Women Entrepreneurship Improving The Quality of Life

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PRINCIPLE CENTRED DEVELOPMENT:  
A NEW PARADIGM HABITAT

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The year 2000 will see half the people of the world living in cities. Urbanisation of society is part of the development process with cities generating 60% of the GNP. However, government support in services to growing cities has not increased proportionately. Urban habitats are therefore beginning to face a serious global environmental and development crisis.

The major cause of the continued deterioration of the world’s environment is the unsuitable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialised countries. Excessive demands together with the insensitive, wasteful life styles of the richer segments of humanity place an immense strain on the environment, the resources being exploited and degraded with impunity. On the other end, poor societies are unable to meet health care, shelter and educational needs – thus aggravating poverty and often perpetrating it.

While sustainable consumption patterns are needed, galloping population together with unsustainable consumption habits are putting an enormous pressure of stress on the earth's resources. Population growth must necessarily be dealt with by development strategies which safeguard the health of the system by promoting environment friendly technologies and access to resources on an equitable basis. The primary goals of sustainable development must include appropriate poverty alleviation measures which provide opportunities for obtaining secure livelihoods, sound health and a quality of life which meets basic needs. Further these measures have to focus more on women who are comparatively more vulnerable and exploited.

Urbanisation is as old as civilisation. The form and structure of urban habitats reveal the manner in which the challenges posed by the growth demands of society were responded to by the city at each stage. These changes while serving the political and economic interests of the privileged elite and politically powerful groups, paid scant attention to the needs of the poor and marginalised segments of the population.

The experience of development planning has clearly indicated that, to achieve growth with equity, key prerequisites require to be established first: planning demands a positive attitude which reflects the human face of development; regulatory process should be such as to provide alternatives for growth, rather than to prevent or skew growth directions and benefits.

Most people derive their security from their membership in a group – a family, a community, an organisation, a racial or ethnic group – that can provide a cultural identity and a reassuring set of values through homogenous and mutually reinforcing interaction. There is a need to shift policies which value the security of technologies to those which value the security of human society with an inherent concern for living life with dignity and peace. This concept which
appears simplistic is indeed difficult to actualise — its implementation through political will backed by operational support would revolutionise life in the 21st century. Principle leadership recognises that the wellbeing and peace of the global community per se would be more easily achieved through timely and proactive containment rather than late and reactive interventions.

While poor people have less health security, the situation of women is particularly difficult — the most serious hazards being childbirth, access to safe and affordable family planning and basic support at home during pregnancy and delivery. A miracle of life often turns into a nightmare of death just because a society cannot spare the loose change to provide a birth attendant at the time of greatest vulnerability and anxiety in a woman’s life.

Personal insecurity shadows women from conception to the grave — in the household they are the last to eat, at school the last to be educated, at work the last to be hired and first to be fired and from childhood to adulthood the butt of exploitation just because they are women.

FAMILY AS AN ENVIRONMENT

The family can be seen as an environment made up of people and their immediate physical surroundings. Individuals who are members of a family interact on a daily basis. A family is a structure that is a set of relationships and a space that creates that environment within which the social, psychological, physical and economic needs of individuals are constantly interacting. The totality of solutions to everyday life problems determine the quality of life.

The family is an environment situated within the larger sphere of society and the two environments interact constantly affecting one another. There is a need to be aware of, and sensitive to, and to be in touch with the realities of social functioning around the world as they do, in no small measure, impact on the life styles of people seemingly distant and diverse from them.

FAMILY AS PART OF THE ECOSYSTEM

Individuals who make up the environment must constantly adapt and change. By seeing themselves as a part of the global ecosystem, families can learn to be responsible to their environment, understanding that a reverence for life is dependent upon a concomitant reverence for its condition.

An ecological approach that places the emphasis on reviewing the family and the environment holistically allows one to note the interdependence between people, families to one another and to other social systems, especially the interdependence of families to the realities of the natural environment.

DEPENDENCE, INTERDEPENDENCE

In the context of development, and the passage of time, the global family can transit from dependent components to independent entities and family to a interdependent, synergetic whole. The global synergy is the harmony between the clock and the compass — the clock
representing the management and utilisation of time and the compass representing the direction or how we lead our lives. This development paradigm which celebrates human effectiveness is governed by principles or natural laws in the human dimension. Principles are guidelines for human conduct that are proven to have enduring, permanent value.

Absolute poverty, rapid population growth and environmental degradation are wreaking havoc throughout much of the developing world today. All these problems have been addressed separately when they have been addressed at all — with limited resources, and not surprisingly, limited impact. In fact, they have become so interrelated, so mutually reinforcing that approaching these problems separately risks underestimating the severity of the crisis they represent taken together.

THE SOUTH AND ITS TASKS

In this last decade of the century the world is in a process of rapid transition. Political alignments, economic systems, and social values are being transformed. Conventional notions are less and less applicable to the changing international environment. These momentous changes present opportunities from which the South should seek to benefit. Acceleration of science and technological advance are at the base of these changes. These affects societies, economies and international relations at a fundamental level. Technology advancement at an unprecedented rate towards the globalisation of economies has given a strong impetus to trends being induced by such institutional changes as deregulation and privatisation undertaken by the leading countries of the North.

The South covers the larger part of the earth's surface. Its people are the vast majority of the world's inhabitants. But they have a very much smaller proportion of the world income. The challenge to the South is to reaffirm in words and in action, that the purpose of development is the promotion of the wellbeing of its people, with economic growth directed at their needs and fulfilling their aspirations.

Most developing countries will need to expand their economies at a fairly rapid rate to satisfy the legitimate requirements and desires of its people. The process of growth will entail a significant increase in the use of natural resources to which the international community will have to adjust if the South is to attain its development goals without harming global ecological stability.

A critical factor is how the South itself confronts the challenge in its choice of development patterns and life styles. Neither the demand side nor the supply side of these patterns can simply be a replica of the past or a blind copy of existing models of advanced industrial societies.

The challenge of removing extreme poverty can become a reality only if a commitment is made to meet basic human needs through people centred strategies for development. Economic growth and the meeting of basic needs have to go together.

The South's development strategy must aim at satisfying basic human needs and at closing the distance between the North and the South in food, education, health, safe drinking water and a healthy and secure environment. Science and technology can be powerful instruments for regenerating economies. In more populous countries, dispersed, broad based and regionally balanced
development is particularly important to avoid the unplanned and unregulated growth of massive urban agglomerations which become increasingly chaotic and ungovernable.

A HUMAN CENTRED STRATEGY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT

A human centred strategy or primary environmental care is an integrated community based approach aimed at meeting basic needs through the empowerment of people and protection and optimal use of the national resources on which people's livelihood depends. Priority should be accorded to meeting basic human needs in an environmentally sustainable manner and to the empowerment of communities by sensitising the targeted communities to environmental issues in the process.

Strategies and actions must be critically judged by the impact they have on people at the community and the household levels. This would be for example, the impact on sectors such as child health and development, water and sanitation, food security, education, employment, household energies and income generation. These sectors form synergistic parts of an integrated whole, the whole in this case being the wellbeing of the community.

Community participation will be vital to ensure that the assessment of problems, formulation of strategies, implementation, monitoring and evaluation all take into account the environment at the local level. Cost of effective social mobilisation, and adaptation to local cultures and priorities are also essential. Efforts are only sustainable when the benefits are tangible at the community level. In order to sustain community level change, however, national level policies must form a favourable network.

The kind of local level human-focused environmental strategy outlined here should take place simultaneously with the actions on the broader issues such as debt, structural adjustment, and environmental change. Only then can we hope to make an impact on poverty and environmental degradation.

WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A new development paradigm in the current context of the environmental crisis and the blatant failure of the old development paradigm to meet the needs of women and the poor, is required. Far from eradicating poverty, the growth model of development has impoverished many women and local communities in both rural and urban sectors.

Sustainable development is sustainability for whom? Sustainability for what? Sustainable development should not be sustained profits for private and public sector interests at the expense of women, the poor and indigenous communities. Sustainable development is the sustained livelihood of people embedded in an environment able to renew itself.

A new development paradigm must be formulated in recognition that sustainable modes of living in a self-renewing environment, proven viable, are already being practised by communities in rural and urban settlements and that women's indigenous knowledge from these communities is incorporated in decision making and development planning.
Women have considerable knowledge and experience in managing and conserving natural resources. However, the role of women in achieving sustainable development has been limited by barriers such as discrimination, lack of access to education, land and equal employment.

**HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HDI)**

A Human Development Index is needed because national progress tends to be measured by the GNP alone. This more comprehensive socio-economic measure has three basic components of longevity, knowledge and standard of living. One of the most important differences within the overall HDI score for any country is between men and women. Men generally fare better than women on almost every socio-economic indicator. For example, the average sex ratio in India is 927 per 1000 men, but within developing countries, several states e.g., the most populous state U.P. has only 882 women per 1000 men. The discrimination is board-based, it occurs not only in employment, but also in education, nutritional support and health care. Illiteracy is always higher for women. Neglect of women's health and nutrition is so serious in some countries that it even alters women's natural biological tendency to live longer than men. Considering their early deaths as well as those from infanticide, some studies estimate that up to 100 million women are "missing". The struggle for women's development has to be conducted by women not in opposition to men but as part of the social development of the entire population.

Gender inequality is both a development problem and an obstacle to progress in all developmental programmes. The most basic concept of development is that of overcoming poverty. Women are a majority of the poor. A woman faces pervasive gender discrimination in access to productive resources, making her self-reliance difficult. If equality between man and woman's development is intrinsic to the definition of women development, the necessary corollary to it is women's empowerment, as a means to overcome the obstacles to women's equality in patriarchal societies.

In the analysis of the socio-economic situation of women relative to men, issues of women development assume significance when there are gender gaps at each of the interrelated levels of equality. These levels of equality are:

**WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK**

The gender gap in the level of equality, relating to welfare happens when women are seen as passive recipients of welfare benefits, not as individuals capable of changing their lives. Women improvement cannot take place only at the welfare level.

Women's lower levels of productivity arise from their restricted access to the resources for development and production availability. The gender gap here refers to lower utilisation of opportunities and resources. Overcoming gender gaps will mean that women have equality of access and empowerment means that women are made aware of the differential situation and assisted to take action for gaining access to means and opportunities.

Often the lack of access to resource is a result of systems of gender discrimination when obstacles to access are a result of systemic discrimination, which can be addressed only through the empowerment process of conscientisation.
The gender gap in women's participation is the most visible and obvious phenomenon. Participation in a development process would mean women being represented in the process of need assessment, problem identification, project planning, management, implementation, and evaluation. Equality in participation at a community level means involving women in the same proportion of decision making as their proportion in the community at large. This is not easily possible in a patriarchal society. Increased mobilisation of women will be needed to push for increased representation.

At the level of control the gender gap is manifested as the unequal power relations between women and men. Equality of control means a balance of power between women and men so that neither is in a position of dominance. The process of empowerment is self-propelling and self-reinforcing. Success at one level provides a better basis for success at other levels.

THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION — ITS IMPACT ON THE EMPOWERMENT FRAMEWORK

The world — especially the Asian region — is experiencing a veritable revolution in the field of information and data dissemination through the exploitation of modern technology. The combination of media with high state of art technology has put in place unprecedented and powerful means of spreading the widest possible range of information to the widest possible mass of people transcending linguistic, cultural and national borders. Clearly there is an urgency to take heed of the unlimited possibilities offered by the current electronics communication technology for all those with a serious agenda in information dissemination and development.

Information is now a crucial determinant of the pace of social and economic change. Very often, the manner in which data are collected, classified and organised has far reaching implications for the use that is made of these data.

The growing consumerist movement has been fed and promoted through the same revolution of information and communication. With short sighted visions and privatised goals, unchecked communication methods and modes have contributed greatly to the weakening of the social fabric. It has generated conflicts in human security by attempting to interpret traditional value systems and often reinforcing harmful attitudes and practices.

Many people do not understand the close ties between human activities and the environment due to inaccurate or insufficient information. There is a need to increase people's sensitivity to an involvement in finding solutions for environment and development problems. Education can give people the environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skill and behaviour needed for sustainable development.

There is already a wealth of information that could be used for the management of sustainable development but many people have trouble in finding the information they need, when they need it. In the developing world, the gap in the availability, quality and accessibility of data has been increasing. We need to use environmental, demographic, social and developmental information to identify indicators that show us if we are moving towards the creation of a more sustainable world.
The existing co-operation among the media of developing countries should be greatly intensified and diversified and the necessary infrastructural links improved. Action on these lines would greatly contribute to the forging of horizontal links with the South for reducing dependence on the North based global information services and to diversify avenues of information in developing countries.

What is assumed in this paper could not be more sincerely articulated than in the seven major constraints articulated by the former Executive Director of UNICEF, the late Mr. James Grant who provocatively called these "The Seven Sins of unplanned Development":

1. Development without infrastructure,
2. Development without participation,
3. Development without women,
4. Development without environment,
5. Development without the poor,
6. Development without the do-able,
7. Development without mobilisation.

In the words of Elizabeth Stanton: "The prolonged slavery of women is the darkest page in human history"; further the words of the great Indian poet philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore who, while speaking on freedom in a different context, articulated that which could well apply to the freeing of women from stifling gender dominance. The Master gave a challenging call by his words "Arise Awake and stop not till the Goal is achieved", So be it.

REFERENCES:


