



WOMEN AS EQUAL PARTNERS
IN
THIRD WORLD COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

A POLICY STATEMENT
OF THE
ICA WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

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1. FOREWORD

In presenting this Policy Statement, the Women's Committee wishes to emphasize that it is not intended as a Development Policy for women which is distinct or separate from the ICA's Development Policy. The Committee wishes to draw attention to the fact that some Development Policies in the past have overlooked the needs of the women and have thus had negative results on their situation.

The Women's Committee is also aware that the situation for women in co-operatives varies from region to region, from one country to another. These statements and lines of action must therefore be reviewed and adapted, taking into account the conditions, traditions and culture in each country.

The Women's Committee feels that the following ideas should inspire any policy action or projects which are meant for the promotion of women in the developing countries. The same principles apply of course to men in co-operative development. The point the Committee wishes to emphasize is that often women are overlooked in Development Policies.

It is urged that this Policy Statement drawn up after consultation with the Women's Officers in the ICA Regional Offices, be read in conjunction with the ICA's Policy for Co-operative Development, published in June 1983.

2. INTRODUCTION : SETTING THE BACKGROUND OF WOMEN IN CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

This part of the paper is meant to call the attention of all those involved in co-operative development to some of the problems which currently hinder the active participation of women in co-operatives.

Active participation of women in co-operative development implies that they fully participate in all areas of co-operatives. Moreover that they are fully associated in the implementation of development programmes.

Too often women are considered as mere users of co-operative services, or passive observers of programmes which can radically change their living conditions.

2.1 Prejudices

In most countries we find both formal and informal prejudices about what women can do and what they cannot, or must not, do. Sometimes these prejudices affect the co-operative sector by preventing women from full participation in co-operative activities; for example, they may not be employed for certain tasks (although they may carry out heavy work at home). Sometimes they are not allowed to attend meetings where men are present, or are not supposed to talk at public meetings. It may be that they are considered incapable of handling money. When planning co-operative development we must be aware of these obstacles and try to overcome those which are based on prejudices.

2.2 Laws and rules

Laws, and even co-operative rules and by-laws, sometimes hinder women's membership in co-operative societies. One example is membership in agricultural co-operatives. Frequently this is restricted to owners or tenants of land or usufruct. Men are generally treated as the owners or tenants but it is women who actually work the fields. Rules like these are very often a result of the fact that co-operative by-laws, copied from European countries, have not been adapted to the conditions existing in developing countries.

Religious rules and traditions may also impede women's participation in co-operative activities.

2.3 Heavy workload and lack of time

Rural women in developing countries often have a working day that starts at 5 in the morning and finishes at 9 or 10 in the evening. They also have the main responsibility for the well-being of the family, including providing water and fuel which is often carried long distances and of cooking, cleaning and washing. Women are also responsible for the upbringing of children and care of old relatives and for attendance and help at weddings and funerals. Usually women also have to grow the food needed by their families, which means hard labour in fields which are often situated far away from their villages.

Women in urban areas often have to struggle hard to feed and clothe their families and work long hours for low salaries in factories, offices and domestic service far away from their homes.

The working day for many women in developing countries leaves little time and even less strength for attendance, let alone for active participation in co-operative activities.

2.4 Lack of means

Employed women are mostly found in the lower income groups. Women working in the home have very limited possibilities to earn money. Whatever financial means they have will first have to be used for the family ; e.g. school fees and materials, clothes for the children. This lack of means limits the opportunities they have to become members of co-operatives where a membership fee has to be paid. It also reduces their opportunities for using co-operative services or for buying seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, farm tools, food and household items. Also for using credit and savings cooperatives or for obtaining capital for small investments to improve agricultural output or for starting other income generating project. Moreover, where the migration of men to the cities and to other countries exists, it often means that women are left behind with inadequate resources both for themselves and their children and for their old parents.

2.5 Lack of influence

Women do not have adequate influence on co-operative activities. This is an unavoidable consequence of their not being present on the bodies where decisions are taken, which is mainly the result of the obstacles listed above.

Men and women live in different spheres of society; they have different views and different experiences. Therefore, it is important, for the future of the co-operative movement, that the "other half" of the world's population should be involved in co-operative development on equal terms with men.

2.6 Lack of training

Knowledge is necessary for people who are to take an active part in the management of co-operatives. Women in developing countries often lack the basic education which is necessary for further training. Special training programmes should be devised for illiterate persons—both men and women. Women may, however, be prevented from participating in education and training activities for other reasons such as not being allowed to travel, stay overnight in a hotel or not being able to leave children. These obstacles can be overcome if the programmes are carefully planned in order to suit women's conditions.

Education and training will give women the knowledge and skills they will require if they are to participate fully in co-operative development at local, national, regional and international levels.

Modern constitutions may provide for adult suffrage and equality before the law but may have little immediate effect on the substance of social relations, especially where social stratification persists. The obvious example is the position of women in many of the developing countries (and even in countries claiming to be advanced). Women may be enfranchised in the political sense, but continue indefinitely, because of immemorial social customs, to suffer economic, educational and other disabilities which condemn them to an all too passive rôle in the progress of their nation towards modern standards of welfare and enlightenment. The Co-operative Movement can become one of the instruments of women's liberation from ignorance, poverty, drudgery and social inferiority. It can reinforce its own action by harnessing their energies and idealism to its constructive efforts.

WP Watkins
ICA Congress Bournemouth 1963

What of the place and role of women in co-operatives?

- Co-operatives in which the talents and capabilities of women are given full play will enjoy great advantages in the future.
- In certain parts of the world, there is evidence that some types of co-operatives, housing for example, make very rapid progress under the influence and leadership of women.
- Participation in all aspects of Co-operation should be on equal terms as between women and men. A special and separate role for women should be continued only where cultural and religious traditions dictate it.

A. F. Laidlaw
ICA Congress Moscow 1980

3.1 Women in co-operative development - is there still a problem ?

In the 20 years since the ICA's Congress at Bournemouth, it must be asked if the co-operative movement has really become an instrument of women's liberation from ignorance, poverty, drudgery and social inferiority. Is their participation, in all aspects of co-operation, on equal terms with men ?

The ICA document on development policy provides for participation on equal terms for men and women in co-operative development. Yet, because of "immemorial social customs" as well as cultural and religious traditions, women are still condemned to an all too passive rôle in co-operative development. Therefore, while the ICA adopts an overall policy, the Women's Committee considers that it is its duty to call upon the co-operative development policy makers and experts, to consider the consequences their actions may have on women in development target groups.

Both the enormous literature and the comprehensive research data which stemmed from the UN Decade for Women show the harmful results which development projects can have on women's situation if devised without due consideration to their direct or indirect effects. "Women in the third world too often have to accept development processes that are implemented by and oriented towards men".

The question must be asked : Has the international co-operative movement a better record to report ? Have development

3.2 Toward a more participative approach

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The Women's Committee of the ICA strongly recommends that full consideration be given in future development programmes to the following basic statements.

3.2-1 Development is a process which must derive its form and content above all from the people themselves and that this applies to women as well as to men.

It is the women themselves in developing countries who should decide the things they want and the form these should take. This again, should be foremost in co-operative development policy.

3.2-2 Support should be given to women's groups and organizations which are striving to promote the economic independence of women and which give them a say in the process of change which takes place in the development context at the local, national and international levels.

In most developing countries, groups of women, often based on traditional economic association, are striving towards better living conditions. The Women's Committee feels that such groups are likely to express actual felt needs and that they should be closely associated in the elaboration of development plans. It recommends that these groups be identified and considered as a base for genuine co-operative development.

3.2-3 Channels of information and communication should be established between women in the developing countries. This should be considered as an important aspect of development policy.

It is generally observed that co-operatives in the developing countries have better knowledge of co-operative achievements in the industrialised countries than of those in the other developing countries. Such a situation tends to imply that there is a single model for co-operative development.

ICA Regional Offices might be asked to identify where and when such exchanges of information and experience should take place. It has been started for men. Efforts should be made to extend these to women; though the Women's Committee looks for integration of both men and women in co-operative activities, it recognises that specific dispositions may temporarily be needed for women.

3.2-4 Plans for any co-operative project should first be scrutinized to determine how they are likely to affect women's work and how they can strengthen their economic and social positions.

The Women's Committee proposes to establish a set of criteria by which co-operative development projects should be scrutinized before they are implemented. This does not lessen the importance of setting some kind of objective as a means of assessing actual results after completion of a project.

The Women's Committee believes that these criteria should be applied to all projects and not only to those specifically intended for women.

Resources should be made available in development budget to check whether the participation of women and men in co-operative development has been on equal terms.

4. FIELDS FOR APPLICATIONS OF THE POLICY PROMISES FOR WOMEN IN CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

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There are aspects of the priorities in the ICA's Development Policy which the Women's Committee wishes to emphasize, because they are of direct interest to the women.

4.1 Food and agriculture

Co-operatives for feeding a hungry world, such was the appeal made by A.F. LAIDEAW. In addition to the ICA paper, the Women's Committee wishes to lay emphasis on the development of food crops. As we said earlier, women in most developing countries, still bear the main responsibility for producing food for their families. Yet they have little, if any, access to means for increasing production, for lightening their work, such as good land, agricultural extension services, new seeds, fertilisers, appropriate tools and animal driven equipment.

They also lack information about what is produced by other women's groups, or what kind of production for which there is a local market. They may continue producing foods for which there no longer is a market. They may also lack adequate information about the better use of water, fuel, and local food products.

4.2 Employment and industry

In addition to the ICA Policy paper, the Women's Committee wishes to emphasize that women need more income generating activities in order to better their economic positions.

Yet women often constitute an easy source of cheap labour for routine work, because "they usually lack the knowledge and opportunity required to rise above the lowest-paid jobs".

When organized in the form of handicraft co-operatives, women, and men alike, are usually keeping to very traditional productions for which no or very narrow - market possibilities, exist.

The international co-operative movement, by providing information and training and eventually new markets, should be asked to participate in finding satisfactory solutions.

Regarding the introduction of new technology, co-operative development experts should take care to ensure that women can use new tools, by relating them to traditionally used methods.

4.3 Savings and credit

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The Women's Committee fully subscribes to the ICA Policy paper on this question. Yet, it wishes to draw attention to the fact that in some African countries, a woman cannot obtain a loan unless her husband guarantees it, even though she can provide the necessary security. But traditionally, women may gather in small saving groups for family projects. The Women's Committee suggests that such practices should be analysed so as to ensure that the introduction of more elaborate schemes does not damage the activities of the women in this field. It should be borne in mind that credit facilities in the developing countries tend to be more frequently used by civil servants, rather than by the farmers themselves and that the women are totally deprived of the benefit of their savings.

4.4. Training and education

The necessity for appropriate training and education for women stems from the above remarks. The ICA Policy paper emphasizes the importance of co-operative education and training programmes for members and Committee members at field level.

The Women's Committee wishes to lay further emphasis on the importance of adopting educational methods which aim at maintaining and strengthening solidarity between the women. An analysis of community relations would be useful to ensure that training is related to activities which are performed by women on the basis of what they are, what they know and the intended objective of newly acquired knowledge.

5. CONCLUSIONS

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This Policy Document seeks a new approach for women in co-operative development. It asks why should not women in developing countries be allowed to influence their own development in the co-operative field.

In order to ascertain the participation of women at all stages of development projects, the Women's Committee recommends that the ICA adopts a checklist of basic criteria which should be applied to any development project to see how it affects the position of women.

In addition, the Women's Committee recommends the following :

- 5.1 Because conditions, customs and traditions vary from country to country, and even from one part of a country to another, a thorough study of local conditions should be carried out when planning all co-operative development projects.
- 5.2 A study of laws and by-laws for co-operative societies should be carried out to determine whether these prevent women's full membership and in co-operative societies and thus limits their means of influencing the co-operative development. The study should also suggest ways of removing these obstacles or for compensating for them when necessary.
- 5.3 In agricultural co-operative development programmes emphasis should be laid on the improvement of food crops. Better seeds, tools and other implements for the food production will improve the standard of nutrition in the family. They will also lighten the workload for women and enable them to spend more time on education, training, co-operative activities.
- 5.4 Many donor agencies have special funds for women projects. These funds should be utilized for projects for women in the co-operative sector.
- 5.5 A model on how to write applications by women for development aid, how to involve governmental institutions, etc. should be circulated by the ICA Secretariat.
- 5.6 The ICA Secretariat, the Regional Offices, all the auxiliary Committees are resources that should be used to further the development of co-operatives and to improve the role of women in this development. Men and women must be allowed equal opportunities in co-operatives.

Checklist of basic criteria for the scrutiny of proposals for co operative technical assistance projects to see how these will affect the position of women.

All project proposals are, of course, scrutinized before approval on points such as :

- which is the target group ?
- what are the problems of the target group ?
 - will these problems be solved by the technical assistance to any reasonable degree ?
 - are the members of the target group themselves involved in the planning and implementation of the project ?

To find out what consequences the project activities will have on the women in the target group, it is necessary to look at some particular points. It is particularly important to ensure that the project does not have any negative effects on the situation for women, but that their position is improved so that the gap between men and women is reduced.

We must

- A) ensure that the role of women has been duly recognized;
- B) determine what positive or negative consequences the proposed project might have for women in the target group, and try to find out ways for offsetting the negative consequences.

In order to do this it is necessary to know what role women play in the community. What are their responsibilities and tasks; on which decisions do they have an influence. A list of the distribution of tasks between men, women and children will be very useful for this purpose.

The following points should be considered when checking project proposals :

- 1) How do the project activities affect the economic situation of women ?

Will their role in the family economy deteriorate ? (This can happen e.g. when cash crops are introduced, since usually men work with cash crops and control the cash received. Projects may result in women losing a source of income).

Will their position in the family economy improve ? (This can be the case if the women can take advantage of a new source of income through project activities).

What kinds of measures are taken to offset negative effects, if any ?

- 2) How will the project affect the social position of women in the community ?

Will it be improved ? (E.g. by making sure that women are given full information about project objectives and activities to enable them to give their views; or by alleviating their workload to give them more time for participation in community affairs, education and training activities).

Will it be worsened ? (E.g. by traditional women's tasks being transferred to men through introduction of new technology; or by taking away responsibilities which women previously had).

- 3) How does the project affect the women's workload ?

Will it be lightened ? (E.g. by providing better access to clean water, fuel; better tools and inputs for working in the fields; new skills and tools to facilitate household work and income generating activities).

Will it be made heavier ? (E.g. by adding new tasks, or by forcing the women to cultivate fields further away from their homes for food production; by making them carry water, fuel, food longer distances; perhaps adding to their responsibilities because men will be engaged elsewhere).

- 4) Will the proposed project have any impact on the food intake or health

Will the women continue to have access to less nutritional food, or smaller quantities of food ? (Cash crop introduction or better marketing facilities may have such effects, as then products may be sold instead of consumed by the family, and the cash received is mostly kept by the men and not spent for the family's consumption).

Will women through project activities be able to improve health prospects ? (E.g. through better knowledge on nutrition, how to make better use of available food items, or even access to more nutritious food).

- 5) How will women be involved in the project activities ?

In what capacity and at what level ?

(E.g. how will women be able to influence the planning and implementation of the project ? Will they be present in the decision-making bodies ?).

- 6) Will women be able to participate in the project activities on equal terms with men ?

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(Do religion, education, tradition, social structure prevent full participation of women in the area? Are they allowed to work out of their homes; to meet other men than near relatives; are they subject to sex taboos, e.g. tasks women are not allowed to do or tasks only women are allowed to do?)

7) How is the choice of technology made?

- (What role have the women in the target group had in deciding on this? How will the technical devices affect the possibilities for women to participate? Do traditional roles prevent women from using these tools? Does economic situation prevent women from obtaining the tools?)

8) What measures have been taken to ensure that women are able to participate fully in the education, training and extension activities defined in the project?

(E.g. will place and time for meetings be suitable? Adequate accommodation, travel facilities and babysitting provided? Will specific dispositions compensate for illiteracy or lack of other basic education?)

9) Will the education programmes in the project give women the knowledge they need to ensure them access to the whole co-operative structure?

(E.g. will they be able to compete on equal terms with men for positions in the societies and unions? Will the education programmes allow women to acquire the know-how needed to use the new technology, to do accounting work etc.)

10) Will the project staff (expatriate and local) be in a position to work with the women in the target group?

Will women be employed in the project? In what capacity?

(Women officers may be necessary if the women in the target group are to be allowed to participate).