

Chapter 3

Women's Role in Shelter Planning

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Contrary to popular belief, every woman is a worker. Her work is multifarious and embraces a multitude of functions of vital social and economic importance. She is a reproducer of the children and a mother, imparting basic skills and knowledge to the future of the country. She is the hub around whom family life revolves. She provides a multitude of services for the well-being of the family. In many cases she contributes directly to the family income. It is this economic contribution that enables the family to survive. Invariably her entire income goes toward this. Women constitute a vital component of human resources and their contribution to development is substantial. It is now generally realized that women can make an active contribution to the development of their communities and that they must be included in all spheres of developmental activities to achieve development objectives.

The condition of poor women and women engaged in the unorganized and self-employed sector in developing countries is quite dismal. Data compiled by various agencies as well as published reports indicate discrimination against and deprivation of women. Life expectancy of women continues to remain lower than men's, the opposite of the case in developed countries. In India, there is a gender imbalance in the sex ratio. This is more pronounced in the rural areas where 70 percent of the population lives. In the urban areas the imbalance is greater in the productive age bracket (20–49 years). Infant mortality rate for females is higher as well. Of late, however, the life expectancy of women in India has risen from 44.7 years to 52.9 years between 1961–71 and 1971–81, respectively. A disturbing factor is the high illiteracy level of women in India, perhaps one of the greatest barriers to their development. It limits their scope of employment, training, utilization of health facilities, access to vital information and services, and exercise of legal and constitutional rights. Although detailed and consistent information on the economic profile of women workers is scant, indications are that the work-force participation rate among women is very low, since most of the female workers are invisible—they are not in the organized sector nor are they enumerated. On the whole, the female work-force participation rate during 1981 was 3.25 times less than that of the males (Census, 1981). At the same time the proportion of women engaged in domestic duties—collecting goods (vegetable, fodder, fuel wood), sewing, tailoring and weaving for household use—is quite high, as can be seen from Tables 1 and 2. Women in low-income communities are not only responsible for economic contribution for the family's survival, but also for a host

Table 1: Percentage of Women Engaged in Household Activities

S. No.	Activities	Rural	Urban
1.	Maintenance of kitchen, garden, orchards, etc.	14.4	4.6
2.	Work in household poultry	14.5	3.9
3.	Work in household dairy	31.8	6.0
4.	Any of 1-3	43.7	11.7
5.	Free collection of fish, small games, etc.	24.1	3.1
6.	Free collection of firewood, cattle feed etc.	43.5	8.0
7.	Any of 1-5	65.1	17.2
8.	Husking paddy	27.6	2.3
9.	Preparation of gur	2.2	0.2
10.	Grinding of food grains	38.8	13.5
11.	Preparation of cow dung cakes	49.9	9.1
12.	Sewing, tailoring	17.4	20.8
13.	Tutoring children	0.4	10.0
14.	Bringing water from outside the household premise	63.0	34.8
15.	Bringing water from outside the village	3.3	-
16.	Percentage of persons engaged in household duties to total persons (5+ years)	42.0	50.5

Source: National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector, 1988.

Table 2: Time Spent by Women on Household Activities

Activity	Hours/day
Fetching water	
Eastern U.P.	1.0-3.9
Western U.P.	0.8-3.0
Karnataka	1.0-1.4
Fuel wood gathering	
Himalayan	4.0-7.2
Karnataka	0.4-0.9
Fetching water and fuel wood gathering	
Gujarat - Rajasthan Border	6.0-9.0
Grazing animals	
Western U.P.	0.0-3.0
Karnataka	0.5-1.0
Making dung cakes	
Western U.P.	0.0-0.5

Source: Menaka Roy, *Reader on Women & Development*, HSML, New Delhi.

of household functions, thereby increasing their burden and hardship.

Realizing the potential of women and the contribution they can make to social and economic development, the Government of India has initiated a number of steps for their uplift. During 1971, under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Welfare, a Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) was constituted. Its report, "Towards Equality," set out policy recommendations of great importance. This coincided with the declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year. A series of action/approach papers and reports was produced to operationalize these recommendations between 1976 and 1978. The Sixth Five-Year Plan included a separate Chapter on Women and Development, 1980-85, and the Seventh Plan also emphasizes women's development. A major outcome of the report of the CSWI was the National Plan of Action, 1976, which identified the key areas of focus as well as the guidelines for action on women's development. This led to the establishment of the Women's Welfare and Development Bureau in 1976 under the Ministry of Social Welfare. The main task of the Bureau was to act as a nodal point within the Government of India and coordinate policies, and programs as well as to initiate measures for the development of women. In 1985, the Government established a separate department in the Ministry of Human Resource Development for the development of women and children. In 1987 the Government constituted the National Commission on Self-Employed Women to make a comprehensive study of the working and living conditions of women in poverty. The Commission submitted its report in 1988.

Presently, the Government has about 27 schemes either entirely or predominantly intended to improve the condition of women. These are managed by various departments and ministries. Various programs are being run to benefit women, e.g., Women's Development Corporation, Support to Training and Employment (STEP), Training-cum-Production Centres for Women, Awareness Generation Camps for Rural and Poor Women, Institute for Rehabilitation of Women in Distress, Women's Training Centre, Short Stay Homes for Women and Girls, Voluntary Action Bureau and Family Counseling Centre, Free Legal Aid and Para Legal Training, Working Women's Hostel, etc.

Women's Problems in Housing and Infrastructure

No matter how important women's roles might be, men are the main decision makers in the allocation of family budget and in determining the various priorities of the

family. Combining child rearing, housekeeping, income generation, and a subordinate role in budget allocation has several implications for women in terms of their requirements, priorities, and possible contribution towards community development. Planning and development of housing schemes or projects for provision of infrastructure are not sensitive, in general, to their needs and priorities. The draft National Housing Policy (NHP), Government of India, 1990, specially mentions the case of women. The NHP has, in general, addressed the shelter requirements of the disadvantaged in society, including displaced and homeless persons, women in disadvantaged circumstances, etc., and also proposes specific actions on behalf of women: "...women have a vital stake in the management of family affairs and suffer far more from deprived housing conditions and inadequate access to basic services and health care. Adequate attention will be given while devising programmes to meet the specific needs of women in disadvantaged circumstances, including widows and construction workers, in terms of joint or exclusive title, access to credit, home based employment, maternal and child welfare and shelter design and to amend all related laws for this purpose." (NHP, 1990, p. 3)

One of the major problems facing women seeking access to shelter relates to access to land. Land is rarely in the woman's name. Where land or house sites are distributed or where collective tribal land is being privatized, women are losing status because sites are being registered under men's names. Widows, usually without sons, may find it possible to register or list land under their names, but are confronted with complicated procedures of transfer of ownership rights. A widow also finds it next to impossible to retain land in her name for long, due to social and economic constraints.

Women's Needs: Plot Layout and Housing Design

Women's preferences about plot layout, house design or neighborhood improvement are not taken as guides in new housing schemes and slum-up gradation programs. In slum resettlement programs, women suffer most. Apart from numerous problems in a new settlement, they suffer most by losing their source of income. In the Dakshinpuri resettlement colony in Delhi, male employment declined only 5 percent, but an estimated 27 percent of the women had to give up their jobs. Owing to low education levels and socioeconomic status, women face problems in transfer of ownership rights of land and houses.

Women thus face numerous problems which need to be taken care of while formulating housing projects. Notable among them are:

1. Basic facilities such as taps, waste disposal pits, markets, schools, and other public amenities are often far away from the houses. Women have to cover long distances every day to reach these amenities. These should be placed conveniently.
2. Women face privacy and security hazards due to lack of proper bathing and toilet facilities.
3. In new or upgraded housing, the layout or housing design does not take care of their priorities and needs. Designs of kitchen or cooking space, toilets, courtyards, bedrooms or sleeping areas must be sensitive to their needs and priorities.

Women have taken the lead in a number of projects of slum-up gradation, and, working together with the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), have been able to mobilize other women in the area and help to create awareness of women issues.

Potentials of Women in Slum-up Gradation

As the primary users, women are more aware of favorable dwelling designs and other aspects related to their living environment, such as location of infrastructural facilities and appropriate plot arrangements. With the help of NGOs, women now are increasingly discussing their needs and assessing the lack of basic facilities in their environment. With the support of the NGOs, women leaders collectively formulate their concerns to brief the authorities about their requirements.

Ekta Vihar in Delhi is one such successful project where gender-based housing development has been attempted. In 1989, an NGO mobilized the women to help upgrade the slums. The residents converted themselves into a cooperative society most of whose members were women. The most important innovation in this colony is that rights of ownership of houses rest with the women. Additionally, the women have been provided a loan of Rs.5000 each for construction of a house. Plots have been allotted free of cost. The results of this project are outstanding and the experiment is being replicated in other slums.

Successful projects like Ekta Vihar have made it clear that women possess distinct potentials for contributions to improvement of low-income settlements. In contrast,

in conventional housing projects these abilities have not been taken advantage of in either formulation, implementation, or maintenance of the projects.

There is now enough evidence that woman can play an important role in mobilizing financial resources for housing investments. In other words, they contribute substantially in enhancing cost recovery performance in housing projects and preventing men from wasting household assets on relatively unimportant items.

Women's potentials in slum-up gradation can thus be summarized as:

1. Women have concrete ideas about the design of their homes, ideas related to their daily and practical requirements.
2. Women possess strong organizational capacities at the grassroots level.
3. Women possess potentials to contribute to house construction.
4. Women can—with some proper training—easily be involved in the maintenance of the living environment.
5. Women have proven able to protect household assets, even more than men.

Women, Housing, and Employment

An important category of laboring women is home-based workers engaged in a variety of activities like rolling local cigarettes, food processing, garment-making, lace-making, incense-stick and candle-making, weaving and zari working. There is no recognition of such home-based income-generating activities. Many times new housing schemes prohibit the use of the dwelling unit for such purposes. The dwellings' design does not take the spatial requirements of these activities into consideration. Women work in cramped, poorly lighted, and ill-ventilated quarters up to 10 to 15 hours a day. Wherever worksheds or workshops are constructed, they cater mainly to men. Completely isolated from the houses, these worksheds neither have any charm for the women nor provide minimal facilities such as a crèche to take care of infants while the women are working. Wherever cooperatives have been formed, women are seldom taken as members, and even if they get membership they are given unimportant work. For example, among handloom weavers, women are given mainly pre-weaving work, although many are adept at handling the loom.

Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) and Women in Development

For quite some time, HUDCO has been actively pursuing a number of programs to sensitize the professionals engaged in the field of housing toward the requirements of poor women and the potential contribution that they can make for the betterment of their communities and neighborhoods.

In 1986, as part of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, HUDCO initiated two projects at Delhi as National Site and Shelter Demonstration Projects. Women-headed households were provided shelter in both projects. The communities, along with NGOs, were involved in the schemes right from the beginning in all important decision-making during planning, designing, and implementation. Post-occupancy management, including maintenance of the neighborhoods, is vested with the women. The success of these projects has led to considerable interest in replication in other parts of the country. The case of Ekta Vihar Slum Redevelopment has already been mentioned. This is yet another successful project initiated and supported by HUDCO.

As part of its lending functions, HUDCO has recently introduced financial packages for the construction of condominiums and hostels for working women. For pavement dwellers HUDCO, with the support of the Ministry of Urban Development, has been vigorously pursuing projects of "Night Shelters." These provide a proper shelter for the night, including all basic facilities, to the pavement dweller at a nominal rate. Special attention is paid to the needs of women. In most of these night shelters, health care facilities are made available. Vocational training of poor women is provided during the day. To boost the efforts of environmental improvement of low-income neighborhoods, HUDCO provides support to erect Pay and Use Community Toilets. Women and children have free access to these facilities, whereas men are charged a nominal rate. This is done to encourage and inculcate the habits of cleanliness among women, as it is believed that women are central in creating and propagating mass awareness of cleanliness.

Apart from projects, HUDCO is involved in research and documentation in women-related development issues. There is a dearth of information on these in

India, particularly related to housing. Every year HUDCO encourages and supports young and upcoming professionals to take up research work in key areas of housing and urban development. For this year, HUDCO has identified women and development as the major concern. HUDCO is also engaged in compiling and making available at one place all existing materials on women-related issues in housing. Preparation of training packages and audio-visuals are other important activities. One audio-visual package, "The Neglected Human Factor in Housing," has already been developed with the assistance of the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS), in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Efforts are underway to develop and conduct a training course on women and housing to sensitize professionals to this area. The Centre for NGOs managed by HUDCO is also engaged in addressing similar problems, along with active support and cooperation from various voluntary organizations.