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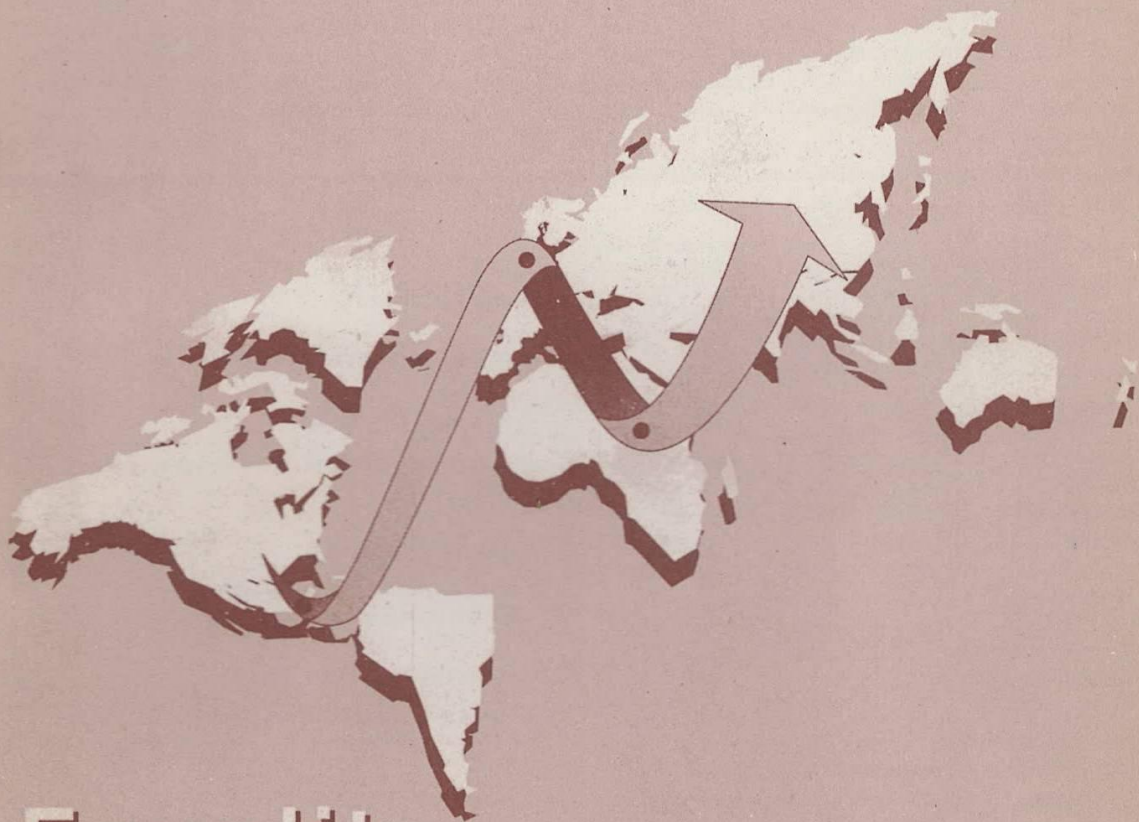
# ISSUES

*Towards Beijing*

Vol. I No. 1

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Equality

Development

Peace

Dear Reader,

With this publication, we in the Coordination Unit for the World Conference on Women—Beijing 95, introduce to you the first of a series entitled "Issues—Towards Beijing". This is planned as an occasional publication, as part of the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women—Beijing, 1995.

Through the pages of this publication we seek to highlight various issues confronting women in India today thereby creating a broader platform for sharing, informing, challenging and questioning perspectives and insights that we have gained during the course of our work.

This first Issue recapitulates some important developments in the women's movement since the International Women's Year in 1975, with special reference to India.

To narrate the progress achieved in about a quarter of a century and compress it within twenty pages is not an easy task. What we have essayed is to merely highlight the salient features of those documents published in the two and half decades, which are universally accepted to have left their impact on the course of the movement.

We hope that in the forthcoming issues we will debate various topics, study them in depth and provide a forum for the growth of a collective understanding of the women's movement.

We earnestly invite you to share with us ideas, thoughts as well as provide us feedback so as to enable us to make this venture more meaningful to all concerned. We also encourage you to utilise and translate the material into any form for wider dissemination.

Coordination Unit

The Inter-agency Facilitating Committee for Beijing (IFCB) was born out of the active Women in Development Donor Group in New Delhi. The IFCB is a consortium of fourteen agencies representing Bilaterals, International NGOs/Private Donor Agencies and Multilaterals. The volunteering agencies have committed themselves to allocate time for regular meetings and earmark budgetary allocations to support Conference preparations. The mandate of the IFCB is donor coordination to ensure equal sharing of resources and systematic information sharing and dissemination. The IFCB initiated a dialogue with the NGOs which led to the setting up of the Coordination Unit (CU), for the World Conference on Women—Beijing '95.

The Coordination Unit is a technical-cum-facilitative team to support preparatory activities of Women's Groups and NGOs towards the Conference. It would facilitate preparations on key issues such as Women's Human Rights, Economic Empowerment, Health and Reproduction Rights and Political Participation and other issues through the following activities:

- \* Facilitating workshops, seminars, meetings
- \* Compilation and dissemination of information
- \* Facilitating participation in key regional and international events for advocacy purposes
- \* Developing liaison and network at various levels with Governmental and Non-Governmental agencies

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## Catalysing Change



Some September '95 and over 30,000 women from all over the world will gather in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women. Coming just five years before the end of the 20th century, the meeting in Beijing will provide an opportunity for women to look back on the advances forged by the movement.

Some 70 years ago, women in England were jailed for demanding adult franchise. The demand for the right to vote was the first stage in the movement for women's empowerment. The establishment of a separate commission, in 1949, to promote gender justice in all UN member countries was a major success of the international women's movement.

Over the last seven decades, the movement has spread all over the world and has achieved a measure of solidarity rare in global history. Though there are differences in ideology and perspectives, the desire to work together coupled with a willingness to learn from each other has channeled efforts to build global alliances to promote local action.

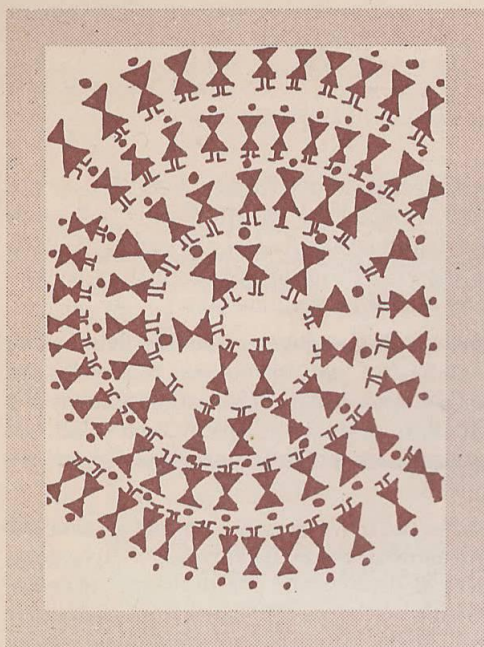
The most recent example was the acceptance of women's rights as human rights in Vienna last year. That declaration was of special significance and a victory for the global women's movement.

Putting aside conceptual differences, women's groups from all over the world worked in unison to ensure the passage of the landmark declaration: 'Women's Rights are Human Rights'.

While women in the West were struggling for equal rights, in India women were working for the establishment of an enlightened society and polity. In 1924, the first women's organisation, the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was established. Through organisations like the AIWC, the social reform movements and as part of political parties women worked at every level of the nationalist struggle.

Having been equal partners in the freedom movement meant women in India got equal treatment under law. In 1947, giving women the rights to property, equal access to education, equal right to run for public office was revolutionary. Women in many Western nations did not have these rights until much later. The example of India provided the catalyst for the concept of equality under law being accepted in other emerging nations.

Yet because of the differences in the initial stages, the women's movement in India and in the Western countries adopted different strategies to achieve equality. In the West, the struggle to create space within the political hierarchy to achieve equality not just in the statute books but in practice continued, throughout the '50s and '60s.



Having worked in collaboration with the political leadership during the freedom movement, a section of women found it easier to work with the government in post-Independence India. Thus large sections of the women's movement worked closely with the government in formulating and implementing developmental programmes.

At the same time, the women's movement began to grow and attracted members from all social classes. While all political parties had always had women's wings, now trade unions too felt the need to set up separate units to examine issues concerning women.

What is now called the autonomous women's movement, also began to emerge in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Beginning on a small scale to examine individual and local community problems, such as domestic violence and the needs of abandoned women and widows, activists and social organisers soon found themselves confronting an apathetic state machinery.

The 1970s saw major changes within the women's movement. In India, new entrants to the movement and a number of the old guard began a process of introspection. Added to that was a growing realisation

that even the legal rights available to women were insufficient to deal with the social situation.

The yawning gap in the status of men and women was unveiled by the Commission on the Status of Women in India. The Commission's report, which was tabled in Parliament in 1974, led to a major overhaul of development plans and priorities. For the first time, a department of women was created within the central government and in all the states. The efforts of the burgeoning social action groups was recognised by the Commission.

While the experience in India is reflective of the experience of many other developing countries, the movement in the West grew in opposition to the state. Notable struggles were waged on the right to abortion. In the West, by the beginning of the 1970s, the movement gained legitimacy with major advances in theory building and research.

The advances made in both theory and in grassroots action received international attention with the declaration of 1975 as the International Year of the Women.

The conference held in Mexico City brought together delegates from all UN member countries. Just a few meters away, the NGO Forum was held. Here,



the atmosphere contrasted with the formal deliberations. Festooned with posters, the venue resembled a fair more than a conference setting. Yet it was here that women were able to compare notes and realise for the first time that the already cliched phrase global sisterhood had meaning. Problems like indifferent state organs, lack of legal avenues, paucity of educational and professional opportunities found echo in all countries.

The Mexico World Plan of Action which emerged from the official deliberations highlighted some of the steps governments would take to achieve the goals of Equality, Development and Peace. At Mexico, the decision to celebrate an entire decade for women was also taken. The entire period, 1975-1985, saw renewed efforts to achieve equality and enhanced developmental efforts towards a lasting peace. The efforts at Mexico also catalysed women's groups to work in unison to keep up the pressure both locally and internationally.

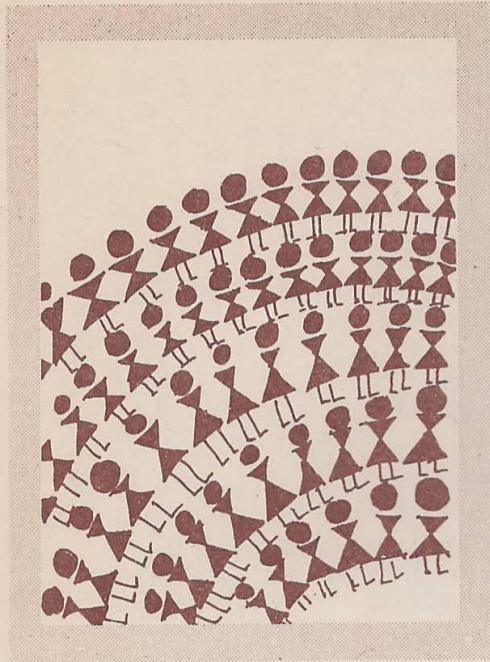
One of the most significant achievements was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Though adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, India signed the Convention only in 1993. The Convention, till date, remains the only legally binding document to promote gender justice.

Soon after CEDAW was approved by the UN General Assembly, the world community met again in Copenhagen for a mid-decade review of progress towards the goal: Equality, Development and Peace. The meeting, in 1980, brought together over 7,000 women from all over the world. As at Mexico, the NGO Forum enthused participants who found the commonalities of their experience over-rode all differences. For the first time however, the differences both in approach and methodology were apparent. To discerning observers it was also becoming clear that despite claims to global sisterhood, women in developing countries had very different agendas from those of women in the West.

Discussions of poverty alleviation, lack of educational opportunities, problems caused by structural adjustment programmes did not sit easily with demands for enhancing avenues for professional advancement and the demand for increasing the number of women employed by the United Nations.

As a section of women activists and scholars from the Third World realised, space needed to be created for developing country concerns on the emerging agenda. Over the next four-and-a-half years as the world geared up for the End of the Decade Conference in Nairobi, women in the developing countries activated networks, lobbied and ensured an enhanced presence





at the conference. This translated into a major revision in the global agenda.

One of the most important documents catalysing the revision was the report of the DAWN Committee. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) brought together women from all parts of the developing world and Norway. Questioning the premise that the process of development with its prescription of economic growth to cure all Third World ailments, the group provided an alternative path which would not just be gender sensitive but would provide space for the concerns of women from poor and marginalised communities.

The DAWN group's initiative brought about significant changes both in the formulation of development strategies internationally and in the devising of methodologies for women's groups. The immediate impact of the DAWN report was evident in the formulation and drafting of the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (FLS) towards the year 2000 which were adopted during the Nairobi Conference in 1985.

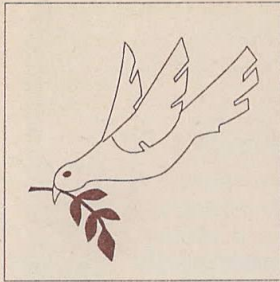
The FLS was expected to provide a guide to governments in implementing CEDAW. The passage of CEDAW had led to muted complaints from the Third World that the provisions reflected more the concerns of western women. The FLS went a long way in attempting to right that perception. Taking on board a number of concerns expressed by the DAWN group and other women's groups and activists, the FLS opened up spaces for diverse agendas.

The importance of the FLS as a guide to sustainable development was reiterated by its inclusion in Agenda 21. The document which outlines a plan of action, to promote sustainable human development, was adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Even in 1985 the adoption of the FLS, had marked the coming of age of the movement. Gender was accepted as central to all development plans.

Also, the focus shifted from the international to the national agenda. For in the Decade just gone, major changes had occurred within India.

Groups were mobilising on issues as diverse as the Mathura rape case, dowry, and wife-beating. Simultaneously they were also taking up other issues such as media portrayals of women, the fate of prostitutes, the denial of rights to women prisoners and under-trials and the needs of girl children. The need to re-examine the concept of work, the lack of a gender component in technological advances appeared on the women's agenda.



This however does not imply that these issues were not on the agenda earlier. The decade and the attendant flood of information helped focus attention on the work being done and on the needs of marginalised communities.

These changes were specially reflected in the two documents released in 1988. The National Perspective Plan chalked out the national gender agenda till the turn of the century. It highlighted

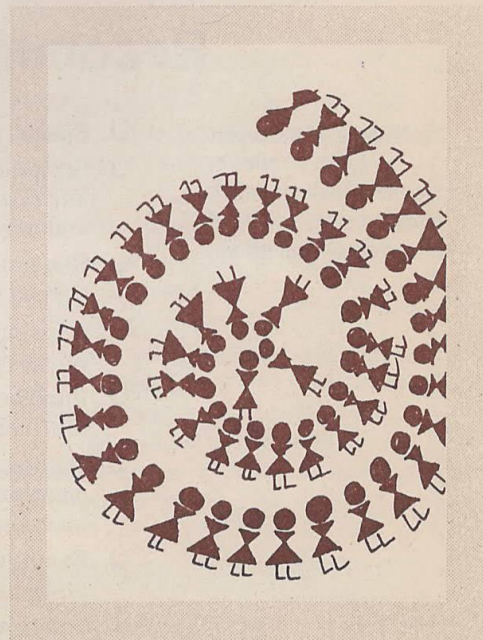
the significant achievements since the publication of the Status of Women Report and recommended action to further the goal of gender justice by the year 2000.

If the perspective plan documented the national achievements and the national goals, the Shramshakti Report examined the status of women in the informal sector. Almost, by definition, the informal or the unorganised sector is not a part of the national accounting framework. Yet in India, 94 per cent of all women work in this sector. As the authors estimated over a third of all households in the country are headed by a woman. The report challenged the existing definition of work and provided an alternative definition. It examined the status of women working as rag pickers, domestic servants, migrant labour. Overcoming the lack of a statistical base, a methodology which combined observation with extensive discussions was adopted.

This study was also significant for turning the spotlight onto groups and organisations working with women. As the academic and policy-making committee realised, the study would not have been possible but for the network of social action groups, NGOs, activists and old-style social workers who had emerged to cater to the needs of this section of the population.

It is the rise and maturing of these groups and individuals all over the world which has facilitated the introduction of new ideas and concepts onto the women's agenda. In the 19 years since Mexico City, the milieu has changed dramatically. There is more appreciation of gender concerns, a basic understanding of the need for equality in the world community. Within the movement there is an ethos of cooperation and solidarity.

The following pages attempt to capture a flavour of all that has happened as we work towards Beijing, in our common struggle for equality, development and peace. ■



# Showing the Way

Towards Equality

Report of the Committee on the Status of the Women in India, 1974

“The revolution in the status of women for which constitutional equality was to be only the instrument, still remains a very distant objective. While the position of some groups have changed for the better, the large masses of women continue to lack a spokesman in the representative bodies of the State”.

The pioneering report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) has to a great extent guided government policy and provided direction to individuals and groups working in the field of women and development.

The recommendations of the report opened up avenues for a new strategy of gender-sensitive development.

The impact of the CSWI report and the later documents on policy-making and the plan process were evident in the Sixth Five-Year Plan document which for the first time devoted a separate chapter to Women and Development. ■



## Recommendations

The findings of the report led to a series of recommendations which impacted every sphere of government action.

- ❑ Special tribunals for violations of human rights.
- ❑ Statutory Women's Panchayats at the village level with autonomy and resources for the management and administration of welfare and development programmes of women and children.
- ❑ Rescinding of orders such as denial of maternity benefits to women in government service after three children.
- ❑ A major change in the content and organisation of education to counteract traditional belief in inequality between sexes.
- ❑ Provision for special leave without pay to enable women to devote fulltime for the care of their family.
- ❑ On divorce or separation, the wife should be entitled to at least one-third of the assets acquired at the time of and during the marriage.
- ❑ Family Courts which will adopt conciliatory methods and informal procedures.
- ❑ Parity of rights on grounds of divorce for both husband and wife.



### On legal systems

"The statutory law in all matrimonial matters follows the adversary principle for giving relief i.e. the petitioner seeking relief alleges certain facts and the respondent refutes them. In addition, most of the grounds in these statutes are based on the 'fault principle' instead of the breakdown theory.

As a result, strong advocacy rather than family welfare is often the determining factor in these cases. The absence of distinction between matrimonial causes and other civil suits leads to unusual delay which stands in the way of conciliation and further embitters the relationship of the parties. Conciliation, which needs to be the main consideration in all family matters is not the guiding principle in the statutes dealing with them.

There can be no compromise on the basic policy of monogamy being the rule for all communities in India".

### On socio-cultural status

"Concern for women and their problems which received an impetus during the freedom movement has suffered a decline in the last two decades".

### On political status

"Though women's participation in the political process has increased, both in elections and in their readiness to express their views... their ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible.

Parties have tended to see women voters as appendages of the males".

### On health

"Demographic indicators and indicators of access to medical care both reveal an increase in the neglect of the female lives as an expendable asset. This is the only reasonable explanation for the declining sex ratio observed to persist over several decades.

The neglect of maternity and child health services and general public health services through over-concentration on efforts for family planning have contributed to this trend as well as defeated the ultimate objective of the family planning programme".

### On education

"Imbalances in women's education and literacy are the consequences of great disparity of educational progress between:

- rural and urban areas;
- different sections of the population and regions

This reflects to a great extent, variations in regional attitudes to women. The influence of these and other sociological factors... make the use of national or state averages in assessing progress of education or literacy rather meaningless".

# Legally Binding

**CEDAW**

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979

**T**he need to protect women's rights gained global recognition during the international decade for women (1975-1985). This recognition became international law when the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The Convention is the only legally binding international instrument dealing with the rights of women. Though States have the right to interpret any or all the Convention's 30 Articles in keeping with their culture and practice, Articles 18 and 24 commit them to work for the elimination of discrimination against women.

To ensure states are complying with their obligations, a 23-member Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), monitors their progress. This Committee is made up of 23 experts who are elected in their personal capacities with a "high moral standing and competence in the fields covered by the Convention". Their position is secured by Articles 17, 20 and 21.

All States which have ratified CEDAW are bound to provide a report within one year to the Committee on the progress made

within the country. Following this, the country must report every four years on progress made.

The Convention has a Preamble and six sections. Of this the first four outline the areas in which states must work to eliminate discrimination while the last two deal with the logistics of ensuring the smooth functioning of the Committee.

The Convention can be a base on which to build a strategy to empower women. NGOs can monitor the government's claims to compliance with CEDAW. The process can be used by NGOs as a strategy to mobilise communities to fight for local rights. ■

**Discrimination against women shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. (Article 1)**

**On 25 June 1993, India joined the club of nations which have ratified CEDAW, though with a declaration in respect of Article 16 (1 & 2) and a reservation in respect of Article 29 (1).**

**These pertain to India's policy of non-interference in the personal affairs of any community without its initiative and consent; difficulty in registration of marriages; and India is not bound by compulsory arbitration or adjudication by the International Court of Justice.**

**This commits India to work for the elimination of discrimination against women. India, like all other signatories, will have to present a report at the end of the first year and after that every four years. The report will document the country's progress in the elimination of discrimination. The first report is due in June 1994.**

**Policy Measures (Article 2)**

"Discrimination against women in all its forms is condemned and the States parties agree to embody the principle of equality of men and women in their national constitutions, civil codes or other laws, to ensure the realisation of this principle; to adopt appropriate laws; to establish tribunals."

**Human Rights (Article 3)**

"States parties agree to take all appropriate measures including legislation, in all fields in order to guarantee women the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms on the same basis as men."

**Political and Public Life (Article 7)**

"Women shall, on equal terms with men, share in political and public life of the country, and shall have the right to vote, to be eligible for election, to participate in the formulation of government policy."

**Education (Article 10)**

"State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education."

**Employment (Article 11)**

"Measures shall be taken to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment and to ensure right to work, the same employment opportunities, to free choice of profession and employment, to equal remuneration, including benefits, to social security and to health protection and safety in working conditions."

**Health (Article 12)**

"Measures are to be taken to eliminate discrimination in the field of health care to ensure that women have equal access to health care services including those related to family planning."

**Economic and Social Benefits (Article 13)**

"Women shall have, on an equal basis with men, right to family benefits, bank loans and all forms of financial credit."

**Rural Women (Article 14)**

"Account shall be taken of the particular problems of women in rural areas and of the special roles they play in the economic survival of the family including unpaid work."

**Law (Article 15)**

"Women shall have equality with men before the law, have identical legal capacity regarding contracts, administration of property, and court and tribunal procedures."

**Marriage (Article 16)**

"States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent
- to responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution
- to personal rights to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation."



# Towards the Year 2000

FLS

The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the advancement of women

One of the most significant documents to emerge from the international decade for women was the Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. Intended as a blueprint for action by governments, women's groups and organisations, the document's length and verbosity intimidated most potential readers. Yet for ambition and vision, the document remains unsurpassed.

The FLS aims at the creation of a new world order based on equality, development and peace. The just society envisaged will involve the equal participation of women in all spheres.

The document identifies barriers to the advancement of women and basic strategies to remove these barriers. The sharing of power equally between women

and men is identified as a basic strategy for equality.

The document is divided into five sections which address the concerns of women from all over the world. Thus the section on Areas of Special Concern has two paragraphs on refugees and displaced women and children, the section on peace identifies the problems of women caught in armed conflicts.

The section on development highlights the negative impact, decline in economic activity is having on the already skewed distribution of income between men and women.

One of the most important aspects of the venture was its inclusion of a wide range of concerns of Third World women. The FLS also provides a document to help monitor national government's efforts to implement CEDAW. ■

## Recommending Changes

In September 1993, a consultative meeting was held in Madras which critically examined the Forward Looking Strategies. The group which included activists, scholars and development professionals from all over Tamil Nadu made a number of recommendations. These it was felt would make the FLS more relevant to India.

**OBSTACLE**

Non-implementation of UN documents like the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, Declaration of Social Progress and Development are responsible for the unequal position of women in most developing countries. (Para 98).

**STRATEGIES**

The effective participation of women in the identification of social and economic goals. (Para 107)

The actual and potential impact on women of macro-economic processes must be assessed and measures to ensure that the impact is not adverse need to be built into the framework. (para 112)

Gender bias evident in most development policy making and programmes should be eliminated. (Para 115)

**MEASURES**

- > National and sectoral plans which will promote the participation of women at all levels and in all sectors need to be formulated and implemented. (Para 127)
- > Gender-specific statistics and information bases need to be developed to help identify weak sectors and take decision and action on the advancement of women. (Para 129)
- > The effectiveness of government-established institutions and administrative arrangements need to be monitored. This will allow evaluation of efforts to enhance participation of women in development. (Para 131).
- > Plan processes should develop and strengthen social security systems, health schemes and maternity protection for all women. (Para 140).

- > **Analysis of women's oppression in society**
- > **Examine the system of patriarchy**
- > **Develop strategies to empower women**
- > **Redefine equality and development from a gender as well as class, caste and ethnic perspective**
- > **Gender sensitive, sustainable development would seek to empower oppressed groups**
- > **Gender sensitive development would entail a process through**

**which women gain control over:**

- **their labour**
- **legitimate share of property and socio-economic-political resources.**
- **their fertility**
- **their sexuality**
- **their mobility and decision making**
- > **Expose the impact of the structural adjustment programme on women**
- > **Themes of Religion, Culture, Fundamentalism and Communalism should be included**

# An Alternative Vision

DAWN

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, 1985

**A**t the end of the Women's Decade in 1985, the DAWN Report was released. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) articulated the views of women from developing countries. The report provided an alternative vision and strategies for empowerment. The group argued that "empowerment of women is essential for the emergence of new, creative and cooperative solutions". Their seminal report articulated an independent Southern voice in the global women's movement. The authors saw themselves as writing for all women from a 'Third World Perspective'. Their efforts influenced development strategies all over the world including the formulation of the Forward Looking Strategies.

## The Vision

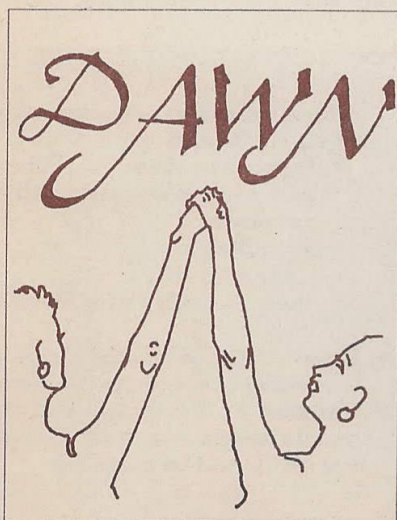
*"Feminism is a political movement, and as such expresses the concerns of women from different regions and backgrounds. Like all political movements, it can be diverse in its issues, immediate goals and methods adopted. But beneath this diversity, feminism has as its unshakeable core a commitment to breaking down the structures of gender subordination and a vision for women as full and equal participants with men at all levels of societal life.*

*The vision of society is a dual one. Since poor women are the central actors on our stage, both poverty and gender subordination must be transformed by our vision.*

*We want a world where basic needs become basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated.*

*The opening of political processes to accommodate greater expression of opinions and dissent as well as participation by poor people in the decisions that affect their lives at the macro and the micro levels, is crucial.*

*The transformation of the structures of subordination that have been so inimical to women is the other part of our vision of a new era. Changes in laws, civil codes, systems of property rights, control over our bodies, labour codes and the social and legal institutions that underwrite male control and privilege are essential if women are to attain justice in society.*

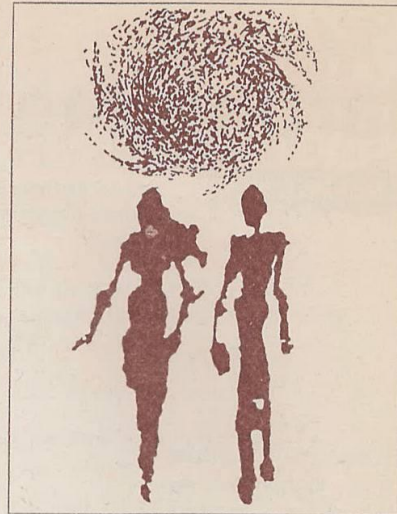


*Only by sharpening the links between equality, development and peace can we show that the 'basic rights' of the poor and the transformation of the institutions that subordinate women are inextricably linked. They can be achieved together through the self-empowerment of women."*

*This vision is based on an analysis of development strategies "from the vantage point of poor women".*

*The DAWN report called for the building of "movements at the national level", the development of a methodology for political action and political support to women's issues as they emerge, both on general questions and in a particular context.*

*For this, coalitions and alliances (possibly cutting across different women's organisations and political affiliations) can help us build a broad-based local and national movement.*



Courtesy: Madhyam

### **Towards 1995**

In preparation for the 1995 meeting in Beijing, the DAWN Group is in the process of coming out with an update to the report presented in Nairobi.

The group is involved in researching the population question and the debate over reproductive rights. Coordinated by Sonia Correa, of the Brazilian Health Movement, the study will examine where women stand on the issue of population and the right to informed choice. It will also examine what women can do to ensure their rights are protected.

The DAWN Group will also examine the process of globalisation with special emphasis on the world economic situation. The study will be coordinated by Dr. Geeta Sen who was one of the authors of the 1985 report.

This study will examine the impact of Structural Adjustment Programme and the international lending flows and the debt pattern. Focussing on case studies of the former Soviet Union and India, the study will examine the impact of different economic policies on women.

The research will also chart the changes in economic thinking in the last decade and the rise of neo-conservative economic ideas. The shifts in power balance with the international economic institutions becoming more powerful and UN as an organisation losing clout will also be studied.

While the study will attempt to identify the new players and the shifts in influences, their impact on women, the attempt would be to evolve an approach which can deal with the changing scenario. ■

# Charting the Course

SHRAMSHAKTI

Report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, 1988

**T**he Shramshakti Report, for the first time, highlighted the contribution of the marginalised poor in both urban and rural areas to the growth of the formal economy.

The Commission's brief covered women in the informal sector, including self-employed and wage labour, paid and unpaid workers and contractual employees. Thus all poor women workers came within the ambit of the Commission. The authors based their findings and recommendations on their observations and discussions with social activists, government officials and women's groups. Thus the report is extremely strong on the qualitative inputs.

The findings and recommendations of the commission have been incorporated in the National Perspective Plan to be achieved by the end of the century.

## FINDINGS

- One-third of all households are solely supported by women; in another third, over 50 per cent of the earnings are contributed by women.
- 94 per cent of all women work in unorganised sector. 83 per cent work as agricultural labourers; dairying, animal husbandry, fisheries.
- Employment of women in the mining industry, has reduced. The Voluntary Retirement Scheme in mining offered to women only.
- Domestic workers are one of the most vulnerable groups of workers, no government regulation nor any written contract for the work.
- Technology has treated women workers unfairly.
- Deterioration of nutritional status of women.
- The Government, is a defaulter on implementing the Minimum Wages Act in construction, in relief works, in forestry.
- Lack of organisation in the informal sector causes exploitation of women workers.
- Workers of informal sector need to be brought into the mainstream of the labour movement.
- Major labour unions need to take the labour of the unorganised sector in their fold.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Women's work as home-makers must be recognised as social/economic production.
- All subsequent data collection efforts should enlarge the definition of women workers to include all such activities paid and unpaid performed at the home or outside.
- Land compensation for the poor instead of cash compensation.
- Need for setting up an exclusive credit body for poor and self-employed women.
- All training programmes be linked to employment with the objective of increasing the remuneration and improving living conditions.
- Famine relief work including activities to build future capital assets and human capital in and around the villages where people live.
- All technologies which directly or indirectly increase women's workload must be accompanied by other technologies or measures to ease or eliminate these side effects.
- 'Right to Work' already a Directive Principle be made a Fundamental Right.
- The piece rate be so fixed to enable women workers to earn for 8 hours work, wage equal to the time rated minimum wage.
- Equal Opportunities Commission be set up, under a central law, with wide powers of investigations, direction, advice and monitoring.
- Special drive for imparting legal literacy to women workers.
- Expansion of the coverage of the cooperative movement in areas like farm labour, artisans, cereal processing, fodder and fuel development, fruit preservation and agro-based industries.



# Breaking the Chains

National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988

The National Perspective Plan recognised the need to mainstream women's concerns. "A parallel substream of women's development, even if possible, will only perpetuate discrimination and subordination". The plan envisioned "an alternative strategy of national development which will provide not just some additional space for women, but create a democratic, egalitarian, secular, cooperative social structure".

The Plan reviewed the gains of the four decades of planning and highlighted the areas that need change. It also outlined the initiatives required and advocated a series of strategies for nine sectors.



## Rural Development

- Bringing all female-headed households above the poverty line.
- 30 per cent of all IRDP beneficiaries should be women.
- Ensuring women's access to productive resources.
- Women's in decision-making positions, especially in local councils.

## Health

- Sex determination tests should be banned.
- A public distribution system to make basic foods available at affordable costs.
- Need for a humane drug policy and check on the pharmaceutical industry.
- Contraceptives banned in developed countries should not be permitted in the country.

## Legislation

- A uniform civil code for all citizens.
- Equal property rights for daughters, widows and sons.
- Demand for dowry should be made a ground for divorce.
- Religion should not be made a criteria for adoption of children.

### **Political Participation**

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- All women members of panchayats and other executive bodies must be trained and empowered to exercise their authority.
- 50 per cent of all grassroots functionaries must be women.
- Declare a percentage of constituencies for women, in the lower tier of Panchayati Raj.

### **Communication**

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- Women should comprise at least half the membership of all Censor Boards and media monitoring cells.
- Alternative media forms such as folk theatre, puppetry need to be encouraged.
- Text books be assessed for removing negative images of women.

### **Voluntary Action**

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- Greater coordination among NGOs, to avoid duplication of services.
- An effective mechanism for coordination between the government and the voluntary agencies to be ensured.

### **Support Services**

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- Creches, with flexible timings must be provided in organisations which employ 30 persons, not just 30 women.
- Housing for working and single women should be a priority.

### **Education**

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- Rapport between the local community, teachers and educational administrators.
- Mahila mandals be responsible for children's education.
- School timings to suit local needs.
- Curricula to stimulate creativity.

### **Employment**

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- Women's participation in trade union activities needs to be encouraged.
- The maximum age for employment in the organised sector, for women should be 35 years.
- Special entrepreneurship training programmes for women. ■

## Catalysts of Change

As women gather to celebrate yet another International Women's Day, the question where the women's movement is heading takes centre-stage. In the last few decades, organisations, groups, activists and scholars have played a crucial role in mobilising women and in raising awareness of the need for gender justice.

In India, the movement for the emancipation of women can be traced as far back as the Vedic age. Later the Bhakti movement had raised gender awareness. In the north-eastern states, women had led uprisings against the colonial state and the imposition of alien rule.

However, the movement got its distinct identity only in the last quarter of the 19th century. As the base of the struggle for social transformation, the women's movement was a fight against injustice by individuals and society. Then as now it was a movement for women's human rights.

This movement for social transformation, became a part of the nationalist struggle in the 20th century. As such, women's issues and concerns have always been a part of the mainstream socio-political agenda of the country.

The establishment of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1924 brought together a number of diverse views and agendas. Though the AIWC was the first national women's organisation, it built on the experience of small, local and independent women's

groups which had been functioning from the early 1900s. These groups worked closely with social reformers.

Their primary concern was the welfare of women. To further that cause, the AIWC had demanded reform in the personal laws and the right of women to property. It was only by the early 1940s that the demands for right to property and changes in personal laws took on a distinct political hue. This despite the AIWC's mandate being political and its stated goal the overthrow of the colonial state.

By the mid-1930s, socialists and communists began to mobilise women. Staying within the fold of the AIWC, they began to organise peasant women and women labourers. These efforts to unionise to fight for better working conditions went on throughout the 1940s. At the same time, another section within the AIWC was fighting for

the right to property. All these efforts facilitated the struggle for gender justice in post-Independence India. The plurality within the AIWC in the pre-Independence period was the genesis of the plurality of views and methods which have been the distinctive feature of the women's movement in India.

In the post-1947 period, the writing of the Constitution provided a number of rights to women. While in the statute books equality between the sexes was the norm, in reality, activists found gender justice was the exception to the rule.



Courtesy, Madhyam

This despite the Indian State's efforts to ensure that women were brought into the economic and political mainstream of national life. The intervention of the State in the development of women's capabilities was quite remarkable by the standard of the times. The setting up of mahila mandals as part of the community development programme, and later schemes like DWCRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas) to enhance their earning capacity had few parallels.

While the State's efforts to uplift women continued, sections within the movement opted to work outside the State structure. The Groups attempted to nudge the State to take on a more gender-sensitive approach to its welfare activities.

The need for different organisational structures, in keeping with diverse ideologies, had become evident even in the 1950s. In the first post-Independence decade, those differences led to the emergence of new national organisations. The National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) and the Samajwadi Mahila Sabha emerged in the 1950s with different agendas.

The movement would perhaps have continued to emphasise cooperation with the state as the primary intervention but for two major events in the 1970s.

1974 proved to be a turning point. At one level, the Committee on the Status of Women presented its report. At another level, the first of what have been called the 'new' women's organisations emerged. In Maharashtra, groups emerged from the anti-price rise agitations of urban women, and the anti-famine agitations of rural women. They brought a new dynamism to the movement. The first 'International Women's Day' march was



organised in Pune that year. Attended by some 700 women ranging from agricultural labourers to bank officers, the march provided much needed impetus to the movement.

Later that year, the first national women's conference was held in Trivandrum. Attended by men (excluded from the Pune meeting) and women, from urban and rural areas, it catalysed a conceptual change in organising women.

Mobilisation of women on a national scale was sparked off by the Mathura rape case. The open letter, protesting the Supreme Court's judgement,

brought women onto the streets in numbers unheard of, in the post-Independence period. For the first time, since 1947, women's issues headed the political agenda. The changes in laws, the appearance of a more socially conscious cinema were some of the wider social consequences of the mobilisation.

The demonstrations and marches which followed the mobilisation on the Mathura case focussed on issues like rape, dowry, domestic violence and portrayal of women in commercial films. The goal remained, social transformation through gender justice. Mobilising women to struggle against violence revealed other issues which also needed a gender-sensitive approach. In response, the number of organisations, groups and individuals who see themselves as part of the movement has multiplied thousand-fold. Simultaneously, there is evidence of a wide range of approaches to deal with each issue.

This signalled that the women's movement had decisively entered a new phase. To cater to specific needs, groups with different approaches emerged. The tag, 'autonomous women's organisations' also appeared for the first time to

describe these emerging coalitions. Most of these organisations remained urban-based, taking on issues which affect urban women rather than the problems of rural areas.

Though there was a perceived need for grassroots organising, mobilising more women to join the struggle was seen as a priority. Despite that a section of women opted to provide organisational structures with specific gender agendas. Women's Resource Centres appeared in most of the larger cities and their number soon multiplied.

The establishment of women's organisations, was made possible by increased awareness of the centrality of gender in development planning. The International Women's Decade channeled increasingly larger amounts of aid to gender-sensitive projects. This allowed a host of organisations to emerge independent of the state.

This left the task of organising rural women to either party-based organisations or to other emerging social movements. Already in the 1970s, women were at the forefront of the Chipko movement. In the 1980s, the anti-dam movement, the movement for people's control over natural resources and technology, the peasant mobilisation and the anti-arrack agitation were spearheaded by women. None of these movements have been identified as women's movements, nor do they have a specific gender agenda. Yet they have influenced and in turn been influenced by the women's movement.

Learning from these movements, throughout the 1980s activists worked to broaden the women's agenda and make the movement more relevant to rural women, especially minorities, Dalits and tribals. The almost frenzied activity of the first half of the 1980s led to a phase of introspection after 1985. The on-going exercise has been empowering both for new entrants and the veterans of the movements.

The concept of empowerment has underlined most gender-sensitive, development strategies in the last few years. The women's movement has used empowerment as a strategy to give women control over their lives. One of those identified was education. Using education as a strategy of

empowerment, programmes like Mahila Samakhya have been developed. Even programmes, catering to the entire population have begun to view empowerment as a desirable goal.

The anti-arrack agitation is one of the better known success stories. When literacy was viewed as an empowerment strategy, the class of neo-literate women agitated to close liquor shops and vends in Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh.

Though the women in the anti-arrack movement did not view their agitation as a women's issue, their experience is symptomatic of the entire women's movement. With the agenda broadening all the time, concerns are becoming more specific and are no longer articulated in terms of gender alone. At the same time other movements are incorporating a gender component, without necessarily opting for a feminist perspective.

The resultant diffusion in the movement should not be seen as a dilution in either commitment or involvement. Instead as groups and individuals gear up for Beijing, the process orientation of the movement is getting stronger. At Tirupati the need to build alliances within the movement and across ideological divides was emphasised.

The movement's emphasis on the process to and after an event is a comparatively new phenomenon which has paid off handsomely in the last few years. At the Earth Summit in Rio, the collective efforts led to the inclusion of the Forward Looking Strategies in Agenda 21. In June 1993, the emphasis on inclusion led to the movement working to achieve a strategic advantage, the acceptance of women's rights as human rights.

Planning for the Beijing meeting provides an opportunity to coordinate tasks and work together. This process orientation is getting reflected even in efforts for other up-coming global events, the Population Conference in Cairo and the Social Summit in Copenhagen.

That women are today the catalysts of widespread social change is testimony to the success of the on-going movement. ■

