



# To touch the face of GAD



The United Nations declared 1976 to 1985 to be the International Decade for Women. At the beginning of the decade, although women made up half of humanity, they worked nearly two thirds of all work hours, received only one tenth of the world's income and owned less than one per cent of the world's productive assets (ILO Journal, 1978).

## WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

Unfortunately, despite the UN Decade and almost a quarter century of "incorporating women into development," many women are worse off than they were before. Many of the mainstream policy efforts in the area

*challenge theories and policies which exclude or inadequately address gender concerns*

of "Women in Development" (or WID) during this time have focused on certain aspects of women's roles, such as women as mothers or women's income earning potential. They have tended to be "top-down" in approach, stemming from international and government agencies such as the United Nations and USAID. Many of these programmes see development as a process of "modernization" of "developing" countries. In the 1980s and 1990s, this has meant restructuring national economies in keeping with International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank "adjustment programs" that involve economic growth through the promotion of exports such as coffee, bananas and sugar, drastic cuts to social spending and a decrease in the role of governments. From a "WID" perspective, the problem is not with this development process itself, but with the particular disadvantages women face within this process. As such, the policy emphasis has been on integrating women into an otherwise beneficial process of development.

## GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT/EMPOWERMENT APPROACH

Many people concerned with the condition and position of women throughout the world, and with the restructuring of gender relations in

society, disagree with the WID approach because it does not adequately address the complex problems women are faced with. An alternative approach to looking at this problem has been referred to as the "Gender and Development" (GAD) and/or the Empowerment approach.

The GAD, or Empowerment approach has largely developed out of the research, experience and analy-



sis of Third World women. Rather than focusing on only one part of women's roles (women as mothers, women as workers, etc.) a GAD approach recognizes that women fulfill and balance various roles, and that women are influenced by unequal power relations based not only on gender, but also on race, ethnicity,

class, nationality, and so on. This approach focuses on bottom-up strategies, (starting with people's concrete experiences and needs rather than policy initiatives of mainstream aid organizations) and as such poses a challenge not only to theories and policies which exclude or inadequately address gender concerns, but also to assumptions about the way in which knowledge is created and used. A bottom-up strategy assumes that people are able to create knowledge out of their own experiences and create alternatives based on this knowledge.

A GAD approach tends to be critical of the development policies and programmes currently being advocated (as outlined above) by international lending and aid organizations on the grounds that they contribute to poverty and inequality and often worsen the position and condition of women rather than improving them. For instance, when governments cut back on health care, education and child care, women often suffer the most because they have to work extra hard to provide these services themselves.

## GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

In November, 1992, a collection of people from the Halifax area concerned with these issues got together to form a "Gender and Development" group. We are interested in

*power relations based not only on gender, but also on race, ethnicity, class, nationality...*

trying to link local and international gender and development issues, as well as being able to link people's experiences to broader political and economic processes (such as economic adjustment and debt restructuring). The aim is to do this through participatory, or "bottom-up" learning processes (workshops, for instance) which start with the experiences and priorities of the people who participate.

In keeping with this participatory approach, the goals and objectives of the group continue to be defined and redefined as we go. For example, one of the goals of the group is to link issues of race, class and gender in local and international contexts. We are finding that it is a lot easier to say we want to do this than it is to actually do it! (We are also looking for a more creative name for ourselves -- any ideas?)

The group meets the third Friday afternoon of every month. If you would like to participate (women and men are welcome) or would like more information, please call Carolyn VanGurp at 454-4874 or Emily Burton at 429-5063.

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