

WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT IN UTTARAKHAND

Dr. Rekha Trivedi*

Purpose of this paper is to convince those researchers interested in rural women and in rural development to widen the scope of their concern, to investigate the role women currently have and should have in the future, in the process of development taking place in Uttarakhand.

Women must be integrated into the process of development not only because justice demands that it be done, but also because excluding women means under-utilising a high potential resource and this can eventually have adverse effects on the economic growth rate.

It is necessary to convince planners and administrators that the potential of women is at the moment is largely untapped by development projects.

Women's role in development is obviously not a simple one it relates to a complete range of socio-economic activities. Women are not only users of basic services, bearers and socializers of children and keepers of home; they also represent a productive potential which is not being tapped.

Women form half the population and the development of this State, cannot be realized if half of the people lag behind. Not only does the failure development but it invariably hinders the process itself. Individual development programme which do not take into account the cooperation and participation of women may be slowed down and made less effective then they could have been had these aspects been considered.

Development planning programmes in agriculture, education, health and nutrition will be most directly affected by ignoring women in planning process and in the long run and in varying degrees, most programmes dealing with commerce, finance and industry will also be affected.

Part of the problem in the state has been the ignorance at the highest level of government and Administration of the participation of women in economy. Hence there is a need for studies of economic position of rural women in Uttarakhand in order that development strategies may be devised and implemented which can bring about equality between gender and improve the quality of rural and urban life.

The changes in economic environment that can best aid women are those that facilitate their unmediated access. Women of the hills need better access to human capital, education, skill training to technology and raw materials and to social organization... membership in cooperatives, users groups and village government.

* Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, D.A.V. (P.G.) College, Dehradun

The most powerful government intervention would be policies to alter the incentives and dis-incentives to families permitting women to sell their labor or take up opportunities for self employment.

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Agriculture accounts for 37% of India's GNP and employs over 4/5ths of all economically active women. The past two decades have seen a dramatic increase in women's share of agricultural employment. This is more true in case of Uttarakhand, where introduction of new agricultural technologies which permit greater use of female labour and to the movement of men to non-farm employment.

The primary recommendations for integrating Uttarakhand women more effectively into rural economy include provision of direct access to institutional credits and membership of producer co-operatives.

Another proposal is to focus these interventions in key sub-sectors such as poultry farming, horticulture, floriculture, sheep rearing, bee keeping, which already employ large number of women and have significant potential for expansion in this region.

Role of women is greater in this region with harsh topography and climate. So there should be a shift from traditional agricultural crops to crops which are most suited to this area and which will yield more. Tea plantation should be encouraged and that also through cooperatives. More emphasis should be given on growing pulses, beans, malta etc. this will further boost small industries like food canning centres, which should be situated nearby the fruit growing areas.

FORESTRY

Women are the chief fuel collectors and one important fuel source is forest. But women also use forests as wage workers, one as self employed suppliers of wood and non-timber products.... Bamboos, oil seeds, species and nuts. This fact is not sufficiently understood at the policy making level. No serious attempt has been made to expand opportunities for female employment in the forestry sector. Problems facing women are acute because recent deforestation has made it harder than ever to gather forest products.

There is a great need to modify general forestry policy. Broadly speaking, policies that would vest responsibility and control for forest resources with local communities that would help women. Women have an essential role to play in plantation in planning and choosing species and in planting and taking care. Here I could mention the need to grow medicinal and herbal plants in Uttarakhand.

INSTITUTIONAL FINANCES

Experiences show that access to credit is the key to almost every form of productive self-employment for women. There should be a fundamental change in the banking system and most important the establishment of a special women Credit Fund. Such a bank for women would enable them to create their own capital and savings and create assets like buffalo, sheep etc and finally improve their living standards. Full employment can only be had if there is work security. Life security and work security are important factors in social and economic development. The women should be both users and owners of this bank.

EDUCATION

Literacy offers the possibility of almost unlimited exposure to new information and new way of thinking. It leads to better hygiene, improved nutrition practices and greater effectiveness in caring for family health and seeking timely medical help. This results in better health status for women, improved maternal competence and lower infant mortality.

Despite marked progress in literacy rate in Uttaranchal, female illiteracy compared to male is high. It is concentrated in the remote hilly regions. There is an urgent need to create child care facilities, perhaps linked to local Anganwadis. These facilities would relieve girls of their child care roles during school hours. Existing incentive schemes, free text books, uniforms, scholarships, need to be more carefully targeted preferably to areas where the primary enrolment ratio for girls is low. Fresh efforts must be made to reach the huge number of adult female illiterates because without education, no development is possible.

FORMATION OF GROUP STRUCTURES OR COOPERATIVES AT LOCAL LEVEL

A promising strategy for new initiatives is the organization of women into groups and cooperatives. Groups formation is particularly powerful. It provides women a legitimate forum beyond the private domestic sphere and a more audible voice in demanding services and inputs. Membership in a group can initially substitute for the individual women's lack of bureaucratic know-how and her capacity to interest effectively with public systems and with structures that increasingly attempt to re-distribute economic opportunity.

PANCHAYATIRAJ

Positive discrimination is shown in favour of women by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment. It gives 1/3rd representation to women in institutions

of local self governance. This is visualized both as an opportunity and as a challenge to women in the exercise of political power. This is seen as a significant step in making political system more accountable to women's issue. In Uttarakhand, this system will work very successfully and in future would play a constructive role in the development of local regions through women's participation.

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