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GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi-1

DATED : 18th JULY 1988

Subject :- National Committee on Women - Minutes
of the first meeting

Madam,

Please find enclosed herewith minutes of the first meeting of the National Committee on Women under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister, held on 17 May 1988.

Yours faithfully,



(C.P. SUJAYA)
Joint Secretary to Govt. of India

Ms. Nandita Haksar,
56, Munirka Enclave,
New Delhi.

MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE
NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON WOMEN
HELD ON 17 MAY 1988

The first meeting of the reconstituted National Committee on Women was held on 17 May 1988 under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister. A list of participants is annexed.

At the outset Ms Geeta Mukherjee and Ms. Nandita Haksar raised queries regarding the composition, the powers and the functioning of the National Committee. A view was expressed that national women's organisations and different political parties should have been represented on the Committee. The Chairman clarified that the National Committee was not a federation of organisations. It had been deliberately kept small and included representatives of different relevant areas such as ^{parliamentarians,} voluntary organisations, the academic sector, media and law. The Committee was purely an advisory body and its recommendations would be sent to the concerned Ministries and organisations.

With regard to the main item on the agenda, i.e. the draft National Perspective Plan for Women, various views were expressed regarding the processing of its recommendations. While some members felt that they could submit their views in writing after consulting organisations and social workers, others called for a national debate and suggested that the draft Plan may be made a public document. Smt. Margaret Alva, Minister of State for Women & Child Development, explained

that the draft Plan was actually the culmination of a debate which has been going on throughout the women's decade and had been drafted within the framework of accepted principles and policies. Part I contained certain general recommendations and a summary of sectoral recommendations based on detailed papers which would be made available in part II and III of the report later. She asked the National Committee to give specific directions on the steps to be taken to finalize the report and have it accepted at various levels. She mentioned that a preliminary discussion with the Planning Commission had already taken place and suggested that the Central Social Welfare Board could discuss it with the Chairmen of the State Social Welfare Advisory Boards and representatives of voluntary organisations. A meeting with State Ministers had been proposed by the Department. Minister for Human Resource Development advised that the meeting with State Ministers could be held after obtaining the reaction of the members of the National Committee, State Social Welfare Advisory Boards and voluntary organisations.

The Chairman suggested that the recommendations of the draft Plan could be discussed in the meeting and it could thereafter be assessed whether committees should be set up to study the report further. The members then expressed their views which are summarised below.

Ms. Ela Bhatt, while stating that she found the draft Plan well balanced, suggested that:

- (a) The major thrust must be on asset building in a woman's own ^{name.} ~~house~~. Even if a family has assets a woman does not necessarily have access to them. With the breaking up of support systems and family units becoming unstable, on the one hand, and resources and raw materials scarce, on the other, it becomes all the more essential that the draft Plan focusses on asset building - land, house sites, bank balances, etc. Experience indicates that this plays a major role in building up a woman's confidence.
- (b) The harassment of women by the Police must be eliminated.

Ms. Sivasankari pointed out that:

- (a) A woman should be treated with respect as an individual by others as well as herself. For this, self development courses at school and college to encourage holistic development should be introduced.
- (b) Partially paid dormitory homes for older single women had become a necessity.
- (c) Women should be trained in unconventional skills.

Ms. Sheila Barse stressed:

- (a) The need to consider modalities for improving the situation of the girl child, her motivation, access, safety, etc. A programme could be started for selecting local talent and training them as animators through voluntary organisations who could be funded by government.
- (b) 'Care for the Child' stamps with a percentage of stamps relating to 'Care for the Girl Child' could be issued to raise revenue and, at the same time, carry a message.
- (c) Care should be taken that employment of women in rural areas did not lead to migration of men.
- (d) Structural changes would be required to deal with the problem of police atrocities on women. Academies for police science, more research and study were necessary. Ways to democratise the police had to be found and their conditions of work and life improved.

On the final point, the Chairman agreed that the question of police behaviour required looking into and existing institutions had been advised accordingly but pointed out that the problem of police atrocities was much deeper.

Ms. Jaya Arunachalam mentioned that:

- (a) Inequalities still exist. To enhance the status of women at all levels, employment for women was necessary. Women need to collectively bargain for their rights through trade unions, cooperatives, mandals, etc.
- (b) Family Planning was an essential programme but should not be limited only to women.
- (c) Grass root workers required to be educated.

Ms. Mrinal Pande suggested that main stream media such as TV and radio should be used to publicise the exact names, addresses and telephone numbers of police cells, hospital cells, counselling centres and voluntary organisations whom women in stress could reach for help. Ms Sivasankari, endorsing the suggestion, added that telephone directories could also be used for the purpose.

Ms. Philomena Reddy suggested that the education of women and their gainful employment would go a long way to improve their situation. Focus should be on the adolescent girls specially in rural areas who need a package of services including educational and health components.

Dr. Nirmala Deshpande felt that:

- (a) Social Workers should work for equality of men and women even in the religious and social field.

- (b) Women scavengers need to be liberated by introducing toilets.
- (c) Pattas for land, ownership of cattle, house sites, etc., should be in the joint name of husband and wife.

Ms. Aruna Asaf Ali stated that while far more opportunities were now available for women, the National Literacy Mission could be used for making both men and women aware of their responsibilities. She endorsed the suggestion of publicising the cells or organisations which women could contact for help.

Dr. Archana Sharma, while pleading for enlarged participation of women in science and technology, stressed the need for low cost simple technological innovations for lessening the work load of women at home and at work.

Dr. Najma Heptullah mentioned that:

- (a) Modernisation in rural areas as well as industry tends to lead to marginalisation of women and it is necessary to develop alternative employment.
- (b) Women should be encouraged to form cooperatives to strengthen their position.
- (c) The additional benefits employers have to provide for women employees leads to a preference for men employees.
- (d) Active intervention was required to ensure equal pay for equal work.

With regard to the final point, the Chairman suggested that thought should be given to a more positive formulation as, in case of heavy physical work undertaken under NREP, relief works, etc., the output of women was normally less and they are, therefore, paid less under the 'equal pay for equal work' formula.

Ms. Sarojini Varadappan, while commending the draft Plan, suggested:

- (a) Women's Development Corporations should carry out socio-economic programmes through voluntary organisations in addition to government machinery.
- (b) Poverty and illiteracy went together and the educational system should be supplemented with supportive programmes like creches, training for employment, etc.
- (c) Banks and insurance companies should allow nomination of women.
- (d) Age for entry into employment should be relaxed for widows.
- (e) It should be considered how educated women with time on their hands could be involved in social work as the old type of dedicated worker is not emerging these days.

Ms. Sheila Kaul referred to the need to concentrate on rural women and examine how programmes meant for them could be implemented effectively.

Ms. Chandresh Kumari pointed out that:

- (a) A large number of programmes meant for rural women were not reaching them. The IRDP target of 30% women beneficiaries should be achieved and women made aware of the programmes being implemented for them.
- (b) Government should help in marketing the produce of women's production units by placing orders for their requirements on such units.
- (c) At least 30% of interview cards should be given to women so that they have a fair chance to appear for interviews for jobs.

Ms. Amarjit Kaur pleaded for awareness programmes through BDOs, Panchayats, etc., so that rural women became aware of the programmes that could help them, obtain bank loans etc.

Ms. Lalhlipuii stated that the proposal of the State Government for setting up a Women's Development Corporation in Mizoram had been turned down by the Planning Commission and asked for support in having it reconsidered.

Ms. Srivastava mentioned that:

- (a) The laws relating to voluntary organisations required to be examined. In particular, the Society's Act should be amended to empower District Magistrates to register societies. Account keeping should be simplified. Smaller organisations should not be taxed. She enquired if the CSWB could set up a task force to examine these issues.

The Minister of State for Women & Child Development clarified that the CSWB could, on its own, set up such a task force.

Ms. Bakshi stressed that:

- (a) Education was a basic necessity and 100% children should be enrolled in schools and adults in non-formal classes. Technical education was also essential and the number of polytechnics should be increased.
- (b) Women had a special aptitude for certain jobs such as primary education and Anganwadi work and such jobs should be reserved for women on a phased basis.
- (c) More women should be employed in the police.
- (d) IRDP facilities should be available for both the husband and the wife. If this limits the number of families that are benefitted, smaller sums may be made available to them.
- (e) Women should have a larger representation in political bodies at all levels.
- (f) Mahila Nigams should be started in every state.
- (g) The recommendation in the draft Plan that the Department of Women and Child Development should be the nodal department for all issues relating to women was sound.
- (h) The recommendation relating to a women's unit in the Planning Commission should be implemented.

The Chairman indicated the need to think further about reserving jobs for women as the claim accepted the principle of discrimination. He mentioned that instructions have ~~been~~ already issued regarding employment of a larger number of women in the police. While stating that it may not be viable to reduce the sum available for helping an IRDP beneficiary, he pointed out that larger inclusion of women in the IRDP programme was being aimed at.

Dr. Bajpai stated that:

- (a) She did not consider the recommendations regarding reservations for women advisable.
- (b) Science and technology should reach women in the villages and greater efforts to create awareness was required.
- (c) There should be a mass movement for education to bring about social change.
- (d) She did not agree ^{that} ~~with~~ maternity benefits ~~being~~ ^{should be} made available to unmarried women.

Ms. Jayanti Natarajan suggested that women's unpaid work should be included in the census computation of national product. If necessary, rules could be changed and questionnaires reframed. UN guidelines were available in this regard.

Ms. Nandita Haksar felt that different views could be held regarding a) provisions of the laws relating to women such as the recent Acts, dealing with sati and the denigration of women as well as the proposed Uniform Civil Code. Such

views should be taken into consideration before finalizing the bills, amendments, etc., b) the development process, which some held had acted against the interest of women and had marginalized them.

In conclusion Smt Margaret Alva, Minister of State for Women and Child Development clarified that the draft Plan calls for a greater coordination of programmes and a common approach through an Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee. It envisages a national programme for training, the thrust being on the rural front. Reservations had been recommended only as a transitory measure. Enforcement of laws relating to women required supportive measures such as para-legal training. A special thrust was recommended to give women visibility in the planning process.

The Chairman considered the various views expressed for processing the draft Plan and suggested four sub-groups be set up to consider in depth the recommendations regarding:

- (a) General issues including policy and legal matters;
- (b) Economic issues, including employment, property rights, equal remuneration, rural development, etc.;
- (c) Supportive services including health and education;
- (d) Catalysts of change including voluntary movements, media, etc.

The sub-groups should report back their views to the Department of Women and Child Development within two weeks

of constitution. A member who would like to make comments on areas other than that of the sub-group in which she is included should send her comments ;to the relevant sub-group.

Within approximately two weeks of obtaining the reports of the sub-groups, the Central Social Welfare Board could hold a meeting of the Chairmen of the State Social Welfare Advisory Boards and national level voluntary organisations and NGOs of experience in this area.

The draft Plan may also be considered a public document and could be made available to whoever was interested on payment. Comments received within the next month, along with the reports of the sub-groups and the meeting to be held by CSWB should be urgently processed by the Department of Women and Child Development. The Department may then call a meeting of the State Governments to finalize the draft Plan so that the National Perspective Plan for Women could be placed before the Parliament at its next session.

The meeting ended with the vote of thanks to the Chair.

FIRST MEETING OF THE
NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON WOMEN
HELD ON 17 MAY 1988

List of participants

- | | | |
|-----|--|---------------|
| 1. | Prime Minister | Chairman |
| 2. | Minister of Human Resource Development | Vice-Chairman |
| 3. | Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Minister of Welfare Govt. of India | Member |
| 4. | Minister of State in the Deptt of of Women & Child Development In the Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India | Member |
| 5. | Ms. Swarup Bakshi
Harijan & Social Welfare Minister
Govt of Uttar Pradesh | " |
| 6. | Ms. Lalhimpuii
Minister of State for Social Welfare and Employment
Govt of Mizoram | |
| 7. | Smt. Geeta Mukherjee, M.P.(Lok Sabha) | |
| 8. | Smt. Chandresh Kumari, M.P.(Lok Sabha) | |
| 9. | Smt. Jayanti Natarajan, M.P.(Rajya Sabha) | |
| 10. | Smt. Najma Heptullah, M.P.(Rajya Sabha) | |
| 11. | Smt. Amarjit Kaur, M.P.(Rajya Sabha) | |
| 12. | Smt. Ela R. Bhatt, M.P.(Rajya Sabha) | |
| 13. | Smt. Sheila Kaul, M.P.(Lok Sabha) | |
| 14. | Smt. Aruna Asaf Ali
Patriot, Link House,
New Delhi | " |
| 15. | Smt. Sarojini Varadappan,
48, Women Road, Mylapore, Madras | " |
| 16. | Dr. Archana Sharma,
35, Ballygang Circular Road,
Calcutta | " |

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 17. | Smt. Jaya Arunachalam,
55, Bhim Sena Garden Road,
Mylapore-4, Madras | Member |
| 18. | Ms. Nandita Haksar,
56, Munirka Enclave, New Delhi-67 | " |
| 19. | Smt. Sasmeeta Srivastava,
Chairman,
Central Social Welfare Board
Parliament Street, New Delhi | " |
| 20. | Ms. Mrinal Pande
B-249 Asian Games, Village, New Delhi | |
| 21. | Dr. Nirmala Deshpande
2, South Avenue, New Delhi | " |
| 22. | Smt. C. Sivasankari,
7, First Link Street,
Karpagam Garden, Madras-20 | " |
| 23. | Prof. Philomena Reddy
Home Science Department
Sri Venkateswara University
TIRUPATI | " |
| 24. | Ms. Sheila Barse, No.3-A, Ratna Deep
29, Juhu Road
Bombay | " |
| 25. | Secretary
Department of Women & Child Development | Secretary |

Draft Perspective Plan for Women

NANDITA HAKSAR

THE draft National Perspective Plan for women 1988-2000 A. D. is an attempt by the Government to "evaluate the impact of developmental plans and programmes on Indian women."

The Plan is divided into three parts. The first part gives an overall perspective with general guidelines and specific recommendations. The second part contains sectoral papers on rural development and agriculture, employment, support, services, education, health, nutrition and family planning, legislation, political participation and decision-making and media and communication. The third part reproduces important documents relevant to the problem.

The Plan states that the focus of government programmes for women has shifted from welfare to development and women must be looked upon as "producers and participants, not clients of welfare." It openly acknowledges the sexist basis in various areas of our national life. For instance, on the section on law it categorically states: "The framers, enforcers and executors of the law are by and large men, and women have little clout to influence legal processes." Similarly, the sections on education, health, family planning and communication are critical of the gender bias in those areas and the Plan has made some important and imaginative recommendations to counter this bias.

However, the Plan is silent on some vital issues such as the Government's policy of looking up family planning as a way to control fertility rather than a tool for men and women to make conscious decisions about their lives. This policy has led to the Government encouraging experiments with injectible contraceptives like Net-en on poor, illiterate women who do not know that harmful effects of these contraceptives have compelled governments of developed countries to ban them.

The Plan is the first of its kind since independence and it is a confession on part of the Government that its developmental policies have failed to reach justice to our people, specially our women citizens. In the preface to the draft Plan Margeret Alva, the Minister for State for Women's welfare, states that "the fruits of development have not gone equally to all sections of our people: the rural masses who constitute almost 80 per cent of the population have not been able to absorb these benefits as the urban classes have, the weaker sections are still unable to assert themselves as against the privileged and women have continued to be the single largest group of "backward citizens".

The Plan concedes that the negative indices over-

shadow the positive indicators of development. The sex ratio is still against women; age specific death rates indicate higher rates for female children and women till 35 years of age; the 1981 census showed that 75 per cent of women are illiterate; the number of women registered at employment exchanges increased from 1.12 million in 1975 to 5.1 million in 1986.

This dismal picture emerges despite the fact that we have already had a National Plan of Action from 1976 that provided guidelines based on the UN's World Plan of Action for women. The outcome of the National Plan was the setting up of the Women's Welfare and Development Bureau in 1976 to "act as a nodal point within the Government of India to coordinate policies and programmes and initiate measures for women's development." The Women's Welfare and Development Bureau was charged with the responsibility of (a) co-ordinating, and collaborating with multifarious programmes in other Central Government Ministries; (b) initiating necessary policies, programmes and measures; (c) collecting data to serve as a clearing house; (d) monitoring programmes for women's welfare; (e) servicing the National Committee — the Steering Committee of the National Machinery; (f) following up the recommendations of the 1974 Committee on the Status of Women in India by formulating proposals and providing guidelines; (g) working out financial and physical targets; and (h) liaising with multinational/UN agencies in the field of women's welfare; (i) legal issues and problems concerning women; and (j) implementing programmes and schemes.

The women specific programmes implemented by the Women's Bureau provide the following services: (i) strengthening and improvement of women's work and employment in agriculture, small animal husbandry, dairying, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, *khadi* and village industries, and sericulture; (ii) economic rehabilitation of women from weaker sections of society in the form of training and employment on a sustained basis; (iii) better employment avenues for women to bring them into the mainstream of national development; (iv) rehabilitation of destitute women by preparing them for suitable vocation and making them economically independent; (v) providing short stay homes for women and girls in moral danger together with counselling medical care, psychiatric guidance and treatment, services, and development of skills; and (vi) preventive and rehabilitative services to women and children who are victims of atrocities and exploitation.

The thrust of these various schemes and program-

mes for women "is to provide the five principal categories of services: (a) employment & income generation services; (b) education and training services; (c) support services; (d) general awareness services; and (e) legal support service".

The draft Plan has given a list of these programmes and targets set. However, it does not really evaluate these projects, schemes or programmes. It does not try to answer why they have failed to reach social, economic or political justice to women. It merely recognises that these schemes have not achieved the purpose they were supposed to. The draft Plan states in clear terms that an alternative strategy for development is needed. It states: "If the results and lessons of the past are any guide, a larger allocation of resources for women within the prevailing pattern and structures of development, does not promise a reversal of trends. A parallel substream of women's development even if possible, will only perpetuate discrimination and subordination. An alternative strategy of national development which will provide not just some additional space for women, but create a democratic, egalitarian, cooperative social structure has to be defined and tried. In such a scheme, it will be necessary to accelerate the woman's component of composite programmes, to ensure the integrity of the enterprise as well as a measure of compensatory justice. The goals of holistic human development must not be at the expense of one another and the ascent to equality must be collective."

The Plan recognises that "poverty is a consequence as well as a cause of several factors that limit life". However, the draft Plan does not attempt to draw up an alternative strategy for development which will effectively bring social, economic and political justice. In fact, the draft Plan does not address itself to the basic problem of removing poverty. It speaks of wiping every tear from every eye but does not even attempt to understand the causes of hunger, inequality and social injustice.

The section on Rural Development and Agriculture speaks of the "low and deteriorating status of rural women" as a result of "modernisation of the agricultural sector". However, it does not explain why modernisation has led to greater poverty and inequality. In the chapter on Employment and Training there is a paragraph on the impact of technology which has one line on mechanisation in agriculture: "adoption of new farming technology has significantly downgraded the input of women, largely on account of their limited education."

There is no mention of the fact that concentration of land in the hands of a few, non-implementation of land reforms and the Green Revolution have all resulted in creation of millions of landless labourers and greater economic inequality in the rural areas.

The Draft Plan does not address itself to the problem and consequences of uneven economic development whereby all the industries are concentrated in or around a few big cities. As a result of this the rural unemployed go to cities in search of jobs and land up either on the pavement or in the growing number of slums. It makes no mention of Free Trade Zones which have been exploiting female labour.

The only solution the draft Plan offers is that "poverty alleviation goals of 2000 A.D. should be to (i) bring all women headed households (estimated to be 30-35 per cent) above the poverty line; and (ii) attain the target of having women constitute 30 per cent of all beneficiaries to be assisted under the Integrated Rural Development Programme. In addition, the endeavour of the perspective plan should be to bring in the women's development dimension in the sectors particularly, agriculture and allied fields which have not responded adequately to women's needs."

The draft Plan's major solution to the problem of poverty and inequality seems to be the effective implementation of various schemes run by different Ministries and departments, by effective monitoring. The Plan recommends: "There are today sufficient number of programmes in the Government of India as well as innovative programmes in many States and sectors. What is needed is the technical inputs for greater effectiveness of these programmes, to guarantee better resources utilisation. Emphasis has to be placed on more effective planning, monitoring and evaluation of existing programmes through a result-oriented mechanism operating at different levels."

In addition to better implementation of the 27 government run schemes, the Plan places an undue emphasis on training as a means to solve basic, complex economic problems.

The Plan gives emphasis to training as a major part of a strategy for overcoming women's poverty and marginalisation. It states: A systematic human resource development strategy focussed on women is recommended. Three levels of training are envisaged viz., (i) grass-roots level; (ii) middle level; and (iii) policy and planning level. The content of training should encompass five principal components as follows: (i) organisational and extension training; (ii) skills training; (iii) management and entrepreneurial training; (iv) sensitisation of administrators/ implementors to women in development issues; (v) training of trainers."

There seems to be no awareness that even if all the schemes are effectively implemented and training perfectly imparted unless the economic policies are changed there will be lakhs of more women every year who will be marginalised, unemployed and destitute. How would these schemes and training programmes keep up with the growing inequality and injustice? These schemes, programmes and projects themselves have a gender bias which the draft Plan does not see as problematic.

The strangest part of the draft Plan is that it does not envisage any extra expenditure. The Minister states in her preface: "this Plan does not seek more investments or more resources. It seeks to give a new thrust and responsiveness to developmental programmes at all levels, and recommends certain special measures for women as transitory support to ensure that they catch up with the mainstream by 2000 A.D."

The Plan recommends that this new thrust and responsiveness can be achieved by the creation of various departments — Departments or Directorates of Women's Development at the State level;

Women's Development Corporations for implementation of economic programmes; a coordinator at the district level to coordinate and supervise education and health schemes; a Special Division in the Department of Women and Child Development for the enforcement of law under a Commissioner for Women's Rights; and an apex body for women's training in the country that cuts across various departments and Ministries to ensure proper planning and elimination of duplication of schemes.

The Plan does not explain how all these bodies will be set up without extra finances when the Plan itself states that the total outlay on the women specific schemes in the Seventh Plan is only two to four per cent. It also does not explain how these bodies or this Plan will deliver the goods when the previous Plan and previous schemes could not.

Perhaps the one difference is that this Plan envisages a widespread participation of voluntary action groups in implementing the recommendations. In the chapter on Voluntary Action in the Development of Women, the Plan concedes the fact that the voluntary agencies are closer to the people than the rigid bureaucratic system. Many autonomous feminist groups are specifically named and their role in raising women's consciousness against gender oppression is acknowledged. The Plan states that the Government is increasingly interested in "enhancing the role of voluntary agencies in the development of women" because "the Government has rightly felt that it cannot assume the entire responsibility of service provision and development. ... A meaningful partnership with the voluntary sector has thus been an avowed goal and an essential variable in the Government's attempts in integrating women in development".

Women's organisations, feminist groups and voluntary agencies have to decide whether they welcome this move or they look upon it as an effort of the Government to shift its responsibility on to the people. There is a need for us to have a clear understanding of what this cooperation means, on what basis it is to be carried out and what the political consequences will be of our decision.

It is indeed strange that while the Plan calls for a greater role of women's groups in the implementation of the developmental schemes, the Government has not bothered to associate any of these groups in the process of writing the perspective Plan. The Plan has been prepared by a core group of 14 people headed by Margaret Alva and this group consulted eleven experts who have been named. Neither the core group nor the experts consulted include any members of a women's organisation, except for one member of All India Women's Conference. The sector papers were prepared by the Women's Division of the National Institute PCCD which also did not consult the women's groups. The draft Plan acknowledges the pioneering role of the Committee on the Status of Women but none of the members of that Committee were consulted.

The draft Plan was put before the National Committee on Women headed by the Prime Minister. The Committee was set up recently to "advise the

Central and State Governments from time to time on the policy, legislative and administrative measures necessary for removing economic and social inequalities affecting Indian women and to suggest ways and means to enable women to achieve their inherent potential and utilise their capacity to contribute to the development process; and to review the progress of implementation of policies and programmes designed in pursuance thereof".

The Committee has such broad terms of reference but it is to ordinarily meet once a year and has no powers whatsoever. Further, the Committee has 29 members but there are no representatives of either national women's organisations such as the Mahila Dakshita Samiti, the Janwadi Mahila Samiti or the National Federation of Indian Women, or of any of the feminist organisations whose role has been acknowledged.

The draft National Perspective Plan was discussed by the Committee but many members felt that the Committee was not representative of women's organisations and the Plan should be a subject of a national debate. So far the Government has not invited such a debate as it did on their new education policy.

Women's organisations and feminist groups must decide whether they want to enter into a dialogue with the Government on the Perspective Plan. Some feel that no real changes can be brought about unless the system is changed, others have felt that the very act of entering into a discussion with the Government give credibility or legitimacy to a Government which is growing more and more repressive. These questions should also be debated at the national level. We must remember this question has a long history. During the freedom movement against colonialism, many nationalists like Tilak attacked social reformers like Pandit Ramabai and Ranade on the ground that asking the British to reform our customs was tantamount to supporting British rule.

The draft National Perspective Plan for Women is the first such Plan after 40 years of independence. The sectoral papers make certain recommendations which could help to bring some relief to a section of the oppressed women. A national debate on the Plan itself would generate greater awareness on the problem. We still have the possibility of political debates in our country. There is still space for open political discussion. This space was won by long years of struggle for democracy. All those concerned with preserving that space must take the responsibility of ensuring that it does not close because of our lack of political vigilance of our cynicism. □

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Lacunae in new schemes for women

By MANJULA SEN

The Times of India News Service

BOMBAY, June 21.

THE national perspective plan for women 1988-2000 A.D. released by the Central government offers several progressive recommendations but fails to suggest any device to implement them or the already existing schemes.

The 81-page plan attempts a developmental perspective and begins with a review of the present status of women arrived at through the five-year Plans.

While the document is commendable for its admission of a lack of conceptual clarity and the general apathy regarding women's issues among government agencies, it is limited in its strategies by the necessity of having to rely on the same agencies for its approval.

The thrust of the document is that with the eventual shift from "welfare" to "development" in programmes for women, the latter must be recognised as "a source of unique strength for reaching national goals". It notes: "Women are not merely producers and providers but also individuals with a right to human dignity in a society where 'culture' and 'class' tend to discriminate against gender."

It is pointed out that the large allocation of resources for women within the prevailing patterns of structures of development does not promise a reversal of trends and therefore an alternative strategy of national development has to be defined and tried.

The plan dispenses with the need for investment of resources.

recommendations include: providing women's cells in all ministries, greater emphasis on access to basic services in general outlays, sensitising the bureaucracy and existing monitoring bodies, raising the representation of women in elected bodies in a manner that integrates and accepts women, creche facilities in girls' schools and at work sites that employ more than 30 persons (and not merely 30 women), health facilities for women per se, matrimonial property to be registered in the joint names of husband and wife and in the wife's when the marriage breaks down and the matter is pending settlement, minimum maintenance to be computed keeping the basic needs in mind, shelter for needy women, central maternity benefit fund to be set up with contributions from all employers and provision of alternate skills for women displaced by new technologies.

MIX OF PROPOSALS

This mix of old proposals, better applied or modified if required, and a set of new, much required programmes is welcome but marred by the fact that the onus for giving an impetus to women's development is

on those agencies which have had little impact in their fields for over four decades. It is mandatory that the reasons for their failure be pinpointed before making recommendations that are otherwise apt to be confined on paper.

For instance, who will ensure that reservation of seats in bodies like panchayats and legislative bodies will not be exploited by vested interests? Maintenance rights was an issue which the Central government used to appease a major vote bank at the cost of women's rights recently but there is no suggestion to circumvent such a recurrence beyond the demand for a uniform civil code.

The plan also recommends that maternity benefits should be provided by all employers, not merely those who employ women. This is a valuable suggestion but is liable to be observed more in the breach, as is the case of the Equal Remuneration Act, unless accompanied by proposals for its formulation and application.

The Union government has 42 schemes for women's training but the plan says these lack emphasis in content and direction. It recommends training policy for women and a sys-

tematic grid of programmes schemes for their training at different levels. Besides a multiplication of "schemes", not much can be expected if the political will is absent. A special division headed by a commission of women and child development really enforce law for women.

For grassroot social workers to take issues of health and literacy, necessary that the social work especially if the person is a woman enabled to rise above the limitations imposed by the socio-cultural milieu.

The plan also mentions the need to compute value to housework, women family farms and other family business. These are often "under-replicated" because in most cases it is unpaid. However, remedies for this problem are not forthcoming. This lacuna repeated when the document stresses the need for increased participation of women in trade union activities fails to suggest steps to achieve it.

The national perspective plan women would, in the ultimate analysis, have done better had it drafted with better representation of the grassroot level and more recommendations on how to do what "should" be done.

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More than a welfare approach

“WE, as women, don't want the welfare approach. We're not asking for handouts,” explained a passionately articulate member, of the very latest, very select National Committee on Women which held its first meeting at the Prime Minister's office on May 17.

This was no breakfast meeting for an informal exchange of views. So there were no idli-dosas for the 29 women gathered from different corners of the country to discuss the Draft National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000 A.D.).

Members of the constituted group included Aruna Asaf Ali, Margaret Alva, Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, Shiela Kaul, Nandita Haksar, Mrinal Pande, Sarojini Vardappan, Amarjeet Kaur, Geeta Mukherjee, Jayanti Natarajan, Jaya Arunachalam, Sushmeeta Srivastava, Sheela Barse, Ela Bhatt and Aparna Sen, among others.

“In fact it was a very hungry meeting,” said Dr Najma Heptullah, Rajya Sabha MP. Lunch had to be skipped by all as the session stretched over three hours into the heat of the Delhi afternoon. Though the meeting started forty minutes later than scheduled, giving rise to some concern among the waiting women that they were not being taken seriously, it turned out to be a marathon session. And it was 3.30 before the assembled lawyers, activists, leftists, scientists and politicians could conclude their deliberations.

The content of the meeting though general was serious. Organised under the aegis of Women and Child Development Minister Margaret Alva, the group of 29 had ample opportunity to put forward their views and concerns to the Prime Minister.

Contentious issues and the inevitable controversies over sati, the Muslim Women's Act and the Indecent Representation of Women Act

The National Committee on Women comprising 29 eminent women, had its first meeting with the Prime Minister on May 17. A report by RUKMANI ANANDANI

time,” said one participant. “I regret that we were not practical enough to co-ordinate and hold at least one meeting beforehand so that we could put forward more specific recommendations, on the spot.”

The draft Plan itself, prepared after months of compilation by Mrs Margaret Alva's department in the Human Resources Ministry is generally considered to be a bold and fairly progressive document.

For instance, it sparked off some heated discussion since it states that maternity benefit of twelve weeks paid leave under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, be provided by the government irrespective of the marital status of the woman worker.

Some of those present, including Dr Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, Minister of State for Welfare, were opposed to the idea of allowing maternity benefits to unwed mothers with children. It was suggested that in India this sort of thing was not acceptable. “But I don't think the Prime Minister was entirely in agreement with this kind of objection,” stated another member of the group of 29.

There was further disagreement over reservations for women. The draft Perspective Plan in fact envisages reservations of the order of 30 per cent in various areas like employment in the Government's rural employment works, IRDP beneficiaries, employment exchanges, professional institutes of study, seats in all Panchayat bodies, and

ter on the impact of science and technology on women. Neither in terms of job displacement or fresh job opportunities nor in terms of spin-off benefits to women from scientific components in reducing the drudgery of their daily work both outside and within the home.

Sushmeeta Srivastava, chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board, suggested that the rules for registering and running mahila mandals at the very grassroots level required simplification. This would encourage women for they would not have to tangle with chartered accountants for only very simple accounting would be required.

Social worker Mrs Ela Bhatt pleaded for the concept of asset building in the names of women. Economic upliftment and independence can only be rooted in title to, and control of, an asset, any asset, that is productive of income will do. This productive asset the woman must be able to call her own and against it she should be entitled to raise a loan whether it be land pattas, tree pattas, worksheds, equipment, cattle, savings accounts or even vending licences with identity cards.

Secondly, she wanted to stress the extreme vulnerability of women particularly in the rural areas whenever they come face to face with the police. “There is too much rape and exploitation of innocent women in their homes and police stations. I said simply this: that the police should not touch women at all,” recalled Mrs Bhatt.

field made by the draft Plan certainly make for interesting reading:

- * The plan recommends that there should be a Uniform Civil Code for all citizens by the years 2000 A.D.

- * All marriages should be registered. And dowry demand should be made a ground for divorce.

- * Steps to ensure the legal validity of a dying declaration in cases of suspected murder of a woman are needed.

- * Legal measures to deter husbands and in-laws from falsely certifying a woman as a lunatic and placing her in an asylum should be initiated.

Laws should ensure women's rights to motherhood and maternity benefits irrespective of their marital status.

- * Parents should be prevented from denying daughters their rightful share of property by making wills disinheriting daughters illegally.

- * Ration cards should be issued in the name of women.

- * Rules should be amended for women, especially single women, to open bank accounts/get loans without having to declare either husband or father's name.

- * Formula for calculating the minimum amount of maintenance (to a divorced woman) should be laid down on the basis of basic needs and the upper limit removed.

- * The right of the wife to the matrimonial home must be guaranteed.

But finally, was it not ironic that supra-committee of women, for women and by women should have men in its two topmost positions of chairman (Rajiv Gandhi) and vice-chairman (P. V. Narasimha Rao)?

“No, not at all, for men should be involved in the development process,” said Mrs Heptullah. “In fact this committee derives its importance from Minister's chairmanship.”

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The content of the meeting though general was serious. Organised under the aegis of Women and Child Development Minister Margaret Alva, the group of 29 had ample opportunity to put forward their views and concerns to the Prime Minister.

Contentious issues and the inevitable controversies over sati, the Muslim Women's Act and the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act were not raised, for the agenda was simple. The group was there to pool ideas and contributions for inclusion in the draft of the National Perspective Plan. This amended draft would then be circulated among the state governments upon whom a large chunk of responsibility for ultimate implementation rests.

But more homework and a closer reading of the draft document beforehand which was circulated ten days before the May 17 meeting would probably have added sharper focus to the discussion. "Strategically, we could have gained more since the PM gave us so much

idea of allowing maternity benefits to unwed mothers with children. It was suggested that in India this sort of thing was not acceptable. "But I don't think the Prime Minister was entirely in agreement with this kind of objection," stated another member of the group of 29.

There was further disagreement over reservations for women. The draft Perspective Plan in fact envisages reservations of the order of 30 per cent in various areas like employment in the Government's rural employment works, IRDP beneficiaries, employment exchanges, professional institutes of study, seats in all Panchayat bodies, and political parties.

Areas requiring further definition and inclusion in the draft Perspective Plan were pointed out by a number of those present ranging across their fields of expertise. Activist Sheela Barse indicated concern that there was no section in the draft dealing exclusively with the female child. It is she who goes on to become a statistic in illiteracy, in infant mortality, in malnutrition, in school dropout figures, in mortality at childbirth, and in unemployment.

Scientist Archana Sharma from Calcutta pointed out that there was no chap-

do. This productive asset the woman must be able to call her own and against it she should be entitled to raise a loan whether it be land patras, tree patras, workshops, equipment, cattle, savings accounts or even vending licences with identity cards.

Secondly, she wanted to stress the extreme vulnerability of women particularly in the rural areas whenever they come face to face with the police. "There is too much rape and exploitation of innocent women in their homes and police stations. I said simply this: that the police should not touch women at all," recalled Mrs Bhatt. "But these things are never so simple. It is not enough to hold seminars where all those high police officials are very polite and sympathetic for the reality on the ground for these poor, simple women is absolutely terrifying and pitiful."

There appeared to be general agreement that if the government is really serious about all these committees and recommendations then somewhere they must make a declaration as to police accountability and sensitisation through training, or disincentives, or punishment or whatever.

The recommendations in the legal

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"No, not at all, for men should be involved in the development process," said Mrs Heptullah. "In fact this committee derives its importance from the Prime Minister's chairmanship."

Said another member of the group of 29: "It is more or less inevitable that all the powerful national bodies be headed by the politicians who count, and they happen to be men. We had a woman Prime Minister for sixteen years and now it happens to be a man. Since this committee is headed by the PM the buck from him are valuable for they can later be quoted back to him."

And what was the Prime Minister's contribution to this long first session of the National Committee on Women? "Well, I would say that he was a keen listener."

Cosmetics for women

WOMEN'S GROUPS all over the country are up in arms at the cavalier manner in which the National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000 AD) is being hustled through by the government. They fear that it will be brought before parliament in the forthcoming monsoon session and become policy without the promised national debate on it. Indeed, leading women's organisations see in the government's haste its anxiety not to permit any impediment in what could prove to be a useful election appeal to fifty per cent of the voting public.

Those who have seen the plan document point out that it neither has a perspective nor is it a plan. It only suggests cosmetic changes and worse, it does not even bother to make resource allocations for the implementation of the plan. The proposal to reserve seats for women in all elective bodies has legislative implications which have not been worked out and despite the fact that it stresses a holistic approach, it separates welfare from development.

On June 26, six women's organisations — All India Democratic Women's Association, All India Coordination Committee of Women Workers, Centre for Women's Development Studies, Mahila Dakshita Samiti, National Federation of Indian Women and YWCA of India — issued a statement, registering their joint protest. The statement said, "The document (i.e., the plan) which most of us have not seen, has been prepared without any consultation with or participation by the women's movement, which has been raising issues affecting women in the process of national development."

It pointed out that a plan that could affect all policies for women's development and participation for years to come should not be finalised without wider dissemination and a nation-wide debate involving organisations which have a popular base among women of different classes or have specialised in women's development concerns through study, action and networking.

Perhaps under pressure from these women's groups, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) organised a two day seminar on June 29 and 30. Those who were invited included the chairpersons of all the state social advisory welfare boards and some selected individuals and representatives of voluntary organisations. Indeed, at least two national women's organisations had to ask the CSWB why they had not been invited to attend. Even more curious, the seminar's discussions were not made public though Doordarshan on its

SPOTLIGHT

Women groups all over the country are up in arms against the National Perspective Plan for Women which will be presented to Parliament during the monsoon session, reports Smita Gupta



Margaret Alva: planning without consultation

nightly news bulletin did announce that the seminar had recommended the need for a national debate.

The general recommendations of this seminar were: that the plan deserved an in-depth study of all three parts of the document (so far only the first has been made public) and a nation-wide debate and consultation with grassroots organisations and other agencies before it becomes a government policy. That this document was a statement of intent rather than a perspective plan was clear because the word "plan" implied resource allocation and the document nowhere mentioned any such provisions.

Even though the total outlay on the women specific schemes in the seventh plan is only 2.4 per cent, Minister of State for Women's Development Margaret Alva, who headed the core group which drafted the plan, says in her preface to the document: "This plan does not seek more investments or more resources. It seeks to give a new thrust and responsiveness to developmental programmes at all levels and recommends certain special measures for women as transitory support to ensure that they catch up with the mainstream by 2000 AD."

The seminar also felt that priority in planning be given to landless women labourers as they form a vast majority of our total deprived population.

On July 4 and 5, the state min-

isters of social welfare met in Delhi to discuss the plan and despite the fact that there were differences of opinion the government chose to issue a statement saying that it had been unanimously endorsed.

Asks a leading women's activist and pioneer in women's development studies, "Why this repeated attempt at suppressing dissent? Moreover, is the future of women such a peripheral issue that it can be settled by social welfare ministries? Should it not, like other plans, go before the National Development Council (a body consisting of state chief ministers and headed by the prime minister)?"

At the two day seminar (June 29 and 30), what was repeatedly stressed was that if the government was serious about empowering women, there was need for giving power to women at the lowest levels and that programmes should be generated from below.

While agreeing that reservation of seats for women in all local bodies upto the district level is imperative, it feels that the demand for similar reservation in parliament is unnecessary. On the question of programmes, while the plan document feels that there are a sufficient number of programmes at both the central and state levels, and all that is required is technical input for greater effectiveness, it also pointed out that the pro-

grammes should be need-based and location specific and that the role of the government should be to monitor, facilitate and finance and not to formulate programmes which should be done at the grassroots.

The seminar added that the performance of women's development corporations which have already been set up in six states should be evaluated before more are set up in other states to ensure that corrective measures are taken to make them more effective.

And finally the seminar pointed out that the dichotomy between welfare and development should not be so rigidly laid down as on page 61 of the plan document. "In a holistic approach as spelt out in this plan document, welfare and development programmes should go hand in hand. The CSWB should continue to be a nodal agency to coordinate the activities of the voluntary sector and the government. It should be further strengthened, rather than confirmed to welfare and supportive services as recommended in the plan document."

On June 22, in a detailed article in a national daily, Nandita Haksar, a civil rights activist and lawyer, who is also a member of the National Committee on Women, headed by the prime minister, and which had also urged a national debate on the plan, raised some political questions. She pointed out that the plan "does not recognise that Indian society is based on certain inequalities which are perpetuated by the kind of political system we have. Therefore, welfare or development schemes, training programmes or anti-poverty projects will not solve the problem..."

Haksar adds that though the plan lays emphasis on rural development and recognises that there is a need to look at women as "producers and participants, not as clients of welfare," it does not anywhere mention that women are being marginalised or thrown out of employment because of the processes inherent in the economic structure.

In its present form, the plan, because of no resource allocation to enforce it and the lack of clearly spelt out implementation strategies, may remain on paper even if it becomes a policy.

In the past too, a national plan for women was formulated after the committee on the status of women's report, but it was nowhere in evidence when the time came to formulate the sixth Five Year Plan.

Surely fifty per cent of the population, a majority of whom bear the twin burdens of poverty and gender, deserve more concern?