

## 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. Women face many demands in working in village development with the focus on human development. Whatever their educational and social backgrounds they are required to develop skills that enable 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 style.

Thirty three women participated, representing thirteen major cities of India. 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 event was provided by daily lectures pointing to the dramatic changes in the twentieth century which have demanded changes in women's lives. Reflections following each talk offered the chance for the group to illustrate their experiences 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 roles session on roles women do and could play in the home provided an 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 with accomplishments in women's advancement work: planning events with the women, Mahila Mandal registrations in the cluster villages, establishing and supporting preschools 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 then went out in nine teams to plan with women in the neighboring 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 ways for furthering the leadership journey. This module provided the women with the opportunity to see how to use their experience and abilities as a part of a team working in villages.

The third module centered on The Woman and Her Family. The intent of this module was to consider 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 effective in their work. The family planning session unravelled the facts and alternatives of child spacing and deciding family size. Reflection on decision making in situations emphasized how to consider alternatives before choosing a necessary response. 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 their community to recover from a famine crisis. Golda Meir was a leader who kept her vision in mind through unspeakable historical tragedy, and found ways to continually respond to it. In some cases the impact of these conversations came from single events in their lives, in others it came in seeing the whole life journey. Each of these women became a sister, a colleague in the journey.

After dinner every evening, one and a half hours 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. Each woman selected one unfamiliar skill: cycling, cutting and sewing, knitting, plastic bag weaving, and 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 spent in introducing people to new skills training. Sharing the journey of mastering a skill empowered the interior decision to take charge of one's own training. The mood became one of jovial experimentation.

The participants brought with them a total of seventeen children, two years and younger. These children took part in the curriculum and child care throughout each day. During the eight days they learned how to care for their bodies, sit and eat with a group and to use a toilet. To see a very young child decide to participate in curriculum events demonstrated the impact of imaginal education, and the potential of freeing women to engage in the community that provides adequate care for their children.

At the closing feast two gifts were presented to each woman: a sari and a 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 Institute was a profound address. They presented a rose to each women at the opening feast and provided a special setting for the concluding event. The men assumed responsibility for food preparation, child care, and curriculum preparation. Their presence, work in leadership preparation and translation were recognized. The event demonstrated the men's awareness of the need for the lively engagement of women in the task of community development.

Guests and those behind the scenes 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 plans and services available for women's advancement. In addition 23 businesses and companies donated money and 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 experienced 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 of them decided to translate for the first time. Those who were experienced leaders struggled with how to share their skills and experiences 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 work in the villages."

"I am not educated but I can still take responsibility. 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

	WOMAN AND HER HOME (ASHRAM)			WOMAN AND HER SOCIETY		WOMAN AND HER FAMILY		CLOSING
	M	T	W	II	F	S	S	
	Breakfast and Journal News Conversation							
6:00								
7:30	CS1: Scientific Revolution	CS1: Urban Revolution	CS1: Secular Revolution	CS1: Contextual Ethics	NavsGram Prayas Movement Story	Ongoing Training Plan	Evaluation & Reflection	
8:30	Spin on Care	Spin on Corporateness	Spin on Courage	Spin on Creativity	Missional Family Spin	-		
9:00	Exemplary Ashram / House and ashram tours; Role w/s	Finances / Building a budget; accounting	Reports on catalytic work in village / schemes / clusters for village women	Demonstration Global Women's Forum	Male-Female Dynamics / Alter-natives in a situation w/s	Health Issues w/s / First Aid demo.	Closing Feast & Commissioning	
12:00			LUNCH BREAK					
1:30	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		
4:30			BREAK					
5:30	Conversation on Jijabai	Conversation on Harriet Tubman	Reflection on engagement	Conversation on Supriya	Conversation on Golda Meir	Celebration with Area		
8:00			Skills Sessions					
9:00			Faculty Prep					
	OPENING FEAST & CONTEXT							