



TOGETHER
for a sustainable future

OCCASION

This publication has been made available to the public on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation.



TOGETHER
for a sustainable future

DISCLAIMER

This document has been produced without formal United Nations editing. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries, or its economic system or degree of development. Designations such as “developed”, “industrialized” and “developing” are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgment about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process. Mention of firm names or commercial products does not constitute an endorsement by UNIDO.

FAIR USE POLICY

Any part of this publication may be quoted and referenced for educational and research purposes without additional permission from UNIDO. However, those who make use of quoting and referencing this publication are requested to follow the Fair Use Policy of giving due credit to UNIDO.

CONTACT

Please contact publications@unido.org for further information concerning UNIDO publications.

For more information about UNIDO, please visit us at www.unido.org



08445



United Nations Industrial Development Organization

Distr.
LIMITED

ID/WG.283/14
3 October 1978

ENGLISH

Preparatory Meeting on the Role of Women
in Industrialization in Developing
Countries

Vienna, Austria, 6 - 10 November 1978

WOMEN IN INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT - INDIA *

prepared by

Leela Damodara Menon **

* The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the secretariat of UNIDO. This document has been reproduced without formal editing.

** Member of Parliament
Kerala, India

Industrialisation had brought multidimensional economic growth during the last five decades in developed nations and given their people life sustenance, choice of work and self-respect. In developing countries the loud cry has already risen "Industrialise or perish". In this context, it is very significant that the Lima Conference and Plan of action call for creation of conditions for full integration of women in an organised manner in the industrial process. The assumption is that only when women are liberated from servitude can a nation awaken fully to economic stability. The International Women's Year had already given a clarion call for the full integration of women in development. Representatives of various nations realistically appraising the problems and capabilities of women all over the world, can help in evolving a new methodology for women's full employment.

Early economic activity.

Women have always worked and they continue to work indeterminate hours doing household jobs which is considered a labour of love, a return for security and a share of responsibilities as mother. From very early ages, they have sometimes also taken up outside their homes, the work left-over by men, in agriculture, spinning, handicrafts and similar home industries. This might have been a rough division of labour when community life started. It is also the beginning of discrimination. As it worked out, these efforts did not give women security of service, proper wages or status of the economically independent. While solving crucial economic issues, it has now become necessary to have a fresh look at gainful employment for women, specifically promoting awareness of woman's place in national progress in equal partnership with men.

Indian attitude to women.

There is a great paradox in the attitude of Indian Society towards women. Cosmic Energy has been deified as Shakti and symbolised and worshipped as the Spouse of the Lord of Universe. The mother is venerated. The wife is "patni" in the Hindu Shastras, the husband's full-fledged companion. It is also stated that in Vedic

times, Indian women had enjoyed equality in all spheres. Yet as far as known, through centuries, women has been functioning totally subservient to the father, the husband and son and not allowed any freedom of her own.

New trends.

Society in India is at present going through a period of transition due to a national planned development programme and influence of modernisation. As elsewhere, the Indian male is unable to abrogate to himself the responsibility of fully financing his family's needs. Planners also realise that successful economic changes will depend on the productive endeavour of all people, women inclusive. Women have therefore to take new postures to get employment, overcoming discriminatory practices of which they themselves are now aware. Both sexes have contributed to these discriminations and inequalities, directly and indirectly and are called upon now to solve the problems together.

Constitutional Rights.

Indian Women's courageous and outstanding contribution in the national struggle for Independence took them automatically to the status of equality at the dawn of freedom. The Constitution of India guarantees women's equality of status and opportunity, equal rights for adequate means of livelihood, and protection against discriminatory practices. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Indian Nation, struck the right note when he said "woman is man's better half. As long as woman has not the same rights in law as man, as long as the birth of a girl does not receive the same welcome as that of a boy, so long we shall know that India is suffering from partial paralysis." Relief has to be found from this paralysis.

Traditional bottlenecks.

General education for women has already opened up new vistas of employment in medical, teaching, clerical and factory sectors. But the percentage of women so engaged is small and the gap is very wide between legal rights and existing realities. Marriage is the main career for a woman. She is thus immobilised and she confines her activity around her home. Lack of skills, tradition, social taboos and submissiveness of woman herself are her main weaknesses. In rural India, even today, a woman's economic status is not determined by the wage she earns but by her husband and her family's status. When there is acute general unemployment in India, it is natural that promotion of women's employment is considered as

snatching employment chances from men. This is one reason for the low percentage of working women.

Present areas of employment

89% of the 273 million Indian women live in rural areas. Women labour force is only 31.3 million. Of them, 80% are engaged in agriculture, 10.5% in industries and 9.5% in tertiary services. In urban area, rigid social barriers are absent and women work in more diversified sectors. The job umbrella of the educated employed women is interesting. There are certain jobs considered women's special preserves. 75% are teachers, the majority of whom are in primary schools. The rest includes typists and stenographers, nurses, physicians and others. 3% constitute administrators, businesswomen, managers, scientists, technicians, engineers and lawyers. From this category have emerged a woman Prime Minister, Cabinet and State Ministers, Ambassadors, Governors, High Court Judges and Executives. The disability for getting into the Indian Administrative Service and some other services (except in some departments of the Military) by married women had also been removed. All-woman Banks, All-woman Police Stations, All-woman Post Offices are introduced to show that Indian women can rise to good levels of competence. But in privileged jobs, the upward mobility for women is extremely difficult.

It is a very disappointing factor that only 13.3% of female population of India has been recorded as "Working population" in the sense that their efforts are socially and economically productive. In industries in the public and private sectors just 10.5% employed are women and only .1% are in the managerial posts, 48% are in very unskilled lower categories in industry. Some of them are paid less wages than even agricultural workers. In Central Government employment, where there is no discrimination between men and women in wages, women constitute 2.5%.

Impact of protective legislation.

A number of protective labour laws have been passed in favour of women, like maternity benefits, inheritance rights and factory acts and even the much talked of enactment for equal remuneration. But so far, these legal powers have not helped to save women from exploitation and discrimination. They have only curtailed off some of the grim realities.

Displacement in traditional and household industries.

Due to a slight increase in women's education, the number of women working in the administrative and other white collar jobs is on the increase. But many educated

women are idle and economically inactive. Yet another factor which cannot be overlooked is that in agriculture as well as in some informal and formal industrial sectors, there has been a massive and alarming decline in the percentage of women workers. This trend is dangerous and shows that modern agriculture, industry and trade services are keeping out more and more women due to their lack of understanding of complex professional skills and marketing systems that have come in these sectors of late and because of which women cannot manage to work as they did.

New programme.

The existing plans for employment of women are found to be very inadequate. But there is a bright silver lining on the horizon. To arrest the trend of increasing displacements, a national policy decision has been taken to make in the Sixth Plan a special provision to enlarge the scope of employment opportunities for women. The plan for accelerated rural industrialisation also will help this policy. The target is to be kept at 25% of the female population brought into productive endeavour for 1980 as against 13.3% now. Even this will be only reaching a position that prevailed 15 years ago, in spite of the fact that more job avenues had opened up for women during these years. There is some loud thinking about reserving a certain percentage of places for female workers in most industrial and other establishments. These objectives added with projects for greater health and literacy facilities to women could trigger off the movement of women's true liberation.

Self-employment.

Only a thorough overhauling change in the economic pattern of society and creation of further avenues of mass employment can thaw a difficult and frozen situation. Employment presupposes economic activity and when men are also in the throes of unemployment, unless there is visible increase in employment opportunities, it could lead to further confrontation between men and women or at best, a status quo. The employment policy includes both wage and self-employment parameters and any policy for women's employment has to fit within this framework. It is in wage or self-employment programmes of the unorganised sector that the clues lie for women's first phase of industrialisation.

Reviewing the overall situation in India, self-employment along with rural industrialisation seem to be the main answer for more employment for women. While maintaining at the national level the steady increase in

production in the hard core industries, the diffusion of industrialisation can be real and general only if it came to rural areas and if there is feed back from the rural sector. In two ways this helps women. It brings the work round the corner to them or to their own homes. The sophistication and high finances necessary to heavy and large industries are not called for. Nor long training in skills. The process is thus simplified.

Self-employment programmes for women will be an exciting adventure and a breakthrough. It is a difficult beginning but a rewarding goal. To mobilise economically weak women with no training, bargaining power or money is not easy. But it is not impossible. One thing is already clear. The Indian woman may be poor, illiterate, but with the right guidance she has shown that she can do well.

Properly trained and organised, women in India can really become very efficient, economically independent groups. This is seen from the exciting story of a group of 6,667 women workers in Ahmedabad engaged as garment-makers, hand cart pullers, vegetable vendors and junk smiths, who were brought together and thus saved from exploitation by money lenders and big traders. Shortage of capital and lack of knowledge in new trends in trade were their problems. With active support of the Nationalised Banks, correct market study and joint operation and management, they are one of the flourishing and powerful groups of independent women workers in the country.

There is another case of a group of 100 women fish-vendors in a village in Kerala. They used to take loans of Rs.30/- to Rs.40/- from private money-lenders each day giving a daily interest of Re.1/- for every Rs.10/-. They organised themselves into a Industrial Cooperative and with aid from the Banks at an interest rate of 4% per annum, they could make many times more money than they did. The number of women in this group is increasing.

New paths have already been cut open. Many young women entrepreneurs have come forward. Manufacture of electric fans, stainless steel vessels, cooking pans and pots, tin containers, leather goods, garments, chemical products, fruit preservation, furniture, export promotion, are some of the new ventures successfully operated on a fairly large scale by women industrialists. One lady is

engaged in a small mining operation. There is another in charge of a shipping line. These women come from the elite educated class. Handicrafts, bamboo work, fruit preservation, beedis, soap, dyeing and printing, handloom are some socio-economic schemes for women organised under the auspices of the Central Social Welfare Board. A women's wing of the National Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs has started attending to the difficulties and problem of women entrepreneurs and encouraging new ventures.

It is among the less-educated that the efforts have to be concentrated. Attempts are made on an experimental scale to operate and tread into areas so far considered men's prerogative as in the case of a foundry and electroplating unit in Kerala. At first it was thought crazy and impossible. But the girls took up the training quickly and it has been a pleasant surprise to see them make the moulds and handle the molten metal with ease. To them 5 Kilograms of metal is as heavy or light as a 5 kilogram baby and the heat from the cupola is not more frightening than the heat in the kitchen. The idea is that in any community with increasing needs, both men and women can strike out new openings for jobs without depending only on traditional type of livelihoods.

Some ancillary units for women attached to the telephone, electronic and lamp industries, work well because they have no marketing difficulty. But such units are few and are only exceptions to the general rule. They also run into a number of difficulties common to all women's units. With some training, ancillary units can play a major role in women's industrialisation. At the Government level thought is being given to redline ancillaries of public sector industries, which women could take up.

It is found that the projects for self-employment for women should work well if:-

- (1) Every worker has an interest in the concern either by share or in any other capacity which will avoid exploitation;
- (2) Project reports are drawn up with the assistance of competent and qualified authority till such time as they can manage to organise it on their own;
- (3) Availability of raw materials is arranged;
- (4) Bank finances are given at concessional rates of interest as to backward sections in the initial stages.

(5) Sufficient management and technical training is given to women workers;

(6) Residential accommodation for women workers is arranged, if necessary;

(7) Creches are organised for the children of working mothers.

(8) Technical and expert advice is made available when the units run into problems;

(9) 95% of these workers are women;

(10) A good sense of Trade Unionism and joint effort is inculcated so that they do not fall prey to fortune hunters of unions;

(11) Women should be involved at decision-making levels;

(12) Special marketing facilities be planned.

While building up the infrastructure, strong national women's organisations have to encourage the movement. Women can be their own enemies. They are easy victims to those forces which have subjugated them for centuries and which can discourage them from taking up economically productive activity, which is still not accepted as women's vocation. They should also realise that good industrialists have to work hard and with dedication and determination. The role of the house-maker should not be an impediment to work. Again, women as employees, are generally acceptable; but their efforts to be independent will have to bear down great resistance.

Being credulous and trained only to obey, trouble can be created among women themselves by interested parties who are sure to crop up as vested interests. These pitfalls have to be foreseen and early action taken. Participation in rural industries must be a properly studied and organised move. Very often there is likelihood of unremunerative units being palmed off to women. Even for rural industries, lack of training can be a serious problem.

There is a new trend regarding capital formation. In spite of legislation prohibiting it, the obnoxious dowry system persists and can only be removed if women are economically independent. So, to lighten the burden of dowry, parents are willing to invest small amounts for their daughters if it will give them employment. That is an important factor when capital for self-employment projects is organised.

The Sixth Plan for development in India has some

special programmes for women's industries. Utilising the blue-prints for these, a good start can be made in initiating women to industries on a large scale in the country, if the right infrastructure is built.

United Nations.

Several meetings of U.N. and specialised agencies have touched upon the subject of women's economic activities and some priority is already given to the subject. But the UN can play a more effective role in

(1) conducting studies through appropriate agencies on various factors of industries like raw material, availability and technical cooperation;

(2) formulation of model projects so that they can illumina the dark path of experimentation;

(3) Assaisting in training in skills and job orientation;

(4) planning a few projects for each developing nation to emphasise the participation of young women;

(5) having a committee connected with the national UN Commission in each country which will be the source of exchange of information;

(6) consider appropriate aid programmes in the initial exprimental stage;

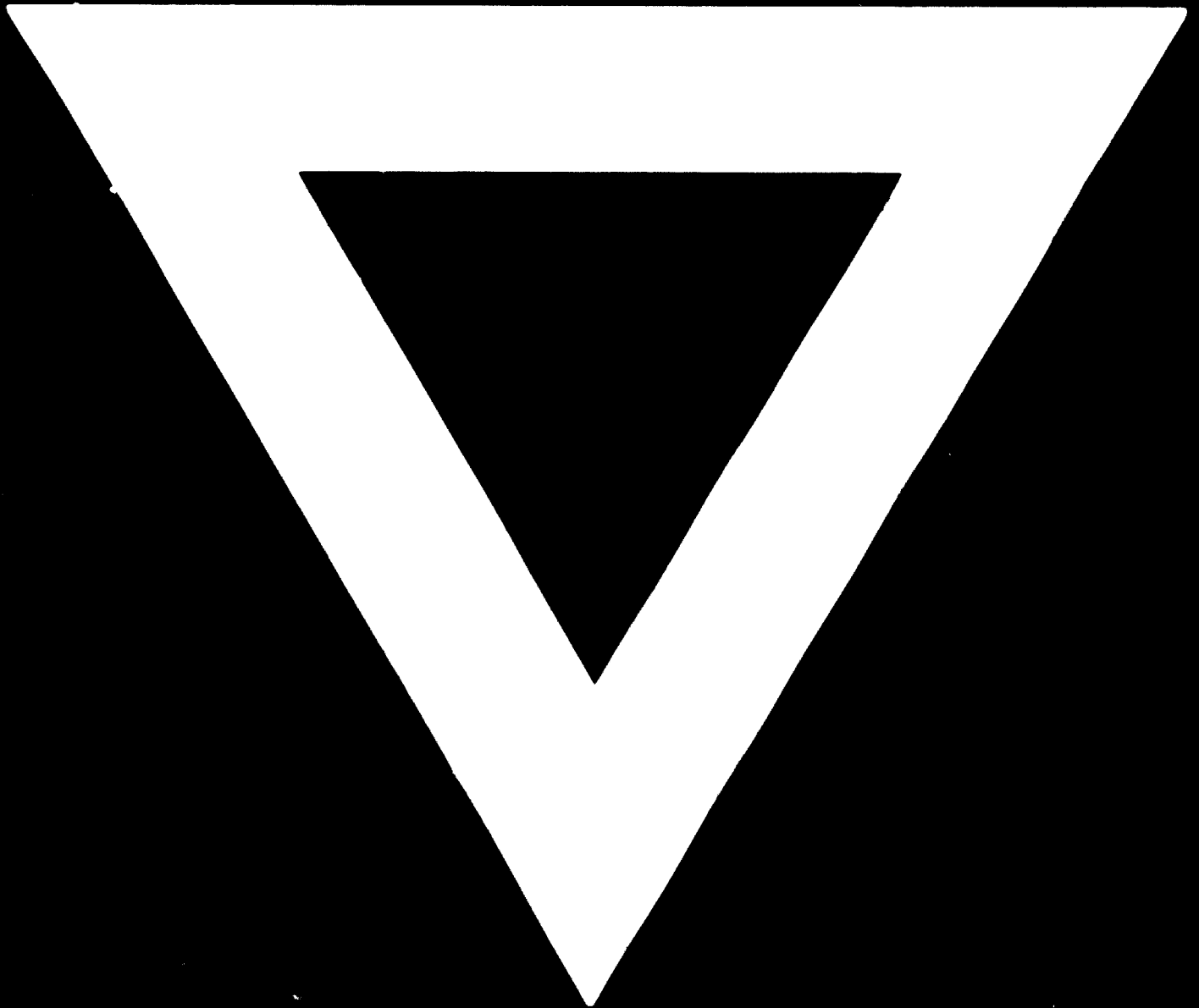
(7) monitor trends and policies so as to reach desirad goals; and

(8) help in establishment of infrastructural services in rural areas.

After considering the programme of women's industrial development from various angles, the main refrain is, "Women, awake".



C-8



79.11.13