UNIT 3 REVIEW OF PRACTICES: OVERVIEW OF GENDER-BLIND PROGRAMMES

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this Unit is to view government policies and programmes in a systematic way through the “gender lens”. This systematic analyses will gives us insight into whether particular policies or programmes are formulated to address gender issues. Analyses of past policies of the government clearly reflected that the government adopted a gender-blind or a gender-neutral approach in many policies. This will be the focus of this Unit. These analyses show that policy makers assumed that men are the key development actors. Biological differences and cultural determinism played a vital role in formulating policies.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain the gender-blind approach;
- examine policies and programmes based on the gender-blind approach; and
- distinguish gender-blind and gender-aware policies.

3.3 OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMMES: IMPACT OF GENDER-BLIND APPROACHES

Country experiences prove that macroeconomic policies continue to be gender blind. Liberalization measures have impacted women adversely. Economic reforms have adversely affected the rights of workers and their bargaining capacity vis-à-vis employers. Wage differentials, job vulnerability and unpaid work burden for women has increased, while their social safety nets have been eroded. Unequal access for women to schooling, land, credit facilities, alternate employment, skill training and technology has led to the crowding of women in the lowly paid jobs of most sectors. While trade unions have weakened, the militancy of the employers is on the rise. This has manifested in a significant increase in the incidence of lockouts and decline in the incidence of strikes. Women are preferentially hired based on their lack of affiliation to trade unions or workers’ organizations. They are also under-represented at the decision-making levels of mainstream trade unions.
Gender Awareness

Current employment policies fail to incorporate women’s concerns or overlook gender relations of inequality. The Government of India’s report to the Committee on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights (CSECR) acknowledges that women constitute the largest group of unskilled workers, concentrated in the informal economy as casual or piece rate workers with no redressal measures in sight.

In the employment scenario, the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 does not cover all establishments. Illiterate or semi-literate women find it impossible to raise claims to proper authority/court. There are also instances in which pregnant women are often denied employment opportunities (PWECSR, 2008).

Microcredit was conceptualized as a social security product and network. It had notable successes but research shows that it has excluded the poorest and often becomes a debt trap when access to resources is denied at times of crisis. This, as a form of social protection for families and communities, moves state responsibility onto already overworked and overburdened women.

Development-induced displacement due to distorted and shortsighted policies is impacting the livelihoods of large populations in various parts of the country. State controlled forest cover has increased. On the other hand, forest dwellers are displaced for projects of development. Displacement has increased the vulnerability of households headed by women as livelihoods are destroyed. Women and young girls have become victims of a large-scale labour force in the unorganized sector, forced trafficking and prostitutions.

The absence of systematic and gender-disaggregated data on resettlement and rehabilitation, distribution of resource rights, income and assets reflect the apathy of the state machinery to the needs of those who are worst impacted by some development interventions. Women are seldom consulted or involved in the development spaces of such communities and the least likely to be considered in situations of displacement and eviction for allocation of land or compensation.

Twenty-five percent of slum women and an even higher proportion of rural women have no access to drinking water within reasonable distances. Planning for drinking water needs to be sustainable and cannot be left to the market. Issues regarding quality of water as well as monitoring of ground water levels need to be addressed. In addition, rural women’s access to irrigation water for their fields and their equal participation in water user’s associations are essential. The fragmentation of water management and the nature of policy making have restricted women’s participation in decision-making regarding the use of water resources. Often women are not allowed to become members of water users associations, formed for irrigation water, since they do not own land (PWECSR, 2008).

In the provisioning of health, *anganwadis* are run by women employed by the State on a part-time basis for the ICDS programme. They are among the most overworked and underpaid workers and are often paid wages below the prescribed minimum wages for tasks that often require more than a full day’s work. The Minimum Wages Act is inapplicable to them as the State declares them as “part-time”.

Time-use data and agricultural census figures indicate that well over 50 percent of all agricultural work in the country is performed by women. Nearly 20 percent of rural households are now women-headed. However, less than 2 percent of women hold titles to land and have access to independent agricultural credit. The impoverishing impact of landlessness is exacerbated by social exclusion and discrimination for Dalit women. An existing Government of India directive (issued in 1992) on joint registration of land distributed under government schemes in the name of both husband and wife has been neither enforced nor monitored.
Recent amendments to legislation on Hindu women's property rights (Hindu Succession Amendment Act, 2005) have mandated equal inheritance rights for men and women in agricultural land and family property including dwellings. However, these amendments do not apply to non-Hindu women. The extent to which Hindu women will be able to take advantage of these provisions in a milieu where dowry is still prevalent, remains to be seen. Systems of monitoring and maintenance of land records are inadequate and do not provide gender and class/caste disaggregated data for a realistic assessment of land ownership and entitlement. Land reforms have served as a pretext for the state to acquire land amounting to thousands of acres. While some of this has been reportedly handed over to Dalits and Tribals, little is known of the utilization of the balance land mentioned in the government report to CECSR. On the contrary there is evidence of the state withdrawing such awards of land to the marginalized population and reallocating them to external private parties.

The most glaring gender disparity is between women's contribution to agriculture and their limited access to the cultivator's primary resource, namely land. Women's access to land must be increased through all channels – by improving their claims to family land, access to public land and access to subsidized credit for land purchase or lease. The issue of agricultural subsidies needs to be urgently re-examined especially since removal of import restrictions contributes to widespread agrarian distress and peasant suicides that affect seriously the lives of women and children. The problems of women agricultural labourers need special attention, including their wage levels, days of employment and access to basic social security. Creches which are critically needed to enable them to work effectively have not gained attention among policy makers. Food security has emerged as a major problem, with particularly adverse effects on women and girl children. The neglect and decline of the public system for food procurement and distribution needs to be reversed. The PDS should be universalized, strengthened and made more flexible by including traditional food grains and responding to changing local needs.

Wage employment is the most important source of income for the rural poor, especially women. Women are paid lower wages in many rural areas on the assumption that women are less productive. In those parts of Kerala where harvesting is paid by a share of what is harvested, usually 1 to 6, one tends to find a larger proportion of harvesting done by women. Still, we have never heard a complaint from a landowner that women were not good at harvesting, or any claim that males could harvest more in a given period of time.

A growing proportion of migrant workers, especially short-term migrants, are women. Since there is no database on such migrants including commuters, policymakers have tended to ignore the phenomenon. There is no public policy for dealing with migration either at the point of origin or destination. Measures are required at different levels for the protection of and assistance to migrants at both ends, recognition of and protection from problems of violence and exploitation especially of women migrants and children and revamping the public service delivery to move away from residence-based qualification.

With regard to forestry, women are the principal users of forests which are still the most important sources of basic needs such firewood, fodder, food items and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) for millions of rural households. Ninety percent of rural women have to struggle daily for collecting fuel, spending long hours and travelling substantial distances. Much of what they collect is inadequate and also causes substantial indoor air pollution and contributes to female and child morbidity. Moreover, given that men and women draw on forests and village common lands in different ways, there are gendered differences in the knowledge about plants and species. Both equity and efficiency (better forest conservation) can thus depend centrally on women's participation in the institutions for forest management. Yet,
today, in the nearly 84,000 forestry groups protecting forests, involving around eight million persons, women have very limited space in decision-making or access to benefits.

In the realm of education, it is important for educational planning to pay specific attention to recruitment of female teachers from different social groups -- by improving their living and travelling facilities and upgrading teaching skills of potential teachers. It is equally important to ensure security in public spaces and enhance the minimum age at marriage as a social norm. Special efforts will need to be made to bring into the fold children, particularly girls, with disabilities and those belonging to migrant families, squatters, pavement dwellers and other disadvantaged families. Expanding educational opportunities with job-oriented content for adolescent girls needs special attention. Admission norms to institutions like ITIs and other vocational schools need to be revised to allow entry with a Class 8 pass so that the large proportion of children (particularly girls) who now drop out in Class 8 will get an incentive and an opportunity to learn a vocation or trade and also acquire a general education (such as knowledge of legal rights, accounting, civic duties, environmental awareness and gender awareness). Secondary education is a critical level of education that needs more attention. Along with upgrading primary schools, hostel facilities for girls as well as scholarship schemes are necessary for dropout rates at this level to be effectively tackled. Efforts must also be made to address the backlog of adult illiteracy.

Besides themselves suffering from ill-health, women are severely affected by the morbidity and mortality within families as they not only have to cope with the impoverishment that is caused by ill-health but also with the additional burden of care that falls almost entirely on women. Recent findings from the National Family Health Survey-3 (2005-06) clearly point to the continuing neglect of health, the high levels of malnutrition of adolescent girls and women and of maternal mortality. Progress in reducing levels of malnutrition has been extremely slow despite the acceleration in growth. While income poverty and health status are closely interconnected, health outcomes are clearly influenced by many factors including women’s position within the household and the increasing workload. More intensive efforts are needed to improve women’s access to health care by improving access, recruiting more women health-care providers and extending the reach of public health education particularly to women from poor, socially disadvantaged and minority communities. The move to recruit additional anganwadi workers as well as appoint Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) as part of the National Rural Health Mission shows the potential that exists for promoting employment opportunities for women in the health sector. However, the treatment of these two essential categories of female service providers as ‘volunteers’ and ‘activists’ and retaining them as low-paid workers without recognizing them as regular government staff is gender discriminatory.

Toilets for women are a particularly neglected need. The lack of toilets leads to severe health problems among women, loss of dignity and threat to security. Yet most rural and urban households lack toilets. For instance, 62% of slum dwellers do not have access to toilets. Every household in rural and urban areas, whether the dwellings are authorized or unauthorized should have a toilet and adequate financial provisioning is needed for this.

For women in general and poor women in particular, infrastructure is critical especially for cooking energy. There is an urgent need for schemes to increase the supply of non-smoky firewood, including schemes for increasing firewood availability in the short-term and all efforts are needed to help shift to low cost clean fuel such as biogas in the long-term. For poor households small size biogas plants should be designed to minimize need for bio matter and water. Village women should be trained to build and maintain such plants and paid an appropriate wage
for such skilled work. Local supply side bottlenecks need to be removed for households that can afford LPG in rural areas. Media campaigns are needed to focus on the ill-effects of smoky fuels on health, especially of women and children. Women, especially poor women, are increasingly excluded from formal sources of finance and, as a result, have to resort to borrowing from moneylenders at high interest rates. Financial inclusion requires increasing women’s access to all types of credit sources, especially from commercial banks and cooperatives and not just microfinance institutions. Such institutions have tended to overwhelm all other sources for women. While acknowledging the important role of microfinance in providing for women’s needs, women need credit in much larger amounts than currently provided for. Financial inclusion should embody not just loans but include savings, various insurance services, as well as pensions. Evaluation of the success of credit programmes for women should not be linked only to immediate repayments but must be assessed in terms of their impact on women’s livelihoods and acquisition of productive assets.

In addition to ensuring that public expenditures are gender-sensitive, it is equally important to recognize that taxation policies affect men and women differently as consumers and producers. The implications of new tax regimes for women and the poor need to be worked out in detail before they are introduced. There is further need for greater rationalization of existing taxes (direct and indirect) from a gender perspective.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note:  a) Use this space given below to answer the questions.

b) Compare your answers with the one given at the end of the Unit.

1) “Microcredit is a useful strategy for poor women but it can have disadvantages”. Comment on this statement.

2) View the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 and Equal Wage Act through the “gender lens”.

3) What are the implications of NFHS-3 for improving health status of women?
3.4 SUMMING UP

We have seen how gender-blindness is often rooted in the policies and programmes of government. They are not sensitive to gender needs and concerns. This result in critical failures in planning. To avoid this, policy makers, practitioners and analysts should check their assumptions with the realities on the ground. Not only checking the realities but proper interventions to develop gender-aware policies will bring fruitful results. We will examine gender-aware policies in the next Unit. Gender-Aware Policies will bring transformative outcomes. This will reflect the combined effects of the predisposition of individual planners, practitioners and the institutional constraints within which they must function, the socio-economic contexts in which they seek to intervene and the possibilities which it offers. In the case of Gender-Aware policies, we can clearly distinguish the interventions they made and the transformation they brought.

3.5 GLOSSARY

LPG:

Liquefied petroleum gas (also called LPG, GPL, LP Gas, auto gas, or liquid propane gas) is a flammable mixture of hydrocarbon gases used as a fuel in heating appliances and vehicles. It is increasingly used as an aerosol propellant and a refrigerant, replacing chlorofluorocarbons in an effort to reduce damage to the ozone layer. According to the 2001 Census of India, 17.5% of Indian households or 33.6 million Indian households used LPG as cooking fuel in 2001. 76.64% of such households were from urban India making up 48% of urban Indian households as compared to a usage of 5.7% only in rural Indian households. LPG is subsidized by the government.

National Family Health Survey:

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) is a large scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India. Three rounds of survey have been conducted since the first survey in 1992-93. The Survey provides state and national information for India on fertility, infant and child mortality, the practice of family planning, maternal and child health, reproductive health, nutrition, anemia, utilization and quality of health and family planning services. Each successive round of NFHS has had two specific goals: a) to provide essential data on health and family welfare needed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and other agencies for policy and programme purposes and b) to provide information on important emerging health and family welfare issues. The Ministry of Health and Family welfare (MOHFW), Government of India, designated the International Institute of Population Studies...
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IIPS, Mumbai, as the nodal agency, responsible for providing coordination and technical guidance for the survey. IIPS collaborated with a number of Field Organizations (FO) for survey implementation. Each FO was responsible for conducting survey activities in one or more states covered by the NFHS. Technical assistance for the NFHS was provided mainly by ORC Macro (USA) and other organizations on specific issues. The funding for different rounds of NFHS has been provided by USAID, DFID, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF, UNFPA and MOHFW, GOI.

ITIs:
Industrial Training Institutes & “Industrial Training Centres” are training institutes which provide training in technical fields and are constituted under Directorate General of Employment & Training (DGET), Ministry of Labour & Employment, Government of India. Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) are government-run training organizations. Industrial Training Centres (ITCs) are privately-run equivalents. They provide post-school technical training. In 2002 there were 1800 ITIs, providing 373,000 training places and 2850 ITCs providing 305,000 places. About 400 ITIs in India, have been covered under the scheme – Upgradation into Centres of Excellence. This is a Vocational Training Improvement Project with World Bank Assistance. Normally a person who has passed 10 standard (SSLC) is eligible for admission to ITI. The objective of opening of ITI is to provide technical manpower to industries. These persons are trained in basic skills required to do jobs of say operator or a craftsman. The course in ITI is designed in a way to impart basic skill in the trade specified. The duration of the course may vary from one year to three years depending upon the trade opted. After completion of the desired period of training the person is eligible to appear in the AITT (All India Trade Test) conducted by NCVT (National Council for Vocational Training). After successfully passing AITT, the person is awarded National Trade Certificate (NTC) in concerned trade by NCVT. After passing ITI course a person may opt to undergo practical training in his trade in an industry for a year or two. Again the person has to appear & pass in a test to be conducted by NCVT to get the National Apprenticeship Certificate.
Gender Awareness

3.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Liberalization measures have impacted women adversely. Economic reforms have adversely affected the rights of workers and their bargaining capacity vis-à-vis employers. Wage differentials, job vulnerability and unpaid work burden for women has increased, while their social safety nets have been eroded. Unequal access for women to schooling, land, credit facilities, alternate employment, skill training and technology has led to the crowding of women in the lowly paid jobs of most sectors.

2) Maternity Benefit Act 1961 – The object of maternity leave and benefit is to protect the dignity of motherhood by providing for the full and healthy maintenance of women and her child when she is not working. With the advent of the modern age, as the number of women employees is growing, maternity leave and other maternity benefits are becoming increasingly common. But there was no beneficial piece of legislation on the horizon which is intended to achieve the object of promoting social justice to women workers employed in factories, mines and plantations.

Act 53 of 1961

With the object of providing maternity leave and benefit to women employees, the Maternity Benefit Bill was passed by both the Houses of Parliament and subsequently it received the assent of the President on 12th December, 1961 to become an Act under short title and numbers “The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (53 of 1961)”. An Act to regulate the employment of women in certain establishments for certain periods before and after child-birth and to provide for maternity benefit and certain other benefits.

Equal Wage Act – The Wages in India are governed by the Central and each States’ own Legislature and Rules made for the purpose. Therefore, it would be wrong to explain a common description for the purpose. However, there are two main Central enactments which broadly govern the minimum wages and related benefits to all the employees in an establishment across India. These Acts also cover the equal wages aspects. States can improve upon these provisions in their own legislations for the purpose. These two Central Enactments are:

- The Payment of Wages Act, 1936
- The Minimum Wages Act, 1948

Additionally, another Act named The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 has been enacted in view of the requirements of the work force in modern times.

2) Time-use data and agricultural census figures indicate that well over 50 percent of all agricultural work in the country is performed by women. Nearly 20 percent of rural households are now women-headed. However, less than 2 percent of women hold titles to land and have access to independent agricultural credit. The impoverishing impact of landlessness is exacerbated by social exclusion and discrimination for Dalit women. An existing Government of India directive (issued in 1992) on joint registration of land distributed under government schemes in the name of both husband and wife has been neither enforced nor monitored.
3.7 REFERENCES


3.8 QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND PRACTICE

1) How can we overcome the implications of the gender-blind approach?

2) What is the gender-blind approach?