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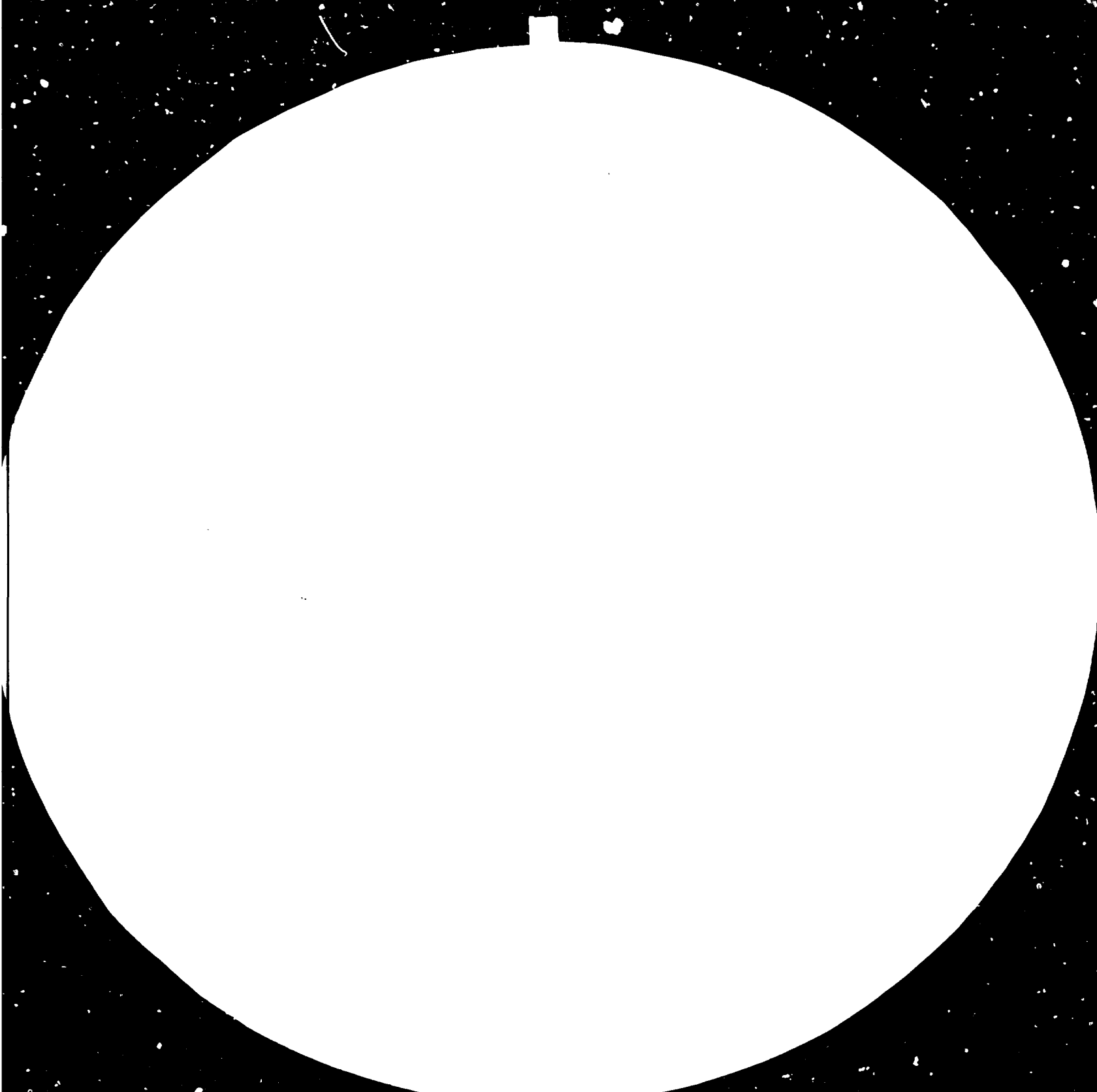
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BASIC ISSUES - WOMEN'S INTEGRATION
IN INDUSTRIAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT *

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BASIC ISSUES - WOMEN'S INTEGRATION
IN INDUSTRIAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

1. Only in the last decade has women's participation in the development process become an issue of major concern. Some three or more decades of development efforts have brought very uneven progress amongst developing countries. Within their societies the needs of the majority have all too often been neglected; problems of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, unemployment, over-population have increased both in absolute size and in intensity in many countries. Early attempts at industrial development in developing countries brought a concentration of resources in the construction of a capital-intensive, advanced technology sector which has been oriented largely to the needs of urban markets and isolated from the requirements of the majority. The hoped for 'trickle-down' effect from this productive monetized sector has not materialized to distribute wealth and benefits to the majority and to women in particular. Thus of late development strategies have recently come to reflect a proper concern for growth with equality, and for social development and change to sustain the process of growth through greater participation.

2. To this wider concept of development has been added belatedly the perception of existing and latent discrimination against women. While on the one hand their major contributions to local and domestic economies are largely unrecorded and unrecognized, their substantial contributions in the industrial sector are poorly rewarded with few prospects for advancement, especially in those processing or assembly industries where women are in the majority. As awareness and understanding has grown of the present roles and condition of women, the first steps to redress this situation have been taken, not least at the international level.

3. In 1970 the United Nations General Assembly urged the full integration of women in development efforts in the Second United Nations Development Decade. In 1975 the World Plan of Action embodied the principles of equality and effective participation to integrate women's potential contribution in the development process including planning; the improvement of women's status was seen as a basic element in any development process. In 1980 further initiatives which followed from the Programme of Action for the second half of the U.N. Decade for Women recognized the close relationship between the inequality borne by the majority of women and the problems of under-development, and the extent of the historical and cultural influences which perpetuate this inequality. Finally the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women has reinforced the links between women's issues and development processes particularly in rural development.

4. Within many developing countries initiatives have been taken by governments to translate this international concern into positive action. Some countries have achieved legislative measures to provide women with equal basic rights; others have established machinery at the policy-making or administrative levels to look after women's affairs. In the majority

of countries non-government organizations have developed to represent women's point of view and to launch development projects and provide supporting services. Out of these deliberations and project initiatives has come a greatly increased understanding of the scale and nature of the reforms required to achieve the goal of full, equal participation for women, particularly in terms of employment.

5. It is now clear that the pattern and processes of development in many developing countries over the last half of a century has been discriminatory in its impact on men and women. Social and economic changes have disrupted traditional economic systems; the breadth and intensity of poverty have increased, so as to give women income-earning responsibilities in addition to their traditional domestic responsibilities. At the same time women's access to resources and opportunities to fulfil these demanding roles has often been reduced by attempts at achieving 'development'. Agents and instruments of assistance have too often discriminated against the interests and participation of women, ignoring women's actual role and substantial existing contribution to family, community and society as a whole. For these reasons there is a pressing need for planners and decision-makers to re-examine economic development policies and their instruments to ascertain their impact on the role and condition of women. This reform of the planning and development process itself will only be carried through with the active and effective participation of women in the process of reform, such is the extent of enertia, bias and conditioning in favour of the 'status quo'.

6. What then is the present role and condition of women in developing countries? Clearly there are substantial differences between individual countries determined by different environments, cultures and economic situations. Some common characteristics and trends can be discerned particularly in relation to features of industrial development such as urbanization, the transfer of some manufacturing activities to developing countries, the introduction of 'higher' order technologies, access to education, training and employment opportunities.

7. In many developing countries a major obstacle to increased participation by women is their low status, reinforced by the rigid attitudes maintained by societies towards women. Undoubtedly a fundamental change in these attitudes, amongst women themselves as well as society as a whole, is a prerequisite to reform. While women's roles remain stereotyped and heavily circumscribed by convention, and women adopt an attitude of dependence, their contribution to society will remain largely unrecognized and undervalued. Artificial and unjustifiable distinctions between men and women reflect women's fixed roles and attributes as they are ascribed by society by tradition or habit rather than by conscious decisions. The first step towards changing such attitudes is to raise society's consciousness of women's existing multiple roles and their onerous responsibilities, spanning the provision of daily requirements, basic needs, economic production, social welfare and culture.

8. The domestic role of women remains dominant in most developing societies. Not only do women have to combine child-bearing and the raising of children with the provision of shelter, food, water, clothing and fuel for their families' survival but increasingly they are having to earn income to meet the family's basic expenditure. With the effects of inflation and recession in recent years in many countries a single income is often not sufficient to provide for the basic needs of a simple family household. What is not fully appreciated however, is the large number of single parent households headed by women who carry the entire responsibility as sole wage earner. A recent survey in Caribbean territories revealed that household headship was almost equally divided between males and females. This situation is not uncommon in many parts of the world, though for different reasons which include visiting and common law unions, customary marriages, migration in search of work, teenage pregnancies, etc.

9. In rural economies this income generation is normally done through subsistence cultivation, or 'in the home' marginal income generating activities, and in urban economies through the informal sector (trading, processing or producing simple consumer items). Even in traditional rural economies where the provision of basic needs is largely outside the monetized market economy, the need for cash incomes has greatly increased in recent decades to meet the demands of education, purchases of manufactured consumer items, and to compensate for the unreliability of subsistence agriculture. Not only this, in many areas of economic activity traditional sources of supplementary income have disappeared with the introduction of specialization and mechanization in processing industries (e.g. food), displacement of craft items with mass produced goods, and more organized agricultural production.

10. It goes without saying that while women's responsibilities have increased with this multiplication of roles, the more general economic situation and environment in many developing countries had made these responsibilities harder to fulfil. The lack of accessible potable water, shortages of fuel, vulnerability of food supplies, the pressure of inflation - all conspire to consume an increasing share of women's time and energy and effectively limit the opportunities for other income earning activities. The significance of those socio-economic factors is such that, when combined with the isolation of the majority of the population (in geographical, social and cultural terms), opportunities for many women, especially those in rural areas far from market centres, to participate in industrial activities are heavily constrained unless special measures are taken to identify, motivate and facilitate their involvement through training, improved access to resources, means of production, etc.

11. Opportunities for women in urban areas are also constrained by the environment and the economic system within which they find themselves. The world-wide pattern of migration of landless peasants to urban areas has resulted from the decline of the agricultural sector and the breakdown of traditional production systems together with the attraction of the cities with the promise of employment in the industrial or tertiary sectors.

In these situations women not only find themselves in a more hostile environment in terms of basic needs, but also are without the skills to compete for employment opportunities often against men. Pressure of population, limited growth of employment in the formal sector, and the breakdown of traditional social support systems combine to place women in a severely disadvantaged position. Even those who are fortunate enough to secure work in the formal industrial sector find themselves in low status, poorly rewarded jobs with working conditions which often conflict with their family responsibilities. Through lack of education and training, and through positive discrimination against women, they are less able to improve their position or to compete for senior, influential positions (in established institutions and organizations) with decision-making roles and so are less able to improve their future prospects.

12. As a result of the rising groundswell of concern at the international level and increased awareness amongst more women through the activities of special interest groups at the national level, in recent years some practical steps have been taken to tackle those problems. The importance of social, political and cultural problems has been recognized and a number of women-oriented development programmes and projects have been launched to try to ameliorate their position. The institutional aspect of these developments has been the establishment of non-government organizations or women's groups and in some countries the creation of special 'machinery' within government to look after women's interests. A variety of women-specific development programmes and projects have emerged, though often backed by limited resources, which have attempted to provide direct support to women in their traditional roles in the fields of welfare, health etc. Yet these measures, though necessary in themselves, can only ameliorate women's disadvantaged position in the short term. New strategies and measures are necessary to deal with the fundamental issues of displacement of labour through the reorganization of production through commercialization, changes in technology, etc., and loss of access by women to the means of production or survival.

13. Access to employment or other income-earning opportunities is the prerequisite for the integration of women's contribution to development so as to achieve their full participation. This is the prime means of reducing and creating a freedom of choice for individuals as to how they prefer to make their contribution. In this way the needs of households headed by women will be better catered for and the health and welfare of family members will also be improved.

14. In order to make this possible, certain other fundamental changes will also be necessary. Not only will much greater progress have to be made with such basic needs as the supply of potable water and the provision of substitutes for wood as cooking fuels, but improved technology will have to be applied in a low-cost, effective way to increase women's productivity and efficiency in their many household-supporting tasks, so as to create time and energy for women to take advantage of any employment and income-

earning opportunities which can be created. Further, much more strenuous efforts must be made to improve women's access to education and training so as to enable them to compete more effectively with men for jobs created by new or different technologies. The present tendency for women to drop out of formal education systems before securing more advanced qualifications is a barrier to their promotion out of lower skilled jobs into planning and decision-making positions. Alternative routes to qualifications other than formal full-time education/training will have to be found to accelerate the process of change in participation rates.

15. Thus far women's participation in formal industrial employment in developing countries has largely been limited to lower skill tasks in certain well-defined industries, such as clothing, textiles, food processing, electronics, where multinational organizations have exploited the passiveness and low cost of young female labour, especially in export processing zones. Not only is there need to ensure the best possible working conditions and terms of employment for women working in these concentrations of industrial activity but the totality of the female workers' need should be recognized especially in terms of health care, education and training. A pattern of unrestrained exploitation of female labour for a period of their working lives cannot be in the long term interests of either employers or employees, controlling financial interests or 'host' governments. Indeed there are significant advantages for all concerned if women's multiple roles in society are recognized and provided for with the necessary supporting services. What is required is a determined programme of advance on a broad front and at all levels to improve the terms and conditions of women's participation.

16. Other employment and income-earning opportunities must also be sought particularly in the expansion of self-employment, part-time businesses and informal sector activities. There can be no simple, standard solution to the creation of large numbers of income-earning opportunities in different developing countries since the rationale response to each resource endowment or market opportunity will be different. However, given appropriate training in commercial and management skills and access to resources, there are substantial opportunities for women to undertake entrepreneurial or other business activities. There can however be no escape from the economic realities of small-scale industries; enterprises will only survive if their productive activities are viable in the longer term; they will only generate wealth for the individuals and the communities concerned if they are profitable; they will only provide additional employment opportunities if output grows in response to demand. From this point of view it is regrettable that early attempts to provide other income-earning opportunities for women have focused so strongly on craft or similar activities where production is difficult to organize, competition is severe, and rewards are so limited. Alternative strategies to involve women more in the production and provision of basic goods and services, which are needed on a regular basis by most local communities, are likely to be more rewarding.

17. Development agencies, both public and private, can do much to facilitate and accelerate the integration of women in industrial development. First must come the establishment of longer-term aims, and the participation of women in fixing of immediate objectives and priorities. Next a concerted attempt will have to be made to raise consciousness and create awareness amongst women of the opportunities which already exist and how to approach them. The creation of contact groups and exchanges of views and experience will themselves generate further ideas and initiatives. Not only must there be a clear understanding of aims and objectives but in order to be credible there must be a patent commitment to these ends.

18. In the shorter term the aim must be to sensitize the planners and the decision-takers towards women's role and condition, and what needs to be done about changing these, and in the longer term to establish more formal mechanisms to further women's interests within the policy-making mechanisms of established organizations and institutions. This will require concerted pressure from outside the decision-making process and a determined effort to influence the decision-making process from within. In the industrial planning and development process itself, women's representatives and organizations will need to master planning techniques and to use them to further women's interests over an extended period.

19. The present situation is an amalgam of cultural tradition and the production systems which grew out of the industrial revolution; powerful vested interests work to preserve the 'status quo' which leaves the majority of women at a significant disadvantage. Yet women's contribution if properly integrated with the other agents of development, will amount to their effective participation and will transform the role and condition of the majority. The realization of this potential demands a social revolution to remove discrimination against women for the benefit of mankind as a whole. Women's participation in industrial activities is one of the most important aspects of the equal opportunity to which women are entitled as a basic right. An accelerated and more equitable pattern of development is not possible without women's contribution.

