

Women Suffer Social Discrimination

by Syeda Zakia Ahsan

THE International Labour Organisation under the auspices of the Women's Affairs Department has undertaken a project of three and a half years duration entitled "Technologies for Rural Employment with Special Reference to Women", with the aim of providing employment to rural women to gain economic solvency, and of reducing drudgery which is so widely spread in rural Bangladesh.

riverine country with water all around, yet the availability of drinking water and clean water for other domestic purposes is a very serious problem. Often women have to

travel miles to fetch water for cooking and other purposes. The effect is negative in more than one way. Firstly, a lot of energy is exerted unnecessarily which could be used in other

useful pursuits. Bangladesh has seasonal variations in the water table thereby making wells not always usable. Also water salinity is high, making it unsuitable for drinking or washing

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Photo: International Labour Office

Village women in Bangladesh spend most of their time in domestic chores. Sometimes the ordeal is even more strenuous when one has to attend to household work along with looking after the aged and the sick and at the same time giving due attention to infants. This sort of life style leaves little or almost no time for leisure.

Statistics show that due to lack of rest, recreation and a poor diet most mothers suffer from ill health and are subject to severe problems during and after pregnancy. If the mothers could earn, life would be better. But then if they want to earn, who will look after the house, the elderly and the infants? This is why reduction of drudgery is a vital component to enrich the lives of the rural women in Bangladesh.

Harvest time bears tidings of good times ahead. But to the female who look after the household, it means continuous work, often skipping meals and in a nutshell a terrible time. It is in this area that the pedal thresher and winnow can play a vital role in drudgery reduction. The selected beneficiary members of the relevant groups received training on paddy threshing and paddy/rice winnowing which has already been deployed at the project locations. Except from the beneficiaries of Arapara village in Savar Upazila, who have been excluded from this training, since they do not have any agricultural background or interest, seven out of eight project locations have been covered with fifteen trainees from each location.

Though Bangladesh is a

purposes. Moreover the massive introduction of shallow tubewells for irrigation in the recent past has resulted in the lowering of water level and depletion of underground resources. Keeping in mind the local condition, it has been found that deep set "Tara" pumps would be the most suitable if the drudgery caused due to lack of water for cooking and other purposes has to be eradicated.

The "Tara" pump is a direct action PVC handpump which can be operated in water tables down to 12 metres. It has many advantages over conventional handpumps. They are:

- 1) High Yield with easy extraction of water.
- 2) Easy installation using traditional shidger system.
- 3) Simple technology and easy to use.
- 4) Easy maintenance by the users without handtools.
- 5) Scientifically designed keeping in view the human anatomy for less physical labour input.
- 6) Approximately half the cost of conventional deeper pumps.
- 7) Made locally in Bangladesh.

Cooking is another area that causes much misery among village women. Sometimes fuel wood has to be obtained from different places, taking up time and energy that could be utilised for other profitable occupations. Cooking is, most of the time women's nightmare. Firstly, because availability of the correct amount of food and the right kind is always not possible. Moreover, it is often hard to light a fire and smoke filled cooking can never be a pleasure.

To relieve rural women

from strain, drudgery and unpaid domestic work and to enable them to release time and energy for alternative use in income generating activities or leisure, the ILO project entitled "Technologies for Rural Employment with Special Reference to Women" working in collaboration with the Women's Affairs Department, has decided to introduce the improved "Chula" (Stoves) for cooking purposes to the project beneficiaries. Prototypes of the improved "Chula" have been developed by the Bangladesh Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR) and R&D institution of the Bangladesh Government. Apart from being energy efficient in terms of using approximately fifty per cent less fuel compared to the traditional "Chula", and conserving heat through innovative structural design, the "Chula" has also other added qualities. Firstly, it reduces environmental pollution and secondly, provides a cleaner, smokeless cooking atmosphere for the users. Apart from domestic use, these "Chula" can also be used commercially for economic activities like the making of chanchur (hot gram) and muri (puffed rice) and other bakery and confectionery products.

The project also intends to explore the dissemination and commercialisation of the improved "Chula", through training the beneficiaries in production and marketing of the "Chulas" in their local areas.

Although no direct economic benefits are expected from the introduction of social/consumption-oriented

technologies in the form of water supply (Tara pump) or improved "Chula" for domestic cooking, certainly the users will benefit indirectly in terms of drudgery relief.

Relief from strain and drudgery by the adoption of the facilities is only a small step, a beginning but in a broader sense, a new beginning of a life for many women in rural area.

Less People Means Steady Development

by A Special Correspondent

BY mid-year, the world's population clock will tick past the 5.5 billion mark. According to this year's State of the World Population Report, growth will begin to ease off at about 10 billion by 2050 when the more fortunate among today's teenagers will be drawing their pension cheques.

But of much greater concern today and for the future, are the 1.1 billion people who are already living under appalling circumstances. Ill-housed, poorly nourished, illiterate and condemned to poor health and abbreviated lifespans, this is the group which is growing fastest on a road to social, economic and ecological ruin.

With population growth nudging the 97-million-a-year mark, more than half of this poverty bulge will be in South Asia and Africa. Over the next 35 years, population density in Bangladesh will more than double from 860 people per square kilometre to 1,755 and India will replace China as the world's most populous nation.

The clock cannot be turned back, but it can be slowed. "India is not one country, but several," states the report. The national experience is the outcome of very diverse

the five northern states of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa, which hold a combined 40 per cent of India's population. It notes that Kerala has matched the human development performance of the most successful developing countries while the other four are among the worst.

The key in both cases is the investment priority given or denied to education, and health, and the rights of women.

Kerala is not unique. Wherever countries have invested heavily in human development and equal opportunities for women, population growth has slowed and the quality of life has improved

Women in Kerala, unlike their sisters in the north, have a greater opportunity to go to school and are allowed to inherit land. The female literacy rate is 66 per cent — almost double that of its nearest northern rival, and when Kerala's women marry, it is the husband's family which pays the brideprice because women are considered to be an asset. The payoff for the state and

2.3 children per woman — lower than that of Ireland, and the equal of Thailand, China and the former Soviet Union. The Indian fertility average is 4.1 children per woman. The use of contraceptives in Kerala is three times national average.

Whereas 34-46 per cent of people in the northern Indian states live in poverty only 27 per cent of people are in such dire straits in Kerala. Slower population growth appears to have helped the poor by lowering the labour supply and enabling wages to rise.

Incomes per capita in the five northern states are all lower than in Kerala despite the presence of the national capital Delhi, and many industrial towns, in the north.

Kerala is the only Indian state where all villages are connected to all-weather roads. It has the highest newspaper circulation in India and the highest ratio of hospital beds per capita.

High educational levels have attracted industry, and in 1980 there were more factory jobs per 1,000 urban inhabitants than in any other state in the nation. Not surprisingly, women also had the highest share of the total workforce — 35 per cent overall.

Nor does Kerala appear to have sacrificed its natural environment for industrial growth. Although it has the highest population density of any state — 655 people per square kilometre — 29 per cent of the surface area remains forested.

The message is abundantly clear says UNFPA: "Fewer people means more resources to go around."

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Thailand, with a heavy investment in education, health and opportunities for women, was able to reduce the average number of children per woman from 6.1 in 1965-70 to just 2.2 in 1987.

Infant mortality in Thailand was at the level of Western European countries in the 1960s. Nine out of 10 women were literate, and two-thirds of couples were using contraception. An educated workforce gave a firm basis for economic growth, incomes grew by 4.2 per cent a year in the 25-year span to 1989, and manufacturing output soared by 10 per cent a year.

Of the 82 countries studied for the UNFPA report, the 41 with slower rates of population growth managed to increase income by an average 1.25 per cent a year. The exact opposite applied to the 41 whose population growth was faster.

— Depthnews Asia



trends at the level of individual states whose governments control much of the policy and spending in education health and many other matters."

UNFPA's report cites the dramatic contrast between the southern state of Kerala and

its inhabitants has been immense. Kerala has the lowest infant mortality rate in India. And because families have confidence in the survival of their children, they are having fewer of them.

Kerala's fertility rate is just

Brick by Brick the Kurds Rebuild Their Lives

by Juliani Gearing from Iraq

The Iraqi Kurds face a double blockade: the West's embargo on Iraq, and Baghdad's efforts to prevent food, fuel and other supplies from reaching Kurdish areas. Now, the Kurdistan Reconstruction Organisation, a non-profit making body, is rebuilding roads, schools and hospitals. A Gemini News correspondent visited northern Iraq to see what they have achieved in the face of many difficulties.

Although they rely on foreign governments and non-governmental organisations for funds, the surveying, planning and execution of the projects are carried out by the Kurds themselves with minimal interference from outsiders.

One of the main groups to benefit from KRO efforts are the thousands of widows whose husbands were allegedly murdered by the government. In the mountain village of Barzan one group of widows with their children were living

in tents as workers built them new houses.

Previously banished to a collective town on the plains they had returned to try to grow enough food to live on. As a start, small vegetable plots provided fresh produce to supplement supplies of flour and rice they had received from the World Food Programme.

For the women one noticeable improvement was the installation of pumped water supplies for several of the vil-

lages. This will reduce their work load as they will not have to walk far for water," said Abdul Aziz.

In many areas of Iraqi Kurdistan, especially in the hills, the fields and orchards have been left unworked for years. Yet with the freedom to return to their land many people have begun tilling the soil. Some have been helped by KRO with the loan of tractors and the supply of basic tools, seed and fertiliser.

Supply routes are of crucial

importance in the reconstruction process. Years of neglect have left many areas in the hills difficult to reach. Roads and bridges have been built, using heavy machinery abandoned by the Iraqi government, to deliver supplies to the areas in need.

However, although the speed and quality of workmanship is seemingly beyond question, KRO inevitably has a few critics, who have indicated their concern about the allocation of resources. One foreign aid worker wondered why some areas were not receiving help, citing neglect of the area around Zakho in the north west as an example.

A Kurdish journalist also questioned why the large town of Halabja — which received huge publicity following the death of 5,000 people in an Iraqi chemical attack in 1988 — had yet to see a major attempt at reconstruction.

Noori Shahbaz explained KRO's intentions: "We try to give priority to the villages that have been destroyed more than once by the Iraqi government, and to help the widows who have little means of support. We rebuild first in areas with land of cultivation and good water sources."

"Also there is the question of access," he pointed out. "Some areas are remote and need better roads before we can bring in large quantities of building materials."

The new Kurdish administration, installed in the Kurdish parliament in Arbil following local elections in May, was cautious about what could be achieved in the present circumstances.

"There can be no proper reconstruction without the embargo on Iraq being lifted," said Hussein Sinjari, from the Ministry for Reconstruction and Development. "There is a double blockade on the Kurds: the international embargo on Iraq, and Iraqi government's clampdown preventing food, fuel and other supplies from reaching Kurdistan."

Dr Salahadin Hafeed, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, stressed they had a long way to go: "Over 90 per cent of our agricultural base has been destroyed and over 80 per cent of the villages. We hope the international community will not forget us and continue to fund our reconstruction programme for one or two years. Then we hope to be self-sufficient."

For now thousands of Kurds fear the coming winter. Yet, thanks to the hard work of engineers, builders and labourers, many will at least have a roof over their heads.

— Gemini News



Children living in the burnt out buildings of a Baath party detention centre in Sulaimanya, Iraq Kurdistan

Long March to a Consumer Revolution

IN a country where 'consumer' was an unknown word as late as ten years ago, a massive campaign against shoddy goods is sweeping the Chinese who had earlier been told it was patriotic to reuse, patch, and make do with whatever they had.

Consumer protection groups have emerged in recent years in response to an increasing number of complaints about shabby products. Last February, leading media organisations and quality control agencies launched the 'Long March to Quality' campaign.

Since then, daily TV reports and newspaper columns have listed names of guilty products and manufacturers. In early March, a huge bonfire of low-quality goods was lit in suburban Beijing.

The climax of the new campaign was a live television show on Mar. 15, International Consumers' Day, during which phone banks received hundreds of calls from all over China.

Top officials, including ministers, discussed the problem of substandard goods and sympathised with the callers. Letters and phoned-in-complaints were read on the air and names of offending companies and products were flashed onscreen.

One of the most notorious substandard products has been Shanghai-made shoes that only last a couple of weeks. One man complained his pair disintegrated 200 meters beyond the shop where he bought it. Numerous complaints about the Shanghai shoes led to the discovery that well-known manufacturers illegally sell their trademarks to com-

Perhaps pressured by a copyright law dispute with the United States, several cases

involving trademark theft of well-known foreign labels like Lux soap, Levi's jeans to radio watches have been publicised.

But products that main and kill because of their low quality have alarmed consumers the most. Last year, several children died and more than 3,000 fell ill in Yunnan province after drug treatment for intestinal parasites. Exploding beer bottles and caustic cosmetics have also injured and scarred many buyers.

China has launched another revolution — this time to bring quality consumer goods to its 1.2 billion people. Deirdre Godfrey of IPS reports.

During the 'Long March' call-in program, one man tearfully told of his younger brother's death from an Anhui-produced water heater — the fifth death traceable to the product.

Coal mixed with garbage has cost the railways an estimated 100 million dollars annually. The use of fake pesticides on the cotton crops in Hebei and Shandong provinces have resulted in damage worth several millions of dollars.

China's consumer analysts say substandard goods are to be expected in a society that switched from heavy industry to commodity production in just 12 years. The rush to produce consumer goods has overwhelmed the ability by the authorities to have quality control.

One city billed itself the 'Kingdom of Refrigerators' after the number of local refrigerator manufacturers increased from eight to 70

within a few years. More than 70 per cent of their products later failed quality control tests.

Even state-run stores have been guilty of selling substandard goods. When one such store discovered it had purchased 30,000 counterfeit 'Flying Pigeon' bicycles — one of China's top brands — it went ahead and let buyers believe they were purchasing the real thing. The bikes fell apart within months.

But the current media campaign in producing dramatic results. Shortly after the brother of the Anhui heater victim made his call, the Anhui governor called in to announce he was firing the factory director and shutting down the factory of the faulty heaters.

Half of the country's manufacturers of medicinal products have also been shut down for failing to meet state standards due to lax management and poor facilities. Dozens of bottles of fake medicine have been arrested in Hunan province.

One of the most talked-about results of the current campaign has been the removal of the popular Qingdao whiskey from the market after insects and bits of rubber were found in some bottles. The ensuing uproar in the city of Qindao led to further inspections and a rash of firings and closures in other industries.

Some businessmen are not waiting for the government to close in on them. Storeowners in Beijing's fashionable Wangfujing street are offering a 150 per cent refund for any low-quality product.

Since the telecast of the consumer campaign, riled consumers from the countryside have travelled to the China central TV station to tell their own stories.