

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

Subject: Meeting of MG with Ms Najma Siddiqi, Quratul Ain and Anis Dani.

Participants:

- Ms Najma Siddiqi	ILO Consultant Nepal
- Ms Quratul Ain Bakhteari Asstt.	PO UNICEF
- Mr. Anis Dani	Social Scientist ICIMOD
- Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan	General Manager
- Mr. Hussain Wali Khan	PSE
- Dr. Zahoor Alam	PSA
- Mr. Mutabiat Shah	PA
- Mr. Mutahir Shah	PSO
- Ms Khalida Nasir	Consultant WSO
- Mr. Mohammad Darjat	DPE
- Mr. Izhar Ali Hunzai	Programme Officer
- Ms Asma Khalid,	Sr. Programme Officer

After five days of field visits and discussions with the MG, the two outside participants of the brainstorming session on the women's programme, Najma Siddiqi and Quaratul Ain presented their findings. The following are the main points of their presentations:

- (1) the existing organisational system at the village level should be studied to determine what needs to be done for women and whether women's organisations should be formed;
- (2) the credibility that AKRSP has developed in the rural areas should be used as leverage in promoting the incorporation of women into the development process;
- (3) the rural community should not be divided up since the unit of activity is a collection of households which includes both men and women;
- (4) because the tasks that women and men perform differ, a package centered around women's tasks, need to be developed;
- (5) because the resource base is shared, AKRSP inputs in terms of PPIs, training etc., affect women as well as men;
- (6) the willingness and/or ability of women to participate in development programmes is not demarcated clearly along sectarian lines;
- (7) training programmes should be oriented towards the target population, i.e. the segment of the population that is responsible for activities in which training is being given;
- (8) the women's programme should be taken more seriously by AKRSP than it has been in the past;
- (9) demonstration models of a women's programme should be tested on a small scale to help in developing a programme for women; and
- (10) the formation of separate women's organisations (WOs) cannot be evaluated conclusively as either a positive or a negative phenomena.

In discussing these points, the GM indicated that he supported whole-heartedly the principle of targeting training programmes to the concerned group in the village and that this principle would be followed. However,

he foresaw problems in extending training to women who could not, due to customary and/or religious constraints, come to Gilgit for courses. He asked the participants what AKRSP's response should be to demands for village-level training for women, given the present training infrastructure. Both Najma and Quratul Ain stressed that AKRSP should use its leverage to enhance the participation of women in the training programme in Gilgit. They recommended that a training package should be developed based on the tasks in which women have the major responsibility in the Northern Areas.

In order to develop this package, the tasks of women need to be identified. Najma indicated that AKRSP would have to use not only its existing staff and forums but additional staff to carry out the task identification exercise. The social organisers, the model farmers, the VO managers and the MG members should participate in defining tasks on which AKRSP should concentrate its efforts. Najma was asked by the GM to come back to AKRSP to assist in this area and she indicated that she would try to find some time.

With regard to the workload of rural women and AKRSP's response to this, the GM indicated that he was in favour of interventions to reduce their present heavy workload, such as nut-cracking machines and drinking water supply. ZA felt that women's heavy workload would prevent them from being effective extension workers since they would not have the time to go from house to house to spray crops and vaccinate livestock. Most of the other participants in the session felt that AKRSP should not make presumptions about women's ability to carry out these activities and that training men in tasks that were traditionally done by women, would not be an effective mechanism and raising agricultural productivity. Moreover, ultimately only increased productivity levels can reduce the workload of women.

The issue of how AKRSP could introduce conditions on the VOs regarding the active participation of women was discussed. HWK felt that a rapid effect in this area would not be feasible but eventually AKRSP could impose these conditions on the VOs. Moreover, he stressed that before amendments in the terms of partnership can be introduced, the training package for women must be developed fully. Both the outside participants reiterated their strong belief that AKRSP has presently has enough leverage to enter into partnership with villagers on its own term. Anis supported this point by stating that if AKRSP was able to convince villagers to meet and save weekly, it could convince them to incorporate women into the AKRSP package.

With reference to health and sanitation programmes for women, the question of coordination with the CBS programme was raised. Since the CBS programme is working in the Northern Areas, the participants thought that collaboration with it would be useful for the women's programme. Although CBS works through Union Councils and thus has not included women to a large extent in its project development or implementation phases, Quratul Ain felt that the strength of AKRSP grass-roots organisations could supersede the Union Council. By creating pressure from below on the existing structure, the WOs could become effective participants in the health and sanitation programmes offered by CBS.

Since the WOs have saved approx. Rs.0.6 million, the issue of how to channel these savings into productive investments was raised. Because the village women have expressed that they do not know to what purpose they are saving, the participants felt that effective utilisation of savings was an important issue for the MG to consider. In addition, AKRSP needs to look into how the savings rates of women will be affected if one organisation consisting of men and women is formed. Presently, the savings are in large part a result of men giving money to women to put in the WO accounts, though some savings has been generated by the quilt project. Najma indicated that during her field visits, she found cases of women having saved 100 per cent of their earnings from the sale of quilts.

Both the participants underlined the need for engaging more women in the various disciplines at AKRSP. They felt that participation of village women could be enhanced substantially by the presence of female social organisers, agricultural officers, engineers etc. Furthermore, the MG must involve itself intensively in the development and implementation of a programme incorporating the overlooked segment of the rural population into AKRSP's programmes. The participants felt that the very capable AKRSP professional staff should be used effectively in this area and be supported by additional staff who would be involved on a full-time basis in the women's programme.

The GM stressed that AKRSP was very committed to the development of women but had been lacking direction in developing a programme. He thanked the participants for their contributions and invited them to visit AKRSP again as soon as possible.