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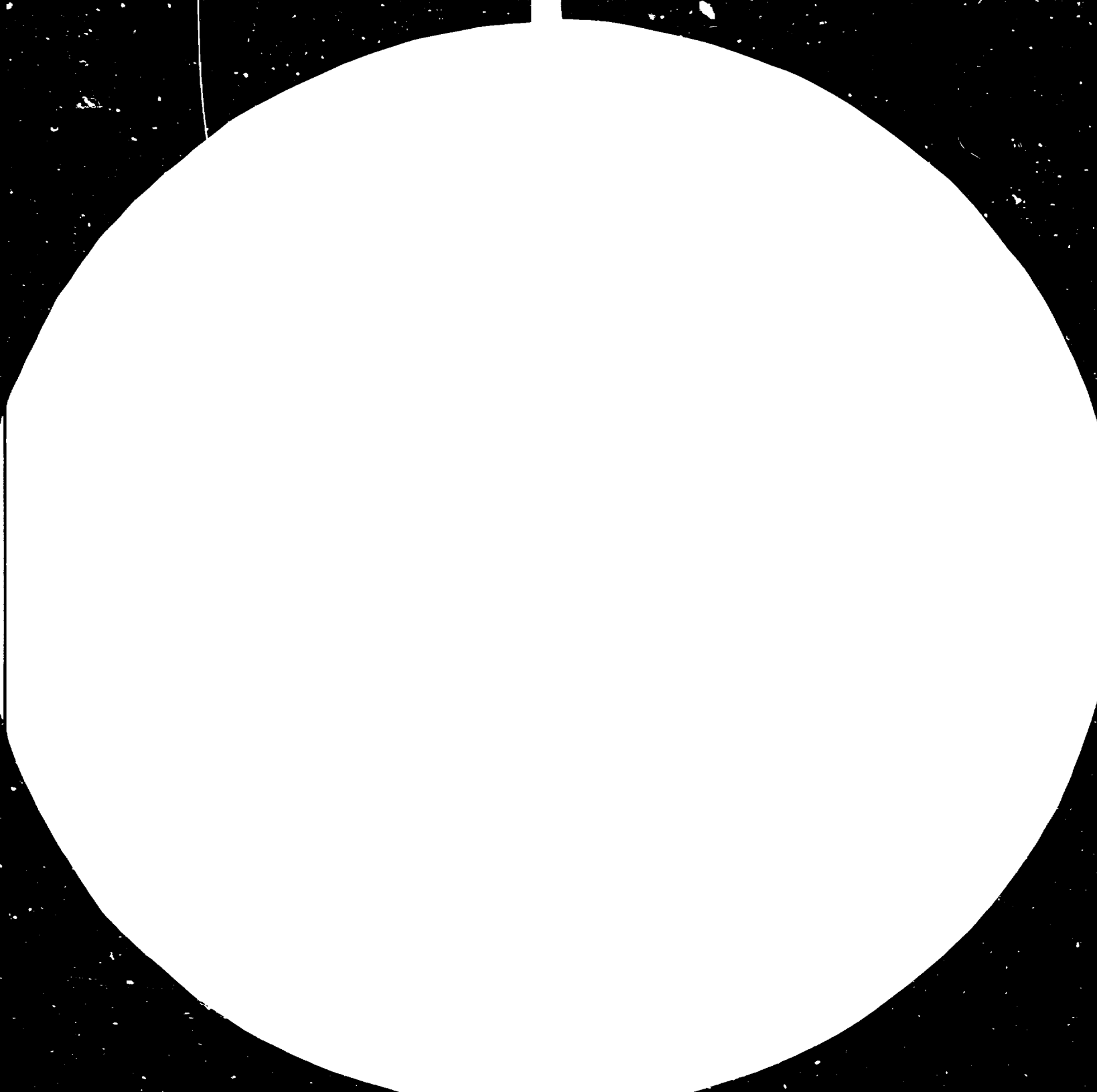
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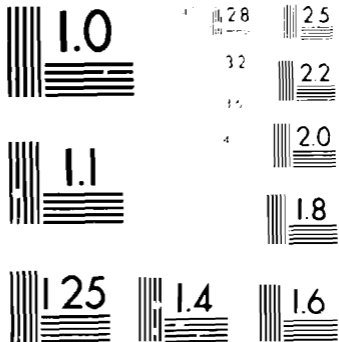
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BASIC ISSUES - WOMEN'S INTEGRATION  
IN INDUSTRIAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT \*

by

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

Only in the last decade has women's participation in development processes become an issue of major concern. Some three or more decades of development efforts have brought very uneven progress amongst developing countries, and within their societies the needs of the majority have all too often been neglected; problems of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, unemployment, over-population, etc. have increased both in absolute size and in intensity in many developing 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 rural 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 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. To this wider concept of development has belatedly been added the dimension of discrimination against women who make up half the human resources available to participate in development processes. The first steps to redress this situation have been taken as awareness and understanding has grown of the causes and effects of women's situation, not least at the international level.

In 1970 the United Nations General Assembly urged the full integration of women in development efforts in the Second U.N. 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.

Within many developing countries initiatives have been taken by governments to translate this international concern into activities. 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 the 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.

Undoubtedly the greatest change necessary is one of attitude both amongst women and society in general. Partly for cultural and historic reasons, partly for economic reasons, women have adopted an attitude of dependence.

In large measure this arises from women's domestic responsibilities and their particular responsibilities for the family's welfare, the upbringing of children and the supply of basic needs. It is now clear that the pattern of development in many developing countries over the last three decades has been discriminatory in its impact on men and women. Social and economic changes have brought added income-earning responsibilities to women in addition to their traditional domestic roles assigned by society, while at the same time resources and opportunities for women to fulfill these roles have in many cases actually been reduced by development processes. For these reasons there is a pressing need for planning and decision-making processes to re-examine policies and the impact of policy instruments on the role and condition of women. This reform of the planning and development process will only be carried through with the active and full participation of women in all levels of that process.

What then is the present role and condition of women in developing countries. Clearly there are substantial differences between individual countries determined by different cultures and economic situations. Some common characteristics and trends can be discerned particularly in relation to universal 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.

The domestic role of women remains dominant in most developing societies. Not only do women have to combine child-bearing and the upbringing of children with the provision of shelter, food, water, clothing and fuel for the family's survival, but they also supplement the family's income. In rural economies this is normally done through subsistence cultivation, 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 but in many areas of economic activity traditional sources of income have disappeared with the introduction of 'low technology', powered food processing, displacement of craft items, and more organized agricultural production. Furthermore, in certain parts of Southern Africa the migration of men to distant or urban places of work places many women in the position of head of the family with near total responsibility for dependents, young and old, as well as survival in the face of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, health problems, unemployment.

It goes without saying that while women's responsibilities have increased with the multiplication of roles, the more general economic situation and environment in which they find themselves in many developing countries has made their responsibilities harder to fulfill. 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 limiting the opportunities for other income earning activities. The significance of those social factors is such that, when combined with the location of the majority of the population (remote from major market centres and isolated in terms of communications), the opportunities for many rural women to participate in industrial activities

are heavily constrained unless compensated for in some way.

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 (such as they were) 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 continuing family responsibilities. Through lack of education and training and through positive discrimination against women by established institutions and organizations women are less able to compete for senior, influential positions with decision-making roles and so are less able to improve their future prospects.

In many developing societies a major obstacle to increased participation by women is the low status and rigid attitudes maintained by society against women. Mention has already been made of the 'dependence situation' which women so often inherit. In addition their relative exclusion from political activities, either by choice or by lack of time and energy, reduces the opportunity for drawing attention to crude inequalities and limits pressures for change. Society ascribes certain fixed roles to women largely by habit or tradition rather than by conscious decisions. Nevertheless there is a natural resistance to change and an inclination to the 'status quo' by vested interests. It must be said that women too have contributed to this self-perpetuating situation by their acquiescence (for whatever reasons) although in traditional societies they have been able to protect their interests to some extent through their dominance in the family. In more open, 'urban', materialistic societies this influence is diminished by their lack of access to resources and to income-earning opportunities.

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. in order to compensate for their neglect in such vital matters. Yet these measures though necessary in themselves can only ameliorate women's disadvantaged position. New strategies and measures are necessary to deal with the fundamental issues of displacement through the reorganization of production through commercialization, changes in technology etc., and loss of access by women to the means of production or survival.

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 women's dependence, raising their status within the family and the community, and creating the 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.

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 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 further 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.

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 costs of young female labour, especially in export processing zones. While there is scope for some improvement in working conditions and terms of employment, care must be taken not to destroy the comparative advantage of developing countries in labour costs too quickly because of the threat of loss of employment opportunities in these seemingly footloose industries. What is required is a determined programme of advance on a broad front and at all levels to improve the conditions of women's participation, allowing time for adjustments to changes in factor prices. Too rapid a change is only likely to cause human suffering since industrial activity is ruled largely by the economics of production.

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, the competition is severe, and the rewards are so limited. Alternative strategies to involve women more in the



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.

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 then 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.

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, but 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, this will require women's representatives and organizations to master planning techniques and to use them to further women's interests over an extended period.

We have embarked on 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 equality of opportunity to which women are entitled as a basic right. The present situation is an amalgam of cultural tradition and the industrial revolution; it will only be reformed by an equally persistent commitment to social change.

