighting for social justice and the creation of a better life for all people.[3]

(c) *Strategies*

84. Strategies will no doubt include many of the programmes outlined by various international and national "Plans of action for women" developed during the first half of the decade. Nevertheless, women in each situation must develop their own strategies and these will vary from one community/ country to another depending on the priorities and situations of the women. For example, where the aspirations of women coincide or overlap with the objectives of other political movements, then strategies can include establishing links with them, so that the women's struggle contributes to and benefits from the momentum of the other movements.

85. As discussed previously in Section II of this paper, the particular strategies for action can include a wide range of approaches and projects. What needs to be added here is that the goal of

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3 *Role of Research.* Social scientists have a vital role to play not only in gathering information on women's position, problems and needs (which they have virtually neglected to do in the past), but also in contributing to the process of transforming values and attitudes, through their analysis of the manner in which the situation of women (of different groups) is related to, and reflects the dominant structures in society. This calls for a re-examination of some of the *concepts* and analytical tools of the social sciences, particularly those relating to the economic processes. We have already shown many of the concepts – value, labour, work employment, productivity, etc. are loaded with meanings that help to serve the interests of the capitalist mode of production. Unless social scientists evolve new tools, or correct the existing ones, their research can obstruct the understanding of feminist issues.

Research with a feminist perspective needs to question all established assumptions about women, and seek explanations for existing realities in objectives examination of changes over time, rather than in facile explanations of "women's roles", "what women do or do not want", or women's natural instincts or capabilities. It requires to be geared to making aware and creating consciousness about the growing numbers of women as household heads and consequent necessity for designing employment policies; of self-employed groups whose needs must be understood, and other such emerging trends.

Research which so far has largely been an instrument of dominance and legitimation of power elites must be made to serve the interests of those who are the dominated, exploited and oppressed groups, particularly women. Women who are committed to feminism should not be satisfied with better, more authentic and relevant data. Women's studies must be deliberately made an instrument of the women's movement. The research process itself must become a process of conscientization for the researcher as well as the researched.

conscientization also affects the choice of strategies. Thus, strategies should be selected that not only meet the "felt needs" of the women involved but also build their self-confidence, sense of effectiveness and power and thus promote further changes in the perceptions both of the women involved and of people in society generally. Effectiveness is maximized when women:

- identify their own needs (conscientization);
- decide on action/strategies/programmes to effect the changes they wish to see (self-determination);
- see the link between their action and larger forces of exploitation in society;
- monitor progress, anlyze, and evaluate the experience, and internalize what is learned.

86. In this way even simple activities or projects can be part of the process of transformation of perceptions, attitudes and communities as women first see themselves differently, have opportunities for decision-making and control and experience their effectiveness.

## Mobilizing and Training

87. First, it should be noted that a great deal of the discussion of mobilizing women treats them as if they were a honogenous group, failing to recognize that even within a single country there are different groups of women with basically different value systems and experiences, characteristics and aspirations. Further, women are stereotyped as being weak, passive and ineffective - as "development problems" rather than as "agents of development." And yet most women and especially poor women have great endurance, courage and resourcefulness, qualities which have enabled them to cope with the harshness of their lives and to survive with dignity. This strength of character if articulated can be a powerful force for change - both for societal change as well as for changing the perceptions of the women themselves.

88. In order to mobilize women's potential strength effectively, it is necessary to recognize the different functions that different women can perform and enlist and train them to do so. Change agents and organizers are crucial to mobilizing women. The most effective organizers are those who already have some personal commitment to structural change in society or who develop this commitment through conscientization in which they see the connection between change in their own lives and societal change.

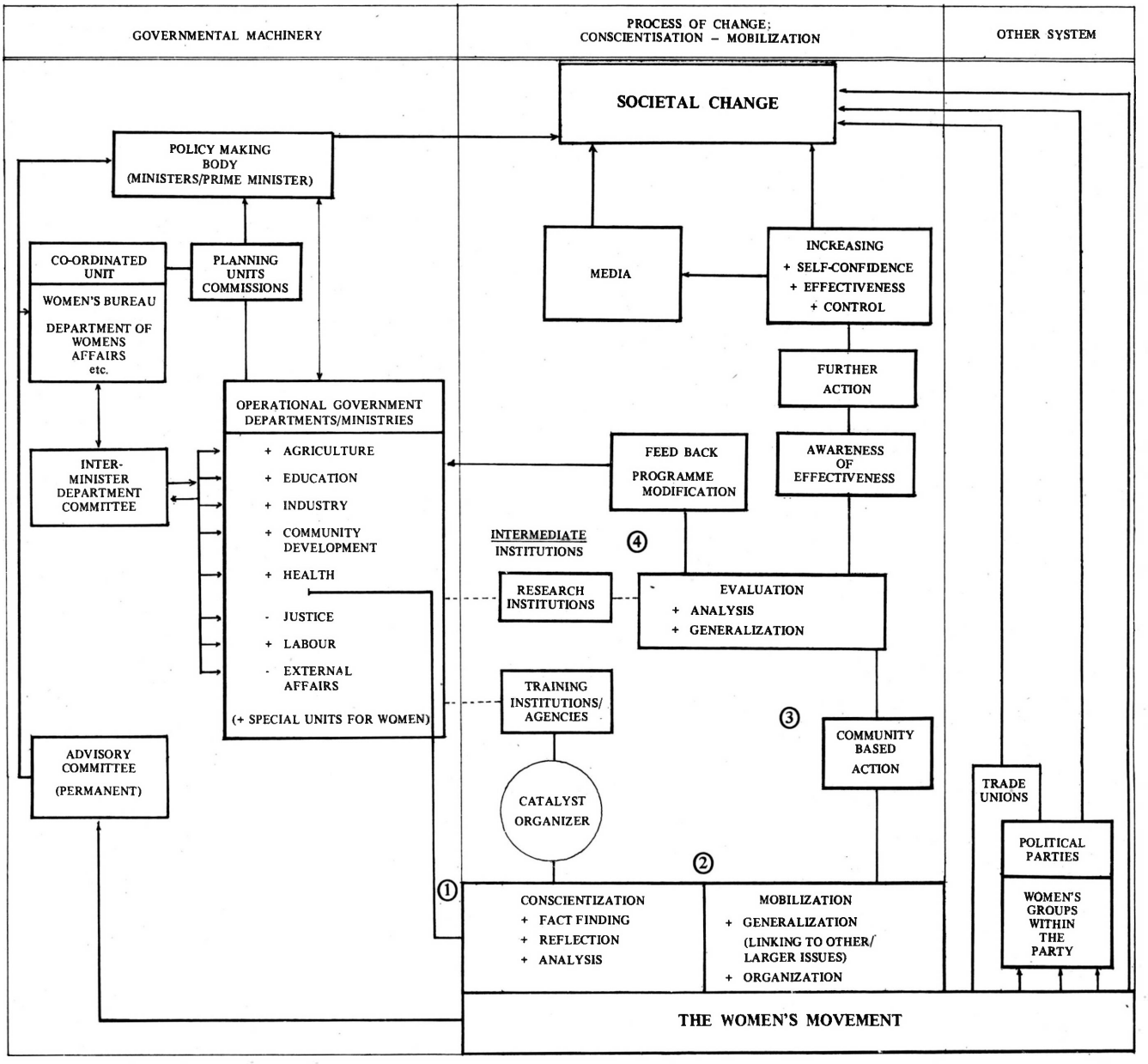
89. Another distinct group of women valuable to a movement are resource people - women with technical/professional skills who can be recruited and encouraged to place those skills at the disposal of low-income and other women. Contact between these different groups of women can transform the lives of both, if the relationship is based on mutual respect rather than on a social welfare approach. Conscientization of resource persons helps to extend the movement but the strength of the movement still lies in its mobilizing of women at the grass-roots level of each society.

90. All of those involved in mobilizing women - change agents, organizers, resource persons - need training in organizing techniques and methods for evaluating the effectiveness of their work. Governments and other existing institutions can sometimes be called upon to provide opportunities for such training and evaluation. Training programmes should include:

- an analysis of the socio-economic structures of the society in which they will be working;
- the creation of an understanding of the role of women in development;
- specific information about the characteristics and the siutation of women in this particular society, along with:
- skills in survey methods, communications and organization.

91. Throughout the training and mobilization of women, it is important to be aware of larger implications of these activities seeing them as part of an over-all strategy for transformation of the lives of those involved, and recognizing that the process of conscientization, mobilization and achievement of goals can itself create a sense of power which can lead to further actions, increased self-confidence, and increased effectiveness in the pursuit of feminist goals.

APPENDIX I




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