

REPORT ON THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

Maliwada, Aurangabad
Maharashtra, India
23-31 August, 1981

The Women's Institute was conceived as a way to support and widen the responsible participation of women in the development effort in communities. The women who work with the Institute of Cultural Affairs:India face many demands in working in village development projects with the focus on human development. Whatever their educational and social backgrounds they are required to develop skills that permit them to be effective in their task. The curriculum was designed to provide models for their work in the villages, to practically equip them to take more responsibility, to beckon village leadership and to deal with family demands.

Thirty-three women participated, representing all the thirteen ICA:India offices. They met together in Maliwada for eight days. The three curriculum modules focused on the Woman and her Home, the Woman and her Society and the Woman and her Family. The curriculum was a balance among participatory conversations, workshops, lectures and outside speakers.

The context for the whole event was provided by daily lectures from the Cultural Studies (CS-1) course. This detailed the dramatic changes in the twentieth century which have demanded changes in the women's lives. Reflections following each talk offered the chance for the group to push through its experience of the twentieth century. The decor and the dinner conversations on great women were a global backdrop to the event.

The first module was on the Woman and her Home. The participants experienced the fascination of seeing ways to master aspects of life which can often be chaotic. Training was done in such skills as curriculum planning for children, budgeting and accounting, planning menus and improving sanitation. The role session on roles women do and could play in the home provided a valuable opportunity for reflection.

In the module concerned with the Woman and her Society, the emphasis was on assuming responsibility in the villages. It began with reports of last year's victories in women's advancement work: planning events with the women, Mahila Mandal registrations in the cluster villages, establishing and supporting preschools in the cluster villages and holding seminars in industry and skills training. Mrs. L. B. Londhe, the Mukhye Sevika of the Aurangabad Panchayat Samiti, reported on available schemes for women and communities. The participants went out in nine teams to plan with women in the neighbouring villages of Maliwada. This provided the experience for a reflection on the challenges in village development. A demonstration Global Women's Forum under the trees provided the chance to express the concerns and present proposals through drama. A session on leadership focused on strategies for furthering the leadership journey. This module provided the women with the chance to see how to use their experience and abilities as a part of a team working in villages.

The third module centred on the Woman and her Family. The impact of this module had to do with ways to continually sustain and recreate the individual and family. The health workshop was a serious challenge to take up the task of keeping themselves and others healthy and at work. The family planning session unravelled the facts and the alternatives of child spacing and deciding family size. Reflection on decision making in situations

emphasised how to consider all alternatives before choosing a necessary response. Hilarious role-playing of telephone conversations and appointments released women to consider their own styles. This module concluded with a celebration in which the women joined with others in games, feasting and singing.

In the evenings over dinner conversations were held about pioneering women of history. Jijabai was a woman who concentrated all her care on training her son Shivaji, who became the leader of Maharashtra in 1674. Harriet Tubman, "Grandma Moses" of the Underground Railway to free slaves in the southern United States, was a woman whose undying passion was sustained through numerous difficulties and who was not satisfied with gaining her own freedom. Supriya, an unknown young woman, took responsibility for finding a way for her community to get over the crisis of a famine. Golda Meir was a leader who kept her vision in mind through unspeakable historical tragedy and found ways to continually act upon it. In some cases the impact of these conversations came from single events in their lives, in others in seeing the whole life journey. Each of these women became a sister, a colleague in the journey.

After dinner every evening an hour and a half were set aside to learn new skills. The first evening the group listed skills they had, skills they could teach and skills they wanted to learn. Every woman selected one unfamiliar skill - cycling, cutting and sewing, knitting, plastic bag weaving, typing. From the initial "I can't learn a new skill now" or "I am not educated, so how can I learn?" the women experienced the fear and fascination of mastering something new that they had named as necessary. Four evenings were far too few to totally equip people with new skills. However sharing the journey of mastering a new skill empowered the interior decision to take charge of one's own training. The mood was one of jovial experimentation. Two women who became quite good at cycling became symbols of possibility for everyone.

The participants brought with them seventeen children two years and younger. These children took part in curriculum and child care from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Over the eight days they learned how to care for their bodies, sit and eat with a group and to use a toilet. To see such young children deciding to participate in curriculum events demonstrated the impact of Imaginal Education and the potential of freeing women to engage in the community with adequate care for their children. The benefits of emerging generation structures for both children and parents became clear.

At the closing feast two gifts were presented to each woman: a blue sari and blouse and a brief case printed with "Women's School, Maliwada, August 1981". These practical tools will serve to remind the women of their resolve.

The participation of the men in the whole event was one of profound honour. The rose presented to each woman at the opening feast and the exquisite settings for the concluding event were dramatic expressions of this honour. The men took the load of the enablement - of food preparation, child care and curriculum preparation. Their presence, constant participation, work in leadership preparation and translation was invaluable. The whole event needs to be cast in the perspective of people who are concerned about the critical role of communities and the radical need for the lively engagement of women in that task.

A special word needs to be said about the guests who shared their resources and expertise with the school. Dr. (Mrs.) Jyotsna Gharpure and her team

of the Family Welfare Training Centre, Aurangabad, gave a talk and showed films on sex education and family planning. Mr. Huddar and Mr. Joshi of Pressure Cookers and Appliances Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, demonstrated the use of pressure cookers and the resultant benefits in nutrition and in saving fuel and time. Mrs. P. B. Londhe, the Mukhye Sevika of the Aurangabad Panchayat Samiti detailed the schemes and services available for women's advancement. In addition 23 businesses and companies donated money and imkin goods to support this event.

The impact of the programme was in allowing women to experience new engagement and collegiality in dealing with the challenges in the villages. They also felt the demand to take on and play various roles. Every woman had an opportunity to lead the group, with assistance in preparation when needed so that the experience was one of success. Several decided to translate for the first time. Those who were experienced leaders struggled with how to share their skills and experience with others. Perhaps the most revealing indicator of the impact of this programme can be seen in the following quotations from participants:

"I received a gift... the gift of courage to go work in the villages."

"I'm not educated but I can still take responsibility for villages. I can also learn to read and write."

"Six months ago I had never spoken to people other than my family; now I can go and talk with people."

"I must take my new knowledge to my sisters."

"We are a demonstration in how we think, talk and act."

CURRICULUM OF THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

	OPENING	WOMAN AND HER HOME (ASHRAM)		WOMAN AND HER SOCIETY		WOMAN AND HER FAMILY		CLOSING	
	S	M	T	W	H	F	S	S	
600		Breakfast and Journal News Conversation							Evaluation & Reflection
780		CS1: Scientific Revolution	CS1: Urban Revolution	CS1: Secular Revolution	CS1: Contextual Ethics	NavaGram Prayas Movement Story	Ongoing Training Plan		
880									
900		Spin on Care	Spin on Corporateness	Spin on Courage	Spin on Creativity	Missional Family Spin	-		
1200		Exemplary Ashram / House and ashram tours; Role w/s	Finances / Building a budget; accounting	Reports on catalytic work in village clusters (spkr) Govt. schemes for village women	Demonstration Global Women's Forum	Male-Female Dynamics / Alternatives in a situation w/s	Health Issues / First Aid demo.	Closing Feast & Commissioning	
130		Lunch Break							
430		Emerging Generation Structures / E.g. curriculum building	Nutrition and Sanitation / Five fingers menus	Women's Meetings in nine Cluster Villages	Pressure Cooker demo. (spkr) / Leadership spin & w/s	Family Planning talks & films (Spkr)	Style w/s / Celebration Prep		
630		Break							
800	Opening Feast & Context	Conversation on Jijabai	Conversation on Harriet Tubman	Reflection on engagement	Conversation on Supriya	Conversation on Golda Meir	Celebration with Area		
900				Skills Sessions					
				Faculty Prep					