

women : a development strategy for the eighties

- talk
 - in "Roundtable about women : a development strategy for the eighties"
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MARIA DE LOURDES PINTASILGO

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ROUNDTABLE

WOMEN: A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE EIGHTIES

Provisional Statement

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A Roundtable on Women: A Development Strategy for the Eighties was convened by the Secretariat of the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women on 13-14 June, 1980, at UN Headquarters, New York. The Roundtable was attended by fourteen eminent persons from all over the world. This document is the Provisional Statement of the Roundtable. The panel of discussants included:

Her Excellency Mrs. Rosa Luz Alegria
Vice Minister for Evaluation, Mexico

Mr. Samir Amin
Director, African Institute for Development and Planning
Senegal

Mr. Kenneth Dadzie
Director General for Development and International
Economic Cooperation
United Nations, NY

Mr. Raj Krishna
Economist, Delhi School of Economics
India

Sir Arthur Lewis
Nobel Peace Prize winner
Princeton University

Ms. Lily Monze
Provincial Political Secretary, Zambia

His Excellency Mr. Niaz A. Naik
Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN

Ms. Lise Østergaard
Minister of Culture, Denmark

Her Excellency Mrs. Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo
Ambassador of Portugal to UNESCO and former Prime Minister

Mr. Jean Ripert
Under-Secretary-General, Dept. International Economic
and Social Affairs, New York

Mr. Paul Streeten
Economist, World Bank
Washington, DC

PREAMBLE

1. The search for appropriate development strategies in the world at large and within the United Nations is paralleled by women's growing activism both nationally and internationally. Women are questioning the basis of the interpretation of 'development' which relates narrowly to material growth. They are also questioning the economic and political systems which support this limited objective. The goal of development must be the fulfillment of human aspirations, both material and spiritual. The significance of the women's movement is the affirmation, by its very existence, of the attainability of this goal.

2. Women's position is determined, and transformed, by dynamic societal processes - economic, political and social - and is not a circumstance arising from an immutable 'natural' order. Development strategies to date have not recognized these transformations adequately, and this has resulted in an unequal impact of development on sections of the population, by sex, race and class. However, imbalances of gender systems and their relation to the international economic and social order have not been addressed globally as yet.

3. The strategies of development policies and modernization attempts, at the national and at the international levels, appear to have internalized stereotypes of women. Women's work is a paradigm of the economic interdependency between North and South, but is never seen as such. In the Strategy for the Second Development Decade, economic development evolved according to a logic of its own, with barely a reference to women.

4. A development strategy which takes into account the increasing impact of women's international activism must re-examine the goals and perspectives of development. Women's contribution to development is significant on an international as well as national scale, and their work is already integrated into a global social and economic order. Women's issues are related not only to "social development" but to a total development which would achieve the fulfillment of human needs.

5. A review of the causes of women's unequal participation in development suggests that this has evolved in a historical process which is shaped by economic, social and political influences, and that women's exclusive association with the domestic sector is at the crux of women's unequal status and its perpetuation.

6. Regardless of their statistical invisibility women are, in fact, participating in all facets of productive life, but subordinately. Thus there is an inadequate acknowledgement of women's contribution to society.

7. The dominant model of development perpetuates the inequalities between groups. The urgent need is an international development strategy springing from the two-fold realities - on the one hand, of women's presently worsening situation, and on the other, the need to make visible what is now women's invisible contribution. Changes are needed in the very concepts and values which underlie strategies for development, as well as in the social and economic institutes through which they are implemented at the household, community, national and international levels.

8. Initiatives in development should be framed in the context of both economic and social systems and political ideologies. This is because



economic organization itself is not responsible for women's subordinate position in development but contains within it ideologies with sexual biases.

9. The importance of women's participation in any development strategy does not flow from a concern only of "integrating" them into an existing development strategy but from the objective of progressing towards a peaceful international order, through the joint endeavours of men and women.

10. Indicators to evaluate women's integration in development must then be drawn from all the strands which shape our society's social, cultural, political as well as economic factors. These should not rely only on quantitative measurements or technocratic economic indices but also on the emergence of a new set of values.

II. Women in the Existing Development Order

The following statements of women's participation are based on findings of United Nations agencies and the global analysis prepared for the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women.

1. Women's share in land, employment, capital, credit, education opportunities, public goods and services and power is disproportionately low:

- While women represent more than 50% of the world population and one-third of the official labour force, they perform nearly two thirds of all working hours and receive only one tenth of the world income and own less than one percent of the world property.
- On a worldwide average women earn only 40 to 60% of the income of men. The labour market is non-neutral against them in many ways: even if they have the same skills as prime males, they are hired less and paid less than prime males; they do not have access to equal skills; they are confined to low-paid, dead-end, long-hour occupations either in agriculture or in the informal sector.

- Much of the work women perform is non-paid and hence does not show up in market and employment surveys. But this does not signify a low rate of economic and productive activity. The contribution of domestic work to the GNP in the United States is estimated to be at least 40% and is probably much more in less monetized economies.
- In the developing countries, most of the production, processing, storage and preparation of food is carried out by women, as well as the marketing of surpluses. Such work can account for up to 50% of the social product. Many of the tasks involved are also performed by children, especially girls. However, lack of access to appropriate technical information and resources has limited their efficiency and lowered their productivity.
- The increasing number of female-headed households is one of the most important and yet the least-recognized trends in development, both in industrial countries and in the Third World. It is estimated that, globally, one household out of three is headed, de facto by a woman, and international data show a significant linkage between female family headship and poverty.
- Nearly two people out of every three illiterates in the world today are women. And in all regions, female illiteracy is 3 to 4 times higher in rural than in urban areas. Problems of women's access to opportunities in employment, education and politics are closely associated with illiteracy. Even so, sex-stereotyping in textbooks and schools perpetuates traditional biases which are obstacles to equal access for girls.

- Maternal mortality is the leading cause of the low life expectancy among women in developing countries. This is due to diseases with anaemia as an underlying cause, affecting up to two thirds of all pregnant women in developing countries. Early childbearing and excessive births contribute to health risks of women.
- Political rights have been won in most countries, but women's effectiveness in influencing political decisions remains extremely limited in most countries. Among the causal factors are traditional attitudes which are prejudicial to a woman holding office, double burden of women in the house and at work, leaving her little time for participation in politics.

This review indicates that women are not marginalized but rather totally integrated into the economy as the oppressed, as the subordinate. This is certainly not part of a "natural" order, but is related to an international, historical process - one which has economic and ideological patterns.

2. The following illustrations show that women's work in the production and unpaid domestic sectors is profoundly affected by shifts in the international economic formation. Furthermore, their vulnerability as workers is carried over into the areas of human growth such as health, education, and political participation, thereby initiating a vicious circle of exploitation:

(i) The nature of women's participation in agriculture is related to the agrarian structure and modes of production. Specifically, women's work is dependent on variables such as land, population density, land tenure pattern, opportunities for wage employment in agriculture and in non-agricultural operations. Shifts in these variables cause corresponding shifts in women's



work in agriculture. For example, programmes of land redistribution often cause women to be denied access to land. Similarly, changes in land tenure patterns from communal ownership to private ownership (evidenced under colonialism) leads to the alienation of women from land, and the disproportionate assumption of titleship rights by men.

(ii) The commercialisation of agriculture, based on the stimuli of national and international markets, is accompanied by changes in the relations of production, most often leading to the proletarianisation of agricultural workers. In conditions of a high density of population on land, the male labourers might obtain wage employment on the commercial farms, but women appear to be nudged out of wage labour, and are simultaneously denied the opportunity of subsistence agriculture due to the acquisition of the subsistence farmers' lands by the agricultural entrepreneur. This displacement leads to an increased dependency on the wage earned by the male worker.

In other cases where small plots of land are retained by peasant households, the male's attachment to commercial farming causes an increase in the women's overall work load, and results in a redeployment of her time from the unpaid domestic sector to the production sector, or to a shift in less time-intensive subsistence cropping.

Technological changes introduced under commercialisation of agriculture influence women's direct participation in agriculture as family farm workers and as reproducers of units of labour in the family, as experienced in Asia.

(iii) Shifts induced in the labour markets of the world through changes in the pattern of industrialisation include major changes in the quality of women's participation in the production sector, with parallel changes in their time disposition in the domestic sector. The relocation of industries in developing countries of South East Asia employing cheap labour, largely female, provides an illustration of the dynamics of industrial structuring and women's work.

(iv) The penetration of traditional systems of trade by the market has affected women in both their activities in the production and domestic sectors. Indigenous systems of trading have usually been dominated by women, who have serviced the requirements of a basically closed local economy. As in subsistence agriculture and allied processing industries, women integrated their trading activities with domestic work. The inter-meshing of activities belonging to the production sector with the domestic sector (as for example, rearing children in the market place) permitted a real, albeit subordinate, participation in the production sector of the economy. The introduction of a structured pattern of trading based on a large-scale operation has displaced women from trading activities, since they lack the physical mobility (on account of their attachment with the domestic sector) and access to resources required for competing. This has been the experience of several African and Latin American communities.

III. Some underlying forces of the present order

1. The contemporary women's movement differs from all social movements of our time in that it crosses national boundaries, springing from the common phenomenon of women's subordinate status and from the commonality of processes which have caused it. The universality of the women's movement can be seen in the fact that in all societies women suffer from the distortions in the prevailing concept of development and are the objects of a patriarchal set of rules. Therefore, despite seeming differences, the character of the current day women's movement corresponds essentially to an international social struggle and links women of different countries in interdependent relationships.

2. The concept of development which has prevailed during the sixties and seventies reflects the narrow concerns of economic science, which has tended to project its technical criteria of growth as the goals of development. To that extent it has lost its basic function of a tool for the betterment of human life in all its dimensions. The world is now, however, faced with the need to reconsider the role of rigid economic criteria in shaping national planning and international development strategies. The women's movement underscores the fact that strategies based on purely economic indicators which substitute social goals, are not only deceptive in the long term but tend to perpetuate disadvantages and to magnify distortions. A realistic development strategy will have to concentrate on human needs, employing economic tools judiciously to that end.



3. Recent trends in the process of modernization have reinforced existing imbalances in women's situation, particularly imbalances in the sexual division of labour within households, in national sectors, and also internationally. The increasingly specialized skills required in the modern sector disqualify women from equal participation and reinforce the sexual division of labour within households. In national sectors, women's low skill attainment again pushes them into semi-skilled or unskilled occupations in the tertiary sector. International enterprises also use this handicap and engage women in low paid, labour-intensive occupations.

4. The current international division of labour between the North and the South is also based partially on the wider range of unpaid services performed by women of the South. These services include domestic chores which have been commoditized in the North, as also services such as the care of the sick, and the maintenance of the unemployed. Women of the South, therefore, bear the burden of the international division of labour through their extensive contribution in the domestic sector, and through their low-paid work in the production sector.

5. The penetration of the market or the 'development process' has paradoxically worsened women's access to social sectors such as education, health and welfare services. Inflation has eroded women's potential as consumers in the North, and in the South women's use of these services has been limited by their costs and incompatibility with cultural patterns.

6. It has been suggested that the pattern of sexual division of labour in the 'gainful' production sector derives from women's 'natural' preoccupation in the unpaid domestic sector. Analysts also point out that women's unpaid labour in the domestic sector is a basis for profit or the generation of surplus in the process of modernisation. Women's labour across the whole range of services in the family (human biological reproduction, maintenance of the labour force, and maintenance of a system of social values) enables the payment of lower wages to labour for subsistence. The existence of a reserve of cheap female labour also assists in maintaining market wages at a low level.
7. Even where the state assigns priorities and formulates policies, the gender-related bias of women's role persists. Development planning reinforces processes in which women are regarded as secondary workers, and as persons whose primary responsibility lies in family or domestic work.
8. The recognition of commonality is, however, not to deny the existence of imbalances between the situation of women in the developing and developed countries. Basically these differences reflect the broader structural and political imbalances underlying the more general phenomenon of global imbalances. For instance, in the existing international pattern of industrialization, women's unpaid work in the South sustains the wages of labour at a low level in the developing world thereby involuntarily perpetuating the North-South imbalance. Direct linkages also exist between women's paid work in countries of the North and South as, for example, in the substitution of one group of women workers in the North by another group of cheaper women workers in the South under the current programme of relocation of industries by transnational corporations.

9. The patriarchal system determines a societal assignment of different roles to women and men, that is, the inequities imposed on women are not due to biological imperatives but rather to a gender system which gives rise to historical, social and ideological prejudices about what men's and women's roles should be. This system partially accounts for the otherwise "mysterious" predominance of women in domestic work or in unpaid activities, and the characterization of this role as "unproductive". Moreover, female occupations are most often located in the unorganized, informal sector, and are either based on household skills, or, can be combined with domestic work in terms of location and time. This pattern of female participation in the production sector has shown a remarkable persistence, both cross-regionally, and over time.

10. In sum, the analysis suggests that the following are among the major interrelated causes of the international subordination of women at work and at home:

- (i) through a historical process women have been "assigned" the major responsibility for family work; their preoccupation with this sector precludes their effective participation in the production sector by limiting mobility, time and access to productive resources;
- (ii) the dominant economic formation in the world, which is oriented towards maximizing "surpluses", and which has subordinated productive resources to this limited end, benefits from women's unremunerated or poorly remunerated contribution;



- (iii) an ideology based on male privilege operates to reinforce women's role in the family and supports the nature of the established inequitable formations.

11. This analysis establishes the rationale for introducing a new orientation to development and a new dimension to the concept of growth. The basic premise of this development strategy is equity by sex and class. The objective of development would stem from the overriding concern to establish equitable access over productive resources to all and to ensure a quality of life which broadens the concept of progress to include not only the material but also the spiritual. The strategy stresses self-reliance, endogeny, flexibility in human and social structures, creativity, equity and ecological equilibrium.

IV. Towards new development strategies

1. Equity, self-reliance, endogeny and ecological equilibrium are the basic coordinates of a rationalised development strategy based on women's aspirations. These broad goals constitute elements of other existing development strategies too. Yet they have not been realized adequately. Why?

2. All efforts to bring about a rationalized development strategy must flow from an examination of the way in which the existing one works. The analysis in the foregoing sections of this document points to basic structural imbalances which perpetuate selective deprivation and exploitation. The nature of these flaws, and distortions in the mechanisms of operation appear to be deep-rooted, so that minor adjustments in the existing structures might only lead to integrating women into a system of inequalities.

3. The discussion at this stage is clearly tentative, and several indeterminate issues remain. Three fundamental questions have to be addressed. What is the nature of the change? At what level, national or international, have the changes to be introduced? And what are the critical political dimensions at the micro or macro levels which have to be stressed specifically in order to facilitate a universal acceptance of this development approach?
4. Analysis has shown that existing structures deny equal access to the benefits of growth to certain sections of the population within communities, within nations and between nations. The first element of the development strategy is therefore to establish equal access for all over productive resources to enable equitable participation in the generation, delivery, consumption and fruition of society's output and norms. This implies the replacement of economic and social structures which create differential access to productive resources, and thereby limit the productive capacity of some, by a system which ensures that all members of society have equal access to the processes of production, including means of production, prioritisation and determination of norms. The 'productive resources' referred to here include land, finance, technology, markets, cultural mechanisms, communications and infrastructural facilities. Specifically with reference to women, this would imply the provision of economic and technical support, and also the generation of a social environment conducive to the full utilization of these opportunities.
5. Secondly, in order to introduce permanent change, a system would have to be devised which provides equal opportunities for "human capital formation". This concept refers to all attributes which contribute to effective participation by members of society in all productive processes. Education, skill

attainment and health are some components of human capital formation.

This measure would ensure the permanent existence of equitable opportunities for participation by members of either sex in the future.

6. Thirdly, a specific set of measurements are required to transform the ideology of male dominance which operates universally and at all levels of decision-making. This tends to alienate women from the processes which introduce changes in society. Cultural and traditional values which support this system would have to be questioned at an international level. A countervailing ideology of equity would have to be introduced. Such an ideology would acknowledge sex-related differences and would stress equity as an operational theme.

7. Within this broad framework, a rationalized approach to development would be evolved, both at the national and international levels. At the international level, this approach would only formulate guidelines for development, and to a limited extent also provide appropriate intervention strategies. It is envisaged that the developmental approach would be formulated and given a concrete frame at the national level. Some elements of the reformulation at both levels are stated below:

International initiatives

8. The linkages between women's situation and international structures have been insufficiently delineated, so that it is not attempted here to develop a comprehensive set of recommendations or policy interventions at the global level. The approach is to evolve a global perspective on development, and through this, to influence national development strategies.



9. This approach would stress an acknowledgement of women's centrality to economic and social development, and would emphasize the internalization of the goals of dignity, and self-determination for women. The approach would embody a unified social and economic model of development, and redress the imbalances caused by overwhelming concentration on techno-economic indicators.

10. Implicit in this approach is a change in structural and power relationships which have institutionalized and intensified wide-ranging disparities in the level of development in the developed and developing countries. From the earliest stages, it would be necessary to focus on the political dimension of the North-South imbalance. This would imply that crucial divisive issues, especially those which confront women in the North and South in the context of international interdependency, are identified.

11. In addressing the conflicts which spring from the interaction between international economic flows and national development policies, norms or evaluation criteria would have to be developed within each country to evaluate changes in women's situation.

12. The following are some specific issues which need to be addressed internationally by on-going debates on a new global development strategy:

(i) Conceptual clarity should be developed in respect of unpaid work performed in the family by its members, women, men and children, with the objective of refining the concept of growth. The process of clarifying this issue will make it possible to clarify the question of which activities may be regarded as investment and which as consumption in over-all productive processes. If a consensus can be reached at the international level on this

issue, clearly it will have profound implications, inter alia, for unpaid family work and on women's participation in all productive processes. International fora might direct their resources - technical and political - towards a universally acceptable formulation of this question.

(ii) Unpaid work in the domestic sector must be facilitated through a four-pronged intervention at the international level: first, support to the development of appropriate technology to reduce the input of time and energy in physical tasks related to the domestic sector; second, active support to measures which favour the sharing of unpaid tasks by men; third, support to community-based services which are generated collectively, such as the provision of water and fuel in rural areas; fourth, mobilization of opinion towards a reorientation of the institutions of socialization - schools, state administrations, international fora.

(iii) International fora have a crucial role in stimulating a global investigation of those mechanisms which lead to women's participation, on a universal basis, in dead-end and lowest paid jobs in agriculture, industry, trade and services. This global analysis would provide a basis to the international community to evaluate multi-national ventures or agreements specifically with regard to the inherent capacity of each to provide women equitable opportunities of participation.

In order to achieve this objective, techniques of monitoring of women's progress must be evolved under the aegis of the international community. Where analysis points to the simultaneous operation of class in determining women's status, these indicators will reflect the relationship between the sexes in respect of socio-economic concerns, as well as the relationship between classes. These indicators will reflect the international concern for creating enduring conditions for women's participation in all productive processes.

(iv) In programmes of agricultural development which involve international initiatives, women's role in production and distribution should be examined closely to ensure that stereotyped perceptions of women's work as marginal are not built into the conceptualization or implementation of the schemes. Specifically, this implies a re-examination of on-going and proposed internationally supported programmes to increase productivity in subsistence agriculture, of food production or cash cropping to ensure that women have access to the necessary raw materials, credit, agricultural technology and infrastructural facilities such as sources of irrigation and markets.

(v) The trend towards exploitation of semi-skilled women workers by expanding transnational industries must be checked through direct intervention by the international community. These world market export-oriented industries employ unskilled women workers in labour surplus developing countries. Since the women lack communication, are unorganized, have no collective bargaining power, and are easily exploited with regard to wages and conditions of work, a formal network must evolve to facilitate the flow of information between States and among the non-governmental organizations.

(vi) The contribution of women's unpaid labour in the prevailing global skewed pattern of industrialization, manifested in the highly industrialized North and a lagging South which provides primary products and cheap labour, must be investigated. The point at issue being the degree to which unpaid female labour in the South reduces labour costs in that region, thereby involuntarily supporting an exploitative process of industrial 'growth'.

Existing global negotiations such as the New International Development Strategy present some direct points of intervention, but it is necessary to ensure that women participate more actively in such negotiations.



Initiatives at the national level

13. The aim of national planning models in most parts of the world is still largely the maximization of national output within a given time horizon. Whereas there is a growing consciousness of the need for women's participation, this has not evolved from the fundamental consideration that the subordination of women per se is contradictory to the over-all goal of improvement in the quality of life. Instead, the nature of women's participation appears to be determined by the narrow objective of maximizing output and attaining a growth in per capita income. This is achieved through women's participation in selected areas of the 'gainful' production sector and by traditional and uncritically accepted norms of reproduction.

14. Women's demand for equitable participation requires a fundamental shift in development towards the quality of participation of all members of the community at all the stages of the development process - formulation, implementation and evaluation.

15. Some measures are suggested below to introduce enduring transformation in the development perspective of countries with regard to women:

(a) Employment

(i) There should be rapid expansion of the total employment potential in a country;

(ii) Development planners must work with the basic assumption that the definition of the labour force includes a 'new' segment of female workers who have been previously omitted from estimates due to their reported preoccupation with "household work". In particular, in labour surplus economies, the acknowledgement of

the fact of the expanded labour force is fundamental to women's equitable participation in productive processes;

(iii) employment planning must remove the biases which locate women in women-intensive sectors through a conscious recognition of women's aspiration to work in all productive processes;

(iv) planning will have to be reoriented towards creating jobs without a prior assumption of their suitability on the basis of sex;

(v) certain measures, which have been introduced already by some countries, will have to be vigorously implemented to ensure that the commitment to women's employment is translated into practice.

These measures include:

- introduction of flexible hours in paid employment for men and women;
- skill training for women in jobs in the organized sector and in supervisory posts;
- establishment of services which will reduce the input of time and energy by women in unpaid services, such as the provision of water and fuel, creches, schools, hospitals;
- ensuring women's access over productive resources such as land, credit, information;
- providing special support such as suitable accommodation for women workers living alone, legalising maternity leave in all occupations;
- ensuring women's entry into political-economic institutions such as production and market cooperatives, and trade federations to enable their full participation in decision-making;

- decisive intervention to ensure women's participation in trade union activities;
- ensuring the access of vulnerable workers such as women and other rural poor to steady employment in public sector programmes, including programmes of guaranteed employment at minimum wages.

(b) Self-reliance

It is necessary to conceptualize women's involvement in development as autonomous and self-reliant individuals, who have the ability to determine the course of their lives as members of society rather than as women constrained within a rigid socio-cultural framework. The State can assist in creating an environment in which women emerge as self-determining members of society.

A few measures are suggested below:

- Promoting women's organizations to challenge socio-cultural constraints, both at the structural level and in the symptoms of imbalances. Illustratively, women's groups are already functioning to implement legislation for equal inheritance of property, equal wages, as also against wife battering, abuses related to gifts at marriage, or again the compromise of women's dignity in promotion of tourism, etc. It is necessary to co-ordinate their activities through some form of national networking and the creation of an interdependent information system.

(c) Research

There is a need to provide a quantitative base for rationalized development planning and to ensure enduring change in women's lives. Areas of research include:



(i) The nature and level of women's contribution to society's output so that women are made 'visible'. The role of micro level research must be stressed in this context;

(ii) The establishment of empirical relationships between women's participation in unpaid and paid work and (a) trends in sectoral contribution to the national output, and (b) the national impact of trends in international commodity flows and in the international pattern of industrialization as they affect the North-South economic organization;

(iii) The evolution of a standard measure for the opportunity cost of female and male wage labour which is constructed on transformed baseline assumptions of women's 'natural' disposition toward unpaid work;

(iv) An appraisal of the contribution of movements around the work dealing with post-industrialized societies and how they affect women.